



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE AND STATE COLLAPSE IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Nigerians are gradually discontented with the democratization process heretofore. This is ascribable to the spectre of fraud, massive rigging, malfeasance etc that characterized electoral processes in the country, specifically from the 1999 general elections to the 2011 general elections. Against this background, this paper debates the complex web of electoral malpractices and its eventful crusade that can instigate a chain reaction, eventually leading to state collapse. The bottom line is that, attitude and excesses of stakeholders lie central to the integrity and credibility crises confronting the electoral process in the country. Thus, the paper seeks to explain the connection between electoral malpractice and state collapse. It provides answers to questions as; what is state collapse? What are the significant features of state collapse? What are the implications of diminished confidence in the democratic process to state formation? Answers to these and other questions may provide a window to arresting the slides from failed elections to a failed state.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of modern states in virtually all the Third World countries is faced with numerous difficulties, such as the enthronement of state institutions of governance, greater citizens' participation, peace and security, sustainable development, and the associated demand for the states' provision of welfare. Therefrom, the forge in which the state deals with these issues, defines its character and its relations with the political system. David *et al.* (1999) conceived modern state as a set of political apparatuses, distinct from both the ruler and ruled, with supreme jurisdiction over a demarcated area; backed by a claim to a monopoly of coercive power, and enjoying legitimacy as a result of minimum level of support or loyalty from the citizens. This implies that, all states whether big or small, have been characterized by certain requisite elements, viz, the distinct attribute of sovereignty, presence of public institutions, formal monopoly over instruments of coercion and an impersonal, impartial, and neutral bureaucracy (theoretically).

In spite of these challenges, until more than a decade ago, it would have seemed almost inconceivable of state collapse to be on the increase. Many modern states were once collapsed and many more others now approach the verge of collapse and some much more ominously, than others do. This nonetheless, it was opined that state collapse is a part and a process of state reconstruction and formation (see Mazrui, 1995). In the same vein, state collapse hardly occurs spontaneously, ad lib or all at once. Wheresoever it happens, it drifts disastrously by complex and conflict-ridden processes of decline, erosion of state functions. A number of scholars have described state collapse in Liberia, Somalia, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Nigeria (Schutz, 1995) and the risk of collapse in at least a dozen other states (Crotty, 2005). The common theme here involves overwhelmed governments that are almost, if not completely, unable to discharge basic governmental functions; the basic of which is security and defense. This is the primary function of any state, which provides the platform through which all other political goods can be delivered.

In other words, the level at which the state effectively provides political goods (defined as those intangible and hard to quantify claims that citizens made on states, see Rotberg 2002) distinguished it from collapsed state. Pennock (1966) brings to the fore, hierarchy of political goods, and opined that none is as critical as the supply of security, especially security of lives and properties. If incidences of state collapse seem on the increase, there is the need to patently locate the causality of the threats to the democratization process in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarification

Difficulties by government in actioning essential function are a denotation of state collapse. These essential functions encompass, 'security, welfare of citizens and the pursuit of national interest' (Elaigwu, 2011). In the same vein, Carment (2003), opined that state collapse occurs when 'central government ceases to function, and is unable to protect its citizens against crime and violence, *let alone* provide for their welfare or maintain the country's physical infrastructure. The loss of population through death or migration is severe. Broadly, the term state collapse depicts state's inability to emphatically assure its territories and render desirable political goods to their citizens. Of all these political goods, security is the most critical, especially human security (see Pennock 1966 and Elaigwu, 2011). Zartman, (1995) for instance defines state collapse as the 'breakdown of good governance, law, and order'. Zartman's definition signifies that not all incidence of insecurity ensue in a state to collapse. It is essential to consider the extent to which an entire collapse state profile is less or more than its component parts. Nevertheless, most often state collapses when there is plethora of dissents directed at it, violent inter-communal or religious conflicts, or when the state becomes paralyzed and inoperative thus losing its power of conferring a name on its people.

Miliken and Krause (2002), more specifically and explicitly, see state collapse as the failure of state to provide security, public order, welfare and a framework of laws and institutions through which economic activity can be carried on. The specificity lies in the fact that they see state collapse as a consequence of state's inability to fully implement policies. In this sense, state collapse is the outcome of

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state's failure to mould citizens' behaviour; benefits fail to reach the intended beneficiaries; weaknesses in enforcing laws and order; too much politicization of the courts; and highly disorganized electoral process that is capable of preventing fraud etc. Indeed, state collapse is *kismet*, when government fails to perform the basic functions of the state. Undoubtedly, state collapse conceived this way necessitates identification of basic features of state collapse and this shall be discussed in the next section.

