

A REFLECTION ON THE 2013 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is an established fact that local government is the closest to the people at the grassroots and as such, the present administration under Governor Adams Oshiomhole, promised immediate conduct of the council polls after the dissolution of elected council officials in October 2010, which was supposedly due for December of same year. Whereas the Comrade Governor Adams Oshiomhole's earlier assertion that if he conducts the Local Government elections and his political party (ACN) wins in all the 18 Local Government Areas of the State, it means something had gone wrong with the process, was highly applauded by all, the EDSIEC eventually declared his party as winner in all the 18 Local Government Areas of the State. The study utilized primary and secondary methods of data gathering. It finds that some members of Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC) were card carrying members of the ruling APC; adhoc staff for the elections was largely composed of members of the ruling APC; and the flawness of the election was due largely to EDSIEC compromise. It therefore recommended a strong-third-tier local government with structural uniformity across Nigeria whose conduct of elections will be the sole responsibility of the national electoral body, INEC.

Keywords: Elections, Local Government, Political Parties, Political Participation, EDSIEC.

Introduction

When the date for the conduct of Local government elections was announced by the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC), there was much fun in the air as citizens eagerly waited for the day, which is due in part to the fact that there had been no local government elections in the state since the last one that was conducted in December 2007. Local government elections in Edo state under the fourth republic first took place in 2000 while the last under the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was in 2007. Having stayed under a caretaker committee in the present administration, citizens began to agitate for elected local council officials, so as to have a say in governance at the local level. This is the plank upon which King (1988:3) argued that "people should be given the opportunity to control their affairs at this level, especially since this is the point at which their interest and welfare are most likely to be directly affected", which also is in consonance with Abraham Lincoln's

declaration that, “no man is good enough to govern another man without the other’s consent (cited in Baba-Ahmed, 2013:17).

In view of this, the Comrade Governor, Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole reconstituted the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC) on the 23rd of December, 2012 with a charge on them to conduct a free, fair, credible and acceptable council poll. In his response, the chairman, Mr. Solomon Ogor, assured the governor and people of the state that the Commission is made up of tested hands willing to deliver a free and fair local government election in the state (News Agency of Nigeria, 2013; Onoiribholo, 2013).

Due to its quintessential role in grassroots development and mobilization, the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, fourth schedule (as amended), clearly spells out local government functions. While section 7 (1) gives it a legal status when it expressly provides that “the system of local government by democratically elected local councils is under this constitution guaranteed”, and also mandates each government to establish the state independent electoral commission to enact relevant enabling legislations in order to give effect to the provision of democratic governance at the grassroots. In effect, the constitutional guarantee of a democratically elected local government is an irreducible minimum from which state governments are not expected to derogate (Abutudu, 2013).

It is the core of governance machinery at the grassroots; the first point of contact between the people and the government. In general sense, is to bring government closer to the people at the grassroots through participation; meeting felt local needs and fostering a sense of ownership in government (Abutudu, 2013). It is according to (Ikelegbe, 2005), a segment of a constituent state or region of a nation state created through legislation to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its area of authority. Since it is the least among the tiers of government, an attribute which makes it the closest to the people at the grassroot, it is therefore its cardinal function to bring about democracy and to afford opportunities for political participation to the citizens as well as socialize them politically (Ola, 1984).

Problem Statement: EDSIEC and the Quest for Credible Elections

In the run-off towards the election, two power blocs emerged. The APC led government in Edo State and EDSIEC. They are so called because the fairness, freeness, credibility and acceptability or otherwise of the local council polls, is determined by them (1999 Constitution, Section 7(1). Four months after Governor Adams Oshiomhole was sworn in, precisely in February, 2009, he stated in a press briefing (cited in Onoirhibholo 2013:9; Emenyonu, 2013:13) at the Government House:

If I have the opportunity to conduct the local government election in the state, it will be a role model and a reference point which will be emulated by all in this country. If I conduct the local government election and all the seats go to my party, it means something is wrong somewhere.

