

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF NIGERIA'S 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This research studied the February 23, 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The election was significant in some way as two major political parties battled to retain and regain political power. The question was whether Nigeria would give itself credible and violence-free election this time. There was also an anxiety over the kind of verdict the citizens would pass on their democracy through the election. This paper therefore examined the events that shaped the election as well as its outcome with a view to presenting empirical facts about the most-recent presidential election and so contributing to existing knowledge bank on elections and democracy in Nigeria. Rational Choice Theory was adopted as theoretical framework. Research data were collated from secondary sources and analysis was done using qualitative descriptive approach. Accordingly, the research found that the election recorded negative incidences including electoral violence, many operational shortcomings by the electoral umpire as well as loss of faith in the political process and political class by voters. To that effect, it recommended reform of the electoral process to eliminate electoral violence and restore voters' trust on the electoral process, electoral umpire and in the political class as a way of sustaining democracy in the country.

Keywords: presidential election, political party, electoral violence, political process, democracy

INTRODUCTION

2019 Presidential election in Nigeria was remarkable in certain ways. Prior to the polls, all eyes were literally on the country to see what becomes of its desire at deepening democracy, having witnessed uninterrupted civilian administrations for twenty years. In particular, it was an election of interest as the former ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) was determined to take back power at the centre from the All Progressives Congress (APC) which dislodged it in 2015 after winning power in 1999 and retaining it till 2015. Besides, it equally generated interest as an election that had record number of presidential candidates in the political history of the country – 73 candidates. Most importantly, the presidential election was an opportunity for citizens to pass

verdict on the country's democracy which had previously witnessed several military interruptions.

Obviously, elections serve for democratic consolidation. This explains why Obikeze and Obi (2004) refer to them as very vital in any democratic dispensation. Ogunna (2003) even goes as far as describing election as a democratic institution established to ensure popular participation as well as promote political responsibility and accountability. Also, Ofobuike (2003) identifies periodic, free and fair election as salient principle or institutional expression of democracy.

These, no doubt, accounted for why the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria was particularly salient. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this paper takes critical overview of the election.

But what is the theoretical framework of this research?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Rational Choice Theory serves as theoretical framework of this research. The theory is examined next.

The Rational Choice Theory

Anthony Downs (1957) in his work on “An Economic Theory of Democracy” propounded an economic explanation of voting behaviour commonly referred to as rational choice theory. It represents an attempt to explain electoral behaviour with an assumption that all decisions made by voters are rational and guided by self-interest and enforced in accordance with the principle of maximization of action’s utility.

According to the theory, what matters to voters are concrete actions which governments take and not ideology of political parties. As explained by the theory, the likelihood of citizens to vote is higher if their expectations regarding the critical importance of their vote and the expected benefits from voting are larger than the costs. What that means therefore is that voters are more likely to vote if they feel that their vote can make a difference. In other words, the decision by voters to vote is predicated on the belief that one's vote will be decisive. Doubts over the decisive potentials of votes result in apathy.

The rational choice theory argues that comparison between ideologies of political parties is only used if the voters already have previously-concrete indicators relating to actions carried out effectively. However, the underlying requirement that voters have accurate and detailed information about their interests and parties' proposals is the main weakness of this theory.

Be that as it may, this research relied on this theory for analysis by using the basic assumptions therein to examine the behaviour of voters towards the election, particularly in determining the issue of voter turnout.

Having established the theoretical framework of the paper, it will suffice to examine the limitations of the research.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research covered only the presidential election in Nigeria conducted in 2019. It did not examine other elections that formed part of the 2019 general elections. The other elections spilled into supplementaries and were uncompleted as at the time of carrying out this research. It is only the presidential election that was effectively concluded with relevant data available when this research commenced.

On the other hand, part of the subjects studied by this paper was accredited voters. That means those that showed up at the various polling units with the intent to cast their ballot and were so accredited. However, the researcher faced challenge with inconsistent figures released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which conducted the election regarding total number of registered voters for the 2019 general election. The researcher needed accurate, non-conflicting data on the total number of registered voters for the election as this should, among other things, assist in determining whether the presidential election recorded low voter turnout or otherwise when considered against the total number of accredited voters for the election. However, INEC had double and conflicting data on the total number of registered voters. The electoral body had what it termed "Total number of registered voters" as well as "Total number of registered voters (as collated)". The figures for both are different, just as there are also some discrepancies in inputs for some states in both data. This discrepancy could have tainted this research as the researcher adopted one of the two data for analysis. However, this could not have damaged the outcome. Whichever data one chooses to work with out of the two,

when the total number of registered voters is evaluated against the accredited voters, the result will yield same low voter turnout for the presidential election.

Finally, this research relied heavily on secondary sources. Apart from the INEC datasheet, it made use of election observers' report, opinion articles and news analyses published by newspapers, media statements/press releases and election result recorded by the media. This over-reliance on the secondary sources could have seriously limited the research and robbed it of the benefit of sourcing directly from primary subjects in relevant instances. These limitations are apart from other related challenges. However, the identified shortcomings did not destroy the relevance of the research.

Having enumerated the limitations of this paper, we shall then proceed to offer some clarifications on some concepts that relate to this research.

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

Arguments and concerns have always centred on the centrality of elections in democracies. Despite disagreements among scholars as well as the fact that elections do not make governments democratic, a major consensus is that elections are imperative, central and sine-qua non in democracies. This fact has come to stay no matter the diverse philosophical leanings of scholars.

This explains the stern position on the subject matter taken by Janda et al (2000), Kwasau (2009), Joseph (1990) and Nwolise (1988) to the effect that elections are central to the existence, stability and development of democracies and remain necessary condition for democracy. The contention even is that the freedom of choice offered by elections is at the very heart of democracy.

Supporting this position, Reynolds (2011) informs that the State asks for consent from the people for its rule. Reynolds' argument is that what is regarded as elections are not only transition points but repeatable historical moments which usher in change, rebirth and renewal in democratic development.

Accordingly, elections need to be free and fair. This is the central message of Ofobuike (2001) and Nwaubani (2012). Thus, elections need to be guided by a transparent electoral process

conducted within a competitive participatory political environment if they must be respected as true institutional mechanism that implements democracy.

If that is so, there is a pre-supposed requirement therefore that citizens must show active participation in government by taking elections serious. In fact, as Nwaubani (2012) puts it, democracy basically entails opportunities for political participation. The import is that the citizen in a democratic state is at the epicenter of development and central to the act of governance (Onu, 2005). It means that the citizen's participation is the core and driving force of democratic process. But the question has also been what is meant in this context by political participation by citizens.

To proffer answer to this, Abba and Egeonu (2010) regard political participation as the voluntary activities of members of a society in the selection of rulers. They rightly argue that it is a person's involvement in politics and proceed to identify general election as one of the avenues for political participation since it offers the citizens the opportunity to participate in politics through casting of votes.

Basically, political participation is advantageous in boosting public confidence in the government. This is outside of the fact that it generates legitimacy or support for the government. As Ogunna (2003) puts it, political participation is a corollary of self government. The implication therefore is that to forgo political participation, even if a truly benevolent despot were to dominate the political scene, would be a disaster for humanity's sense as rational, moral and religious beings (Mill, 1972 quoted in Mackenzie, 2009).

Therefore in contemporary democracies, the most fundamental characteristic of any democratic system is the idea that citizens should be involved in the making of political decisions, which can be either directly or indirectly (Mbah, 2009). It avers that such political participation of citizens means much for every democracy. But, the global focus currently is on free and fair elections.

