

'Gold, Guns & Goons': the complexity of electoral irregularities in Nigeria, 1999-2007

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Abstract

Electoral irregularities have become an irritant but inseparable aspect of democratic development in several countries of the world. From the US Florida electoral crisis of 2000 to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004/2005, which was staged to protest perceived electoral malpractice, the story has been that of the inability of electoral bodies to conduct free and fair elections devoid of electoral malpractice, coupled with incompetence and numerous electoral flaws, unfairness and injustice. Although, Nigeria's case of electoral irregularities may not be unique, their magnitude makes it a good subject of historical investigations. This work examines the impact of the illegal use of money, weapons and thugs as aspects of electoral irregularities in the conduct of elections in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007.

Keywords

Democracy, party politics, election, electoral irregularities, election observation

Introduction

We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislature and the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the Bench... If not met and overthrown by force, it forebodes terrible social convulsions or the establishment of absolute despotism. (Tindall and Shi 1989, p. 564)

Once elections are massively rigged, then, there is no hope for sustainable democracy. Election riggers are therefore killers of democracy. They are

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enemies of civil society. Free, fair and credible elections are central to the survival of democracy in Africa. (*The Nation*, Sunday, July 22, 2007, p.12)

Scholars of political analysis such as those quoted above and others have drawn attention to the impact of free and fair elections or the lack of it in the development and stability of democratic countries. While most advanced countries have attained a high level in their conduct of elections, the same cannot be said of developing countries where elections and the entire electoral process have been bedeviled by the triple malaise of the illegal use of money to influence the electorate and the electoral officers, as well as the illegal use of weapons and thugs to coerce voters, suppress, intimidate and scare opposition candidates from winning elections. In Nigeria, scholars and political analysts have paid considerable attentions to the discourse, especially the impact of electoral irregularities on the socio-economic and political development of the country. For instance, Anifowoshe's work, which has been cited by many political analysts, examined the causes and impact of electoral violence among the Tiv and the Yoruba areas of Nigeria. (*The Sun*, January 26, 2010)

Since the dawn of electoral system in Nigeria, politicians and their collaborators have employed different strategies to rig elections. These strategies ranged from manipulation of the logistic aspects of the electoral system to human, intelligence and institutional manipulations. (Osiki 2008, pp.67-98; Emordi and Osiki March 2008, pp. 34-52) Electoral manipulations also covered the use of state security apparatus, electoral officials, civil servants and other categories of people to subvert the electoral system. A historical examination of electoral irregularities in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 revealed a trajectory of worrisome trend in the illegal use of money, physical weapons and thugs, metaphorically referred to as 'gold, guns and goons' in this work.

The concept of electoral irregularities

Electoral irregularities reflect the determination of politicians, political actors and political parties to capture power by all means and at all cost. (Ejituwu 1997, p. 38) They involve all sorts of electoral malpractices such as rigging of elections and the intimidation of voters in order to subvert the electoral process. To rig an election involves the manipulation or control of the electoral process to favour the political party or politician perpetrating the rigging exercise. (Hornby 1998, p.1011) When political actors rig elections in order to capture power, they do so to the disadvantage of their opponents and the electoral system. Rigged elections amount to stolen mandates, which are described as a situation whereby 'the people who cast the votes decide nothing; the people who count the votes decide everything'. (www.theorangerevolution.com, February 12, 2010)

Gold in politics, also known as 'money politics', 'politics of money' or the use of large sums of money to win elections to public office has become an inevitable element of Nigerian politics. (Yaqub 2001) In his attempt to conceptualise it, Yaqub (2001) opined that:

'money politics' or the use of large sums of money to win elections to public office has acquired a unique form of notoriety in Nigerian politics. In recent years, this type of political competition has become an important aspect of the country's political culture. Given the fact that this approach to politics is not yet well

understood and also because social scientists are still to fully conceptualize it, policy measures adopted to deal with it have proven ineffective. Despite several attempts by successive post-independence governments to rid Nigerian political economy of money politics, the phenomenon seems to be quite resilient and remains pervasive.

