ELECTORAL PROCESS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the 1999 general elections, democracy and sustainable development in Benue State. For any nation to attain any form of development, such a nation has to depend to a very large extent on the nation's electoral process, particularly the conduct of the election. This is because a credible electoral process tends to produce the right people with the right attitudes that can engineer the cause of development. For democracy to be achieved in Benue State and indeed Nigeria, and enhance development, its election and the electoral process must be strengthened. Data for this study was gathered from secondary sources and personal observation. The objectives of this paper are to examine elections and democracy in Benue State with a focus on the 1999 general elections. To assess if the 1999 general election in Benue State have been able to lay a solid foundation for democracy to thrive. The paper, therefore, recommends among other things that for democracy to be fully achieved, elections must be violence-free, as democracy cannot survive in an atmosphere of chaos and trauma. The 1999 Constitution and Electoral Act should be amended to provide stiffer penalties for any violation of electoral laws. With these elections in Benue State and indeed Nigeria, will always reflect the true wishes of the people and hence guarantee good political structures and institutions which form the bedrock of democracy

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Introduction:

Elections are fundamental features of representative democracy. They are regarded as the only acceptable means of either enthroning new leadership or dethroning an existing one. Election, broadly speaking, refers to the process of elite selection by the masses of the population in any given political system. As rightly stated by Mbah (2006), the electoral system is seen as the key to measuring whether a political system is democratic or not. He further stated, for any country to be classified as democratic, there should be periodic elections that will guarantee free participation without any form of harassment, intimidation, thereby allowing the masses to choose who they want to vote for. To Ajayi, (2015) election involves a set of activities leading to the selection of one or more persons out of many to serve in position of authority in a given nation. Nnoli (1990) defines election as the manner of choice agreed upon by a group of people which enables them to select one or a few out of many to occupy one or a number of positions of authority. This choice is usually agreed upon by a group of people which enables them to select one or a few people out of many to occupy one or a number of authorities. This choice usually involves rules and regulations designed to ensure a certain degree of fairness and justice to all concerned. From the forgoing, election may be regarded as a process of choosing from the many contestants who should run the affairs of government by casting of votes by the masses. Thus, there cannot be democracy without elections, hence they are regarded as pillars of democracy.

Democracy exists where the people of a particular country rule through a form of government they choose to establish. It connotes free and equal rights of every person to participate in a system of government. In other words, democracy underscores the practice of electing representatives of the people into public offices by the majority of the people. The most popular concept of democracy is that given by a former American President, Abraham Lincoln, who defined democracy as government of the people, for the people and by the people. This, by implication, is a government that the people rule through the process of electing leaders.

To Heater (1964) democracy is essentially a method of organising society politically. He further adds that, there are five basic elements without which no community can claim to be democratic. These elements include equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life and the rule of law and the liberty of the individual. It follows that democracy has largely come to refer to a form of government that allows for popular participation by the citizens. It is a system of government that is guided by a body of laws and which guarantees people's basic rights, but not limited to civil or political rights. Therefore, no democracy exists without elections and democracy can only be meaningful where there is sustainable development.

Sustainable development according to World Development and Environmental Commission (WDEC) (1987) refers to it, as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This entails the ability of a nation to harness its resources for the sustainability of a given economy.

The attainment of any form of development, especially political development in a nation, depends to a very large extent on such a nation's electoral process, particularly the conduct of elections. This is because a credible electoral process tends to produce the right people with the right attitudes that can engineer the cause of development. This is more likely to happen when democratic institutions and structures are strengthened, and individuals are willing to play the game of politics according to set standards or rules. Elections in particular have the potential to confer legitimacy, moderate dissent, engender compliance, and heighten citizen's efficacy (Elekwa, 2008). In support of Elekwa's view Abudlateef (2009) asserts that, the fact that Nigeria has not become an industrial giant can be traced to lack of free and fair elections that should have brought about stable democracy and have positive economic development.

The emergence of candidates in election generally reflects the true wishes of the people. This makes the emerging leaders accountable and responsible to the yearning and aspirations of the people who elected them. By this, they enter into a social contract with the people by virtue of their elections and hence, pledge to employ every available resources to attract development for the people who they represent. Going by the above, representative government have to be in place where the authority of government is derived safely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating the consent into government authority is the holding of free and fair elections. In Nigeria, the electoral process and election administration have been terribly inefficient, lacking in desirable attributes of free and fair elections, a situation that often precipitates violence and acrimony.

