
An Overview of the State Houses of Assembly Elections

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Introduction

In this chapter we critically examine the nature and character of elections conducted in the State Houses of Assembly in 1999, 2003 and 2007. Not only is the State House of Assembly a replica of the National Assembly, it has also suffered the same fate under past military regimes. The state assemblies in Nigeria were also suffocated out of existence and were only restored with the return to democracy in 1999 (Alabi 2008). Though certain areas of jurisdiction may differ, its importance in the operation of democratic government at the state level can be seen in the functions it carries out. As the law making body at the state level, the state legislature is the source of laws that define the parameters of governance in the state. Second, through the scrutiny of state budgets, the state legislature plays an important role in determining government policies and programmes. Third, being an elected assembly that is closer to the people, the state legislature serves as a barometer for assessing public opinion on the operation of government. The closeness of the state legislature to the people helps it to articulate the peoples' needs and aspirations in theory (Hamalai 1996). In practice, however, what we have is a case of illegitimacy of government marginalizing some segments of the constituency from governance, and benefitting from democracy dividends. Apart from carrying out the important function of legislation at the state level, the state legislatures hear petitions, exercise powers of oversight over the executive, confirm appointments and check other agencies of government. This quality control function is essential for providing effective governance.

Given the important role of the legislative arm of government at the state level, the nature and character of elections that produce members of the state legislature are fundamental. Important as elections are in the democratic process,

as the means through which people choose between different political parties and candidates offering different programmes, they have also proved to be problematic in some cases, particularly where the people are denied the actual rights of choosing their representatives through free and fair contests (Obi 2008:20). Ndadozie (2008:45) observed that of the two types of democracies, namely direct and representative democracies, it is only through the electoral process that the representative democracy can be practised. This is so because direct democracy is no longer feasible in a modern society. It is against this background that some have argued that without elections, democracy cannot be practised or institutionalised (Bratton, 2008). It has also been observed that political succession, especially when viewed in terms of elections, has been a problem of democratisation not only in Nigeria, but Africa as a whole (Okoosi-Simbine 2008:3). Attempts by civilian governments to organize elections in the past in Nigeria have been fraught with various problems, which in most cases were cited by previous military regimes as reasons for their incursion into politics. The inability of civilian governments to conduct free and fair elections acceptable to all in the 1964/65 and 1983 general elections and the violence that followed contributed to the collapse of the First and Second Republics (Mohammed 2008:188; Dudley 1982; Osaghae 2002:152).

The recent democratic experiment in Nigeria has raised serious questions about democratic consolidation in the country. Ibrahim (2007) argues that the manner in which the elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 were conducted in the country shows that it is more or less mimicking democracy. As noted by Kurfi (2005:101), rigging is almost synonymous with Nigerian elections. The rigging of elections has not only frustrated the aspirations of Nigerians, it has also paved way for persons of questionable character to occupy various positions of public trust, including the posts of legislators. This process of political disempowerment runs counter to the tenets of democracy. Elections are supposed to give people the power to decide how they are ruled and who rules or represents them. The elections conducted for the State Houses of Assembly and other elective positions in Nigeria, therefore, falls short of the expectation of Nigerians. This chapter critically examines the conduct of the State Houses of Assembly elections in Nigeria up to 2007. Given the fact that Nigeria has 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory in Abuja, the desire to undertake a critical examination of the State Houses of Assembly elections conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2007 and to also closely engage the stakeholders necessitated our selecting three states for study. These are Borno State (North East), Plateau State (North Central) and Lagos State (South West).

Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives

Sources of data and information: Data for this work were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The field research involved the conduct of face-

to-face interviews with law makers and officials of INEC. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involved citizens of voting age (18 and above). This was conducted in Jos-South (Urban), Jos-North (Urban) and Barkin Ladi (Rural) in Plateau State; Maiduguri (urban), Bama (Urban) and Konduga (Rural), in Borno State and Somolu, Lagos Mainland and Eti-Osa Local Government areas of Lagos State. Discussions were also held with individuals, journalists, activists and community groups. The researcher also obtained information from relevant texts, journals, magazines, newspapers, official publications and historical documents and this was analysed through content analysis.