Four years later, he afforded himself the opportunity he once desired on April 20, 2013. During the campaign, the governor restated his avowed commitment and desire to conduct a free, fair and credible council election. This was during one of his campaign tour of the three metropolitan local government areas of Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba-Okha. He said the election was ‘a litmus test for one man, one vote mantra’ while addressing his party supporters in these areas. He assured that it is to him a thing of joy that they will conduct a clean and transparent council election on the basis of one man, one vote. “This is our commitment. That is our power. That is why we are mobilizing, organizing and reminding the people that politics is not a game without purpose” (Ebegbulem, 2013).

This seems to be mere political statement as a number of issues were raised prior to the election which were never responded to nor addressed. Rather than address these issues that emanated prior to and during the election, such issues as the appointment of ACN card carrying members as members of EDSIEC and ad hoc staff, imposition of candidates, late arrival of materials, non availability of result sheets in most polling units, and a host of other grievances, the Governor, without previous announcement, hastily swore in the supposedly ‘elected chairmen’. The question therefore is, ‘Why the hurry’? He (Governor) was re-elected July, 2012 and sworn in November 12; President Buhari was elected March 28 and sworn in May 29, 2015. This is the normal routine in all democratic societies across the world.

On the day of swearing in of the Council Chairmen, the governor declared that the local government council elections was the best ever organized not only in the history of this state but in the entire South-South geo-political zone mostly controlled by the PDP (Ogidan, 2013), even though he asked EDSIEC to tender unreserved apology to the people of Edo State for all the challenges associated with the election (Osauzo, 2013). Meanwhile on July 14, 2012, the day of his re-election when he heard rumours of late arrival and delay of election materials in Oredo, he addressed a press conference at Auchi and declared ‘Jega fuck up’, upon further questioning, he again declared, ‘yawa go gas’ (African Independent Television, 2012; Independent Television, 2012).

Before the April 2007 governorship election, PDP controlled every aspect of the political life in Edo state. Then came the Action Congress (AC) without any single government structure and took the state by stormy surprise. Three events happened. First, there was internal wrangling within the ranks of the PDP. Secondly, there was an internal implosion arising from grievances among members, especially when some members like, former Governor Lucky Igbinedion, Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu, Dr. Pius Odubu, etc were deregistered. These people came together to begin the prospect of forming a new party. While some called them ‘PDP 2’, others referred to them as ‘conglomeration of the remnant of PDP’. Third, and most importantly, the non-party votes. This was very essential as this set of people does not belong to any political party, but statistics has shown that they far more than the membership strength of any single political party. So, these factors summed up was enough for the Action Congress to win the 2007 gubernatorial election.

Ironically, these same phenomena especially the first and third, reversely played out this time against the ACN preceding the local government elections. Before the local government election under study, PDP was still in control of all elective political offices, except one House of Assembly seat in Edo Central (Esan). How then could anyone say that such a political party in the state was dead?

Immediately the 'election' results were announced by EDSIEC in favour of the APC, there were massive protests across the three senatorial districts. The Secretary to the State Government, Prof. Julius Ihonvbere, while reacting to the protests, referred to it as the "ranting of the PDP" and described the protests as "pedestral and infantile" (ITV News, 2013). Similarly, when asked by a Silverbird reporter on the allegation by PDP that the election was rigged, the then Special Adviser to Governor Oshiomhole on Media, Prince Kassim Afegbua, referred to those who made the allegation as "jobless" (STV News, 2013).

EDSIEC, through its Chairman, Mr. Solomon Ogor, said no stone was being left unturned in the bid to make the election free, fair and credible. His words, "most of the faults in past elections in Nigeria are the faults of most Nigerians. I am not saying that EDSIEC, INEC or other agencies have no faults of their own. All I am saying is that to have a free, fair and credible election is a task for all of us. Having said that, I assure you that the coming council elections will be free and fair. I assure all of a level playing field. We have no doubt that we will conduct an election that will be a reference point in the country" (Ebhuomhan, 2013). The first test of EDSIEC's sincerity came when the ACN conducted its primaries. The electoral body did not deem it fit to speak out on the allegation of Candidates' imposition by ACN nor did it supervise the party primaries.