It is worth noting that one strong defensive mechanism of any form of representative government anywhere in the world has been that it is a means of safeguarding the liberty of individuals and protecting them against unnecessary constraints on their actions. It is only a democracy that provides persuasion rather than by violent coercion. From the above explanations, sustainable development can hardly be achieved unless the ground has been watered and enriched by hard work, patriotism, true love for one's self and neighbours, willingness of the people to discharge their various and numerous civic responsibilities and obligations and the sincere commitment of leaders to uphold and sustain the democratic values such as fundamental human rights and individual liberty, periodic elections, the rule of law, accountability, independence of the Judiciary among others. It is against this background that this paper examines whether the 1999 General Elections have

been able to produce credible leadership in Benue State, hence sustainable development. This paper investigated the relationship between electoral process and sustainable development in Benue State.

Theoretical Framework

Every political and social problem is amenable to a theoretical explanation. This is because; it can best be understood and appreciated when viewed within the ambit of a theory. For the purpose of this study, there are a variety of theories that can adequately explain the role of elections in the political development of Benue State and indeed Nigeria. However, the theory considered most suitable for this study is the elite theory. This is a theory that postulates that public policy, government actions and activities reflect the values and preferences of the elites, rather than the wishes of the masses. The theory states that because the elites share common interest in the preservation of their status their actions and activities are bound to be conservative, non-innovative and marginal, rather than those with bold and high change potentials. Even though their policies and programmes may sometimes be in the masses interest, the long-term interest may always be that of the elites. The elites are normally few in the society but they wield power and influence, allocate values and rule. The masses that constitute the majority in the society only obey and are guided, controlled and governed by the few elites (Ikelegbe, 1996).

The theory further posits that the elites consist of those who hold leading positions in the strategic sectors of the society and wield power in the strategic groups. They are however classified as military elites, business elites, bureaucratic elites, political or governing elites, as well as religious and traditional elites. The theory postulates that most of these elites do not hold formal or legal authoritative powers but are rather behind the scene, tele-guiding and manipulating political policy matters. They however owe their positions to the control of the productive resources of the society and of the social or religious values held by the society such as wealth, economic influence, social status and education (Ikelegbe, 1996 and Enemuo, 1999).

The Theory relies heavily on Marxism and political economy approach, particularly the Marxist strand of it. Marx therefore, believes that there is no way the elite can use state power to benefit all and sundry in the society. According to him, those in power would always do everything possible to preserve the power they have and those who want power would do anything possible to secure political power. They therefore have the domineering power over the masses. Anifowose (1983) has stated that "The Nigeria society is structured in a way that no one outside the elite have access to power, they would always want the power to rotate between them" These elites referred to by Rodney (1972) as petit-bourgeoisie are the managers of the state structures who impede the development process of the state, benefiting immensely from a weak system they help to consolidate at the detriment of impoverished masses. These elites frustrate

the development process generally, and thus make the attainment of political development quite illusive for their selfish motives. The theory is however criticized for over assuming that the people that control economic resources normally control political power which is not always the case. The theory is equally presumptuous and normative in nature and do not at all times capture the reality. Also according to Dahl in Anifowose and Enemuo (1999) the elite model is undemocratic as it is amenable to oligarchy than democratic tenants.

This theory is relevant to the study in the sense that, it goes to explain that political development which is supposed to ensure adjustments between old patterns of state life and new demands and hence, encourages political participation and competition of social and economic groups in the political life of a nation is always hampered by the governing elites who always want to maintain the status quo for personal gains. The governing elites always strive to subvert a progressive political culture in the state by resisting changes in the various strata of the society, making it difficult for new types, goals and demands to be achieved in the political system. They equally subvert the welfare and wellbeing of the people including their right to participate in elections and choose their preferred leaders. And it is these set of people who occupy important positions in the government and society, and as well control economic resources. So, they wield so much influence in the society, thereby determining who becomes what and how, through the use of their power and resources to woo the people into accepting their decisions and preferences. In view of this, it becomes very difficult to effect changes in structures, institutional processes and political behaviour. Because the elite seek political power for personal gains, they often tamper with the credibility and fairness of elections in some cases through votes buying, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation of prospective voters, just to mention a few.