In respect of theory, the chapter followed the general thrust of the tenets of representative democracy, on the understanding that elections serve as vehicles for effecting changes of government through the citizenry electing selected members of the society presented by the political parties. From this perspective, the political process is expected to be transparent, and the elections free and fair, whilst political and human rights of the populace and contestants are respected and upheld.

Political Parties and the Selection of Candidates

The 1999 elections were supervised by the military government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Three political parties which eventually emerged after the nine that participated in the local government elections, fielded candidates for the State Houses of Assembly elections in the country. These parties were People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP), now the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Although people were sceptical of the political transition, political activities gathered momentum following the release of a political transition programme by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. This was not surprising considering the many unfulfilled promises and political manoeuvring by the past military regimes to hand over to democratically elected government. The selection of candidates for the State Houses of Assembly elections by the three registered political parties for the 1999 elections was not without challenges; however, the characteristic nature of the candidate selection process was connected to the fact that politicians did not want to do anything that would further prolong military stay in power (Yaqub 2004). Prior to the elections of 2003, some political associations in December 2002 obtained a court judgment allowing them to form political parties contrary to the stand of the electoral commission, which had insisted on using stringent measures to register and control the political parties. As an outcome of the judgment, by the February 2003 general elections, about 30 political parties had been registered to contest the elections (Sha 2006b). Despite the increase in the number of political parties, the nature of campaign and electoral process were hardly different from those of the 1999 elections. Particularly in the area of funding of political parties and candidates contesting for seats in the State Houses of Assembly, the incumbent candidates and political parties in power had the upper hand.

Campaigns for the State House of Assembly Elections

The State Houses of Assembly campaigns ahead of the 1999 elections, which were initially characterised by an atmosphere of uncertainty later attracted the participation of the masses. In Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau state, majority of those seeking to be elected to the State House of Assembly staged their campaign rallies at party offices. In some parts of Borno State, the campaigns involved, among other activities, the use of drummers who sang the praises of the candidates they supported. The candidates of the three political parties that fielded candidates for elections, namely the PDP, APP and AD staged almost similar campaigns. In the case of the 2003 elections, the late release of the dates of the elections by INEC affected the campaigns by the political parties. This created an atmosphere of haste and confusion in the electoral process, including the campaigns. In Plateau State the campaigns featured the use of mostly posters which were pasted indiscriminately on residences and public places, and writings on rocks and bridges. Compared to the presidential and gubernatorial election campaigns, those seeking elections into the State Houses of Assembly made less use of the print and electronic media. Even those who made use of the print and electronic media hardly focused on, and addressed specific issues beyond the general promise to improve the lives of the people; they also engaged predominantly in sloganeering. As a result of poor usage of the print and electronic media, most of the voters did not know the candidates seeking election for the State Houses of Assembly elections even within their constituencies. In some cases, the campaigns deviated to digging up unpleasant stories about their opponents and calling for their disqualification. Some even resorted to removal of opponents' posters.

To a large extent, most of the campaign strategies were sustained during the 2007 campaigns. Most of the candidates also sought to identify with political financiers and godfathers, whom they held in awe as the guarantors for successful election into the State Houses of Assembly.

The State Houses of Assembly Elections

The 1999 State Houses of Assembly elections took place on 9 January. It has been observed that the transition to civil rule elections held in 1999 contained serious electoral flaws; however, these were overlooked because of the desire to ensure the exit of military dictatorship. The State Houses of Assembly elections for 2003 took place on 3 May. It was noted that voters' turnout was low in many areas arguably due to fatigue as a result of the staggered nature of the general elections, the disenchantment with the conduct and outcome of the National Assembly and the Presidential/Gubernatorial elections, and the apparent cynicism of voters that winners for the State Houses of Assembly elections were already predetermined and that voting would not really change anything. In some cases in Plateau State, it was the aggrieved political parties and/or candidates that instructed

their members and supporters to boycott the elections. Some Nigerians did not attach much importance to the elections into the State Legislatures as that of the National Assembly and the positions of the president and governors. Apart from the poor voter enlightenment by the political parties and politicians, some political parties dismantled their campaign structures immediately after the Presidential and Gubernatorial elections. As such, most people did not know the candidates seeking for elections to the State Houses of Assembly.