IMPERATIVITY OF FREE POLL IN DEMOCRACIES

The first question here is, what is free and fair election? The second is how does free and fair election impact on democracy? An answer to these inquiries is the main thrust of this section.

A free and fair election is a type of election where a voter is free to cast vote according to his or her wish without any intimidation, harassment, inducement or coercion (Anikeze, 2011). To him, a voter in a free and fair election is free to vote according to the dictates of his conscience while having results which are capable of being challenged in courts is equally a critical feature of a free poll.

Obviously, the perspective above captures the ingredients and essence of a free and fair election. This implies that any election with opposite realities to the perspective offered by Anikeze is antithetical to what free and fair election represents. The implications of this are, therefore, obvious. This includes the requirement that balloting is done in secret. It equally entails such conditionalities as unbiased electoral umpire, public counting of votes and instant announcement of the true results at the polling units after voting is concluded (Okeke, 2018).

Clearly, free and fair election is both ideal and beneficial. Otherwise, the question would remain how else can sentiment of popular consent and participation in public affairs be created? This explains why Anikeze (2011) is swift to postulate that free and fair election makes the people feel that they have been consulted and have indicated their wishes in the broad field of national policy and are therefore willing to accept the legitimacy of the power exercised by those put into positions of authority by the electoral system.

This then follows that free and fair election in a democratic society which thrives on credible electoral system becomes political diet in every democratic menu. It decisively sustains democratic culture. In fact, it should truly be appreciated as an inseparable component of democracy. No doubt Janda et al (2000) see it as a necessary condition of democracy.

But the sad tale is that institutionalizing free and fair elections in Nigeria has remained a mirage. Previous elections in the country fell short of free and fair requirements. These factors that continue to plague elections in Nigeria are examined next.

NIGERIA AND ELECTION CHALLENGES

Lack of democratic culture is still visible in Nigeria today, just as free and fair elections and by implication democratic culture is affected by electoral malpractices and attendant lack of electoral reforms (Nwaubani, 2012). In the 1983, 2003 and 2007 national elections, the ruling

party in each case exploited some lapses in the constitution and relevant electoral laws to compromise the integrity of electoral bodies through political interference and inadequate funding (Elekwa, 2008).

The assertions above go to indicate that elections in Nigeria are enmeshed in various degrees of irregularities and appear in recurring dimension. Of course, Kwasau (2009) agrees to this as he lists irregularities often associated with Nigeria's elections to include uncertain legal and constitutional terrain, outright manipulation of the electoral process and the production of predetermined results. Chukwu (2007) equally supports this. In fact, he affirms that one of the greatest obstacles confronting free and fair elections in Nigeria is the independence and integrity of electoral bodies. This is even as Jinadu (2007) and Ibeano (2007) note that machine politics or god-fatherism is also a challenge to elections in Nigeria.

Nwaubani (2012) encapsulates the ills besetting elections in Nigeria as political corruption. His contention is that electioneering campaigns, party nominations and other related electoral procedures are always fraught with bribery, fraud and outright financial corruption. To him, despite the attempt and other provisions in the various electoral acts on the issue of money politics, political corruption has remained a very disturbing and contentious aspect of the electoral system and politics in general in Nigeria.

Be that as it may, it is important to take it up from the argument by Nwaubani and pinpoint the very factors supplying oxygen to the ills of elections in Nigeria. Unarguably, locating these factors is not difficult as they are glaring. Mamdani (1987), quoted by Said (2000), comes in handy to even assist in this task. He was emphatic that voting and elections will count for little in an atmosphere of crippling poverty, want and despair. Obviously, in a system plagued by high poverty level of citizens, it is an upheaval task overcoming the temptation thrown in the way by bribery, fraud and outright financial corruption during elections.

Now, with the high prevalence of these ills in elections in Nigeria, the consequent effect is distrust in the system and lack of faith in democracy. Nass (2012) already laments that the almost consistent ability of those in government not to lose elections has continued to cast doubt on democratic process in Africa. Of course Nigeria is part of Africa.

Having examined relevant literature, the next logical task is to answer the question, what gap is identified in the literature?

GAP IN LITERATURE

The research noted that there is yet no scholarly work on the events that shaped the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria as well as its outcome with a view to presenting empirical facts about the most-recent presidential election in the country and so contributing to the existing knowledge on elections and democracy in Nigeria. In general, no scholarly attention has been focused on any aspect of the election under interrogation. Specifically, the researcher encountered no research paper that focused on analysis of outcome of the election; none also juxtaposed the outcome with democracy in the country. This could probably be because the election barely took place.

Consequently, this paper seeks to fill this knowledge gap by presenting an analysis that focused on the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria, the outcome and its implications for the country's democracy. With this, scholarly research on general election issues in Nigeria must have further been advanced with a study on the most-recent presidential election. This goes to benefit students of politics, policy makers and other researchers.

With the gap in literature identified, the next task is presentation and analysis of data on the presidential election.

UNDERSTANDING THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The presidential election was initially scheduled to hold on February 16, 2019. The election was to take place in 1,558 constituencies and 774 local government areas while the collation of results was to hold in 8,809 registration areas/wards and in 119,973 polling units and 57,023 voting points nationwide.

A total of 91 registered political parties took part in the election conducted in 119973 polling units and contested by a total of 73 candidates with a total of 84,004,084 as registered voters (Premiumtimes, 2019).

As part of the processes to ensure a successful exercise, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which was saddled with the responsibility of conducting the poll,

announced that it carried out identification, recruitment and training of over 814,453 adhoc staff and as well accredited 116 domestic observers and 28 foreign observers for the election. It produced 13.6 million leaves of result sheets for the presidential elections with about 180,000 Smart Card Readers, and assured that the poll would proceed as planned as adequate arrangements were put in place for a hitch-free poll. In order to promote large voter turnout, the Commission sent out text messages to Nigerians, encouraging registered voters to go out and vote on the presidential election day.

Meanwhile, the INEC which conducted the 2019 presidential election was appointed in November 2015 under the chairmanship of Professor Mamood Yakubu with a promise to consolidate the improvements made in the management of elections in Nigeria since 2011 and to always be open, transparent and responsive. Prior to the 2019 presidential election, the Yakubu-led Commission had conducted 195 re-run and off-season elections across the country since the last general elections of 2015. It equally announced fixed-dates for elections in Nigeria to the effect that Presidential and National Assembly elections will always hold on the third Saturday in February of an election year, while the Governorship and State Assembly elections follow two weeks later.

According to the Commission, it began planning for the 2019 general elections quite early, with a Strategic Plan (SP), a Strategic Programme of Action (SPA) and an Election Project Plan (EPP). The plan for the 2019 general elections was ready in November 2017 and the Commission subsequently issued the timetable and schedule of activities for the elections over a year to the presidential election on 9th January 2018. Consequently, it implemented 13 of the 14 activities as scheduled.

Table 1 below presents the INEC's timetable for the 2019 general election which featured the presidential election.