Historical Overview of Elections in Benue State

The history of elections and indeed politics in Benue State pre-dates the creation of Benue State in 1976. This is because Benue-born politicians in the likes of the late Joseph Saawuan Tarka, Dzungwenen Iorkyaa Ako, Tyu Abe, Obande Obeya, to mention a few were actively involved in party politics in the Northern Regional Government and had contested various elections into the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos and the Tiv and Idoma Native Authority (Okpoju, 2002). The creation of Benue-Plateau State among the twelve states created by Gowon in 1967 is linked to this Tiv struggle. This was done with the aim to satisfy the persistent Tiv demand for having a state of their own where they could exercise individual and group self-determination.

Elections and Political Development in Benue State during the Second Republic (1979 – 1983)

This period marks the first electioneering process in Benue State since its creation in 1976. Party politics and electioneering activities began in full swing in the state following the lifting of ban on political activities on 21st September, 1978 by the Federal Military Government of General Olusegun Obasanjo after nearly thirteen years of military rule.

The gubernatorial candidates of these political parties as noted by Okpoju (2003) were Mr. Chia Surma, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Mr. Usman Sule Ejembi, Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Mr. Simon Bai, Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), Mr. Paul Belabo, Nigeria People's Party (NPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Mr Aper Aku of the NPN eventually emerged the winner of the governorship contest. This was a short but eventful period for Benue State.

Elections and Political Development in Benue State during the Third (Aborted) and Fourth Republics (1991 – 2015)

This period marks the third and the fourth electioneering process in Benue State. This came after a long period of military rule which saw the military governments of Generals Mohammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida. Two political parties were eventually formed bequeathed to the electorate. These were the Nigerian Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democracy Party (SDP) (Jibo, 2014).

In Benue State, the two political parties were embraced by the electorate and the political elites. After intensive campaigns, elections were finally held and Rev. Father Moses Orshio Adasu of the SDP emerged as the second democratically elected Governor of Benue State in December 1992 and was sworn in on 2nd January, 1993.

On the other hand, the Fourth Republic was ushered in on 29th May, 1999 following the successful conduct of elections and handover of government machinery to the civilians by the Military (Adega, 2013).The gubernatorial elections of 1999 General Elections in Benue State was contested and won by George Akume of the Peoples Democratic Party.

Methodology

The questionnaires and interviews were the major instruments used to obtain primary data. Out of the total population of study, a sample population of 400 people was used. This was arrived at using Taro Yamene's formula, for determining a definite sample population. Leaders and members comprised INEC staff, security agencies, political parties, students, academics, farmers, traders, among others were part of the registered voters in Benue State as the study population. However, out of the 400 questionnaires issued out, only 393 were successfully returned. So the analysis here is based on the 393 questionnaires returned. This is presented below in a tabular form for

lucid understanding. Also, eight people, two each from among INEC officials, leaders of political parties, press executives and leaders of thought were interviewed.

The 1999 General Elections and Political Development in Benue State

This section presents an analysis of data obtained from the field on the 1999 General elections in Benue State and discusses its implications for democracy. The data presented here is based on both primary and secondary sources.

Table 1: Analysis of questionnaire issued out and collected back

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Total number of questionnaires issued	400	100
Total number of questionnaires received back	393	98.25
Total number of questionnaires not returned	07	1.75

Source: Field Survey, December 2016

The presentation and analysis of data here treat the main data in line with the objectives of the paper, which we stated in each of the tables given below.

Table 2: Table showing how the sample (respondents) were distributed by Senatorial Zone/ Local Government

Questionnaire:

Senatorial Zone	Local Government	Distribution of Respondents	Zonal Total
Benue North East	Vandeikya	75	
	Kwande	75	150
Benue North West	Buruku	75	
	Makurdi	75	150
Benue South	Otukpo	55	
	Oju	45	100
Total		400	400

Source: Field Survey, December 2016

We also interviewed a total of fifteen (15) respondents, comprising of five (5) from Benue North East, one from each of the Local Government Areas, Vandeikya, Ushongo, Ukum, Konshisha and Logo, five (5) from Benue North West, with one respondent each from Guma, Gboko, Tarka, Gwer and Gwer West, while five (5) from Benue South comprising one each from Apa, Agatu, Ogbadibo, Obi and Ado. This was done in order to balance the distribution.