The conduct of the State Houses of Assembly elections also witnessed several challenges as some of the polling units not only opened late, but also lacked relevant election materials. Because of the late commencement of voting some voters left and never came back to vote. People who needed assistance to vote were assisted by party agents who pressurized them to vote for particular candidates. In addition, election monitors such as the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) reported that numerous cases of electoral fraud and malpractices, including 'under-age voting, multiple voting, stuffing of ballot papers into ballot boxes, snatching of ballot boxes, falsification of results, and so on, were observed in many states in different parts of the country' during the 2003 elections (TMG 2003:73). The State Houses of Assembly elections for 2007 were held at the same time with the gubernatorial elections on 14 April. Some argued that the 2007 elections were programmed to fail (Ibrahim 2007). This is arguably connected to the pre-election problems, the poor preparation and management of the elections by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) such as the voter's registration exercises, voter's education, distribution of voting materials and many others. The presence of the police and other security agencies did not deter party agents from influencing voters and in some areas clashes occurred among party supporters as revealed by one of the local observer groups – the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC).

Assessment of the Conduct of the State Houses of Assembly Elections and Performance of the State Legislators in Plateau State

Jos-North LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

The FGD in Jos-North LGA showed that most people participated in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections as voters and only a few as active members of various political parties in the state. The choice of participation in most cases stemmed from the level of interest of the electorate in the process and their support for particular political parties and candidates. Though both men and women of voting age were free to participate in the elections, some pointed out that they did not participate because of either a lack of interest or because they did not know the candidates seeking elections. The FGD in Jos North LGA agreed that most people switched between different political parties between 1999 and 2007. While all the political parties participated in the 1999 elections, not all participated in the 2003 and 2007 elections. Some of the political parties did

not have candidates seeking elective positions on their platforms. It was the consensus of the FGD that not all candidates that emerged as winners in the past elections actually won. The negative role played by the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) officials in support of some candidates and also the role played by political god-fathers and political financiers were said to be the deciding factor in who emerged victorious at the elections. It also observed that most people became desperate to become state law makers due to the sudden wealth accumulated by those that became legislators from 1999. As a result, the 2003 and 2007 elections were characterised by more desperate competition by the candidates to attain political offices at all cost. The 1999 elections were said to be more peaceful compared to the 2003 and 2007 elections where the supporters of various political parties such as the PDP and ANPP clashed. The elections were also characterised by several problems such as thuggery by party supporters, late arrival of voting materials and early closure in some centres and missing names from voters list. In some centres where supporters of political parties clashed, the presence of security agencies made little or no difference. In some cases party agents and supporters continued to campaign at the election centres and sought to influence voters, especially those that needed help during elections right under the watch of the security personnel.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD in Jos-North was of the general opinion that the performance of the state legislators in terms of representation, law making and constituency development was very low. The performance level, in some cases, was gauged on the promises made during campaigns which were rarely, if ever fulfilled. Most people could not make input into the law making process because they did not have access to the state legislators. Some electorate noted that the state legislators who had almost become permanent residents in the state capital mostly seek to re-connect strongly with the people at the grassroots only when they are seeking for re-election to the State House of Assembly or other positions. The electorate lacked awareness of legislation that could improve their lives which were sponsored and/or supported by their representatives at the state levels.

Jos-South LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

Generally, people had different reasons for participating or not participating in the State House of Assembly elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007. While some argued that they participated in the elections because they wanted to elect the persons who would represent their interest at the state level, others supported particular candidates to win elections because of close or personal relationships. Some of the voters also pointed out that they did not participate in the elections because they were completely unaware of the dates for the state assembly elections

