

ISSUES IN DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: BETWEEN COMPETITIVENESS AND REGULARITY OF ELECTIONS

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Abstract: *This paper examined issues in democratic consolidation in Nigeria by focusing on the nature of the linkages among competitiveness of elections, regularity of elections and democratic consolidation in the country. The haunting experience of a protracted period of military rule in the West African state makes the subject matter of democratic consolidation in the country usually engaging. Even at that, extant literature has not adequately covered issues bordering on the linkages among the competitiveness of elections, regularity of elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. What then is the nature of the linkages among these research variables? The methodology of the work is qualitative and relies on secondary sources of non-numerical data for analyses. The paper found a position of disarticulated relationship among the study's variables. In addressing the embedded issues, it is recommended that independent candidature be constitutionally introduced as part of the electoral culture of the local government system in Nigeria. So that under such scenarios, as many citizens as possible at the local government level would usually become candidates during council elections. In so doing, competitiveness would have become totally practicalized and locally epitomized in democratic consolidation in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Democratic Consolidation, Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, Competitiveness of Elections, Elite Theoretical Framework, Elite Theory*

Introduction

Democratic consolidation in Nigeria promptly evokes memories of military disorder in the affairs of the West African nation. Nigeria was formerly colonized by Britain and obtained unready independence in October 1960. The emergent leaders of the new state (the neoteric political elite) remained ostentatiously in office as if governing a newly independent country was a tea party. The Westminster pattern of government was ostensibly in place but the purpose of the state and the expedient responsibilities of its key functionaries were largely misread. The nascent political elite possibly concluded that the preceding colonial lords handed over the evolving state to them as recompense for their ostensive nationalist exertions towards the county's independence. Kwaghe & Ecoma (2016) argue that this antecedent set of leaders never had a common perception about the country. This indeed appears to be the abiding defectiveness of that leadership class and not truly corruption as nearly concluded everywhere. In retrospection therefore, the politicians of that era (previously freely accused of grave corruption) continue to portray the images of virtuous persons in comparison with their contemporary counterparts.

In any case, even with corruption eating deep into the marrows of a society, what currently seems to matter profoundly is whether such a location is describable as a

democracy? This system of government accordingly appears to have become the ultimate system of government. However, democracy usually has some discontents (Dahlberg et al., 2015; Hernández, 2018). Such dissatisfactions frequently lead to attempts at scuttling national democratic processes. Post-Independence Nigeria saw the occurrence of such rupture in its first decade of existence and incidentally the democratic system of government had to encounter a series of truncations prior to what currently appears like democratic normalcy being witnessed in the country. In consonance with the foregoing therefore, the general objective of this paper is to examine the issue of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. A specific objective of the work is to determine the nature of the linkages among competitiveness of elections, regularity of elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The expositions of the paper are anchored on the elite theoretical framework of social scientific investigation.

The contribution further continues in the following order. There is the section on “Memories of a Democratic Rupture: The Toppling of Nigeria’s Post-Independence Government”, followed by “When Brutality Begets Cruelty: The Counter Coup of July 29, 1966”. The next section is titled “Prelude to a Stoppable War and the Birth of Prolonged Militocracy”, followed by an overview of the theoretical framework of the paper and then the segment captioned, “Explicating Democratic Consolidation”. The next section of the paper is on how competitiveness of elections, regularity of elections or deficiencies in such regards might have contributed or detracted from democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Then there is a conclusion of the paper. The focus of the work fundamentally covers the period of democracy’s truncation in the country in 1966 and extends to the reintroduction of the democratic order of governance in the same nation up to the period of political parties’ primary elections in 2022, precedent to the 2023 general elections.