Similarly, the use of guns, other harmful weapons and goons to win political offices have become a major component of the political culture of Nigeria. In this direction, there has been interconnectedness between the three concepts of gold (money), goons (thugs) and guns (weapons) since the emergence of democratic practice and the conduct of elections in Nigeria. (Olusanya 1980, pp. 545-569)

Background to party politics and electoral system in Nigeria

Party politics and the formation of political parties were part of the legacies bequeathed to Nigeria by the colonial system. The beginning of party politics itself dates back to the Clifford Constitution of 1922, which provided the legal framework for elective principle in Nigeria. The constitution provided the catalyst for the formation of political parties and gave birth to the emergence of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), which was founded in 1923. (Adeleke 2006, pp. 3-10) The party started the process of electoral education and mobilization across major cities in Nigeria especially the southern part of the country. In 1934, the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) was formed in response to series of socio-political development of the period, including emerging nationalist struggles. Later in 1936 the LYM transformed into the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). The activities of nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and H.O. Davies, who joined NYM on their return to Nigeria in 1937 and 1938 respectively, gave the movement a national outlook and positioned it to pursue its aim of promoting Nigerian unity and national consciousness. It paraded nationalists such as J.C Vaughan, Ernest Ikoli, H.O. Davies and Samuel Akinsanya. (Olusanya 1980, pp. 545-569)

Between 1937 and 1960, more political parties emerged in the political scene. These were the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), which was founded in 1944 and led by Herbert Macaulay (Chairman) and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Secretary). The Action Group (AG) was founded in 1951 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was an executive member of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organization. (Crowder 1980, p. 231) In the north, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was founded in 1949. The United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) was founded in 1955 as a way of fusing together the various socio-political associations in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. Others included the Northern Element Peoples Union (NEPU) which was established in 1950 by Aminu Kano and Saad Zungur. These various political parties dominated the political scene until 1966 when the first coup occurred in Nigeria's history leading to the eclipse of all the political parties. (Olusanya 1980, pp. 545-569)

In 1978 after a period of twelve years of military rule, party politics resumed once again in Nigeria. The political parties that emerged during this period included the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). These four parties contested the general elections of 1979, which brought in the first executive president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari. In

1983, the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) was registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). The political experience of the Second Republic was truncated by the military coup of 1983 that brought in Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. The government itself was overthrown in 1985 by the Babangida Regime.

The Babangida Administration set up the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in 1989 to register political parties and conduct the national elections. The outcome of the exercise was the registration of two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). The administration later annulled the election through Decree Nos.39 and 42 of 1993. Babangida later stepped aside and put in place the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan. The ING was sacked on November 17, 1993 by Babangida's Defence Minister, Gen. Sani Abacha who became the Head of State.

General Abacha administration registered five political parties, namely the Committee for National Consensus (CNC), the National Center Party of Nigeria (NCPN), the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM). Abacha died on June 8, 1998 before he could succeed himself after all the political parties had adopted him as their flag-bearer. Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, who succeeded him, established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to register political parties and the outcome was the registration of three political parties: the All Peoples Party (APP), the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The APP later transformed to ANPP in 2003. By 2009, there were more than fifty political parties in Nigeria. (Chizea June 2004, pp. 49-58)

The 1999 General Elections: the era of controlled irregularities

The 1999 general elections were conducted after a period of about eight years of similar democratic experiments, which climaxed in the annulment of the 1993 presidential election. Recounting the aspirations and expectations of Nigerians prior to the 1999 general elections, the Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), which monitored the election remarked that:

after 15 straight years of military rule, which reached stifling levels of repression during Gen. Sani Abacha's five-year regime, Nigerians hungered for change. A fervent desire to elect a civilian president and live under a democratic system of government dominated the aspirations of nearly all Nigerians. This occurred with a brutal military dictator's passing, an enlightened leader's unexpected rise to power, and the Nigerian people's determination...From the outset, NDI and The Carter Center recognized that most Nigerians viewed the transition process with guarded optimism. (The Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 1999, pp.8-9)

The general elections provided the opportunity for Nigeria's ruling elite class to support the candidacy of Olusegun Obasanjo, who ruled as a military Head of State from 1976 to 1979. Unlike his opponent, Olu Falae of the AD/APP alliance, Obasanjo was perceived as a better

ally by the retreating military elite and their civilian collaborators. Besides, his successful handover of power to a civilian government in 1979 seemed to have engraved his name in the minds of the ruling class and reinforced their convictions that he could be trusted in maintaining the status quo that had always favoured them. On the other hand, Falae appeared to be more radically inclined to upset the status quo in favour of people-oriented development.

