

The Historical evolution of Nigeria's present model of election and its unique features

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Introduction

Nigeria is a federation of thirty-six states and conducts elections periodically for federal as well as state political offices. The Nigerian National Assembly is composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. There are three Senatorial districts in each of the thirty-six states, and the Federal Capital, Abuja, is counted as one district, which brings the total number of senators to 109. For purposes of allocating seats in the House of Representatives, Nigeria is divided into 360 Federal constituencies, each of which is represented by one member in the House. For the purpose of presidential elections, the federation is considered to be one constituency in which everyone who qualifies to vote for a member of a legislative house is eligible to vote. Each state has a legislative body known as a House of Assembly, with the number of seats ranging from 24 to 40, representing in as far as it is possible an equally divided number of residents. For purposes of gubernatorial elections, each state is considered to be one constituency, in which everyone qualified to vote in state Assembly elections is eligible to vote. Every four years, Nigeria conducts elections for these elected political offices in three phases: National Assembly elections, presidential elections, and gubernatorial as well as state Assembly elections.

Election is key to the stability of democracy in any country because it enables the citizens decide who represent and govern them. In Nigeria, representatives of the three arms of government (federal, state and local) are chosen by election. Kuye *et al.*, (2013) stressed that the integrity of the election process is fundamental to the integrity of democracy, therefore the electoral process of a country must be transparent and comprehensible enough to enable voters and candidates accept the results (Kuye *et al.*, 2013). However, the election circle in Nigeria is characterized with numerous problems. The major problems include: missing names of some registered voters, intimidation and disfranchisement of voters, multiple and underage voting, snatching or destruction of ballot boxes, miscomputation and falsification of result. In the light of this, Nigeria have taken a deliberate effort to redesign her model of election in a manner that

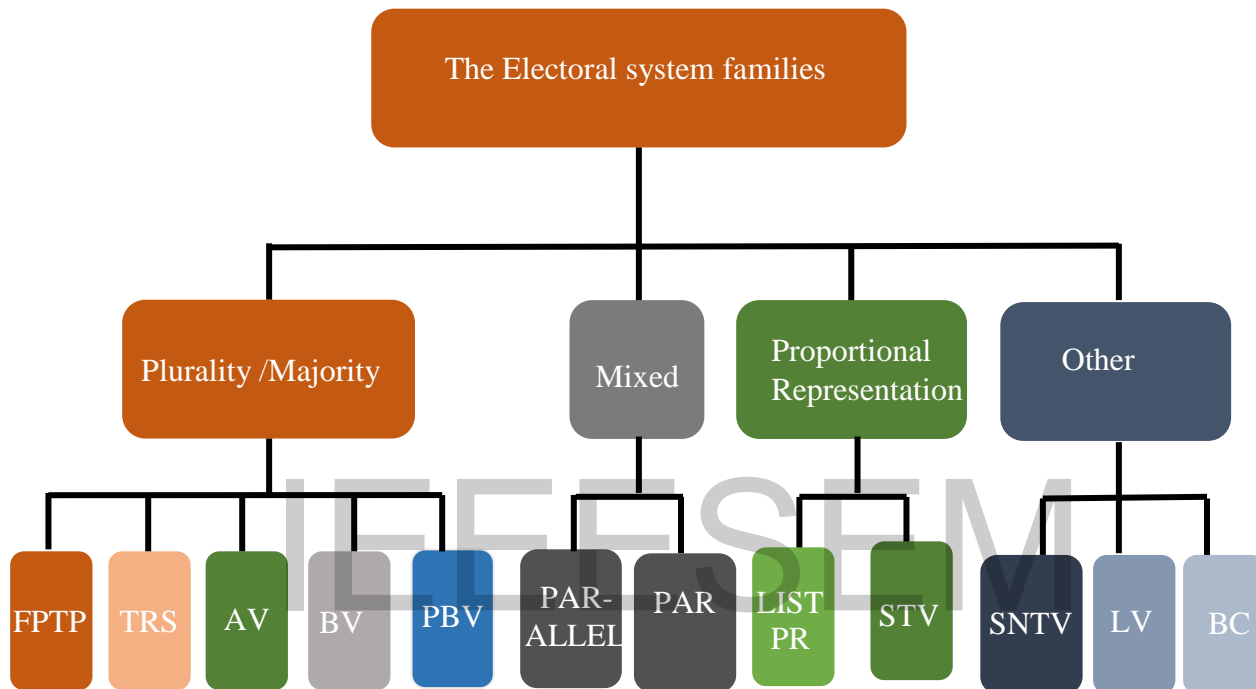
addresses immediate challenges of their democratic imperatives such as accountability, representation and political stability. Therefore, what is Electoral system?