Memories of a democratic rupture: the toppling of Nigeria’s post-independence government

A group of radical and impatient army officers on 15 January 1966 toppled the post-independence government in Nigeria. The bloody military action led to the murder of leading figures in the government, including the nation’s Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Also murdered was the influential Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello (the Sarduna of Sokoto). The casualties included many high-ranking politicians, senior Army officers (inclusive of their wives), and sentries on guard duty, all 22 in number (Kirk-Greene, 1971; Siollun, 2009). Assassinated leaders and other casualties hailed mainly from Northern Nigeria, populated by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic bloc (one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The two other ethnic groups that make up the dominant trio are the Yorubas of Western Nigeria and the Igbos of the Eastern region. In the coup-plotting and the occasioned casualties, the Yorubas recorded comparatively minimal participation and impact. Dauda (2022) gives account of “the people assassinated by the January coupists as follows: Prime Minister Balewa - north; Premier Ahmadu Bello - north; Premier S. L. Akintola - west; Finance Minister Festus Okotie-Eboh- east (sic) (non-Igbo); Ahmed B. Musa - north; Hafsatu Bello (Bello’s wife); Mrs Latifat Ademulegun -west; Zarumi Sardauna - north; and Ahmed Pategi - north”. Dauda (2022) further recounts that “among the military and police casualties were: Brig. Samuel Ademulegun - west; Brig. Zakariya Maimalari - north; Col. Ralph Shodeinde - west; Col. Kur Mohammed -

north; Lt. Col. Abogo Largema - north; Lt. Col. James Pam -north; Lt. Col. Arthur Unegbe- (the Igbo officer who refused giving the coupists keys to the armoury)”. Others were “Sgt. Daramola Oyegoke - west; PC Yohana Garkawa - north; L.C Musa Nimzo - north; PC Akpan Anduka - east (non-Igbo); PC Hagai Lai - north and Philip Lewande - north” (Dauda, 2022)

The coup plotters were predominantly Igbos. Citing Gbulie (1981), Dauda (2022) gives the names of the participants in the coup plot as follows: “There were eight Majors: Nzeogwu, Ifeajuna, Okafor, Anuforo, Chukwuka, Onwuatuegwu, Obienu, and Ademoyega and five captains: Nwobosi, Oji, Ude, Gbulie and Adeleke, four lieutenants: Ezedigbo, Okaka, Oguchi and Oyewole and seven second lieutenants: Igweze, Ikejiofor, Wokocha, Azubuogo, Nweke, Amuchienwa, and Olafemihon”. Invariably, the bloody overthrow of the post-Independence government of Nigeria became known as an Igbo coup, particularly in northern Nigeria. However, according to Chief Mbazulike Amechi, First Republic politician / parliamentarian in Nigeria and the country’s first post-Independence Minister of Aviation, in Ujumadu (2016) “Ademulegun (one of the leaders of the group who was of Yoruba nationality) and other Yoruba officers never admitted that it was an Igbo coup. It only happened that there were more Igbo officers involved in the coup because there were so many Igbo officers in the army at that time”. Amechi on this score further asserts that after “they killed the Prime Minister of the country; they killed the Premier of the West; they killed the Premier of the North. They were about to kill the Premier of the East but what saved Dr Michael Okpara (Premier of the East) was that Archbishop Macarius, the President of Cyprus, was his guest that night and probably they wouldn’t want war between Cyprus and Nigeria”. Still according to Amechi, “on the other hand they could not kill Chief Dennis Osadebey (Premier of Nigeria’s Mid-Western Region) because there was no Army in Benin (Capital of Mid-Western Region) at the time of the coup and so Osadebey managed to escape”. Amechi further posits that his close friend, “Colonel Arthur Unegbe (of Igbo nationality) who was in charge of the Armoury was also killed because he was reluctant to release the Armoury to them and they shot and killed him in his house”. The account of Dauda (2022) corroborates this incidence (coincidence) of the predominance of Igbos in the officer-cadre of the Nigerian army at this time in the nation’s history. According to Dauda (2022) “Isa Alkali Abba in his book titled Mahmudu Ribadu, said:...at the time of the January 1966 coup d’etat 60 percent of the officers were from the Eastern region alone...”. The Eastern region is the ethnic base of the Igbos. Sunmi Smart-Cole in Anazia (2021) further affirms that “there were not many educated Hausa/Fulani in the army in pre and post-independent era. As such, they were not among the ranks of commissioned army officers in the country at the time of the first coup. Majority of the top officers in the army at that time were Igbo”. Strangely also, there are several accounts of how this same coup was foiled by Igbo officers. Summarizing the various narratives, Akinbode (2019) posits that “interestingly, those who foiled the coup were senior Igbo officers. Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, Lieutenant-Colonels Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Comrad Chukwujimje Dibia Nwawo, Alexander Attah Madiebo, and Major Alphonso Keshi”. Akinbode (2019) highlights that “as Brigade Major, Two Brigade, Kaduna, Keshi informed Madiebo of the coup, Madiebo moved over to Brigade headquarters where Nzeogwu had taken over Ademulegun’s seat and worked on Nzeogwu”. Then “Ojukwu, Commanding Officer, Fifth Battalion Kano, stood his ground strategically and all the officers worked with Ironsi to fly in Nwawo, the Defence Attaché in London, and