As a result of Obasanjo's pro-establishment credentials, the elections of 1998/99 were believed to have been rigged in some states of the federation in his favour. Revelations made by former governors of Abia State and Delta State, Orji Uzo Kalu and James Ibori, as well as former Vice President Abubakar Atiku indicated that the elite class made available huge money and political strategies to secure victory for Obasanjo. (ThisDay January 16, 2007) Falae believed the elections were rigged. He could only record overwhelming votes in the South-west and parts of the North where the APP controlled some states while the candidate of the PDP recorded success in the North-central, North-east, South-east and the South-south. The result indicated that the presidential election was won by Obasanjo by a margin of 18 million to 11 million scored by Falae. (The Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 1999 p. 11) Falae described the entire process as being 'a farce', and vowed to appeal the results. Ethno-religious sentiments, another bane of Nigeria's democratic experience, may have prevailed on Falae and nothing much came out of his threat to appeal the results. International observers supported the claims that the elections were rigged in some states of the federation. For instance, in its final report on the elections, the Carter Center and the NDI reported that:

the Feb. 27 election of retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, as the culmination of a political transition to install democratically elected civilian officials at all levels of government, represents a landmark opportunity for Nigeria. This transition from military to civilian rule was conducted generally without violence, and for that, Nigerians should be justifiably proud. However, the registration process and all four election rounds were marred, to varying degrees, by electoral irregularities, and sometimes, outright fraud. Both Nigerian civil society and the new government should explicitly commit to achieve electoral reforms before the next round of elections to remove this corrupting strain from the new Nigeria's political life. (The Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 1999 p. 8)

The political actors in the 1999 elections employed tactical rigging by exploiting the ignorance of the electorate to perpetrate their acts. Many politicians connived with electoral officials to influence the votes in favour of their parties. The summary of reports by the NDI/Carter Center delegates and observers from other organizations reported:

low voter turnout and serious irregularities nationwide. Abuses of the electoral process – including ballot stuffing, inflation of results, and voter intimidation – were widespread enough to question the elections' outcome in certain electoral districts. (The Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 1999 p. 11)

However, compared to the 2003 general elections, that of 1999 was relatively free with respect to the use of money, thugs and weapons to influence the outcome of electoral

results. It can rightly be described as the first base in the trajectory of electoral irregularities and the illegal use of money, thugs and weapons in the conduct of elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007.

The 2003 General Elections: the era of political 'Tsunami'

The 2003 general elections were like 'tsunami' that separated politically strong politicians from their opponents. This was because of the massive deployment of the forces of money politics, illegal use of thugs and weapons. In a bid to capture the South-west, which was the stronghold of the AD prior to the 2003 general elections, the ruling PDP employed all sorts of strategies to dislodge the AD. In the end, only Lagos could manage to remain in the fold of the AD while the rest states of Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun and Ekiti went to the PDP. The elections to the various legislative houses across the federation were also marred by corruption and the illegal use of weapons and thugs and most of the Houses of Assembly became one-party legislature. Okoh has noted that although the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) reported that the election was generally peaceful and that voters' turn out was heavy throughout the country, the 2003 election was significantly marred by incidents of violence, intimidation, and killing of voters in many parts of the country. (Okoh 2005, p. 40)

Moreover, the machinery of godfatherism was unleashed on the people. Political actors such as Tony Anenih of Edo State, Lamidi Adedibu of Oyo State and others had declared that there was no vacancy in Aso Rock in 2003 and that politicians should consider other ventures instead of planning to win the presidency or wrestle power with the PDP generally. (ThisDay January 15, 2007; Emordi, Oshedere and Attah-Echa 2007) Godfatherism, which is a phenomenon that allows political heavy-weights unlimited powers to dominate the political scene, influence the victory of candidates (the godsons/daughters) and dictate the direction of policies and programmes, remained a major element of the political culture of Nigeria prior to the 2003 general elections. (ThisDay January 15, 2007; Emordi, Oshedere and Attah-Echa 2007)

Prior to the conduct of the elections, some key politicians were assassinated. These included Bola Ige, who until his assassination was Nigeria's Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation. He was shot dead at his home in the South-western city of Ibadan on December 23 2001. It was alleged that Ige's assassination was to make way for the capture of the South-west by the ruling PDP. Bola Ige was a member of the AD. Whatever was the reason for his assassination, it was clear that the killing had political motives. (Lawal September 14, 2009) Like Ige, Marshall Harry who was until his death the National Vice Chairman of the All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP) (South-south), was assassinated on March 5, 2003. He was formerly the chairman of Rivers State PDP before his defection to the ANPP. (Uko 2003) Several other assassinations of low profile politicians took place across the nation before the 2003 elections.