and who the candidates were. Some faulted the candidate selection process of the major political parties, particularly the PDP and ANPP as biased in favour of richer, more influential candidates and those with links to political god-fathers, who also sponsored such candidates. Most people participated more as voters than as card carrying members of any political party. The PDP emerged as the dominant political party in the 1999 State House of Assembly elections. By 2003 elections, it was felt that the PDP was dominated by state government officials. This made some of the members of the PDP, who also desired to contest the state assembly elections, to decamp to either ANPP or AD. It was the consensus of the FGD in Jos South that politicians seeking elective positions as state legislators displayed desperation for the office right from the campaigns. Consequently most of them devised different strategies to win at all costs, including the use of monetary inducement. Some candidates, especially women, complained of being denied party tickets after spending on campaigns and mobilisation of the electorate. Some decided to team up with the candidate selected by the party, while others switched to a different political party. The FGD disagreed that the legislators declared as winners in the 1999, 2003 and 2009 State House of Assembly elections actually won. Some members of the FGD argued that the elections held in 2007 was a case of competitive rigging by politicians, including those seeking elections to the State House of Assembly. As was the case with the National Assembly elections, the State Houses of Assembly elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007, in varying degrees, were characterised by problems of poor management, interference by state officials and clashes among political groups supporting different candidates.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at State Level

It was the consensus of the FGD in Jos South LGA that the performance of the legislators at the state level fell far short of the expectations of the voters. People expected that state legislators, in addition to performing the functions of representation and law making, would regularly visit their constituencies and assist the people with various development projects such as roads, water supply, schools, health clinics, markets and others. The FGD conducted in Jos South LGA revealed that the legislators from 1999-2003, interacted better with the people in Jos South than those who represent them from 2003-2007 and after the 2007 elections. While some who were close to the legislators had access to them, some argued that the lawmakers did not impact on their lives in any meaningful way, since they could not gain access to them, and did not know how to contribute to governance. Even where state legislators had attempted to make impact on their constituencies by offering scholarships, distribution of school books, and, in some cases, provision of free medical services, these activities mostly go unnoticed because only a few people are able to access and

derive benefits from such services. What could not be ascertained at the time of this study was whether these came from the pockets of the legislators or from their constituency allowances. There was also poor communication between the state legislators and their constituencies. As a result of poor communication between the law makers and their constituencies, many were uninformed of the constituency projects executed by the law makers. The people were also unaware of various roles played by the state legislators in the area of law making in support of their constituencies.

Barkin Ladi LGA: Participation in the State Houses of Assembly Elections

The elections for the State Houses of Assembly in Plateau State in 1999 witnessed low participation in many parts of Barkin Ladi Local Government Area. In many respects, most people were not optimistic that the military would actually hand over to the democratically elected government. The previous transition programmes mid-wived by the past military regimes before that of General Abdulsalami Abubakar's in 1998, were carefully designed to enable self-succession of the incumbent military leader(s). While some people participated more actively in the 2003 State House of Assembly elections, others who did not argued that their votes would make no difference since the candidates had already been chosen by the PDP. More candidates indicated interest in contesting the State House of Assembly elections in 2007. This included female candidates who also took active part in the election campaigns. The youth also participated actively in the elections. However, a youth leader in Barkin Ladi LGA argued that the candidates in the dominant party in the state (PDP) used the youth during elections and dumped them thereafter. Most people participated more as voters than as card-carrying members of political parties in Barkin Ladi LGA. While some remained in the same political party from 1999, others changed political parties in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. Some candidates who failed to secure party ticket for elections to the State House of Assembly moved to other political parties with their supporters with the hope of succeeding in the other political parties. It was the consensus of the FGD in Barkin Ladi that all the registered political parties were represented in the 1999 elections. However, not all political parties were represented in the 2003 and 2007 elections because some of the political parties had no candidates seeking elections for legislative positions in the State House of Assembly. During the 1999 elections, voter turnout was reported as low when compared with the governorship and presidential elections. The voter turnout was said to be higher for the 2003 elections than the 2007 elections for the state legislature. The FGD conducted in this LGA revealed that monetary inducement was used to lure voters by politicians seeking elections to the State Houses of Assembly. However, this was reported to be lower compared to the governorship and presidential elections. It was the consensus of the FGD that

not all state legislators declared as winners in elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 actually won the elections. The FGD also observed that the 2007 elections was the worst election in Nigeria's political history going by the various problems that characterised its organisation, conduct and attitude of the election management body which denied that the election was flawed. Among other things, the elections were widely condemned due to many irregularities, fraud, and violence.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