The Conduct of the 1999 General Elections and Democracy in Benue State

This section is devoted to assessing or determining how well the 1999 General Elections were conducted and how that promoted constitutional order, rule of law, political stability, tolerance, political consciousness and participation in Benue State. This section seeks to also address the quality of the 1999 General Elections in Benue State before, during and after the elections as well as the role of Civil Society Groups and INEC in the area of voter education.

The Quality of the 1999 General Elections and its impact on Democracy on Logistics, timely collation of results, security of Electoral Materials and Personnel.

In a bid to addressing the issue in this section, efforts were made to examine how the 1999 General Elections in Benue State were conducted by exhibiting some level of fairness and justice to all concerned parties. Also in the area of logistics timely and adequate provision of electoral materials, the security of electoral materials and personnel as well as timely collation and announcement of results.

Table 3: The 1999 General elections were a sharp departure from past elections particularly the 1979 & 1983 General Elections in terms of its general conducts and voter participation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	19	4.83
Agree	154	39.19
Disagree	142	36.13
Strongly Disagree	15	3.82
Not sure	63	16.03
Total	**393**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, December, 2016

Table 3 indicates that when an assertion was made that the 1999 General Elections in Benue State were a sharp departure from past elections particularly the 1999 and 1983 elections in terms of their general conduct and other participation in Benue State, the responses were thus; 19 (4.83%) Strongly Agreed; 154 (39.18%) Agreed, 142 (36.13%) Disagreed, 15 (3.81%) Strongly Disagreed, while 63 (16.03%) were not sure. The implication here is that quite a number of the respondents answered both to the negative and positive. However, those who were on the agreement side of the statement were more in number. What that means therefore is that even though it was difficult to decide whether, the 1999 General Elections in Benue State were different from the previous ones, on the whole, it was to some extent better than the previous elections (the 1979, 1983, 1991 elections), considering the fact that these elections were characterized by too many electoral defects. The 1999 General Elections in Benue State offered opportunity for most prospective voters to participate in choosing their preferred leaders. They were also generally peaceful thereby ensuring stability and orderly change of government from the military to a democratically elected government.

Jibo (2014) also admits that the 1999 General elections were to some extent peaceful in Benue State. Given Kwande local government – a hitherto volatile area as an example, he pointed out that the PDP won the gubernatorial contest in Kwande with a margin of 52, 718 votes as against 29,996 votes for the ANPP. It also won the thirteen out of the fifteen council wards in the local government. This to say that, the 1999 general elections in Benue state to some extent was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere where the winner emerged with a clear margin which was even accepted by other gubernatorial candidates. Yet, these stunning defeats were accepted by Paul Unongo- the ANPP gubernatorial candidate in his own local government of origin and his party the ANPP with “feeble, peaceful protest” (Jibo, 2014). The general atmosphere before, during and after the 1999 General election was relatively peaceful across Benue State

Table 4: showing the quality of the 1999 General Election when compared to the 1979 and 1983 Elections in terms of General conduct and political participation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	61	15.52
Agree	169	43.01
Disagree	124	31.55
Strongly Disagree	30	7.63
Not sure	09	2.29
Total	**393**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, December, 2016

Table 4 showing the quality of the 1999 General Elections in terms of general conduct and political participation indicates that 61 respondents (15.52%) strongly agreed that the elections were conducted and that most people actually participated in it, 169 (43.01%) agreed, 124 (31.55%) disagreed, 30 (7.63%) strongly disagreed, while 09 (2.29%) were not sure.

The implication here is that a vast majority of those sampled were of the opinion that the 1999 General Elections in Benue State were to some extent better than the others particularly in the areas of preparations, timely provision of electoral materials, security of materials and personnel, collation and announcement of results, but were not totally different from the 1983 and 1979 elections. In the sense that some pulling units still had a shortage of electoral materials and a few cases of late arrivals of electoral materials were still noticed in some places. Also, some wealthy politicians tried to influence the voting behaviour of the electorate in some places. The elections however, offered an opportunity for political parties to mobilize their members who came out to exercise their franchise after many years of military rule. This held in no small measure to build democracy in Benue State.