Moreover, the 2003 elections witnessed an unprecedented massive and illegal use of thugs and weapons to influence results of votes. Ajayi (2006 pp. 60-65) has argued that:

security agents were out to collaborate with and protect the ruling party. In most of the polling stations they did nothing to prevent hijacking of ballot papers by

political thugs ... Rigging was peacefully done in the form of ballot box stuffing by mainly PDP party agents collaborating with polling officials.

Ajayi (2006 pp. 62-64) summarized the impact of the illegal use of state security apparatus, money, thugs and weapons in the 2003 elections to include:

collusion with politicians to scare opponents from polling centers; receiving of bribes from politicians to stuff ballot boxes; collusion with political party agents and thugs to stuff ballot boxes; failing to act in the face of violence and rigging; personally thumb-printing ballot papers; abandonment of/absence from, attached polling centers; sporadic shooting into the air to scare away genuine voters, and in the process, ballot boxes already stuffed were substituted for the empty ones; illegal arrest and detention of political opponents at the eve of election and election days; sporadic shooting into the air at the house of opponents before and during election days to prevent them from any effective mobilization of supporters and the electorate; harassing of voters at polling booths including beating and jack booting thereby infringing on their human rights; and allowing hijacking of ballot papers and boxes by political thugs.

His position aligned with the reports of several international observers that monitored the elections. The 30,000 Justice, Development and Peace Committee (JDPC) local team that monitored the elections reported that:

the ruling party in each of the two geo-political zones (South-south and South-east), with the connivance of some INEC officials and the security officers, unleashed fearsome intimidation against its opponents and succeeded in carrying out massive rigging of elections in a manner that was reminiscent of the dark ages. (JDPC 2003: 20-37; Ajayi 2006 pp. 60-65)

The National Democracy Institute observed that there were 'ballot stuffing, rigging, voter intimidation, violence and fraud particularly in the South-east and South-south zones'. (Ajayi 2006 pp. 60-65) The results of the elections indicated land-slide victory for the ruling PDP, followed by the ANPP, the AD and APGA. The PDP won the presidential election with 24,456,140 votes to beat other contestants including Muhammadu Buhari of the ANPP, who scored 12,710,022 votes, Ojukwu O. Odumegwu of the APGA, who scored 1,297,445 votes to emerge second and third respectively. No other candidates from the remaining political parties scored up to a million votes. (Ajayi 2006 pp. 60-65; INEC 2003) Similarly, in the gubernatorial election results, the PDP won twenty-nine states (Abia, Adamawa, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Gombe, Imo, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Plateau, Rivers, Taraba,); the ANPP won six states (Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara), and the AD won one state (Lagos). (INEC 2003) In the senatorial elections, the PDP won seventy-three seats out of a hundred and nine senatorial seats in the country; the ANPP won twenty-eight while the AD won six. In the House of Representatives elections, the PDP won two hundred and thirteen, as against the ANPP's ninety-five, the AD's thirty-one and the APGA's two. The rest parties recorded no victory.

The results were greeted with litigations. Buhari of the ANPP and Dikko Yusufu of the Movement for Democratic Justice (MDJ) challenged the victory of Obasanjo. After more than two years of judicial battles, the court affirmed the victory of Obasanjo. At the state level, the Election Tribunal in Adamawa State nullified the PDP gubernatorial victory and ordered a run-off election in 14 of the 21 local government areas. The tribunal ruled that the governor, Boni Haruna was 'not validly elected' and that 'it was evident that thugs and security officials acted in favour of the PDP to disallow agents of the ANPP from performing their roles during the last general elections in various local government areas'. (Akinadewo 2004 pp. 1-2) The rerun was won by the PDP. In Anambra State, the victory was awarded to the APGA after a legal battle that lasted for about three years. Many of the defeated candidates did not consider the option of winning their mandates through the platform of the various electoral tribunals across the country. This was in sharp contrast to the reactions of defeated candidates in the 2007 general elections.