Nzeogwu's teacher. Only then could the Major (that is, Nzeogwu) be softened" (Akinbode, 2019). Nzeogwu was eventually flown to Lagos where he surrendered to Ironsi.

When brutality begets cruelty: the counter coup of July 29, 1966

To avenge the brutal effects of the January 1966 coup on Northern Nigeria against the Igbos of the then Eastern Region of the country, the counter coup of July 29, 1966 was staged. After the January coup was foiled (with Igbo officers playing major roles in the foiling) it was yet an Igbo man, Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi (General Officer Commanding, Nigerian Army at the time), who became the Military Head of State of Nigeria. Onwe (2017) recounts that "there was widespread rumour of coup plots not from one but from several quarters – mainly the Northern aggrieved soldiers who were disaffected by the killings of their leaders (military and political), the supporters of January 15, 1966 coup who felt that their original coup and their mission had been foiled and hijacked and so there ought to be another coup to topple Ironsi and free Nzeogwu and his cohorts and even an alleged coup plot by some Igbo military officers who were disenchanted with both Ironsi and the original coup". According to Onwe (2017) "all the rumour were swirling round and virtually suffocating the society when on the night of July 29, 1966 at the Army Barracks, Abeokuta, Lt. Col. Gabriel Okonweze (Midwest Igbo) and Major Obieniu – both ethnic Igbo in charge of the barracks had directed Lt. Abdullahi Mamman to summon a meeting of the officers at the Officers' Mess for a discussion of the loud whispers of rumour of coups, especially the information he received from Defence Headquarters, Lagos on July 28, 1966 of an impending coup, and the need to guard the barracks against unnecessary incursions as happened in January 15, 1966 coup". Onwe (2017) further narrates that "the two officers – Lt. Col. Gabriel Okonweze and Major John Obieniu had briefed officers of the rumour and the need to guard the barracks against incursion from outside. One of the resolutions of the meeting was that arms were to be issued to soldiers for the defence of the facility against possible incursion from outside. This order was passed, but instead of complying with the intent it was breached as the northern soldiers hijacked the exercise and instead turned it against their Igbo and other southern compatriots". In the account of Onwe (2017) "Lt. Col. Okonweze and Major Obieniu were still sitting at their high table and had hardly finished the meeting when two soldiers, Sergeant Sabo Kwale and Corporal Maisamari Maje (the unit's armourer) intruded into the meeting and shot dead Lt. Col. Okonweze and Major Obieniu. Then Lt. Pam Mwadkon, Corporal John Shagaya, Inuwa Sara and others rallied other Northern soldiers to the mutiny, which had spread out to hunting and killing any available Igbo and southern officers and soldiers".