Similarly, in an interview with a respondent who represented Kyan in Vandeikya constituency in the Benue State House of Assembly between 1999 and 2003 acknowledged and praised the preparations of the INEC in the conduct of these elections. He was of the opinion that as "a beneficiary of this election" he must confess that INEC did their best in the conduct of these elections. That is not to say that there were no issues at all. He said there were some challenges associated with late arrival of materials in some polling units and the shortage of ballot papers. However, these challenges, according to him, were minimal compared to what took place in 1983. Asked why he thought the 1999 polls were better conducted, the respondent admitted that the elections were conducted under the watch of the military. And because the military is known for order and discipline, the military government gave all the necessary support

to INEC to succeed in this onerous task, because General Abdulsalam Abubakar the military Head of State really meant to handover to the civilians in 1999 (Oral Interview, December, 2016).

in an interview, another respondent who was a former member of the Benue State House of Assembly under the ticket of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in 1999 attributed the successes recorded by INEC in the conduct of the 1999 elections to the inability of the emerging politicians to infiltrate INEC officials and the fear of unknown given the fact that the government in power was still a military government and could do and undo. Therefore, he said most of them tried their very best to do the right thing. The little lapses noticed were because he said, they were conducting elections for the first time after many years and some staff were new on the job, Generally, he said there were better preparations for the conduct of the 1999 General Elections (Oral Interview, Makurdi, 2016).

In the view of another respondent who said she served as a presiding officer in the governorship and House of Assembly elections in 1999 in Ukemberagya council ward of Logo local government, the 1999 elections were to some extent credible. This she said because compared with, particularly, the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections in which she also participated as INEC ad-hoc staff, elections took place in almost all the polling units in the local government. She also said there were considerably limited cases of ballot paper snatching, under age voting, shortage of electoral materials and announcement of results before collation which characterized the subsequent election in the area. The only area she found wanting was that of poor logistics arrangements which led to late arrival of electoral materials in some polling units, particularly where the terrain was very difficult (Oral Interview, Anyiin, December, 2016).

The views of another respondent who said he served as a ward collation officer in the 1999 elections in Agatu local government was also sought. He also praised INEC for a job well done in terms of preparations and conduct of the 1999 General Elections despite the short period of General Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition programme. He was of the view that in spite of the little time available INEC did its very best in the areas of logistics, timely collation and announcement of results. He also collaborated the view of the respondents who served as presiding officer, that elections took place in almost all the polling units and wards of Agatu Local Government Area with some only experiencing late arrival of election materials yet elections took place too. He was of the opinion that both permanent and ad-hoc staff did in most cases, did not compromise the credibility of the electoral process. He attributed the success recorded to the use of teachers and civil servants as INEC ad-hoc staff. These personnel he said, being employees of government were mindful of the security of their jobs in an event they were caught and so most of them refused to compromise the

integrity of the process. This he said, was contrary to the case of subsequent elections in which politicians hijacked the press and made sure party faithfuls and thugs were nominated as INEC ad-hoc staff to do the bidding of their respective political parties, making the process flawed (Oral Interview, Ogbule, Agatu 2016).

The results of the governorship election also indicated that the PDP had a total votes cast of 681,717, ANPP 399,723 and AD 3,683. This shows there was some level of transparency and sincerity in the 1999 electoral process.

The researcher also sought to know if at all money was used to influence voting behaviour in the 1999 elections. This is captured in Table 5.

Table 5: On the question of if money was used to influence voting behaviour and mobilization of voters in 1999 elections

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	79	20.10
Agree	147	37.40
Disagree	108	27.48
Strongly Disagree	26	6.62
Not sure	33	8.39
Total	**393**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

The result in the table indicates that 79 (20.10%) respondents strongly agreed, 147 (37.40%) agreed, 108 (27.48%) disagreed, 26 (6.62%) strongly disagreed while 33 (8.39%) were not sure.

The implication here is that over fifty percent of the total respondents have acknowledged that money may have greatly influenced in the 1999 elections in Benue State to mobilize prospective voters and encourage the participation of voters in the election. This was to enable them vote for the preferred candidates and political parties of their financiers. In a related development, a frontline politician in Vandeikya Local Government area of Benue State confirmed to the researcher in an interview that despite the fact that the election was conducted under the watch of military, politicians still rolled out money to influence and entice voters to vote for their preferred candidates and political parties. He was of the opinion that in some council wards, prominent politicians lavished money to make sure their council wards won for their respective political parties.

As to whether the 1999 General Elections ensured the security of electoral materials and personnel and that whether election results were timely collected and announced as expected by law, those interviewed; affirmed to the fact that it was generally

encouraging. One respondent particularly noted that because the tendency to cheat in elections was not much, most election results were announced early enough to prevent the possibility of contemplating rigging of army point in the course of transiting results.