Features of state collapse

History of modern states is replete with instances of decline and virtual disappearance of a once functioning state system. It is worth noting from the onset that these instances of state decline and virtual disappearance could be seen against the background of the numerous shocks, which have confronted the government. Apparently, state collapse hardly occurs *ad lib*, it reveals its presence when state performs lamentably, thence, ineffective in delivering the most crucial political goods. The opposite of that is the best shield. Put differently, proper performance and firm maintenance of state functions provides the best protection against state collapse. Be that as it may, proliferation of violent dissident groups delineates state collapse. Lending credence to this assertion, by Rotberg (2002) when he observed that in most collapse states, the governments face a number of insurgencies, varieties of civil unrest, and different degrees of communal discontent and plethora of dissents directed at the state and at groups within the state. However, he further argued that it is not the absolute intensity of violence that qualifies it a collapse state; rather it is the enduring character of that violence. Indeed, Salihi (2012) aptly contends that the manifestation of political protest in form of militancy, or more precisely, militarism or violence has largely to do with the character of state in Africa particularly with respect to governance. Thus, state collapse darts political violence as the weakness of the government to meet the expectations of the people coupled with its inability to control violence allow it to get out of proportion.

Ostensibly, election malpractices have drifted many countries into violent conflicts, absence of law and order, impelling the state paralyzed. Hence, unable to discharge basic functions. Of recent, Peru and Serbia fell in 2000 because of popular rebellions against flawed election. Others are Zimbabwe (2008), Haiti (2010), Liberia (2011), Cote d' Ivoire (2009), Kenya (2007), Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo (2011). However, Stewart and Brown (2010) observed that collapse states are those that lack the authority to protect its citizens from violence of various kinds; the state fails to ensure that citizens have access to basic services; and, the states lack legitimacy, enjoys only limited support among the people. Thus, the potential for state collapse exists where institutions of the state failed to provide basic security, policies inconsistencies, prevalence of armed conflict challenging the state's ultimate monopoly of violence, excessive concentration of power and gross institutional mismanagement and social cleavages along class, ethnic, religious, or regional divides. Just as the generalization about the meaning of state collapse can be hazardous, the same is true when it comes to identifying the causes and consequences. For the scope of this paper, attempt will be made to explore how electoral malpractices serve as a trajectory to state collapse. Thus, the paper sufficiently finds the causes and characteristics of failing states as identified by McLoughn (2012) suitable for its analysis.

The causes and features are:

- Structural and economic factors: poverty, low income and economic decline, violent conflict, presence of armed insurgents, natural resources wealth/lack of it, demographic stress (including urbanization);
- Political and institutional factors: crisis of state legitimacy and authority, bad governance, repression of political competition, weak (formal) institutions, hybrid political

orders, institutional multiplicity, political transitions, succession and reforms crises, state predation, neo-patrimonial politics;

- Social factors: horizontal inequalities, severe identity fragmentation, social exclusion, gender inequality, lack of social cohesion, and weak civil society;
- International factors: legacy of colonialism, international political economy, global economic shocks, and climate change.

Electoral malpractice and State collapse: the Nexus

There is a strong correlation between electoral malpractice and state collapse. That electoral malpractice has major implications for state formation is by now quite obvious. It is also clearly evident that election malpractice has drifted many countries into conflicts, absence of law and order, forcing the state paralyzed, incapacitated, hence unable to discharge basic functions such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2011), Kenya (2007), Zimbabwe (2008), Nigeria (2007), and (2011). Based on these considerations, it is predictably feasible to argue that incidences of state collapse in a number of African countries woes largely to the flawed and fraudulent electoral processes. In effect, electoral malpractice refers to any wrongdoing affecting election procedures and materials, especially by government officials and political party and candidate's agents. It takes different forms ranging from irregularities, deficiencies, flaws in electoral management at different levels during the election process. Drawing from the above premise, Foreign Policy Magazine (July 1, 2005) reasoned that elections are almost universally regarded as helpful in reducing conflict. It further explains that when elections are rigged, conducted during active fighting or attract a low turn out, they can be ineffective or even harmful to stability of states. As Crisis Group (2007) points out while reporting on the conduct of the 2007 general election, 'the failure of the April elections has major implications for Nigeria's governance, internal security, and stability'.