Though most state legislators are supposed to be closer to the people, the electorate reported that they lacked access to them. The very few state lawmakers who established constituency offices at their home bases hardly visited. The constituency offices actually came alive only during election campaigns or when other party activities were to be held. Because of the poor communication between the state lawmakers and their constituencies, most people were not informed about the legislations sponsored or supported by them that could improve their lives. It was also the consensus of participants at the FGD that most lawmakers diverted money meant for constituency projects for personal use. They also noted that most of them were unaware of such projects executed by the legislators at the state level. On the whole, individual state legislators were said to have performed below the expectations of voters in Barkin Ladi LGA from 1999-2007.

State House of Assembly Elections in Lagos State

Somolu LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

In terms of participation in the elections of 1999, the FGD in Somolu noted that people took active part in the elections because they were tired of military rule. Their participation in the State House of Assembly elections in 1999 was further bolstered by the release of the transition programme and subsequent conduct of the local government elections in 1998 by the Abubakar regime. The 2003 and 2007 state assembly elections had lower participation of voters due to '*disenchantment with democracy*'. The people's expectations that their standard of living would improve with the return of democracy did not materialize. Most people who participated in the elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 did so as voters. Some who participated as candidates for elective positions and lost the elections argued that they were rigged out by their opponents with the collaboration of INEC.

To understand why some people prefer to participate as voters, campaigners, members of political parties and/or election observers, we need to understand how they perceive the political terrain. One candidate who contested for the state assembly elections pointed out that 'to be a politician you need to be strong and ready to put your life on the line'. Apart from the fear of political opponents,

the electorate argued that politics is highly monetized and expensive. It has thus become a lucrative business for political financiers and godfathers, who demand 'dividends' from those they instal in political office. The FGD in Somolu observed that because of the poor nature of campaign by some candidates seeking election into the State House of Assembly, most voters did not know them even on the elections days. The voters noted that in most cases, politicians would still achieve their aim of rigging the election irrespective of whether they voted or not. As far as the state assembly elections were concerned, the politicians demonstrated their desperation for political office during the 2007 elections than in any other election since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999. Various forms of inducements were used to seek support, ranging from promising scholarships to indigenes, giving free medical care and using monetary inducements. Some became so desperate that they employed political thugs to intimidate their opponents. These thugs played very negative roles during elections with some deliberately fomenting trouble in order to facilitate the rigging of elections in favour of their preferred candidates. The FGD in Somolu observed that it is questionable that those declared as winners in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections for the state assembly elections actually won the elections. Many problems were encountered during the campaigns and on election days. These included political violence and the collusion of state officials and the police in the rigging of elections.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD in Somolu was of the consensus that the performance of the state legislators from 2003-2007 and, to a lesser extent, 2007 to date could be said to be better than those legislators from 1999-2003. They argued that though the people sometimes had access to the state legislators, not much was done to improve their welfare. Most of the politicians made promises without the intention of fulfilling them. That notwithstanding, while some of the lawmakers made efforts to fulfil campaign promises, others had not. The FGD also noted that some of the electorate and groups frequently made demands on the state lawmakers that were rather self-serving and not necessarily in the interest of the generality of the people

Eti-osa LGA: Participation in the State Houses of Assembly Elections

The voter turnout in the elections to a large extent indicated the level of participation by citizens in elections. The FGD in Eti-Osa LGA argued that the experience of people under military rule impacted on their participation in the 1999 elections. The FGD also observed that more people contested the state assembly elections in 2003 and 2007 than in 1999. While majority participated in the elections as voters in 1999, 2003 and 2007, some noted that they did not participate because they did not know whom to vote for. Some reported switching political parties in