Relating the same incident, Iloegbunam (2016) writes that "three casualties lay instantly dead in the persons of Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Okonweze, the Garrison Commander, Major John Obieniu, Commander of the 2nd Reece Squadron, and Lieutenant E. B. Orok, also of the Reece Squadron. It was the beginning of the much-touted revenge coup of Northern Nigerian army officers and men against the regime of Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi". Iloegbunam (2016) adds that "by August 1, when Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon assumed power in Lagos as Nigeria's second military Head of State, the bullet ridden bodies of both Ironsi and his host, Lieutenant Colonel Francis

Adekunle Fajuyi, the military Governor of Western Nigeria, lay buried in shallow graves at Iwo, outside Ibadan”.

According to Onwe (2017) “report of the mutiny (ironically by an Igbo officer), Lt. Rowland Ogbonna, had got to the planners of the northern coup of revenge led by Murtala Mohammed, Martin Adamu, Joe Garba, Nuhu Nathan, Malami Nassarawa, Muhammadu Buhari, Paul Tarfa, Musa Usman and Shittu Alao in Lagos, while Ibadan was taken charge of by Garba Dada, Jerry Useni, Ibrahim Bako and assisted by TY Danjuma, William Walbe, who were part of Lagos group but being part of General Ironsi guards participated by default as they accompanied General Ironsi to his official tour of the Western Region. Onwe (2017) still contributes that “the coupists immediately seized the moment to escalate the mutiny into a full-fledged coup. General Ironsi and Col. Fajuyi were seized by TY Danjuma and William Walbe and killed. The Abeokuta orgy of violence was repeated both in Lagos and Ibadan and across Northern cities with greater vehemence and outrage as civilian Igbo and other easterners were added to the lot marked for elimination in most brutal manner and savagery”.

Citing First (1970) Iloegbunam (2016) states that “within three days of the July outbreak, every Igbo soldier serving in the army outside the East was dead, imprisoned or fleeing eastward for his life. But Africa’s bloodiest coup did not stop at that stage, despite the shooting to deaths of 42 officers and over 130 other ranks, who were overwhelmingly Igbo. The killing sprees and ever-expanding killing fields spread like wild fire across most of the country. Northern soldiers and civilians went into towns, fished out Easterners and flattened them either with rapid gunfire or with violent machete blows, leaving their properties looted or torched.” The report of Iloegbunam (2016) further highlights that “according to “the Massacre of Ndigbo in 1966: Report of the Justice G. C. M. Onyiuke Tribunal”, between 45,000 and 50,000 civilians of former Eastern Nigeria were killed in Northern Nigeria and other parts of Nigeria from 29th May 1966 to December 1967 and although it is not strictly within its terms of reference the Tribunal estimates that not less than 1,627,743 Easterners fled back to Eastern Nigeria as a result of the 1966 pogrom.”

Prelude to a stoppable war and the birth of prolonged militocracy

There are indeed extant records of the Nigerian tragedy in highly accurate and participant-observer trajectories. This includes the work of Madiebo (1980). The point is that the 15 January 1966 coup in the country and the 29 July 1966 counter coup occasioned a series of unprecedented bestialities in the affairs of the nation as the nascent power elite engaged in a show of force involving hardheartedness and political myopia. The narrow-mindedness of the soldiers that are now in power did not help matters in anyway. With Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon in Lagos as the new Head of State, there was Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu in Enugu as the Military Governor of Eastern Region. Besides his grappling with a refugee crisis resulting from the massive return of Easterners from everywhere in the country, particularly from Northern Nigeria, Ojukwu had other points to make about the existing situation (s). Part of it was that the rightful person to become Head of State was not Gowon. Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe was Second-in-Command to Ironsi and Ojukwu’s position was that Ogundipe, not Gowon should have become the new Head of State after Ironsi was killed. The

occasioned rivalries were integral to everything else that happened precedent to the civil war that commenced July 6, 1967.