TABLE 1: TIMETABLE AND SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

S/N	ACTIVITY	DATE	REMARK
1	Notice of election.	17 th August, 2018	Section 30 (1) of the Electoral act, 2010 (as amended) provides

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			not later than 90 days before the election.
2	Collection of forms for all elections by political parties at INEC Headquarters.	17 th -24 th August, 2018	For Political Parties to issue to their candidates.
3	Conduct of Party Primaries including resolution of disputes arising from the primaries.	Commencement date 18 th August, 2018 End 7 th October, 2018	To enable Political Parties democratically nominate candidates for the election as required by Section 87 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended).
4	Commencement of campaign by Political Parties.	Presidential & National Assembly – 18 th November, 2018 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 1 st December, 2018	Section 99 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provided 90 days before polling day.
5	Last day for submission of Forms CF001and CF002 at the INEC Headquarters (for all elections).	Presidential & National Assembly – 18 th October, 2018 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 2 nd November, 2018	Section 31 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provides for not later than 60 days before the election.
6	Publication of Personal Particulars of candidates (CF001) (for all elections).	Presidential & National Assembly – 25 th October, 2018 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 9 th November, 2018	Section 31 (3) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provides for publication within 7 days of the receipt of the Form CF001.
7	Last day for withdrawal by candidate (s)/replacement of withdrawn candidate(s) by Political Parties.	Presidential & National Assembly – 17 th November, 2018 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 1 st December, 2018	Section 35 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provides for not later than 45 days before the election.
8	Last day for the submission of Nomination forms by Political Parties	Presidential & National Assembly – 3 rd December, 2018 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 17 st December, 2018	Sections 32, 37, 38 and 39 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended). (Commission to appoint time for submission).
9	Publication of official Register of voters for the election.	7 th January, 2019	Section 20 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provides not later than 30 days before the election.
10	Publication of list of nominated candidates.	Presidential & National Assembly – 17 th January, 2019 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 31 st January, 2019	Section 34 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provides at least 30 days before the day of election.
11	Publication of Notice of Poll (for all elections).	2 nd January, 2019	Section 46 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provides not later than 14 days before the election.
12	Submission of names of Party	Presidential & National	Section 45 of the Electoral Act,

	Agents for the election to the Electoral Officer of the Local Government Areas or Area Councils.	Assembly – 1 st February, 2019 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 16 th February, 2019	2010 (as amended) provides not later than 14 days before the election.
13	Last day for campaigns	Presidential & National Assembly – 14 th February, 2019 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 28 th February, 2019	Section 99 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) prohibits Advertisements or broadcasts of campaigns 24 hours prior to the day of election.
14	Dates of Elections National Assembly/Presidential Governorship/State House of Assembly.	Presidential & National Assembly – 16 th February, 2019 Governorship & State House of Assembly – 2 nd March, 2019	Section 25 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended), empowers the Commission to appoint date not earlier than 150 days but not later than 30 days before the expiration of the term of office of the last holder of that office.

Note: (i) Run-off election to the office of President or Governor of a State (if any) will be held within 7 days after the announcement of the result of the election in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended).

Source: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/?inecnews=inec-releases-timetable-and-schedule-of-activities-for-the-2019-general-elections-party-primaries-to-begin-august-18> Sourced on April 6, 2019 at 4:47pm

From the timetable, INEC scheduled conduct of party primaries by the various political parties to pick candidates for the general election including the presidential election, as well as resolution of disputes arising from the primaries to hold between August 18, 2018 to October 7, 2018. Last day for withdrawal by candidate(s) and replacement of withdrawn candidate(s) by political parties for the presidential election was on November 17, 2018. Publication of list of nominated candidates for the election was on January 17, 2019 and publication of official register of voters January 7, 2019. Campaigns for the presidential election commenced on November 18, 2018 and were to end on February 14, 2019. The campaigns were however extended to February 22, 2019. This is because the date for the presidential election was later shifted to February 23, 2019. The circumstances leading to this shift are to be explained afterwards. However, the shift in the date of the election showed that the 2019 presidential election was without many challenges. These challenges came against the plans by INEC as presented above. But what are these challenges?

MAJOR CHALLENGES OF 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

As previously noted, contrary to plans by INEC, few hours to the election, the electoral body announced that following a careful review of the implementation of its logistics and operational plans as well as its determination to conduct free, fair and credible elections, the commission

came to the conclusion that proceeding with the election as scheduled was no longer feasible. It consequently rescheduled the presidential election to Saturday, 23rd February 2019. The Commission noted that the shifting of the poll was to afford it the opportunity to address identified challenges in order to maintain the quality of the election, arguing that was a difficult decision for the commission to take but necessary for the successful delivery of elections and consolidation of the country's democracy.

Stating the reasons for the postponement, the national chairman of INEC, Mahmood Yakubu, in an address claimed that flights were affected by bad weather and as such the commission had to rely on slow-moving long haulage vehicles to locations that can be serviced by air despite creating five zonal airport hubs: Abuja for North-Central, Port Harcourt for South-South and South-East), Kano for North-West, Maiduguri and Yola for North-East, and Lagos for South-West to facilitate the delivery of electoral logistics.

However, The Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) countered the claim. According to Saharareporters (2019), General Manager, Public Affairs of NAMA, Khalid Emele, in a response to the claim by INEC said the Nigerian airspace was directed to work round the clock in order to transport election materials for the commission and accused INEC of finding excuses to justify its inability to carry on with the elections. Emele maintained that there was no disruption in the provision of air traffic services on Saturday, the 16th of February 2019 in line with the agency's mandate to provide uninterrupted safe, effective, efficient, and economic air navigation services in the country. Furthermore, he recalled that the agency, in line with the directive of the Minister of State (Aviation), Hadi Sirika, had earlier ensured 24-hour operation at all Nigerian airports on Friday 15th February 2019 to facilitate the transportation of INEC materials nationwide.

But Yakubu said the Commission was also faced with attempts to sabotage its operations. He said that within a period of two weeks, there were three serious fire incidents in the Commission's offices. One of those offices was in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State. The other was in Qu'an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State where an entire office was razed, destroying all the materials prepared for the elections – printed register of voters, ballot boxes, voting cubicles and several electricity generating sets. Eleven Registration

Areas and over 100 polling units were affected by the fire. The third and most serious was the facility at the Anambra State INEC office at Awka where over 4,600 Smart Card Readers (SCRs) being prepared for the elections were destroyed. The Card Readers, according to the commission, took at least six months to procure.

Apart from the incidents and the delays in delivering ballot papers and result sheets for the elections, the Commission battled with court cases as it was sued or joined in over 640 court cases arising from the nomination of candidates with nothing less than 40 different court orders against the Commission on whether to add or drop candidates. The net effect of this, according to the Commission, is that there was usually roughly a one-month window for the Commission to print ballot papers and result sheets and either fly or transport them to several destinations until they finally got to each polling unit. Also the implication of the challenges mean that there were differences in preparations from one State to another.

Other challenges abound. These came in the form of violence. For instance and according to Vanguard (2019), Foreign and local observers who monitored the 2019 presidential election disclosed that no fewer than 25 Nigerians lost their lives during the election. The observers described the election as a rape on democracy by desperate power mongers, stating that the election was dramatic and marred in some areas by late arrival of election materials, ballot snatching and absence of materials at some polling units, noting that it seemed Nigeria was transiting backwards to the dark ages of a near anarchy situation.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) which monitored the elections alongside its partners including PremiumTimes and Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) and quoted in Premiumtimes (2019) states that feedback from its observers who were deployed to 8,809 polling units in the 36 states in the country and Federal Capital Territory, indicated that the ward level collation was marred by logistical challenges, misconduct, inefficiency and poor technical knowledge of INEC ad-hoc staff; security lapses and intimidation of collation staff by security agencies; inappropriate activities of political thugs and party agents; and the denial of access to media and observer groups.

Also, the INEC which reviewed the presidential election noted a number of cancellations in certain areas due to violence, which prevented the Commission from deploying personnel and materials for the elections due to disruptions and deliberate non-compliance with the use of the Smart Card Reader (SCR), contrary to the INEC regulations and guidelines for the conduct of elections (Saharareporters, 2019). The commission decried the high level of violence in a few places and condoled with the families of its ad hoc staff and other Nigerians who lost their lives during the elections.