the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. Most of the people, however, did not partake in the campaign, but rather participated as voters in these elections. The FGD in Eti-Osa was of the view that though the politicians seeking election into the State House of Assembly used various forms of inducement to elicit votes, these could not be compared to those of the governorship elections in the state. The State Houses of Assembly elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 were characterised by many lapses and malpractices. Some of the problems actually started with the disenfranchisement of the people during the registration of voters. While some of those registered were under-aged, others who were of the voting age had their names omitted in the final list that was released. The FGD noted that some of the problems encountered during elections involved INEC officials who did not or could not prevent under age voting, partisanship of its officials, and ensuring secrecy in balloting. The security officials also failed to provide adequate protection at the voting centres.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD in Eti-osa LGA was of the consensus that members of the State House of Assembly did not perform well from 1999-2007. While majority reported not knowing the state legislators, others noted that though they knew them, they had no access to the lawmakers. People argued that they had no way of knowing whether the legislators sponsored or supported any legislation that could have improved their lives between 1999 and 2007. They also claimed to be ignorant of the number of constituency projects executed by the state lawmakers from Eti-Osa LGA. Most respondents rated the performance of the lawmakers from 1999-2003 as poor; those from 2003-2007 as fair; and those from 2007 as poor.

Lagos Mainland LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

The FGD of Lagos Mainland LGA noted that the State House of Assembly elections attracted less participation when compared to the presidential and gubernatorial elections of 1999. Some argued that they did not have confidence in the military transition programme after several failed transition programmes in the country. The FGD also observed that even in the 2003 and 2007 elections, people participated more actively in the presidential and gubernatorial elections than in the state assembly elections. While majority participated as voters, others were ordinary party members. Those who were members of political parties were mainly in the Alliance for Democracy (AD) or Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from 1999-2003 and some decamped and joined the Action Congress (AC) when it replaced the AD in September 2006, while others stayed in the PDP or joined other numerous political parties that were formed as from 2002. The AD, PDP and ANPP fielded candidates for the 1999 elections. However, in the 2003

and 2007 elections, not all the political parties had candidates seeking elections for the State House of Assembly. While the PDP and AD candidates were the main contenders in the 2003, the PDP and AC struggled for the state legislative seats in the 2007 elections in Lagos. The FGD noted that the candidates seeking elections used monetary and other forms of material inducement to influence the electorate. It was the consensus of the FGD that not all those declared winners in the state assembly elections actually won in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. According to them, not only was the 2007 state assembly election brazenly rigged, it also was also violent, as a result of the clashes of AC and PDP supporters in some areas. Voting in some centres in the Lagos Mainland LGA was so undermined by open display of rigging, intimidation and violence by armed thugs that the elections cast serious doubts on the possibility of achieving the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD also observed that because of the cosmopolitan nature of Lagos State, most people were likely not to know the state lawmakers. Some reported knowing the state legislators but having no access to them. The FGD also agreed that there was poor communication between the state legislators and the voters in their constituencies. Most members of the state assemblies became distant after they got into office. Most people noted that they did not know the number of legislations sponsored/supported by the legislators that could be said to have improved their lives. It was the consensus of the FGD that the state lawmakers performed below the expectation of the electorate, particularly in the areas of constituency service and representation.

State Houses of Assembly Elections in Borno State

Maiduguri LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

Two major political parties, the PDP and ANPP emerged as the major contenders in the 1999 state assembly elections in Borno State. In Maiduguri, the state capital, where the Kanuri are in the majority, those contesting for the state assembly seats adopted different campaign strategies, including marching from street to street and organising rallies using the local languages of Kanuri and Hausa. While the men and women in Maiduguri participated actively as voters during the elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007, the youth wing of political parties participated actively in the campaigns. The smaller groups that were formed by the youth and, in some cases women, had the financial backing of politicians and political parties in the state. Some of the youth groups such as the 'ECOMOG', named after the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group, were rather used by the politicians for their