According to Amechi in Ujumadu (2016) “the quarrel between two Lieutenant Colonels – Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon – eventually led the country to a civil war. Ojukwu said he was senior to Gowon and that Gowon cannot be the head of state when he (Ojukwu) was a governor. Gowon said if you want to be head of state, come to Lagos so that soldiers could take order from you”. According to Amechi “the argument (between Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon) continued until it led to the killing of Igbos in the north and killing of Igbo soldiers all over the country, with one of them buried alive in Ibadan”. Amechi narrates that “the young man had insisted on not doing what the counter coup plotters wanted and they threatened to kill him. He said he was prepared to die; after all it was only one bullet that could kill him. So they told him they were not going to waste a bullet on him and buried him alive after forcing him to dig his grave. He was a major in the Army. A lot of atrocities were committed then”. The point is that, despite the national tragedies occasioning gruesome murders which started in January 1966 and the pogrom that was unleashed as response; if Gowon and Ojukwu were more statesmanlike in their readings of the situations, the Nigerian civil war would have been prevented.

In any case, the concept of statesmen-like soldiers appears empirically contradictory. Amechi in Ujumadu (2016) thus opines that “the army took over and continued to blunder. They continued to do what they were trained to do; that is to destroy; to kill and to loot”. These were essentially what they did from January 1966 to January 1970 when the civil war they precipitated ended. At the end of the war, the soldiers remained in government with intermittent pretences of claiming to be interested in handing over to civilian politicians (their elite counterparts in civilian robes). The coups and counter coups, allegations of coup plotting and narratives of phantom coups continued to be features of the militocracy that became the new system of government in the country (in replacement of democracy). In the course of their coups-plotting and executions, counter coups, allegations of coup-planning and narratives of coups phantasms, they “killed, brutalizing our common ego, as they turned to murder, killing one another” (Okeke, 2005, p.1). They have however since allowed the nation to return to the route of democracy from May 29, 1999, necessitating this scholarly enquiry on the state of democratic consolidation in the country.

Theoretical framework: the elite theory

The elite theory is one of the flagship theories of the social sciences. Okeke & Anyadike (2020, p.17) who cited Higley (2010) and Okeke (2014) explicate that “elite theory’s origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). Furthermore in Okeke (2014, pp.322-323), Henry (2001) “suggests that perhaps, the classic expression of elite theory can be found in C. Wright Mills’ “The Power Elite”. Okeke & Anyadike (2020, p.17) then deposes that “the elite theory is about the bifurcation of society into subaltern members on one hand, and the men and women of means and influence on the other hand. The influential ones create the policies that govern societies and usually reflect their wishes and needs (even greed) in such policies, before other considerations. The elites also ensure that subject policies are implemented according to their wills and caprices”.

Focusing further on the contemporary dimensions of the elite theory Okeke (2014, p. 325) elucidates that “over the years, the spheres of elite activity have expanded to reach finance, business, bureaucracy, the military, education and different other areas. Consequently, types of elite, in addition to the power or political elite include the military elite, business elite, economic elite, bureaucratic/administrative elite, educational elite, economic elite, social elite and even sports elite”. But within the conceptual gamut of the elite theory, the specific trajectory of the generic theorization that is most relevant to this contribution is the power elite thesis of C. Wright Mills. Bierly (2022) then explicates that “Charles Wright Mills was an American sociologist who received his Ph.D from the University of Texas and worked at Columbia University from 1946 until his death at age 45. He elaborated and extended the ideas of Karl Mannheim and Max Weber, and helped give birth to the New Left movement in the U.S”. According to Bierly (2022), “as a leftist sociologist, Wright Mills was concerned about social inequality and the decline of the middle class, and the complicity of the sociology profession in these developments. His book *The Power Elite* was his most important contribution to sociology (social sciences)”. Bierly (2022) further elucidates that “in the *Power Elite* (1956), Mills identifies the centers of status and power among the elite as made up of three groups: a governmental elite, corporate elite and military elite”. Then “the power elite are the group of people who comprise the leadership of these three spheres. Mills states that the common person is powerless in society. Even the average rich person is more or less powerless as power resides in a very small group at the top of the military, economic, and political system” (Bierly, 2022). Invariably, in the application of elite theory to this study, the researchers explored how it was the nation’s power elite that actually truncated democracy in the country in 1966. The work fundamentally bordered on how the same disordered elite overtly maintained the truncation for several decades and even currently continues to do so covertly.