The Impact of 1999 General Elections on the Political Structures, Systems, Institutions and Constitutional Order in Benue State

This section tries to see how the 1999 General Elections were able to impact on the political systems, structures and institutions of government in Benue State and as well enhanced constitutional order that was eroded during the long days of military rule. Below are the views of the respondents.

Table 6: The 1999 General elections brought about political development in Benue State by enhancing constitutional order and political stability as well as political participation and improvement in political structures and institutions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	06	1.52
Agree	104	26.46
Disagree	101	25.69
Strongly Disagree	09	2.29
Not sure	173	44.02
Total	**393**	**100**

Source: field survey, December, 2016

Analysis of the result obtained from the field on the above subject matter indicated that out of the 393 total respondents o6 (1.52%) strongly agreed, 104 (26.46%) agreed, 101 (25.69%) disagreed, 09 (2.29%) strongly disagreed while 173 (44.02%) were not sure. The result indicates that the matter is a highly contestable matter as the percentage of agreement was almost the same thing of the disagreement. Also, the number that was not sure was high which means it was difficult to decide if at all the 1999 General Elections brought about constitutional order, political stability, political participation and improvements in the political structures and institutions of government in Benue State.

Asked to find out in oral interview if and how the 1999 General Elections were able to impact on the political systems, structures and institutions of government in Benue

State and if it has been able to provide a constitutional order, four respondents all alluded to the fact that the 1999 General Elections to a very large extent impacted on the political structure and institutions of government apart from providing a constitutional order. They were of the opinion that after several years of military rule, there was no constitutional order stating how political leadership should emerge and carry out its duties. The military was rather in charge and could decide what they wanted at any time. The masses had no opportunity to decide how they should be ruled, but that, the 1999 General Elections were able to restore these dashed hopes. One respondent particularly submitted that since the 1999 General Elections, the people now have a legislative body at National and State levels and of course Local Government level to make laws for the people and as well carryout other oversight functions. He equally argued that the 1999 General Elections had made it possible for a clear separation of powers among the various organs of government in addition to ensuring that the rule of law reigns instead of the hitherto practice where the military decided with their draconian laws. one respondent noted that since the 1999 elections ushered in these political structures and institutions of government, there have been remarkable improvements. That since 1999, we can now boast of successfully transiting from a civilian government to another in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. All these he says, attest to the growing nature of our democracy and maturity of elections. when asked in an interview, three respondents all affirmed to the fact that the 1999 General Elections was an improvement over the previous elections particularly the 1979 and 1983 General Elections and it was able to contribute positively to the entrenchment of democracy in Benue State and indeed Nigeria. One respondent was particularly of the view that, the election actually provided the people an opportunity to participate in governance after many years of military rule, enhanced constitutional order and political stability. Yet, these things were later rubbished by the subsequent General Elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011 thus, eroding the foundation of political development laid by the 1999 General Elections (oral interview, 2016).

Asked to find out if corruption had negative effects on the conduct of 1999 General Elections in Benue State, the responses obtained from the field survey indicated that 62 (15.77%) Strongly Agreed, 143 (36.38%) Agreed, 103 (26.20%) Disagreed, 12 (3.05%) Strongly Disagreed while 73 (18.57%) were not sure. The implication here is that the matter was difficult to decide but over 40% of the total respondents were of the opinion that corruption negatively affected the conduct of election in the past such as the 1983 elections and could likely have had some impacts on the 1999 elections and political development in Benue State.

In an interview with one respondent (oral interview in Gboko, 2016) he posited that the 1999 elections were not corruption free except that it was minimal. He further

argued that some INEC officials (both permanent and ad-hoc) and security personnel drafted on election duty in some few cases across the state compromised the credibility of the election. Some of them he said collected money from some wealthy politicians who wanted their political parties to win in their areas at all cost. The situation led to the falsification of results, and selling of ballot papers in such areas. This position is also corroborated by another frontline politician who was interviewed in Ugbokpo, Apa Local Government Area in December, 2016 He pointed out that in Benue South senatorial district for instance, it was a serious battle for the People Democratic Party (PDP) under the leadership of Senator David Mark to win the zone at all cost. Therefore where it proved difficult for the politicians to appeal to the conscience of the voters a lot of money was drafted to influence presiding officers, polling clerks, collation officers and supervisors to change results in places the PDP was not favoured. (Oral Interview, Ugbokpo December, 2016).