‘personal security’. Some of the politicians seeking election into the State House of Assembly moved around with the ‘ECOMOG’ boys to protect themselves from political opponents. The ANPP, PDP and AD presented candidates for the 1999 State Assembly elections in Maiduguri. In the case of the 2003 and 2007 elections, majority of the political parties did not have candidates seeking election. In the 2003 elections, the contest for State Assembly seats was more or less between the supporters of the former governor, Mallam Mala Kachalla, and the ANPP governorship candidate, Senator Ali Modu Sheriff. Those contesting the State House of Assembly maintained close alliance with the governorship candidates as a way of attracting more support from the people. This was the consensus of FGD in Maiduguri. The elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 were characterised by various problems, such as the partisanship of election officials and security agencies, invasion by political thugs, under age voting and some cases of meddling by traditional rulers. Some voting centres were stationed either near or in front of the residence of traditional heads. The ballot box of a centre in Borno was taken to the house of a traditional head, while people stood outside waiting. The presence of the INEC officials and security personnel at such centres did not make any difference.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD observed that most people in Maiduguri did not know the state legislators. As a result, most people whose inputs into the lawmaking process were not sought by the lawmakers made no contribution in this regard. The state lawmakers, after the elections, became distant from the people. Most people also lacked knowledge of the legislations that had been sponsored by their representatives at the state that could improve their lives. It was also the consensus of the FGD in Maiduguri that the state lawmakers performed below the expectation of the people between 1999 and 2007.

Konduga LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

The FGD noted that the people of Konduga LGA participated more actively in the 1999 and 2003 elections than in 2007. The majority of the participants in the elections who were card-carrying members of political parties were men. With the exception of a few, most women who participated as voters were not members of any political party in Konduga LGA. The women interviewed observed that the dominance of men in politics could be seen in the composition of Borno State House of Assembly. Some were of the opinion that politicians were not to be trusted because they never keep the promises made to the electorate; hence the lack of interest in politics by the electorate. The FGD in Konduga pointed out that elections conducted in the local government were characterised by challenges. Some of those encountered on the Election Day actually stemmed from the nature

of political campaigns such as the unhealthy competition between and within the various political parties, and name calling among politicians and party supporters. The partisanship of some electoral officials at the local government level further compounded the problems. It was the consensus of the FGD that those seeking election as state legislators used various forms of inducement, including money, to solicit for votes. The youth who had participated actively in the political rallies and campaigns, some of whom were under-aged, took part as voters in the elections. Some electoral officials were suspected to be members of the ruling party posted to do the bidding of the government in the local government. There were also clashes in some areas between the supporters of the PDP and ANPP. The FGD agreed that some of the state legislators declared winners in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 did not win the elections. The 2007 elections were described as the worst in the local government since the return to democracy in 1999. Politicians desperate for political offices employed every possible means, including the use of political thugs and influencing security officials, to intimidate voters unwilling to vote for them.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD in Konduga LGA was of the opinion that the performance of members of the state house of assembly was not different from members of the national assembly in terms of consultation and involvement of the people in the governance of their own affairs. The state legislators were rated poorly in the area of rendering constituency services such as assisting the people with community development, immunization, roads, schools and farming implements. Most people saw the state lawmakers as controlling very large finances. Generally, there was poor communication between the state legislators and their constituencies. However, the state legislators visit their constituencies more frequently during campaigns and when seeking re-election. Most people also lack knowledge of any legislation sponsored/ supported by their legislators since coming into office. Some legislators are said to have scholarship programmes and other support programmes such as free medical tests and drugs, for the less privileged, however, only a few were able to access the services. The state legislators were said to have performed poorly between 1999 and 2007.

Bama LGA: Participation in the State House of Assembly Elections

The youth in Bama LGA were generally attracted to political activities, especially campaign and elections activities. Sometimes, the people abandoned their farming or trading activities, which majority of them are engaged in, during campaigns and elections. Participation was said to be lower in the 1999 elections than in 2003. In the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, with the exception of

those seeking political offices and party members, others participated as voters. Unlike the 1999 State Houses of Assembly elections where all the political parties were represented, in the 2003 and 2007 elections, some political parties did not have candidates seeking to be elected to the State House of Assembly. The 1999 elections were contested by three political parties, while the 2003 elections had about thirty political parties and by 2007 the number had increased. Some reported that their names were omitted in the voters register in spite of the fact that they had registered as voters. Some politicians took advantage of the high participation of the youth, some of whom were under aged and used them as political thugs. INEC officials did not prevent the under aged voters majority of whom had registered during the registration exercise from voting. It was the consensus of the FGD that candidates declared winners in the past elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 could hardly be said to have won. The consensus was that politicians made efforts to outsmart each other by way of rigging the elections. The use of financial/material resources to influence the voters in Bama appeared a normal process and fits a pattern where the candidates with more financial resources and who rigged most are usually declared winners. The FGD observed that in the 2007 elections, the conduct of the elections was compromised as a result of the partisanship of INEC officials and some security agencies who supported particular candidates and political parties.