The action according to Edo State Chairman of PDP, Chief Dan Orbih, violated EDSIEC guidelines and described it as unconstitutional, null and void and against the tenets of democracy. The electoral body also failed when it unlawfully imposed fees on forms to be collected by contestants (Enogholase, 2013), a decision which the state High Court had since declared illegal (Channels TV, 2013). Besides, Section 26 (5) of EDSIEC Handbook (2013) mandates it to provide all election materials at the polling units before commencement of the election; this was not to be as result sheets were not provided in almost all centres across the state (Umoru, 2013; ITV, 2013). Whereas the Handbook empowers EDSIEC to within seven days conduct another election if no candidate is duly elected, for more than three months, EDSIEC refused to announce the result of Esan North East Local Government Area after the first and second rounds of ballot or to even conduct the third round of elections. When it eventually did, the Chairman announced the concocted results at about 7:45pm in his Benin City office while the then Commissioner of Police and Director, Department of State Security in the State were still at Uromi, headquarter of the local government, supervising collation of election results.

However, rather than accept the fact that the Commission had failed in Esan North East, the Chairman justified its failure on the ground that there was no genuine result to announce to the public (Ebegbulem, 2013). Knowing well that it is a PDP dominated area, it went ahead to announce the result in favour of ACN. Despite these

allegations and reports of massive rigging, the Commission's Chairman opined that, "though there were some hitches in some local government areas because of late arrival of voting materials which led to the suspension of election in four local government areas, the election can still be described as free, fair and credible (Onoirhibholo, 2013).

Similarly, a member of the Commission, in his presentation at a conference organized by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in Abuja June 4-6, 2013, described the April 20 polls as 'far better' than all previous ones conducted in the state. In betrayal of these claims, EDSIEC, through its Chairman sacked its spokesperson, Mrs. Osaretin Uwagboe told an ITV reporter attached to their State headquarter, Best Orator, in confidence through the telephone that she was disallowed from entering any of the offices and that her movement was restricted (Ebhuomhan, 2013). Though the Chairman refuted the allegation of barring ITV and radio from carrying out its responsibilities; on why the Commission's Public Relations Officer was redeployed, he replied that redeployment does not mean punishment in the civil service (Edo People's Entertainment, 2013).

What is certain is that the roles of these two power blocs cannot be over emphasized in the freeness and fairness of any council poll. To us in Edo state, it has brought a bleak political dimension to local government elections and politics in the state. They had the opportunity to put things right in the state but did not. It may well be as Frantz Fanon (cited in Otoghagua, 2004), once observed "every generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil or betray it". Thus, one can boldly say that the power blocs did not fulfil their mission but betrayed it.

Methodology of the Study

This paper reports on research conducted over a two year period between 2013 and 2015 in Edo State. While research has been conducted on the more traditional roles of EDSIEC, existing research on specific local government elections in Nigeria particularly in Edo State in this fourth republic remains limited. It is however important to mention the works of some Nigerian academics on the subject of study, notably Abutudu (2011, 2013) whose study on challenges faced in conducting local government elections, highlighted the opportunities for improving local government elections in Nigeria for improved service delivery. Ikelegbe (2005) espoused the challenges of local government system in Nigeria and the factors inhibiting development at this level of government. Ola (1984) carried out research on local government administration in Nigeria.

The study adopted the primary and secondary sources of data generation. Secondary sources of data gathering consisted of books, journals, newspapers and magazines for relevant information. It also involved consultation of various official publications and gazettes for relevant statutory positions on the subject of study. This was done to give a background and context to the study. The primary source of data was oral interviews which focused on a sample of 35 stakeholders- some members of EDSIEC, Edo State House of Assembly, Civil Society Activists, Academia and Electorates. Three local government areas of Edo State were selected for this purpose.

These were Ikpoba-Okha in Edo South, Esan North-East in Edo Central and Akoko-Edo in Edo North.

In the analysis of data from the above sources, attempts were made to sift through the volume of materials available with a view to drawing out observable patterns. Key recommendations for this work also emanated from information sourced from secondary data and personal interviews.