Explicating democratic consolidation

In explicating democratic consolidation, one does not need to go farther than the definitive contribution of Schedler (1998). Consequently, the current paper cites extensively from the positions of the eminent Austrian political scientist, Andreas Schedler. According to Schedler (1998, p.91) “originally, the term “democratic consolidation” was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual reverse waves.” Then “to this original mission of rendering democracy “the only game in town,” countless other tasks have been added. As a result, the list of “problems of democratic consolidation, as well as the corresponding list of “conditions of democratic consolidation” has expanded beyond all recognition” (Schedler, 1998, p.91). Schedler (1998, pp.91-92) adds that these lists have “come to include such divergent items as popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of antisystem actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty, and economic stabilization”. Schedler (1998,

p.92) posits that “at this point, with people using the concept any way they like, nobody can be sure what it means to others, but all maintain the illusion of speaking to one another in some comprehensible way”. Hence, while "democratic consolidation" may have been a nebulous concept since its very inception, the conceptual fog that veils the term has only become thicker and thicker the more it has spread through the academic as well as the political world” (Schedler, 1998, p.92). Schedler’s concerns and apprehensions about democratic consolidation are shared by the current researchers. However, the inherent discontents and unpredictability of democracy itself has made the concept of democratic consolidation an ever relevant type. In this paper therefore, attention is focused on how the competitiveness and regularity of elections or their deficits might have contributed or undermined the courses of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Competitiveness and regularity of elections in Nigeria’s democratic consolidation

Elections have continued to be held in Nigeria since 1999 and new governments inaugurated at different levels of government, from the federal, state to local government levels. By some readings, the embedded processes constitute democratic consolidation. In some interpretations also it is even the very incidence of an unbroken cycle of elections that is describable as democratic consolidation. But elections are not ends in themselves. An election is a means to an end. Hence, it is not the very act of an election that confers legitimacy on democracy; it is the quality of the election. Then one of the critical indicators of quality in the elections that characterize democracy is competitiveness. Devoid of competitiveness, election will not be different from selection, and that would be when the shortcomings of the process are mildly stated. Elections that are lacking in competitiveness are impositions and there is nothing democratic about impositions.

Competitiveness of elections is an allusion to the expectation of free and fair elections. But above everything else, competitiveness implies that the winner of an election is not predetermined. Incidentally, winners of elections in Nigeria are now predetermined. Anytime results are announced contrary to the predetermination of the power elite, suggesting competitiveness, the germane actors use the law courts to upturn and invalidate the previously announced results. On the other hand, when the results are orchestrated to conform to the prearrangement of the power elite, no law court can invalidate the same result. Consequently, to challenge the result of a presidential election in Nigeria up to the nation’s Supreme Court is a mere academic exercise. In the country’s Imo State in 2019, after the governorship election results had been announced by the electoral umpire - the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Mr Emeka Ihedioha sworn in as Governor of the State on May 29, 2019, he was removed from office on January 15 2020 by the country’s Supreme Court (the highest court of law in the land). Mr. Hope Uzodimma who took the fourth position as earlier announced by INEC was now declared winner and sworn in as the Governor of the state. Salihu (2020, p.101) describes the verdict of the Supreme Court as “an obviously bad judgment”. The insinuation is that Governor Uzodimma has been imposed on the people, not elected, because he had been consecrated to win by the power elite. The process was not designed to be competitive.

At the local government level where the electoral bodies funded by the state governments conduct the elections, the political party in power at the state level has undeviatingly won all the seats available at the local councils. None of the other registered

political parties existing in the state and at these local levels ever wins any seats in such elections. The elections are accordingly considerable as non-competitive. In the face of such non-competitiveness at the local council levels in the country, the meaning of democratic consolidation in the nation begins to appear palpably woolly.