In the same vein, Daily Trust (2019) quoted the Resident Electoral Commissioner of INEC in Imo State, Professor Francis Chukwuemeka Ezeonu, as having said that the commission lost 30 smart card readers in the February 23 Presidential election in the state. According to the newspaper, Ezeonu, who spoke to newsmen in Owerri on Wednesday, said that the card readers got missing in Ohaji Egbema as a result of violence. He affirmed that insecurity was an issue in the 2019 general election, adding that some security officers preferred to work in locations where they could make money and abandoned where they were posted. According to him, the election was largely sabotaged by some ad hoc staff as they sold their appointment letters to politicians who deployed their cronies to the field.

That was not all from the Commission regarding the issue of violence during the presidential election. James Apam, Kogi Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) decried the widespread electoral violence in Kogi East Senatorial District during the February 23 Presidential elections in the state (Premiumtimes, 2019). He noted that the electoral violence claimed three lives and disrupted elections in over 157 polling units in the senatorial district with 89 units in Dekina/Bassa Federal Constituency alone. The REC disclosed that a pick-up van loaded with electoral materials was burnt down by thugs in Dekina while in Ogori-Magongo Local Government Area of the state, eight polling units with card readers and other materials were destroyed.

In Akwa Ibom State, some vehicles engaged in election duty were destroyed in a pre-election crisis that erupted in Obot-Akara Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom, the state Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Mike Igini, quoted by Premiumtimes (2019) said. According to him, the vehicles were engaged to convey election materials from INEC headquarters in Uyo to

Nto Edino, the headquarters of Obot-Akara Local Government Area office of the Commission for the conduct of presidential elections.

Also few days to the election, security agencies in Kaduna State reported the recovery of 66 bodies that were killed in attacks by criminal elements on various dispersed hamlets in the Maro Gida and Iri axis of Kajuru LGA. The settlements affected include Ruga Bahago, Ruga Daku, Ruga Ori, Ruga Haruna, Ruga Yukka Abubakar, Ruga Duni Kadiri, Ruga Shewuka and Ruga Shuaibu Yau. Among the victims were 22 children and 12 women. Four wounded persons rescued by the security agencies received medical attention (Premiumtimes, 2019).

On the other hand, the United States Government in a statement on the presidential election noted that acts of violence harmed Nigerians and the electoral process. United Kingdom Government through its Minister of State for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, in its own statement also referred to reports of intimidation of election officials and other election-related violence recorded during the election.

President Muhammed Buhari, in a victory speech following his re-election and quoted by Premiumtimes (2019) said although the presidential election was relatively peaceful, troublemakers in a handful of states attempted to disrupt an otherwise orderly process. He expressed sadness at what he described as grievous loss of lives during the election.

In another development, the national chairman of INEC, Mahmood Yakubu, was quoted by ABC (2019) as having disclosed that an electoral official was shot dead by unknown people. The news media also reported that in one incident, seven people were killed in a shootout between Nigerian army troops and a gang.

But what were the campaigns for the elections like? Were they devoid of issues or bedevilled by violence and other associated ills?

2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND CAMPAIGN-RELATED INCIDENCES

Campaigns by both the ruling APC and the main opposition party, PDP, witnessed various incidences of violence. Even some of them could not have been reported by the traditional

media. However, BBC (2019) reports that at least 15 people were killed in a stampede at a campaign rally for the APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a hospital spokesman says.

According to it, the incident happened at the Adokiye Amiesimaka stadium in the southern city of Port Harcourt when the crowd surged towards a gate after President Buhari's speech shortly after 15:00 local time (14:00 GMT). Most of the victims are reported to have fallen and trampled upon as the crowd tried to force its way through a partially locked gate to follow Mr Buhari as he left the arena. Quoting spokesman of University of Port of Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Ken Daniel Elebiga, it said bodies of 12 women and three men were taken to the mortuary, even as twelve people were admitted for treatment.

Also, at least eight people were confirmed dead in February 2019 at APC presidential rally held in Taraba. PremiumTimes (2019) reported the stampede at the rally due to overcrowding at the Jolly Nyame Stadium in the state capital, Jalingo. Three people were initially thought to have died from the stampede but the presidency in a statement, however, put the death toll at eight.

In another development, two persons lost their lives as they returned home after the rally which the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar held for the 2019 presidential election in Jos, Plateau State. The victims were members of one of PDP's support groups and they perished in a road accident on their way to Shendam after the Jos rally (The Eagle Online, 2019).

Meanwhile on the activities planned ahead the rescheduled date, INEC stated that deployment of materials would be completed by 18th February, configuration of Smart Card Readers by 21st February, deployment of sensitive materials and personnel to RACs by 21st and 22nd February respectively while the election proper would hold on 23rd February. It took full responsibility for the postponement but said it believed that ultimately the postponement was for the good of the country's democracy, while pledging its commitment to free, fair and credible elections.

Certainly, the postponement could have created fear of negative consequences, including low-voter turnout during the rescheduled date. This fear was confirmed through certain independent actions directed at sustaining the interest of voters during the election.

For instance, the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN) directed its members nationwide to reduce petroleum pump price from N145 per litre to N140 from February 20 to February 25 in a bid to motivate Nigerians to return to vote again on February 23 (Premiumtimes, 2019). In a statement signed by the National President of the association, Chinedu Okworonkwo and issued through the chairman, IPMAN Kano state chapter, Bashir Dan-Malam, the association noted that Nigerians travelled to different places across the country to cast their votes but to their dismay, the election was shifted to February 23 and said that the gesture was to enable Nigerians to travel again to exercise their civic responsibility.

On the other hand, Nigerian carriers, Aero Contractors and Arik Air in separate statements issued by their spokespersons, equally introduced promo fares to help Nigerians who wish to travel to go back and vote (Premiumtimes, 2019).

Spokesperson for Aero Contractors, Chika Ubendu, said the airline decided to cut its fares by about 50 per cent to support Nigerians to travel back to their polling units without spending so much. Similarly, Arik Air's spokesperson, Mr Adebansi Ola, said the airline put promotional fare in place to ameliorate the effect of the postponement on the travelling public and encourage voter participation.

The question then is, how did election observers see the presidential election?

ELECTION OBSERVER'S REPORT ON THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

An election observer group, The Centre for Democracy and Development, in its report on the presidential election said it deployed over 3500 field observers spread across the country. In the report, (<http://www.cddwestafrica.org/final-election-day-report-2019-presidential-and-national-assembly-elections-2019/>), it chronicled electoral violence on the eve of the election as well as on the election day. According to the report, there were bomb blasts near Maiduguri on the election day and also report of Boko Haram attacks in Gaidam, Yobe State on the eve of election day. The insecurity situation led to the relocation of voters from Gujba to Damaturu to cast their votes. Similarly, voters in Madagali were also relocated to a safe location in Adamawa to cast their votes. The observer group further noted that violence marred the polls in some areas in Lagos, Ebonyi, Imo, Rivers, Osun, Oyo, Delta, Kogi and Akwa Ibom and surmised that over

twenty people were confirmed killed on election day. Other reported incidences were ballot box snatching, voting disruption, killing, abduction of election officials, vote buying, harassment of voters by thugs, arrest of observers by security agents, stuffing of ballot papers, disruption of voting by VIPs in spite of the warning from INEC that VIPs, notably elective public political officers, should not disrupt voting on election day, and other electoral malpractices.