The 2013 Local Government Poll in Edo State: An Analysis

“In accordance with the Edo State Local Government Electoral Law 2013, elections to the offices of Chairman and Councillors in the 18 Local Government Councils of the state had been fixed for April 20, 2013”. This statement is credited to the chairman of EDSIEC Mr. Solomon Ogor when announcing the date for the conduct of Local Government elections in Edo State (Ebhuomhan, 2013; Alema-Ozioruva, 2013; Oise, 2013). Though some analysts and pundits were then of the opinion that the election may not hold as scheduled due to shoddy preparation by EDSIEC, the fear was later confirmed prior to and during the election.

Prior to the local government election, the state chapter of the PDP, through one of its leaders Mr. Okharedia Ihimekpen had asked his party and other parties in the state to boycott the election due to what he referred to as ‘failure of EDSIEC to formally invite PDP to the stakeholders meeting where modalities for the election were outlined’. In a twist, its state Publicity Secretary, Pharmacist Matthew Urhoghide, said in a statement that the party had resolved to participate in the election and urged members of the party and citizens of Edo state to disregard the earlier call (Engholase, 2013).

Following the resolve by opposition parties to take part in the elections, the APC and PDP embarked on aggressive campaigns with allegations of plots to rig the poll being traded by the two major political parties. As the election drew closer, Candidates embarked on intensive campaign that took them to the nook and crannies of each of the local government areas. While some adopted the house-to-house strategic type of campaign, also referred to in political parlance as “mosquito campaign”, others preferred the rally type that gathers party faithful in thousands at venues for direct address (Ebhuomhan, 2013).

The campaign witnessed a lot of decamping or what is called “cross carpeting” from one party to another notably from PDP to the ruling APC, and much permutations within and among parties, individuals and groups. On Election Day, voters’ response was high as they thronged the voting centers as early as 8am being the official time fixed for the commencement of accreditation. The time was first for 10am and later changed to 11am by EDSIEC. Eventually, voting materials started getting to most polling stations in the post-noon while voting and counting extended into early dusk in some polling areas (Onoiribholo, 2013). On that fateful Saturday, reports of late arrival of voting materials and in some areas, no material at all pervaded the air waves. For instance, one of the accredited domestic observers for the elections after observing the election, commented rather solemnly:

The late arrival of election materials was observed throughout the three senatorial districts of the state which eventually led to late commencement of accreditation and voting in the entire councils. Voters accreditation commenced very late about 2:30pm and proper voting commenced at 4pm at most of the Polling Stations visited (Umoru, 2013).

Evidence that strategy had been perfected to rig the election presented itself when the state Deputy Governor, Dr. Pius Egberanmwun Odubu, told ITV reporter that same day of election that his personal vehicle conveying election materials to his locality was vandalized by hoodlums who carted away election materials and that those who did, had nailed their own coffin. The questions we need to ask are: (i) why would the deputy governor use his personal vehicle to carry electoral materials? (ii) How did they get another set of election materials for the election at that time of the day? Yet, Orhionmwon's result was one of the first seven to be announced on Sunday 21st of April, 2013. Similarly, the distribution of election materials without result sheet raised dust, provocation and protest in most local government areas.

The Coordinator, Centre for Strategic Studies, Dr. Isaac Onyika, maintained that "the Chairman and the entire staff of EDSIEC were not fully prepared for the elections. They also lacked the professional experience to conduct the elections. The distribution of sensitive and non-sensitive election materials was largely delayed and distorted. We observed a shortfall in the distribution of election materials throughout the 18 councils. In some polling units, result sheets were not supplied". He stated further that in the course of carrying out their duties, they were denied access to the EDSIEC office, adding "for obvious reasons, which we believe had to do with the tendency to rig the elections in favour of the ruling party, APC in Edo State". He therefore concluded that Edo state local council elections were one of the worst elections ever conducted in the history of Nigeria's democratic process (Umoru, 2013).