The godfather syndrome has made putative elections non-competitive in Nigeria. The person the godfather had earlier consecrated must emerge the winner. Competitiveness merely begins and ends with being blessed and presented by the godfather. Even political parties' primaries for purposes of electing candidates that would represent parties at the main elections are controlled by godfathers. Fundamentally therefore, where the choice of delegates to the conventions slated for primaries was not competitive; the final choice of candidate(s) also fails the test of competitiveness. Essentially, generic non-competitiveness only begets final non-competitiveness in the choice of national flag bearer of such a political party in a presidential election.

Then there is the mercantilist factor in the sale and purchase of the expression of interest and nomination forms of the major political parties in the country. In this regard, Itodo (2022) reports that for the 2023 general elections "the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) fixed the cost of nomination forms for president at N100 million (\$240,884), governorship at N50 million (\$85,470), senate at N20 million (\$34,188), House of Representatives at N10 million (\$17,094) and state assembly at N2 million (\$3,418)". Then "the leading opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) pegged N40 million (\$68,376) as the cost for presidential nomination forms, N21 million (\$35,897) for governorship, N3.5 million (\$5,982) for senate, N2.5 million (\$4,273) for the House of Representatives and N1.5 million (\$2,564) for state house of assembly" (Itodo, 2022). This only translates to competitiveness in the purchase of the forms, not in the elections. The nation's power elite uses such excessive charges to debar credible but non-members of their class from standing for election. The resultant scenario rather smacks of exclusivity in place of competitiveness in general elections.

The thesis of this study is that from Nigeria's post-independence government, to the protracted military period and the current democratic dispensation in the country, if the same breeds of power elite have continued to be in charge, but elections are currently being regularly held, it is contradictory to interpret the surrounding positions as democratic consolidation. In other words, what amounts to democratic consolidation can only occur when electoral choices are continuously made in sacrosanctity by the people under self-evident competitiveness? To begin to gradually address the embedded issues, it is recommended in this study that independent candidature be constitutionally introduced as part of the electoral culture of the local government system in Nigeria. Under such scenarios, as many citizens as possible at the local government level would usually become candidates during council elections. Competitiveness would in so doing become totally practicalized and epitomized.

The kernel of democratic consolidation

Democratic consolidation is not an end in itself. According to Schedler (1998) the essence of democratic consolidation is the security of democracy. However, there must be other beneficial purposes derivable from democratic consolidation. It must lead to the good life for the generality of a country's citizens. It is not an issue for elite rationalization and

elite-led sophistry. Democratic consolidation needs to be accompanied by undisputable decreases in national misery. Such cases of nationwide pain and privation have however persisted in the Nigerian nation. Political instability, citizen alienation, electoral violence, insensitivity of the political elite have all continued to lead to massive deaths and monumental destructions in Nigeria. This scenario as illustrated by Table 1 is not describable as index of democratic consolidation.

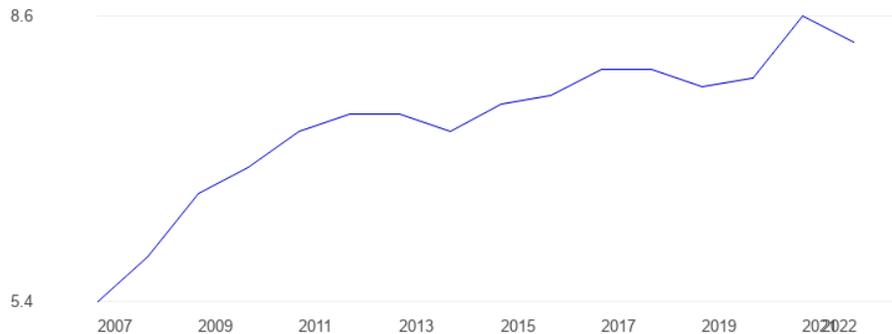
Number of Violent Deaths Caused by Political Instability and Citizen Alienation in Nigeria between 2011 and 2021, by Perpetrator

| Perpetrator Classification | Number of Deaths |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| State Actor | 13, 241 |
| Boko Haram Terrorist Group | 18, 397 |
| Boko Haram / State Actor | 22, 138 |
| Sectarian Actor | 12, 201 |
| Other Armed Actor | 10, 082 |