The concept of Electoral System

At the most basic level, electoral systems translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates. The key variables are the electoral formula used (i.e., whether a plurality/majority, proportional, mixed or other system is used, and what mathematical formula is used to calculate the seat allocation), the ballot structure (i.e. whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences) and the district magnitude (not how many voters live in a district, but how many representatives to the legislature that district elects). It also focus on the administrative aspects of elections (such as the distribution of polling places, the nomination of candidates, the registration of voters, who runs the elections and so on), these issues are of critical importance, and the possible advantages of any given electoral system choice will be undermined unless due attention is paid to them. Electoral system design also affects other areas of electoral laws: the choice of electoral system has an influence on the way in which district boundaries are drawn, how voters are registered, the design of ballot papers, how votes are counted, and numerous other aspects of the electoral process (International IDEA, 2004).

There are many different electoral systems currently in use and many more permutations on each form (Reynolds et al. 2005). For the sake of simplicity, they can be categorized into three broad families: plurality/majority systems, proportional representation systems, and mixed systems. Within these, there are nine ‘sub-families’: First Past The Post (FPTP), Block Vote (BV), Party Block Vote (PBV), Alternative Vote (AV), and the Two-Round System (TRS) are all plurality/majority systems; List Proportional Representation (List PR) and the Single Transferable Vote (STV) are both proportional systems; and Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) and Parallel systems are both examples of the mixed model. In addition, there are other systems such as the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV), the Limited Vote (LV), and the

Borda Count (BC) which do not fit neatly into any category and can be regarded as three further sub-families. Figure 1 below lays out these different families and sub-families.



Reynolds et al. (2005)

The key characteristics/features of the three main electoral families according to Reynolds et al. (2005) are summarized below:

In most plurality/majority systems (e.g. FPTP, AV, TRS), there is only one seat per electoral district (that is, the district magnitude is 1), and only one candidate can be elected from a given district. Under plurality, candidates can win a seat when they win the most votes without necessarily winning over 50 percent of the vote. However, majoritarian systems (e.g. AV and TRS) try to ensure that the winning candidate receives an absolute majority (i.e. over 50 per cent), essentially by making use of voters' second preferences to produce a winner.

The rationale underpinning all proportional representation (PR) systems is to consciously reduce the disparity between a party's share of the national vote and its share of the parliamentary seats:

if a major party wins 40 per cent of the votes, it should win approximately 40 per cent of the seats, and a minor party with 10 per cent of the votes should also gain 10 per cent of the legislative seats. Proportionality is usually achieved through party lists of candidates, and these lists can be either open (where voters rank the candidates in order of preference) or closed (where the ordering is in the hands of the party leadership and is decided prior to the elections). In mixed systems (e.g. Parallel and Mixed Member Proportional), representatives are elected through a combination of different elements of the PR and plurality systems. Plurality systems are the most widely used worldwide.

Based on the above, it is obvious that there are many models of election all over the world and there is little consensus as to which promotes democratic governance and political stability. It is preferable for each country to choose a model that best suits its particular conditions, history and political context, but that will also contribute towards the deepening of democratic governance. Nigeria on her part choose first-past-the-post which happens to be her present model of election till date.