The 2007 General Elections: the era of 'do-or-die' politics

Money politics, the illegal use of weapons and thugs were much felt in the 2007 general elections than those of 1999 and 2003. They assumed more crudely and yet sophisticated dimensions in the 2007 elections. Political actors such as former President Olusegun Obasanjo and others had said in several of the campaigns organized by the ruling party, the PDP that the 2007 elections would be a matter of 'do or die' for the contestants. (*New Age*, April 24, 2007; *ThisDay* April 14, 2007; *ThisDay* April 6, 2007; *ThisDay* April 1, 2007; *Osun Defender Newspaper*, December 4, 2009) True to the predictions, the elections were marred by unprecedented violence, bribery and corruption and other electoral irregularities. *The Nation* (April 24, 2007) remarked that by his conduct before and during the election:

Obasanjo has lost his elder statesman status because of his partisanship in the current political dispensation. Nothing more portrays him as a typical Nigerian politician than the just concluded elections which his party, PDP won through foul means... The April 14 and 21 elections did not only reflect an electoral day of lies, aberration and gangsterism, it provides a window not only on the polls but also on the shameless bravado of INEC and a President at peace with high handedness and deception.

The elections left more than 200 people dead across the country. (*The Sun*, May 25, 2007, p.1; *The Nation*, May 18, 2007, p. 13) There were allegations that the Acting Governor of Ekiti State during the election was involved in electoral irregularities involving pre-vote thumb-printed ballot papers, which he tried to mix with genuine ballot papers through the aid of thugs. (*The Nation*, May 11, 2007, p.15) Similarly, the Deputy Governor of Ondo State during the election was alleged to have led a group of thugs to snatch ballot papers and boxes during the 2007 governorship election in the state. (*The Nation*, May 10, 2007, p.5; *The Nation*, May 15, 2007; *ThisDay*, May 10, 2007) There were several other cases of electoral corruption and violence involving high ranking government officials and their collaborators. (*The News*, May 7, 2007; *The News*, April 30, 2007)

In addition, the INEC was alleged to have been bribed by politicians in Anambra State to exclude some candidates and disenfranchise electorate in the stronghold of the AC and the APGA (Anyanwu, May 13, 2007, p.52) Fabulous results were later declared in those areas for

the candidate of the PDP in the gubernatorial elections. (Anyanwu, May 13, 2007, p.52; *The Nation*, 30 April, 2007; Emordi, Oshedere and Attah-Echa 2007, pp. 15-16) Similarly, in Lagos State, the candidate of the Democratic Peoples Alliance (DPA), Mr. Jimi Agbaje, accused the INEC of excluding his photograph on the ballot paper to shortchange him. (*Punch*, May 26, 2007, pp. A1-3) A similar case was made by the FRESH party's candidate in the state, Mrs. Uche Ibukun Ohimai, who alleged that her photograph and her party's logo were missing on the ballot paper. (*Punch*, May 26, 2007, pp.A1-3)

Several electoral officials were accused of doctoring figures in favour of certain candidates. (*The Nation*, May 25, 2007, pp.1 and 6) Some others were accused of thumb-printing ballot papers in favour of some candidates who offered them financial inducement. For instance, some INEC officials were alleged to have connived with some party members in Osogbo, the Osun State capital, to thumb-print ballot papers in favour of a particular party after which ballot papers were dumped in the bush. (*The Nation*, May 11, 2007, p.15) There were similar cases in Anambra State concerning illegal ballot thumb-printing by INEC officials. For example, in Edo State, three officials of the INEC were arrested in Akoko Edo Local Government Area by the police for thumb-printing unused ballot papers in an attempt to cover up the rigging they perpetrated during the gubernatorial election in the state. (Mayaki May 25, 2007, pp.1 and 6)

In several instances, security men, including police, soldiers, customs officers, prison officers, Road Safety officers, State Security Service officers and Civil Defence officers who were deployed to ensure free and fair elections were accused of conniving with politicians to forcefully take away ballot boxes and other electoral materials at gun point. (*The Nation*, May 10, 2007, p.5) An embattled police boss and former chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Malam Nuhu Ribadu agreed that the police contributed to electoral frauds in the April 2007 elections but blamed the development on the ill-funding of the police. (Olasanmi May 10, 2007, p.42)