The report goes further to identify the consequential effects of the flawed election as:

- Legitimacy Deficit, as the product of a deeply flawed, disputed election, it takes power in Abuja but has not yet earned a place in the hearts of the people;
- Slide Towards One-party State, since 1999, the PDP has steadily captured even more states and legislative seats at state and national levels;
- Diminishing Confidence in the Democratic Process, the flawed elections have diminished voter confidence in the democratic process. The turnout during elections have continued to shrink as follows; 52.2% in 1999, 64.8% in 2003, 57.2% in 2007 and 53% in 2011. The drop in the turnout reflects growing apathy and has some bearing on the legitimacy of the results;
- Undermining Conflict Management, the flawed elections also have implications for the country's domestic conflict management. Elaigwu (2011), cited about 286 selected cases of election-related conflicts in Nigeria and about 373 selected cases of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria from May 1999 to November 2011. While Paden (2012), advice that 'if Nigeria is to repair the social and political damage wrought by the postelection violence, it needs wise and principled leaders both at national and state levels'.

Expectedly, Maduagwu (2012) sum up Nigeria's experience with flawed elections as;

Nigeria has had a chequered history with democracy. Next to the cankerworm of 'corruption' flawed elections also provided alibi for military interventions in Nigerian politics. Indeed among the root causes of the first military intervention in Nigeria was the massive electoral violence that erupted in the Western regional election in

1965. The level of electoral violence in Western region during the first republic manifested in high level of loss of lives and property....’.

Furthermore, he argued that the ‘post election violence did cast a very dark shadow on Nigeria’s democratization process, as well heightened the serious insecurity situation in the country’. The above notwithstanding, Eric Guthschues had this to say about the 2011 general elections; ‘while recognizing that INEC had improved from past performances, as had the security forces, he described how the PDP had hijacked ballot boxes at gun point in Akwa Ibom, and how results from Akwa Ibom had nonetheless been reported at the collation center (quoted by Paden, 2012). Furthermore, he highlights few flaws that characterized the election. He explains that ‘the urban areas were more accessible to domestic and international observers, but the rural areas were where the vote rigging occurred. Ballot stuffing was widespread, as well payments of about \$2 per vote to rural people. Money was paid even to the local opposition party observers to agree to the results’. Based on these and other allegations, the HRW report called on INEC to release complete results, including the results for individual polling units, as a means of ensuring accountability. Despite these shortcomings, unlike the 1999, 2003, and 2007 general elections, the 2011 general elections was adjudged by many as the best organized and conducted election in Nigerian history. For instance, a former U.S. envoy, Ambassador Howard, remarked that ‘the level of success and credibility recorded by Nigeria in the 2011 general elections could make the country the standard bearer for democracy’ (quoted by Paden 2012). Similarly, the spokesperson of the E.U. Catherine Ashton, asserts that ‘the 2011 general elections appears to be the most credible election since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999 (cited by Maduagwu, 2012). Lastly, Maduagwu (2012) captured the remarks of Joe Clark former Prime minister of Canada who opined that ‘the National Assembly and Presidential elections of 2011 represent a step forward from seriously flawed elections of the past and hold the promise of setting a new standard of integrity in Nigeria’s electoral process’.

The Verdict

Dauda (2011) observed that Nigeria’s April 2011 election was viewed by many as a critical test of the government’s move towards credible democracy. He further asserts that the findings of most observer groups have characterized the 2011 general elections as significant improvement over the previous polls, although not without problems’. Thus, the post election violence across the North has highlighted lingering communal tensions, grievances, and mistrust. The question remains, why despite the applauses to the 2011 general elections, the reactions to the outcome posed a critical test to the legitimacy of the government. Additionally, the successive elections in the country from 1999 to 2011 had always patently posed potential landmines to state formation in Nigeria. Elaigwu (2011) declared that leaders who are not genuinely elected lack legitimacy. Thence, the Crisis Group on the outcome of 2007 Presidential election cited a number of remarks. Crisis Group observed that groups that did not believe in the legitimacy of the new government threatened a campaign to destabilize the regime. Specific mention was made of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) and Adewale Balogun, executive director of the Centre for Constitutional Governance. The later had warned that ‘if Yar’Adua allows himself to be sworn in, based on that fraud called election he will not enjoy our cooperation, and will ensure that he (does) not enjoy his reign’, while the former that is CD says ‘it will challenge the legitimacy of the government by any means possible’ (quoted by Crisis Group, 2007). Be that as it may, election malpractices in Nigeria serve as impetus to election violence in the country thereby diminishing the citizens’ confidence in the democratic process and political institutions of the state. According to the Executive Summary on the Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the post Presidential election disturbances in Kaduna state, the remote causes of the crisis: is the non-adherence of the PDP zoning system as enshrined in its Constitution; desperate politicians and winner-take-all-syndrome (quoted by Paden, 2012). Secondly,

