

EDITORIAL

On 14 and 21 April 2007 Nigerians went to the polls to elect their leaders. The first election was for governors and members of the state houses of assembly, the second, for the president and members of the National Assembly. The elections, the central institution of democratic representative government, were vital in a nascent democracy like Nigeria. Why? Because in a democracy the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the conduct of free and fair elections at regular intervals.

Nigeria's 2007 general elections were remarkable in a number of ways. First, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, the country had had eight tumultuous years of democracy – the longest period since Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960. The second significant factor was that for the first time in the country's history power was being transferred from one civilian government to another. It would have been even more significant if it were being transferred from the ruling party to the opposition.

All modern democracies hold elections, but not all elections are democratic. And that is what makes the difference and is why this special issue of the *Journal of African Elections*, focusing on the 2007 general elections, is important, investigating, as it does, just how democratic the elections were. The papers are carefully crafted by Nigerian scholars who followed the elections closely and as dispassionately as possible.

The issue is introduced with Ojo's theoretical postulations on elections, which serve as the theoretical framework. The hub of the theoretical perspective is a cue from Jeane Kirkpatrick, scholar and former US Ambassador to the United Nations, who believes that 'democratic elections are not merely symbolic ... They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism and to present alternative.' Ojo's paper highlights the crucial criteria for an election to achieve its democratic purpose.

Ojo's lead empirical paper analyses the elections in relation to the problem of political succession, concluding that without credible elections sustainable democracy in Nigeria might prove to be a mirage.

Aiyede considers the constitutional provisions on elections and the Electoral Act 2006 in the context of the challenges of achieving credible elections in Nigeria.

Albert reviews the campaign strategies adopted by candidates and political parties, looking at both pre-primary and post-primary campaigns. A key issue that emerges is that the environment within which the candidates in the 2007 elections campaigned was neither positive nor equitable. He expresses the view that the election campaigns were characterised by misuse of money and the media and by threats, restrictions, intimidation, pressures and other unethical practices.

Ijim-Agbor examines the role of the electoral body, INEC, which is expected to be an impartial umpire, finding that INEC compromised itself and its officials before, during, and after these crucial elections, thereby damaging their credibility.

In a joint work Adejumo and Kehinde bemoan a situation whereby politicians driving political parties are far from being democrats, either in terms of their ideological fluidity or in their political behaviour. They observe, further, that rather than political parties being a catalyst for sustainable democracy, they pose the threat of democratic reversal.

Mimiko, using case-study methodology, concentrates on Ondo State politics, considering the processes of party formation and electoral contests. His focus is on the Labour Party and the 2007 elections. Writing as an insider, Mimiko, a participating observer, believes that although wider space was provided for political engagement in the country, as represented by new, freer, party formations and administration, the bungling of the 2007 elections and the wanton deployment of state power in support of the ruling party, the PDP, was uncalled for.

One of the potent problems of democratic consolidation in the recent past in Nigeria has been the phenomenon of 'godfatherism'. Omotola examines this issue critically and calls for deepening of democratic institutions to limit the powers of domineering personalities, without which, he argues, Nigeria may relapse into what he terms a 'choiceless' democracy.

A concomitant effect of 'godfatherism' is electoral violence. O B C Nwolise chronicles the spate of election-related violence, describing it as unprecedented. Nwolise notes that no nation ever achieves a stable democracy in an atmosphere of prevalent electoral violence and sees violence as the greatest enemy of democracy and electoral processes in Nigeria.

Danjibo and Oladeji examine the phenomenon of vote buying and selling and consider its origins and possible solutions to the problem.

The last paper, by Adebayo and Omotola, looks at public perceptions of the elections. The authors express the belief that the elections were flawed and concede that the perceptions of both local and international observers accords with those of the average Nigerian.

It is imperative to note that the flawed election generated unprecedented legal battles across the country. Thus far six governors have lost their 'mandates' as a result of unfavourable election petition tribunals judgements while several

others have lost theirs in state assemblies and the national bicameral legislature. Two leading presidential candidates, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) of the ANPP and former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar of the AC, have also taken their grievances to the Supreme Court. The petitioners complained that, among other things, the voters' register was defective and ballot papers lacked serial numbers and were not in booklet form with counterfoils to allow for crosschecking. They also protested the deployment of the armed forces in an apparent attempt to intimidate voters.

In the words of Mohammed Haruna in his column 'People and Politics' (*The Nation* 5 March 2008, p 48), the courts not only refused to take judicial notice of these and other attempts by the authorities to fix the elections, they dismissed the oppositions' petitions as 'miniature complaints'! Yet, there were fundamental flaws in the very foundation of the elections.

This special issue is a modest contribution to efforts to explain and understand Nigeria's contemporary politics and a worthy addition to the extant literature on the subject.

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