The results of the 1999 gubernatorial elections in Benue State in particular indicated that the elections were to some extent well conducted yet with some reservations. This is because the results of the election indicated that despite Paul Unongo's popularity and that of his party the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), did not perform well in the gubernatorial election raising some concern that the election was likely rigged in the favour of the PDP. In the area of electoral violence, the 1999 election witnessed a substantially reduced incidence of electoral violence, before, during and after elections (Adega, 2013).

Concerning whether the 1999 elections enhanced political participation and competition among citizens of Benue State, preferably in the area of voting, campaign and mobilization, results obtained indicated there was an impressive participation. For instance, all the three major political parties that contested the 1999 gubernatorial elections in Benue State had equal opportunities to campaign and mobilize their members. This was demonstrated by the result of the election. For instance, out of a total number of less than two million registered voters, over one million eighty five thousand, one hundred and twenty three registered voters took part in the 1999 gubernatorial election in Benue State.

The three dominant political parties pulled the following results, PDP – 681,717 APP – 399,723 and AD – 3,683. These results shows that over 50% of the total registered voters participated in this election and fair opportunity was given to the parties involved.

This view is collaborated in a separate oral interview with a respondent in Ushongo Local Government and another in Apa Local Government, that the 1999 elections provided an ample opportunity for the Benue electorates to exercise their franchise. They were of the view that, considering the fact that coercion or threat of force was not used to lure people in voting, people willingly took part in electoral activities

without molestation. The incidences of electoral violence were considerably minimal and did not pose any security threat to the lives and property of Benue electorates. In view of this many registered voters voted en mass (Oral Interview December, 2016).

In a related development, the researcher found out through interview conducted on some respondents that the 1999 elections were to some extent, free, fair and credible. The credibility (to some extent) of the 1999 elections to a very large extent peaceful contributed in deepening democracy and the attainment of political development in Benue State. This is because, they opined, did not only provide grounds for constitutional order and political stability but equally provided a reliable procedure for leadership succession in Benue State. They argued further that the 1999 election was able to set the ball rolling after many years of military rule for democracy to thrive. According to them the election provided for a PDP led government under the leadership of Dr. George Akume, 1999 – 2007, Dr. Gabriel Suswam 2007 – 2015 and the present APC led government of Dr Samuel Ortom. The State Assembly equally produced the 4th Assembly from the 1999 elections and has consistently evolved the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Assemblies that supposedly represent the voice of the teeming Benue populace (Oral Interview December, 2016). Since then there has been reforms in the process and procedures so as to address the nagging areas that often cause acrimony in the cause of ensuring a reliable leadership succession in Benue State. The 2010 and later 2015 amendments of the Electoral Act are central to this process.

Table 7: To ascertain whether the role of INEC in the 1999 elections fell within or short of international best practice

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	169	43.00
Agree	61	15.52
Disagree	99	25.19
Strongly Disagree	25	6.36
Not sure	39	9.92
Total	**393**	**100**

Source: Field work, 2016.

Out of the total respondents of 393 who responded to the questionnaire issued to them on this subject matter, 169 (43.00%) strongly agreed that INEC's performances in terms of preparations and collaboration with stakeholders to ensure smooth conduct of

the elections recorded tremendous success. 61 (15.52%) agreed, 99 (25.19%) ticked disagree, 25 (6.36%) settled for strongly agree, while 39 (9.92%) were on the fence of ticking "Not sure". The result shows generally that INEC tried to some extent by way of collaborating with stakeholders in enhancing the credibility of the process in 1999. This also led to mass mobilization and participation of prospective voters in the electoral process. It also helped to foster political unity among various stake-holders, political parties and candidates.

This position was collaborated by an INEC Director of Public Education in the Benue State Office that the 1999 election even though the Commission had a short transition period, made concerted efforts to plan for the success of the elections. In the overall, he said the Commission recorded huge success in its preparations and conduct of the Presidential, Governorship and House of Assembly, National Assembly and Chairmanship elections in the 1999 general elections. He said there were however some logistic challenges, particularly in the distribution of electoral materials which led to late arrival of materials in some polling units. This, he said was minimal (Oral Interview, 2016).