It said in some places, people were requested to put their names down and phone numbers so that they can be paid later. “However, most disturbing is the situation where party agents go around with voters’ register, hustle voters and negotiate for their votes. We also observed voters willingly selling their votes to the highest bidder. The telephone was a valuable tool utilised in the vote buying and selling transactions,” it said. The group further reported that there were high profile incidents of disruption of voting processes through the abuse of the power of incumbency in states such as Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Imo, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos and Rivers, where huge supporters escorted politicians to the polling units. These are apart from what it described as anti-democratic political culture of the country’s mainstream political class through their engagement in various forms of political brigandage and their do-or-die attitude to elections.

Be that as it may, the next logical task is to examine the promises made to voters by candidates.

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND THEIR ELECTORAL PROMISES

Despite the fact that 73 candidates took part in the presidential election, not all of them were serious contenders for the position of President. Many did not have requisite structures across the states of the federation nor adequate funds to properly support their ambition. As a result, they were not much visible in most states and consequently unknown to voters. Also, they could not traverse the nooks and crannies of the country to solicit for votes to enable their victory at the poll.

Meanwhile, Muhammadu Buhari of the APC who sought for re-election in the presidential election anchored his electoral promises on *The Next Level*. In the *Next Level Agenda* were major promises that bothered on jobs (that include in agriculture, tech and creative, industrialization and school feeding), industrialization (roads, rail and broadband), power, people moni bank, policy, health and inclusion in government (<https://apc.com.ng/apc-next-level-agenda/>). In it, he promised, among other things, to engage a million N-Power graduates, complete coastal rail

(Lagos-Calabar), 2nd Niger Bridge and Lagos- Ibadan-Kano rail, increase beneficiaries of TraderMoni programme from 2.3 million to 10 million and remodel 10,000 schools every year.

On his own part, Atiku Abubakar of the APC anchored his campaign on *Getting Nigeria Working Again*. In it, he promised to focus on human capital development, job creation, poverty eradication and infrastructural development. Some of the specifics are plans to reduce unemployment and under-employment rate to a single digit by 2025, creation of three million self-and wage-paying employment opportunities in the private sector annually, increase of downstream oil sector contribution to GDP from less than 0.5% to 2% by 2025, ensure that 65% of Nigerians have access to basic Primary Health Care (PHC) and services package by 2024, and 80% coverage by 2030 (<https://atiku.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Atikus-Plan.pdf>)

Having examined the electoral promises, we shall proceed to look at the details of frontline candidates for the election.

FRONTLINE CANDIDATES IN THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

It is imperative at this juncture to present details of the candidates considered as frontline in the election, and their running-mates. Their detail, covering names of candidates, their political parties, age, gender, whether candidate is person with disability and their academic qualification, is presented in Table 2. INEC published details of all the candidates for the presidential election. The researcher however culled details of five of the candidates with their running-mates. This is presented next.

TABLE 2: DETAILS OF FRONTLINE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND THEIR RUNNING-MATES

S/N	STATE	POSITION	NAME OF CANDIDATE	PARTY	PWD	AGE	GENDER	QUALIFICATION	REMARKS
1	NIGERIA	PRESIDENT	BUHARI MUHAMMADU	All Progressives Congress (APC)	None	75	M	FSLC, WASC, CDT	INCUMBENT
2		VICE PRESIDENT	OSINBAJO OLUYEMI OLULEKE	APC	None	61	M	FSLC, WASC O&A, LLB, LLM	
3		PRESIDENT	ABUBAKAR ATIKU	PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP)	None	71	M	FSLC, WAEC, DIPLOMA	MAIN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE
4		VICE PRESIDENT	OBI PETER	PDP	None	57	M	FSLC, BA, WAEC	

5		PRESIDENT	MAILAFIA OBADIAH	AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS (ADC)	None	61	M	FSLC, SSCE, BSc, PHD	
6		VICE PRESIDENT	NASIRU TANIMOWO NURAIN BOLANLE	ADC	None	65	M	FSLC, BEd, PHD	
7		PRESIDENT	GBOR JOHN WILSON TERWASE	ALL PROGRESSIVES GRAND ALLIANCE (APGA)	None	70	M	FSLC, WASC, HSC	
8		VICE PRESIDENT	GERALD CHUKWUEKE NDUDI	APGA	None	61	M	FSLC, BSc, WASC	
9		PRESIDENT	DONALD DUKE	SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SDP)	None	57	M	LLB	
10		VICE PRESIDENT	GABAM SHEHU MUSA	SDP	None	48	M	BSc	

Source: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/elections/election-candidates> Sourced on April 7, 2019 at 6:42pm. Minor adjustment by the researcher.

From the table above, certain inferences can be made. All the major political parties fielded male candidates for the office of President and vice president. None presented female candidates for each of the positions. This shows lack of gender consideration by the parties. Also none of the political parties gave consideration to persons living with disabilities. From the table, it is clear that no person living with disability was picked by the frontline political parties to fly their flags in the presidential election. On the other hand, both the ruling political party and the main opposition political party fielded candidates that are above 70 years. In fact, none of the frontline political parties presented candidates who are below 50 years. This could have raised questions as per the possibility of a young person to assume political leadership of Nigeria. Equally, the table shows that both the ruling party (APC) and the main opposition party (PDP) fielded presidential candidates who do not possess minimum of a first degree. Presidential candidates of both political parties did not obtain degrees from conventional universities. It is only the African Democratic Congress (ADC) that had presidential and vice presidential candidates with Doctor of Philosophy degrees. However, it is instructive to note that all of the candidates possess minimum academic qualifications for the presidency as allowed by the Electoral Act 2010 (as

amended) but the fact that both the ruling and the major opposition party did not consider candidates that have university degrees, whether first or higher degrees, is worthy of notice.

Be that as it may, the next question should be, what choices did Nigerian voters make out of all of this?

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS FOR 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The task here logically takes us to examine the outcome (result) of the 2019 presidential election. To do this, we shall first examine how the candidates of the frontline political parties fared. After, we shall look at summary of the election and then the final result. But let us begin with performance of the candidates of the frontline political parties in the election.

TABLE 3: RESULT OF FRONTLINE CANDIDATES AND PARTIES FOR 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

S/N	NAME OF CANDIDATE	GENDER	PARTY	VOTES RECEIVED	REMARKS
1	BUHARI MUHAMMADU	M	APC	15,191,847	ELECTED
2	ABUBAKAR ATIKU	M	PDP	11,262,978	RUNNER-UP
3	MAILAFIA OBADIAH	M	ADC	97,874	4 th
4	GBOR JOHN WILSON TERWASE	M	APGA	66,851	5 th
5	DONALD DUKE	M	SDP	34,746	8 th

Source: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/elections/election-results/>. Sourced on April 7, 2019 at 7:18pm. Adjustment by the researcher.