However, there were instances when security operatives arrested thugs who attempted to disrupt elections, but there are no evidence of meaningful prosecution following those arrests. For instance, the General Officer Commanding the Second Mechanised Division of the Nigerian Army, Ibadan, Major-General M.S. Saleh during the election reported that 'we arrested five people in a Blue Bird car with registration number "Oyo AKALA2007". It was loaded with arms and ammunition, assorted charms and dangerous weapons.' (*The News*, April 30, 2007, p.25; Sekoni May 20, 2007, p. .9) Alao Akala won the 2007 gubernatorial election in Oyo State.

The verdicts of both local and international observers portrayed the 2007 general elections as monumental failure arising from well orchestrated use of money, thugs and weapons. The European Union described the elections as marred by 'poor organisation, lack of essential transparency, significant evidence of fraud, widespread procedural irregularities, numerous incidents of violence, lack of equal conditions for the contestants and adjudged the election as not credible.' (*The Sun*, May 25, 2007, p.1; *The Nation*, May 18, 2007, p.13) Following this observation, the European Union Assembly called on member countries to freeze aid to Nigeria. (*The Sun*, May 25, 2007, p.1, and *The Nation*, May 18, 2007, p.13) Other international authorities, including the NDI expressed shock over the outcome of the elections. (*The Nation*, May 18, 2007, p.13)

Local observers decried the level of irregularities in the elections. The Transition Monitoring Group, TMG along with six other civil society groups including Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reforms, CFCR; Labour Election Monitoring Group, LEMG; Electoral Reform Network, ERN; Centre for Democracy and Development, CDD; Muslim League for Accountability, MULAC; and Alliance for Credible Elections, ACE condemned the illegal use of money, thugs and weapons during the elections. (*The Nation*, May 18, 2007, p.13)

The litigations that followed the elections were unprecedented in the history of Nigeria's electoral system. Unlike in the 2003 case, the 2007 general elections witnessed stiff legal battles between winners and those who believed the elections were rigged. All the thirty-six states in Nigeria and Abuja witnessed series of electoral cases involving illegal use of money, thugs and weapons during the elections. Some of the celebrated cases included the case between the AC candidate in the gubernatorial election, Adams Oshiomhole against O. Osunbor of the PDP, who was declared winner by INEC. The process resulted in the upturning of the gubernatorial elections in Edo State in favour of the AC candidate. (ThisDay November 10, 2008; ThisDay November 14, 2008; ThisDay November 11, 2008; ThisDay November 12, 2008)

In Ondo State, the PDP lost at the judiciary to the Labour Party candidate, Olusegun Mimiko. Other celebrated gubernatorial victories nullified by the court in included those of Cross River, Kogi, Kebbi, Adamawa, Bayelsa, Anambra, Rivers, Sokoto and Kebbi states, among others. They were all won by PDP candidates during the election. (ThisDay November 11, 2008)

There were other numerous cases involving elections to the Senate, Federal House of Representatives, and Houses of Assembly. The presidential election cases lasted for up to two year. In 2010, some petitions arising from the conduct of the 2007 elections remained unresolved.

Conclusion

Bribery, use of thugs and physical weapons continued to be part of the political development of Nigeria and the country's electoral politics between 1999 and 2007. Elements of money politics, use of thugs and dangerous weapons were effectively used by the political class to alienate the electorate and have a firm grip on the machinery of government. The trend helped to sustain the phenomenon of 'godfatherism', which assumed a potent force in Nigeria during the period. The fact that the Nigerian electoral system thrived on patronages made the illegal use of money, weapons and goons the surest option available to the political elite.

While acknowledging the fact that rigging of elections denied the people their constitutional rights, the work concentrated on the impact of financial corruption, illegal use of weapons and thugs in the conduct of elections in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. The work observed that there was an increase in the level of these electoral irregularities between 1999 and 2007.

The reasons for this trend included the culpability of members of the electoral body, the constant perfection of the strategies of electoral irregularities by the political class and their collaborators. The climax of this development was the adoption by the political class of the politics of 'do-or-die affair' as the surest way to electoral victory in Nigeria.

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