In a related development a respondent in an interview posited that he participated in the 1999 general elections as a ward party chairman. He assessed INEC to have performed considerably well in its duties particular in terms of logistics and personnel despite the short period of time at its disposal. He argued further that the only area he found the commission wanting was that of late arrival of electoral materials in some few polling units with terrain challenges. He attributed this challenge to the difficult terrains of some places, particularly the river line areas of Guma, Logo, Buruku and Agatu as well as the Mountainous terrains of Kwande Local Governments on the whole, INEC was commended for improving on their assignment compared to the previous elections (Oral interview, Gbajimba, December, 2016).

Regarding INEC's partnership with political parties, the study gathered in an interview with another respondent that there was synergy between INEC and political parties contesting elective positions in Benue State. INEC, he said collaborated with political parties like the PDP, ANPP and AD particularly in the area of voter education. Bill boards, radio and television jingles, newspapers and handbills were used as strategies of reaching out to the prospective voters and members of the public on what was expected of them on the day of elections, before and after (Oral interview, Makurdi, 2016).).

Further interview conducted by the researcher on different persons across Benue State indicated that civil society groups such as the Transition Management Group (TMG), National Union of Benue State Students (NUBESS), and others were at the vanguard of promoting a virile and democratic state after many years of military

rule. They, according to them, played very significant roles in public enlightenment, sensitisation and mobilisation.

A respondent who was a former chairman of a local government under the ticket of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) commended the media for its dogged determination to ending military rule in Nigeria. He was of the view that the media in Benue State and indeed Nigeria was firm and determined to achieve the cause of democracy. So it devoted its time and energy in educating, informing and conscientising the prospective voters and members of the public about the activities of INEC and political parties. To him, they were at the vanguard of change from a military to a civilian government (oral interview, 2016).

On the role of the security agencies and their personnel in ensuring the smooth conduct of the 1999 elections in Benue State, results from the questionnaire returned indicated that out of the 393 people who responded to the questionnaire 45 (11.45%) poured commendations on security agencies for the gallant role played during the 1999 elections by ticking "Strongly Agree", 26 (6.61%) agreed, 95 (24.17%) disagreed, 64 (16.28%) strongly disagreed, while 63 (16.03%) stood on the fence by choosing "Not Sure". The implication here is that a vast majority of the respondents did not favour the security as playing their expected duties.

Similarly, in an oral interview conducted, most of the respondents interviewed all blamed the security personnel on election duty on some of the lapses witnessed during the 1999 elections (Oral Interview, 2016).

Conclusion

In view of the above, we dare to say that the 1999 General Elections in Benue State considerably fell within international best practices, but with some challenges deriving from the nature and character of the society and its value system. A society that things hardly work completely as they are expected to be because of the class structure and our level of orientation, and of course, our integration into the world's capitalist system. The 1999 General Elections thus, contributed in no small measure in laying solid foundation for democratic structures and institutions in Benue State after a long period of military rule. The elections contributed among other things in re-introducing the executive and legislative structure of the state, it afforded the Benue people the opportunity to choose their leaders and representatives, it awakened the people's consciousness, took away apathy, rejuvenated the culture of competition and reintroduced a new political process.

By and large, we can say in the final analysis that the 1999 General Elections in Benue State and indeed Nigeria greatly laid a good foundation for political development to thrive. This is because, it provided a constitutional order and political stability in the state. It also established a settled framework of government which is democracy and is based on the people's consent. A reliable procedure for leadership

succession based on competitive and popular elections was also established. On the whole, it encouraged mass mobilisation and participation of the people in politics to decide who should govern them and how they should be governed. All these can be said to be a pointers to the fact that the 1999 General Elections took Benue State and indeed Nigeria closer to political development, but in a real sense, it was not able to achieve the desired political development because that cannot just be achieved with one single election but rather a collective effort of various elections in the electoral process. As earlier alluded to, these structures were later eroded by the 2003, 2007 and 2011 General elections that came later.

It is imperative that, there must be commitment among the political leadership to free and fair elections.

INEC must be seen to be independent. Its capacity must be widened and strengthened. Specifically, it must be seen to be impartial as it discharges its duties. There should be transparency in the selection of its members who should be non-partisan and people of high integrity. The autonomy of its budget and the authority it exerts to enforce the election laws must ensure.

People who violet the electoral laws must be punished by relevant authorities. The influence of money in politics needs to be reduced. There should be legislation regarding limits on contributions and campaigns expenditures by parties and candidates. All campaign contributions and expenditures must be published by all political parties.

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