As table 3 shows, the ruling party, APC, won the 2019 presidential election with 15,191,847 votes. So its candidate, Muhammadu Buhari got re-elected for a second term in office. His first term began in 2015. The main opposition party, PDP, came second. Its candidate, Atiku Abubakar got 11,262,978 votes. However, none of the political parties regarded as frontline was able to secure third position in the election. Even the ADC which fielded candidates with PhD degrees garnered only 97,874 and lost the third position to Peoples Coalition Party (PCP) with its 37-year-old, little-known, non-disabled male candidate, Felix Nicholas which secured 110,196

votes. Some reasons have been given for the sterling performance of PCP in the presidential election. Primarily, it is believed that the political party may have gained from its proximity to the PDP which was a former ruling party and main frontline party in the election. In the ballot paper for the election, PCP comes just immediately before the PDP and it is the belief that many voters may have been confused by near similarity in acronym of both parties into mistakenly casting ballot for the PCP. Nevertheless, Table 3 shows that the SDP, also considered a frontline party for the presidential election, occupied 8th position, losing 6th and 7th positions to Action Democratic Party (ADP) with its 64-year old, non-disabled male presidential candidate, Yabagi Sani Yusuf which got 54,930 votes as well as Grassroots Development Party of Nigeria (GDPN) whose 53-year old, non-disabled male candidate with PhD degree, Akhimien Davidson Isibor, got 41,852 votes respectively. SDP's fortunes in the presidential election may have been adversely affected by the squabble over who among Donald Duke and Professor Jerry Gana is the legal candidate of the political party for the election. Just a few hours to the election, the Court of Appeal awarded candidacy to Duke which informed the decision by INEC to have his name on the ballot paper. Gana however rejected the judgment and approached the Supreme Court for justice. It was only after the presidential election itself that the apex court affirmed Appeal Court's recognition of Duke as candidate. The meaning is that the SDP went into the presidential election as a divided house and that could have explained why, even though a frontline party, internal crisis dwarfed what could have been an advantage. Meanwhile, the overall implication is that some political parties considered as frontline in the election did not end up enjoying voters' appeal at polling units.

But what is the summary of the result for the 2019 presidential election? This, with its analysis, follows next. Table 4 shows summary of the outcome of the presidential election.

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A	TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS	84,004,084
B	TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS (AS COLLATED)	82,344,107
C	TOTAL NUMBER OF ACCREDITED VOTERS (AS COLLATED)	29,364,209

D	TOTAL NUMBER OF VALID VOTES (AS COLLATED)	27,324,583
E	TOTAL NUMBER OF REJECTED VOTES (AS COLLATED)	1,289,607
F	TOTAL NUMBER OF VOTES CAST (AS COLLATED)	28,614,190
G	PERCENTAGE TURN OUT (AS COLLATED)	35.66

Source: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/elections/election-results/>. Sourced on March 26, 2019 at 3:30pm

On table 4 above, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) gave the total number of registered voters and the total number of registered voters (as collated) for the 2019 presidential election as 84,004,084 and 82,344,107 respectively. However, the total number of accredited voters (as collated) for the election, that means the number of registered voters who eventual turned out to vote on the election day, stood at 29,364,209. This represents a paltry 35.66 percent of the entire registered voters.

Table 5 below shows details of turnout per state. The election took place in 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

TABLE 5: INEC FINAL RESULTS FOR 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

S/N	STATES	REGISTERED VOTERS	ACCREDITED VOTERS	TOTAL VOTES CAST	TOTAL VALID VOTES	REJECTED VOTES
1.	Osun	1,674,729	732,984	731,882	714,682	17,200
2.	Ekiti	899,919	395,741	393,709	381,132	12,577
3.	FCT	1,335,015	467,784	451,408	423,951	27,457
4.	Kwara	1,401,895	489,482	486,254	459,676	26,578
5.	Nasarawa	1,509,481	613,720	599,399	580,778	18,621
6.	Kogi	1,640,449	570,773	553,496	521,016	32,480
7.	Gombe	1,385,191	604,240	580,649	554,203	26,446
8.	Ondo	1,812,567	598,586	586,827	555,994	30,833
9.	Abia	1,793,861	361,561	344,471	323,291	21,180
10.	Yobe	1,365,913	601,059	586,137	559,365	26,772
11.	Enugu	1,935,168	452,765	451,063	421,014	30,049
12.	Ebonyi	1,392,931	391,747	379,394	359,131	20,263
13.	Niger	2,375,568	911,964	896,976	851,937	45,039
14.	Jigawa	2,104,889	1,171,801	1,149,922	1,106,244	43,678
15.	Kaduna	3,861,033	1,757,868	1,709,005	1,663,603	45,402
16.	Anambra	2,389,332	675,273	625,035	605,734	19,301

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17.	Oyo	2,796,542	905,007	891,080	836,531	54,549
18.	Adamawa	1,959,322	874,920	860,756	811,534	49,222
19.	Ogun	2,336,887	613,397	605,938	564,256	41,682
20.	Lagos	6,313,507	1,196,490	1,156,590	1,089,567	67,023
21.	Bauchi	2,453,512	1,075,330	1,061,955	1,024,307	37,648
22.	Edo	2,150,127	604,915	599,228	560,711	38,517
23.	Benue	2,391,276	786,069	763,872	728,912	34,960
24.	Imo	2,037,569	585,741	542,777	511,586	31,191
25.	Plateau	2,423,381	1,074,042	1,062,862	1,034,853	28,009
26.	Kano	5,391,581	2,006,410	1,964,751	1,891,134	73,617
27.	Katsina	3,210,422	1,628,865	1,619,185	1,555,473	63,712
28.	Taraba	1,777,105	756,111	741,564	712,877	28,687
29.	Cross River	1,512,915	461,033	446,046	421,901	24,145
30.	Akwa Ibom	2,119,727	695,677	605,140	578,775	26,365
31.	Delta	2,719,313	891,647	882,254	829,762	52,492
32.	Borno	2,319,434	987,290	955,205	919,786	35,419
33.	Rivers	3,215,273	678,167	666,585	642,165	24,420
34.	Zamfara	1,717,128	616,168	597,224	578,439	18,785
35.	Kebbi	1,802,697	835,238	803,755	756,605	47,150
36.	Bayelsa	923,182	344,237	335,856	321,767	14,089
37.	Sokoto	1,895,266	950,107	925,940	871,891	54,049

Source: <https://www.pulse.ng/news/politics/presidential-election-see-results-here/qcvmet8>.

Sourced on February 28, 2019 at 12:25am. Tabulation done by the researcher.

From the table, Lagos State with largest total number of registered voters in the country as 6,313,507 had number of accredited voters for the presidential election as 1,196,490. In the same vein, Abia State which has total number of registered voters of 1,793,861 recorded 361,561 as accredited voters during the election. Also, only 678,167 out of the 3,215,273 registered voters in Rivers State turned out to cast their votes during the presidential election.

In Kano State with 5,391,581 registered voters, 2,006,410 were recorded as accredited voters. In Anambra State, out of the 2,389,332 registered voters, only 675,273 turned out to cast their votes on the election day. The same low voter turnout was recorded in Ogun State where 613,397 of the 2,336,887 registered voters turned out to vote. The situation was the same in Imo where 585,741 out of 2,037,569 registered voters and Cross River where 461,033 out of the 1,512,915 registered voters turned out to cast their votes.

Equally from the table, the situation of low voter turnout during the 2019 presidential election was not different in both Katsina and Adamawa states where the frontrunners in the election

come from. As indicated by the table, Katsina State had total number of registered voters as 3,210,422 but only 1,628,865 came out to vote. Even in the face of the low voter turnout, the state had second largest voter turnout as indicated by the table.

In the case of Adamawa State, only 874,920 of the 1,959,322 registered voters turned out to vote. This is regardless of the fact that Atiku Abubakar who is the candidate of the main opposition party in the election, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) hails from there and could have campaigned vigorously to elicit high voter turnout.

In the election and as indicated by the table, the state with highest rate of voter turnout in the presidential election is Jigawa. Even at that, finding of this research indicates that only 1,171,801 out of the 2,104,889 registered voters turned out to vote. Even in Sokoto with third highest voter turnout rate, only 950,107 of the 1,895,266 registered voters eventually turned out to vote.