Assessment of the Performance of the Legislators at the State Level

The FGD observed that most people in Bama did know the names of their legislators, even those who were popular during campaigns, and have very low opinion of most of them in terms of performance especially in the area of constituency service. This is apart from the other problems of effective representation, application of people-friendly laws, oversight functions and corruption. Even though these questions were not posed in these exact words, the FGD did allude to problems of governance, representation and corruption. But given that these were grassroots people, this could not be substantiated. What we documented here are true reflections of the information obtained from the FGD. Most members of the FGD also point out that they did not have access to the legislators. As such they lacked opportunity to make input into the laws made by their representatives. Most people in the local government were not aware of the number of constituency projects executed by legislators at the state level since the return to democracy in 1999. Against this background, the state legislators were said to have performed below the expectation of the electorate.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it could be said that the struggle to institutionalise representative democracy in Nigeria as a whole, and at the state level in particular, through the conduct of elections has been fraught with shortcomings. This was particularly revealed in the examination of elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 conducted for the State Houses of Assembly. The state legislature, as we noted, is a replica of the national assembly that operates within the jurisdiction of the powers assigned to it by the 1999 Constitution. Since the local governments and state assemblies are potentially closer to the people at the grassroots level, their participation in governance is key to the consolidation of democracy in the country. However, our examination of the State Houses of Assembly elections conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2007 showed that elections have proved to be unhelpful as a reliable way for citizens to choose individuals to represent them, and also as a platform to choose among laws to be made by their representatives and implemented at the state level for the development of the states.

Our findings show that although the electorate generally have different reasons for participating in elections, the failure to conduct free and fair elections for the State Houses of Assembly, and other elective positions, could lead to loss of faith in the system and create dissatisfaction with democracy (Alemika 2007:11). In some states such as Borno, where the youth took active part in the state assembly elections campaigns, the politicians took advantage of their involvement to recruit underaged voters and political thugs to intimidate opponents during the elections. Our findings also show that electoral officials as well as security personnel tended to be partisan in the conduct of the state assembly elections. The desperation by the politicians to secure elective seats in the state assemblies in the country has tended to increase the struggles for these positions in form of 'competitive rigging', thus reducing the elections to a situation where the candidates and parties that rig most are declared winners (Ibrahim 2007; Kurfi 2005).

In terms of performance of the state legislators, the study noted from the FGD, interviews and discussions that most of the state legislators do not maintain close contact, communication and interaction with the people after elections. Constituency offices tended to become active only during electoral campaigns and elections proper. In some cases, the representatives do not maintain functional constituency offices. The study reveals that a wide representational gap exists between the state legislators and their constituencies. It also reveals that there is a general mistrust of state legislators as rather self serving. The wide consensus of the FGDs in Borno, Plateau and Lagos states are that most of the people are not aware of legislations initiated/ supported by their state representatives. The electorate even rate most of their legislators lower in the area of constituency services and involvement in community developments. Even in the few instances where the legislators were said to have made efforts to fulfil their campaign

promises, the services provided are accessible to only a few. Generally, as pointed out by respondents from the FGD, interviews and discussions, the State Assembly elections are not given adequate attention in terms of preparation by the elections management bodies as well as political parties and the active participation of the electorate. Some of the candidates seeking election to the state house of assembly, lacking adequate party support rely on political financiers and god-fathers to attain their goals. Indeed, this appears to be the case at all levels of political contest from the Presidency to the local government elections.

The elections that produce members of the state legislature are fundamental since they also determine the quality of governance and development at the state level. State elections therefore ought to be not only competitive, free and fair, and inclusive of all stakeholders at the state level, but should also, in the true sense, provide an avenue for the concrete expression of peoples' choices and their representatives, as well as their participation in governance.

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