plethora of literature abound on the multiplier effect of social factors (such as horizontal inequality, poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, lack of social cohesion, illiteracy etc) towards the credibility of electoral processes. For instance, Paden (2012) marveled over the incumbents’ access to government resources: ‘drawing from the Excess Crude Account to finance incumbent party campaigns; deployment of security forces; controlling and hiring of powerful electoral commissioners..’ etc. while Jega attributed ‘crisis of expectation’ on the post election violence. In addition, Charles Dickson commented on the formation of the government thus... ‘today, whether we like it or not, the president is Christian, the Senate President is Christian, Head of Judiciary is Christian, SGF is Christian, National Security Adviser is also one, the Chief of Army, the SSS Director, in fact, welcome to the federal republic of Christians’ (quoted by Paden, 2012). Finally, the Crisis Group Africa (2007), worried over the implications of the flawed elections for Nigeria’s domestic conflict management.

Paden (2012) highlighted the role of the international community on the circumstances and the outcome of the 2011 general elections. He made explicit reference to the establishment of U.S. - Nigeria Binational Commission on April 6, 2010. Implicitly, Paden (2012) opined that the Binational Commission made it hard for U.S. officials to be neutral in a situation where they and their colleagues were working closely with Nigerian counterparts on common problems. Furthermore, he argued that it is ‘always hard for Washington to step away from incumbent governments during election cycle when U.S. policy makers fear that the stability and continuity provided by the incumbent administration may give way to a new, unknown government. Thus, from his submission that ‘a closer link between U.S. military and the Nigerian military could be seen as supporting a southern president against a grassroots insurgency in the North’, implicates U.S. involvement in the outcome of the election. Thence, it is the views of this paper that even if the conduct of the 2011 general elections will be immune from criticisms, the pre election intrigue marred the credibility of the whole exercise, hence, impair state formation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The approach of this paper has been an attempt to correlate electoral malpractice with state collapse in Nigeria. Drawing from the conduct of general elections in the country from 1999 to 2011, the paper argues that the Nigerian state is derailing towards state collapse by the slightest provocation from flawed elections that have questioned the legitimacy of the government (institution of the state); necessitate prevalence of armed, violent conflicts; repression of political competition; led to bad governance, lack of social cohesion, and gross inequality, dilapidated infrastructure, collapsed educational and health sectors; all of which in no small measure affect state formation. While the paper recognizes the improvements recorded by 2011 general elections as expressed by both domestic and international observers, critical reforms awaits the democratization efforts of the Nigerian state. Specifically, the paper suggests the need to diversify the economy. Giving that Nigeria is a rentier state in which there is preponderance of one source revenue to the state; prompt the elites’ struggle for power at all cost in order to feed their clientele chains. Secondly, electoral reforms should empower INEC with certain responsibilities and powers such as monitoring and sanctioning campaign finances by political parties, firing and hiring of Resident Electoral Commissioners, as well INEC’s role in the conduct of primary elections. In the same vein, INEC should be mandated to publish results from the individual polling units. Thirdly, perpetrators of violence, rigging, ballot stuffing and all other vices militating credible elections must be prosecuted and sanctioned accordingly. It remains a mirage why none of those related offences committed during the 2011 general elections were brought to justice. Fourthly, institutions such as the security agencies and the judiciary should eschew partisanship in all ramifications. Additionally, the posture demonstrated by the regime that took office after the 2007 general

election should serve as lesson towards consolidation and regaining legitimacy by government. The international community should strive to ensure fair and impartial ground for both parties.

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