Perhaps, another factor which could assist in the analysis is the issue of collection of Permanent Voters' Card (PVC). Irrespective of what turns out as total number of registered voters for the election in general and for each of the states in particular, no voter was allowed to vote without possession of a PVC. The data is present in Table 6.

TABLE 6: TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS AND COLLECTED PVCs FOR THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

S/N	State	No of Registered Voters	No of PVCs Collected as at 11/02/2019	No of Uncollected PVCs	Percentage of Collected PVCs to Registered Voters
1	Abia	1,932,892	1,729,943	202,949	89.50
2	Adamawa	1,973,083	1,788,706	184,377	90.66
3	Akwa Ibom	2,119,727	1,933,362	186,365	91.21
4	Anambra	2,447,996	2,071,714	376,282	84.63
5	Bauchi	2,462,843	2,335,717	127,126	94.84
6	Bayelsa	923,182	769,509	153,673	83.35
7	Benue	2,480,131	2,244,376	235,755	90.49
8	Borno	2,315,956	2,000,228	315,728	86.37
9	Cross River	1,527,289	1,387,314	139,975	90.84
10	Delta	2,845,274	2,470,924	374,350	86.84
11	Ebonyi	1,459,933	1,299,048	160,885	88.98
12	Edo	2,210,534	1,726,738	483,796	78.11
13	Ekiti	909,967	666,591	243,376	73.25
14	Enugu	1,944,016	1,787,537	156,479	91.95

15	FCT	1,344,856	1,026,920	317,936	76.36
16	Gombe	1,394,393	1,335,223	59,170	95.76
17	Imo	2,272,293	1,702,178	570,115	74.91
18	Jigawa	2,111,106	1,625,721	485,385	77.01
19	Kaduna	3,932,492	3,648,831	283,661	92.79
20	Kano	5,457,747	4,696,747	761,000	86.06
21	Katsina	3,230,230	3,187,988	42,242	98.69
22	Kebbi	1,806,231	1,718,180	88,051	95.13
23	Kogi	1,646,350	1,435,751	210,599	87.21
24	Kwara	1,406,457	1,149,969	256,488	81.76
25	Lagos	6,570,291	5,531,389	1,038,902	84.19
26	Nasarawa	1,617,786	1,442,184	175,602	89.15
27	Niger	2,390,035	2,173,204	216,831	90.93
28	Ogun	2,375,003	1,694,867	680,136	71.36
29	Ondo	1,822,346	1,478,460	343,886	81.13
30	Osun	1,680,498	1,266,587	413,911	75.37
31	Oyo	2,934,107	2,176,352	757,755	74.17
32	Plateau	2,480,455	2,095,409	385,046	84.48
33	Rivers	3,215,273	2,833,101	382,172	88.11
34	Sokoto	1,903,166	1,726,887	176,279	90.74
35	Taraba	1,777,105	1,729,094	48,011	97.30
36	Yobe	1,365,913	1,261,914	103,999	92.39
37	Zamfara	1,717,128	1,626,839	90,289	94.74
	TOTAL	84,004,084	72,775,502	11,228,582	86.63

SOURCE: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/all-about-2019-general-elections/> Sourced on April 4, 2019 at 11:27pm

According to Table 6, number of uncollected PVCs prior to the presidential election stood at 11,228,582. This means that more than 11 million electorate were disallowed from voting even though they were registered voters because they failed to collect the permanent voters' card which could have enabled them to cast their ballot. As a matter of fact and as revealed by the table, the number of PVCs collected as at February, 11, 2019 stood at 72,775,502 while the percentage of collected PVCs to registered voters was 86.63 percent. However, it is instructive to reiterate that the figure of 84,004,084 in this table as total number of registered voters for the election contradicts what INEC gave as number of registered voters (as collated) after the election which stood at 82,344,107. This had been stated earlier.

However, in view of the obvious low turnout of voters for the presidential election, the question therefore remains, what is implication of this phenomenon on sustenance of democracy in Nigeria?

2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

One of the issues identified in this research is the low voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. It means that most eligible voters failed to show up in order to cast their ballot on the election day. The phenomenon necessitates further interrogation on what it portends for efforts at sustenance of democracy in the country.

Obviously, extant secondary sources provide answers to this. For instance, Adekoya (2019), in an opinion article titled *Democracy has failed in Nigeria when voters no longer care who wins* published in *The Guardian*, provides both reasons for the low voter turnout as well as its implications for Nigeria's democracy. She said poor organisation was one reason and argued that the postponement of the presidential election at the last minute caused frustration as well as suspicion that politicians were delaying things to perfect their rigging strategies, even as she observed that voting itself often involves waiting long hours, in a cumbersome and inefficient process and for some, it was too much hassle.

According to her, there was also the ever-present fear of violence on election day. Considering the fact that politics is a high-stakes game anywhere and in Nigeria the rewards of victory are particularly high as well as the fact that the Nigerian State is too weak to have a monopoly on violence, some political actors took advantage of this and deployed it as a tool for competitive advantage. To her, it is likely that the largest contributing factor to the extremely low turnout was the feeling that whoever won, nothing would change. As she noted, the system is so corrupt that it makes no difference whether X or Y is president, and referred to Pew Research conducted last year which she said showed that only 39% of Nigerians were satisfied with their democracy, 72% said most politicians were corrupt, 57% said no matter who wins elections, things do not change much and only 38% felt that elected officials cared what ordinary people think.

Turning to the implication of this on the country's democracy, Adekoya insists that a democracy is in trouble when two out of three voters don't bother to turn up for a presidential election. She said, "And so here we are. The problem is that it is difficult for a system to maintain its legitimacy if only one in three citizens believe in it. This is the position Nigerian democracy now

finds itself in. Like a marriage, democracy cannot survive without trust. The relationship between the Nigerian government and its people is broken. Apathy prevails. Trust is scarce.”

Also, Wilmot (2019) in an opinion article published by *Reliefweb* (<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/after-elections-important-questions-remain-nigeria-s-democracy>) titled, *After Elections, Important Questions Remain for Nigeria’s Democracy*, first notes that by some estimates, the 2019 elections had the lowest voter turnout since the country emerged from military rule in 1999—and the lowest on the continent, further hinting that violence, intimidation, and harassment increased fears around voting, and evidence of misconduct that went unpunished may have led citizens to decide that voting was more trouble than its worth. He said, “While voter turnout could have been influenced by many factors, some have speculated Nigerians may be losing faith in the freedom and fairness of the process. If these processes fail, the credibility of Nigeria’s democracy could be undermined, possibly contributing to a more volatile political security environment through to the 2023 elections.”

Equally in an article titled "*Nigeria's Election Disappointments*" published by *Council on Foreign Relations*, Campbell (2019) said February's presidential election did not inspire confidence in the democratic trajectory of Africa's most populous country. According to him, Nigeria's latest presidential election cycle has been bad news for democracy in Africa's most populous country and across the continent. As he observed, “The poor quality of this election cycle and the low and declining number of voters do not inspire confidence, and some Nigerians have begun to question whether democracy is right for their country.”

In its editorial published on March 1, 2019 titled *Nigerians voted – by not voting*, *Mail and Guardian* newspaper reports that the low turnout during the presidential election suggested a loss of faith in Nigeria's political system, with voters uninspired by either of the front-running candidates. It said, “In this election, Nigerians made their feelings clear — by not voting. The people have now spoken. For the sake of Africa's largest democracy, we hope that its leaders are paying attention. Other African leaders, perhaps even those from the continent's other economic hub, should also take note.”