Understanding First-Past-The-Post

The FPTP system is a historical parliamentary system developed by the British. It falls within an overarching family of political systems known as majoritarian systems, in which the party that receives the most votes is the winner. Depending on the rule set, an individual may require a plurality of votes or a majority to win in a district. The FPTP system is favoured by many democracies as it ensures democracies run smoothly as it promotes the election of stable majority governments. This allows governments to execute their legislative agenda without the constant fear of losing confidence within the house and helps save time in decision making. The FPTP system is very simple and easy to understand. The system produces clear winners and the system utilises one of the simplest ballots. The results are very easy to tally, minimizing costs. The system promotes the service of the people as public support determines who is within power. The link between electors and members is strong as members aim to represent their constituency as best they can to win further elections. The system promotes political actors who represent their people. Although the system has many advantages, it is not perfect. The largest complaint individuals hold against the FPTP system is that it produces a disproportionality between number of votes received and number of seats awarded. The winner-takes-all nature of the FPTP system

also encourages parties to nominate safe candidates. This results in the underrepresentation of minority groups, indigenous people, and women within the House. The system discourages voters as votes supporting the winner of elections only hold weight in determining outcomes.

Historical evolution of Nigeria's present model of Election- First-Past-The-Post

The history of elections in Nigeria began in 1923 following the promulgation of the Clifford's constitution of 1922; an electoral system was introduced to regulate the elections into three legislative seats in Lagos and one in Calabar. It was based on a restricted franchise of 100 pounds per annum. In 1946, no major change was made in the electoral requirements, except the reduction in income requirement to 50 pounds.

The major landmark in the history of electioneering in Nigeria was the introduction of party politics by the Macpherson's constitution of 1951, which led to the evolution of the political parties that contested elections into the regional Assemblies. The parties were: The Action Group (AG), led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and was in control of the Western Region; The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), led by Sir Ahmadu Bello and was in control of the Northern Region while the National Convention of Nigerians and Cameroons (later National Convention of Nigerian Citizens) (NCNC), which controlled the Eastern Region.

During the 1954 and 1959 regional elections in the East and West, universal adult suffrage was used, but it was modified during the 1959 Federal elections when the East and West adopted universal adult suffrage, and only the North used male adult suffrage. The above is to show you that the history of electoral process and institutions, as well as their administration in Nigeria dated back to the colonial era. The first electoral institution established to manage the administration and conduct of elections in Nigeria was the Electoral Commission of Nigeria. The ECN administered and managed the conduct of the 1959 pre-independence general elections that heralded Nigeria's first republic. In the First Republic the body was renamed the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) by the administration of late Sir Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa.

The Commission conducted the controversial General Elections of 1964 and the West Regional election of 1965. The manner the two elections were conducted and the crises they triggered combined to cause the collapse of the First Republic. In preparation for the 1979 elections, the General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime established the Federal Election Commission (FEDECO).

The commission established in 1978 was disbanded in 1983 by the military because of its glaring partiality and culpability in the massively rigged 1983 elections, which returned then incumbent President Shehu Shagari to power in what was then described as “a land slide victory”. This shoddy performance was in spite of the setting up of the Justice Ovie Whiskey Panel by the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari to probe into allegations of electoral fraud in the 1979 elections, and to make recommendations to guard against same in future elections. The consequence of the 1983 electoral debacle is that the military terminated the second term administration of Alhaji Shagari on December 31st 1983.