Source: Adaptation by Authors from Statista (2022)

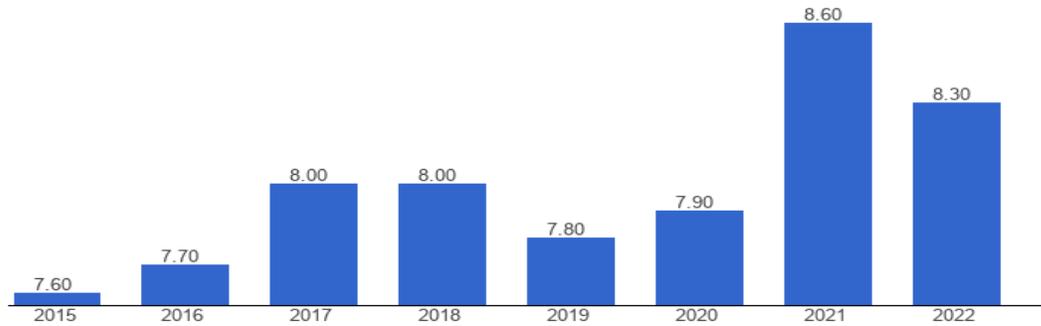
The country has also not recorded steady growth on the economic front in the period under review as possible pointer to democratic consolidation flowing from regularity of elections without competitiveness leading to the good life for citizens. In the Fund for Peace’s economic decline index for Nigeria reported by the Global Economy.com (2022) measured in index points of 0 (low) - 10 (high) Nigeria’s latest value (2022) was 8.3. For this indicator, data was provided for Nigeria from 2007 to 2022 (see Figures 1 and 2). During the period, “the average value for Nigeria was 7.39 index points with a minimum of 5.4 index points in 2007 and a maximum of 8.6 index points in 2021. The latest value from 2022 is 8.3 index points. For comparison, the world average in 2022 based on 177 countries is 5.59 index points” Global Economy.com (2022).

Figure 1: Nigeria’s Economic Decline Index: Longer Historical Series



Source: Global Economy.com (2022)

Figure 2: Nigeria’s Economic Decline Index: Recent values



Source: Global Economy.com (2022)

The above economic decline indicator for Nigeria considered issues related to economic degeneration within the country. For instance, “the indicator looks at patterns of progressive economic decline of the society as a whole as measured by per capita income, Gross National Product, unemployment rates, inflation, productivity, debt, poverty levels, or business failures. It also takes into account sudden drops in commodity prices, trade revenue, or foreign investment, and any collapse or devaluation of the national currency, the higher the value of the indicator, the greater the economic decline in the country” (Global Economy.com, 2022). Regularity of elections that are devoid of competitiveness can only engender contentious democratic consolidation that leads to economic decline.

Conclusion

This paper examined issues in democratic consolidation in Nigeria by focusing on the nature of the linkages among competitiveness of elections, regularity of elections and democratic consolidation in the country. The work demonstrated that extant literature had not adequately covered issues bordering on the linkages among these research variables and found a position of disarticulated relationship. Such disordered associations are attributable to historically entrenched power elite dominance of Nigerian affairs inclusive of election issues in the current democratic dispensation. The thesis of the study is that contrary to orthodox thoughts, elections in the country are acutely devoid of competitiveness and the resultant scenario does not smack of democratic consolidation. In addressing the implications of the research findings for democracy and democratic consolidation in the country, it is recommended that independent candidature be constitutionally introduced as part of the electoral culture of the local government system in Nigeria. It is accordingly prognosticated that under such scenarios, as many citizens as possible (at the local government level) would usually become candidates during council elections. In so doing, competitiveness would have become largely practicalized and locally demonstrated in democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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