In the same vein, an election monitoring group, YMonitor (2019) reports that in the presidential election, Nigerians just decided to stay back such that at the end of the day, when the numbers were counted, only 36% of the eligible voters decided who became the President of Nigeria. It observed that was unprecedented in the history of democracy in the country, worse than in 2015, and said, “Maybe we should stop being carelessly optimistic, maybe we should equally agree that if the necessary things are not done, 36% voters’ turnout may just be a better figure compared to what would come in 2023.”

Yet another election monitoring group, YIAGA Africa, in a preliminary report signed by its Communications Officer, Moshood Isah, which was released in Abuja on the presidential election quoted by *Leadership newspaper* (2019) states that the outcome reflected a growing sense of disconnect between the political class and the masses. The newspaper also quoted a member of Alliance for Democracy (AD), Stephen Mondo, as having said that there was low voter turnout because elections are becoming so violent and nobody wants to loose his or her life. He said, “You know politicians are so desperate, even the electoral process is not credible and the whole process has become a do or die affair, killings among other things are some factors discouraging people from voting. People turned out to believe that even if they vote, their vote will not be counted.”

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in its work (<http://www.cddwestafrica.org/electoral-trends-in-nigeria/>) in 2019, *Nigeria Electoral Trends*, notes the following as some of the reasons behind voter apathy: the absence of dividends of democracy to the people, maintaining that many Nigerians, particularly the poor, are yet to feel the impact of transition from military to civil rule in terms of improved welfare and livelihood and this has brought about increased disenchantment with the whole political process as this class of citizens are now in a place where going to the polling unit to vote has lost its meaning. According to the group, the conduct of the political class is unfortunately now becoming a disincentive to some Nigerians as it regards participation in the electoral process. “It is commonplace to hear some politicians say: no matter what; they are going to win. Many voters take that to mean their votes won’t count and so don’t participate in elections,” the group said.

Achi (2019) in news analysis titled, *Low voter turnout reflects loss of faith* and published by *ThisDay* newspaper, observed that the February 23 presidential poll was curiously defined by voter suppression, outright targeted violence/deaths, palpable militarization of the electoral space, targeted inflation of poll figures and a long list of other malfeasances, including the deepened sense of “my vote doesn’t count anymore”. He said, “Clearly, the low voter turnout flows from diminished faith in the process. Elections that fall short of the standards can only serve to undermine the consolidation of democracy. This is the danger facing Nigeria today, unfortunately so after 20 years of unbroken civil rule.”

SUMMARY

The research studied the February 23, 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. Specifically, it examined the events that shaped the election as well as its outcome with a view to presenting empirical facts about the election and so contributing to existing bank of knowledge on elections and democracy in Nigeria.

The election interrogated was significant in some way. The ruling All Progressives Congress was determined to retain power which it gained from the People’s Democratic Party in 2015. The latter, on its own part, put up spirited effort to regain power at the centre. Besides, there was the belief that the election provided an opportunity for citizens to pass verdict on the country’s democracy, having been ruled by two different political parties since the country returned to uninterrupted civilian administration in 1999. The question before the election, however, was whether Nigeria would be able to give herself free, fair, credible and violence-free election and through that navigate her way through her democratic choices. There was equally an apprehension over the kind of verdict the citizens would give concerning their democracy through the election.

This paper therefore undertook critical review of the election. Events before and during the election were reviewed. Implications of those events as well as the general outcome of the election on the country’s democracy were equally examined.

The documentary method was used in collation of data for the research. Thus, data was collated from secondary sources. These sources include INEC’s election datasheet, election observers’

report, opinion articles/news analyses published by newspapers, media statements/press releases, textbooks, journals and newspapers. Analysis of the data was done using qualitative descriptive approach.

The research established that the election recorded negative incidences. These included electoral violence, many operational shortcomings by the electoral umpire (the Independent National Electoral Commission), as well as loss of faith in the political process and political class by voters. Various kinds of violence including voter suppression/intimidation, outright targeted violence/killings, militarization of the electoral space, compromised security, targeted inflation of election results and ballot box snatching and stuffing were recorded during the election. Also, as the election was shifted barely few hours to the opening of polling units, the electorate suspected that those responsible for superintending over the electoral process were up to something untoward. Besides, there were many logistics challenges that confronted the electoral body and which affected the integrity of the election. These were in addition to the failure of most registered voters to turn out to vote. Those who failed to come out to vote believed that their votes would not count afterall. In fact, the presidential election witnessed low voter turnout. It had the lowest voter turnout since the country emerged from military rule in 1999 and was the lowest on the continent so far and this has far-reaching implication for the country's democracy. It meant that the citizens did not believe that their democracy works for them.

CONCLUSION

The overall objective of this research is to examine the events that shaped the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria as well as the outcome of the election. The specific aim is to assess the relevance of democracy in the country, going by the outcome of the two phenomena interrogated.

Consequently, the research established that electoral violence challenged the credibility of the election. With the established security lapses, there was certainly no way of concluding that the election was free since voters were not free to cast their ballot as intended.

On the other hand, the research revealed that most electorate boycotted the election. That means that majority of the registered voters failed to turn out to vote on the election day. In fact, it was found that the presidential election recorded the lowest voter turnout since the country emerged

from military rule in 1999. This phenomenon is found to have been engineered by voters' loss of confidence in the electoral process characterized by electoral violence and many operational shortcomings by the electoral umpire as well as loss of faith in the political class to represent voters' interest when voted into office. The essence is that the lack of interest in the election by the registered voters did not happen for nothing. It means that there is loss of faith in the political system and the electoral process and a growing sense of disconnect between the political class and the masses. People believe their votes will not count even when they vote; they believe going to the polling units to vote has lost its meaning. This therefore calls for reform of the electoral process to eliminate electoral violence and restore voters' trust on the electoral process, electoral umpire and in the political class. Except this is done, fear is heightened on what kind of implication the lack of interest in elections by eligible voters can have on sustenance of democracy in the country. Obviously in the heart of the phenomenon of low voter turnout during the presidential election is difficulty of the system to maintain its legitimacy. Since popular participation in elections accords legitimacy to democracies, boycotting polling units on an election day produces opposite effect. Again, the decision to boycott the election shows that Nigerians are losing faith in democracy. It means that citizens have begun to question whether democracy is right for their country. Political participation and in particular participating in elections is an important indicator of the state of health of any democracy. Whereas this is true, low voter turnout at elections sadly serves to undermine efforts at sustaining democracy in the country. In fact, it outrightly means that democracy is failing in the country when voters no longer care who wins in elections.

With this, it can therefore be concluded that events before and during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria posed big threat to the country's democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the conclusion highlighted above, the following recommendation can be made: reform of the electoral process to eliminate electoral violence and restore voters' trust on the electoral process, electoral umpire and in the political class. As was established by the findings of the research, the presidential election witnessed various forms of electoral violence including voter suppression/intimidation, outright targeted violence/killings, militarization of the electoral

space, compromised security and targeted inflation of election results. On the other hand, there was lack of trust in the electoral process, on INEC and on the political class by the voters. Whereas there was mistrust that the process was not credible and had been skewed to favour certain interests, INEC's logistics shortcomings including the last-minute postponement of the election raised the feeling that something untoward was fishing and went on to reinforce the fear. That was same way that the conduct of the political class was a disincentive to some Nigerians as it regards participation in the electoral process. This is so as it is becoming difficult to see the political class deliver dividends of democracy to the people yet boast during elections that they are going to win no matter what. Continuing in this way would certainly jeopardize democratization process in Nigeria, thus the need for the reform.

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