Given its interpretation of the state of the nation and its leaders' disdain for politicians the Muhammadu Buhari's administration did not bother itself with a political transition program. However, on assumption of office on 27th August 1985, General Babangida committed his administration to a program of transition to civil rule. In 1987, following the report of the Political Bureau, he established the Electoral Commission (NEC) initially headed by Professor Eme Awa and later by Professor Humphrey Nwosu. The commission was charged with the responsibility of managing the electoral process during General Babangida's staggered and flamboyant transition process. Though NEC managed to conduct local, state and national assembly elections, the annulment of the presidential election in June 1993 called to question the integrity of the whole transition program. Though, Chief Abiola was denied his victory, but Professor Nwosu in a book published in 2008, fifteen years after the 1993 presidential election confirmed that Chief Abiola actually won the election, an information known, though unofficially, to most Nigerians.

The regime of General Sani Abacha in November 1993 succeeded the lame duck Interim National Government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan and established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). Abacha also preoccupied himself with an unpopular self-succession program, which alienated the vast majority of Nigerians, transformed the country into a pariah state and alienated her from the mainstream of civilized world community. After the demise of General Sani Abacha, his successor, General Abdusalami Abubakar overhauled the electoral commission, and renamed it the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The commission came into being via the enactment of Decree No 17; of 1998 (now Act of Parliament). INEC's responsibility as contained in the Third Schedule of the 1999 constitution of

Federal Republic of Nigeria is the conduct and management of the electoral process in the country. INEC successfully conducted the series of elections, which ushered in the nation's Fourth Republic in 1999. The commission also conducted the second general elections of 2003, which did not go without criticisms. Predictably, in the conduct of the 2007/2011 General Elections INEC seemed to have perfected the art and science of rigging.

In 2003, what mattered was the disposition of election officials to the candidate. Indeed in 2003, 2007 and in 2011, the cliché “those who vote decide nothing but those who count decide everything” became a popular way for describing the farce in the electoral process. In 2007, the former president described the election as a “do or die affair” and little wonder, the opposition parties were almost wiped off from the political scene when the results were announced. Almost three years after the 2011 General Elections were lost and won; the litigations arising there from have not been completely disposed of at election tribunals. This is not good enough for the survival of democracy. What is obvious from the history of elections in Nigeria from the First Republic till date is that Nigeria have make use of different model of election till this present one in use.

First-Past-The-Post Features

While the first past the post system has been greatly criticized in recent years, it does have several unique features over other types of systems. The concept is easy to understand, and ballots can more easily be counted and processed than those in preferential voting systems. FPTP often produces governments which have legislative voting majorities, thus providing such governments the legislative power necessary to implement their electoral manifesto commitments during their term in office. This may be beneficial for the country in question in circumstances where the government's legislative agenda has broad public support (albeit potentially divided across party lines), or at least benefits society as a whole. However handing a legislative voting majority to a government which lacks popular support can be problematic where said government's policies favour only that fraction of the electorate that supported it (particularly if the electorate divides on tribal, religious or urban/rural lines). Among the features of first past the post system includes the following:

1. It tends to produce stable governments.

2. It tends to produce a strong opposition party (both the winning party and the main opposition party often receive a higher number of seats than their share of the popular vote).
3. It allows voters to support a local candidate who represents the geographical area in which they live
4. It allows individuals who are not members of a political party to run as independents.
5. It is easy for voters to understand how the system works.
6. It tends to provide a clear-cut contest between two major parties.

Conclusion

This paper critically trace the historical evolution of First-Past-The-Post been the present Nigeria's model of election, the paper also highlight its unique features. The paper notice that they are several challenges confronting the Nigerian electoral and process, the paper argued for sincere reconstruction of the Nigerian electoral system to improve the quality of electoral politics in the country. The current Electoral Act and its reform in the country is nothing but a deceit by the politicians to maintain the status quo whose provisions cannot guarantee credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process. Genuine commitment to electoral reform remains the key factor to credible and enduring electoral system in Nigeria. The depth of commitment deployed to the reform efforts both by the government and the people will determine the level of legitimization that will be accorded the reform process, therefore all hands must be on desk on the part of the National Assembly to do the needful to reform electoral act and also to carry the masses along.

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