This confirmed the fears earlier expressed by political parties and other stakeholders in the state. When the results of seven out of the fourteen local governments in which election took place were announced by EDSIEC, the state chairman the of PDP, Dan Osi Orbih, accused EDSIEC of shoddy preparation for the election and alleged that APC rigged the exercise (Orbih 2013). In the same vein, PDP state Publicity Secretary, on Channels Television (2013), described the local government election as a national calamity in which the people of the state were not allowed to make their choices. He said the botched local government polls passed as one very big embarrassment to the people of the state and in his own judgment, a national calamity. He opined that "an election conducted by an electoral body appointed by the state is against known democratic codes and implied that the governor paid the people's goodwill back with ingratitude. The election was a charade, a travesty of known and acceptable democratic practices, it is just unfortunate". He then described the swearing in of 14 Local Government Chairmen

as 'brazen' and an act which disregarded the interest of the people. He further described the EDSIEC as deficient and wicked.

To buttress his points, the Publicity Secretary, speaking on Channels Television Breakfast Programme, Sunrise Daily, challenged the APC and EDSIEC to let a neutral electoral body conduct elections in the four Local Government Areas where election did not hold on Saturday April 20. He said, "the only challenge we want to throw here is, if EDSIEC and its employees are really ready to give Edo people what we want, the four local government areas left as a prototype. We want to have a neutral body composed of civil society groups, NBA members, market women, students, e.t.c. Let them come and conduct these elections so that the world will know exactly what the thinking of the mind of Edo people is, over local government election" (Otabor, 2013). This in our view is a very good challenge.

Edo State 2013 Local Government Elections: Any Respite Yet?

The personal interviews lend support and further elaborated on the problems that was encountered by voters during the elections. The list of malpractices observed in the course of the election include: imposition of candidates by political parties; lack of transparency in party primaries; in some cases, party primaries were not held at all; interference of party officials and their agents at polling centres; intimidation and violence by party thugs; snatching of ballot boxes and ballot papers by hired thugs; intimidation and violence by thugs; vote allocation; false declaration of results; late arrival of election materials; and deliberate withholding of result sheets.

The events preceding the election showed that it was not going to be easy because right from the day the state chapter of PDP alleged that it had uncovered discreet plans by the state government and officials of EDSIEC to manipulate the authentic result sheets of the election, analysts knew that many feathers were going to be ruffled after the elections. These allegations came from the state PDP Publicity Secretary who said in a statement that contrary to the State Local Government Law the EDSIEC guidelines 2013, the state government had had instructed presiding officers not to sign the result sheets at the polling units as these officials had already signed pre-written result sheets that would be handed over to EDSIEC (Onoiribholo, 2013).

For instance, one of the Supervisory Presiding Officers (SPOs), who also was a member of the APC, who I interviewed, told me that:

We were lodged in Best Western hotel along third East Circular Road, Benin City over night where we were informed on the modalities for the election. We were all barred from making or receiving calls. A leader of the party came to the hotel to address us after which they (the presiding officers and returning officers) were given result sheet to sign before going for the assignment.

The high level of hope, enthusiasm and confidence accounted for the suspicion of each party by others, resulting in allegations and counter allegations

being traded between all parties in the election. While for instance, the PDP has accused the ruling APC government of planning to arm and deploy the neighbourhood watch, a state owned community based security outfit that assist the police and other security agencies to tackle crime in Edo State (Channels TV; Enogholase, 2013), the APC raised alarm over alleged plans by the PDP and INEC to inflate the Voters' Register with a view to manipulating the polls. Speaking through its then state Chairman, Hon. Thomas Okosun, it accused INEC in the state of demanding ₦4m from EDSIEC to enable it print fresh Voter's Register for those who have changed their residential addresses. This he said was illegal since the law stipulates that one can not change address 30days to an election. He therefore warned that any move to rig the election will be resisted (Ebegbulem, 2013).

The first thing this government did was to set up an EDSIEC dominated by card carrying members of the APC (Ogidan, 2013). This was the first issue that raised dust as to whether there will be an acceptable election in the state. A notable member of the state electoral body, in the course of a friendly discussion told one of my research assistants (name withheld) that:

PDP is just wasting their time in this election. The election has already be concluded. It is a matter of time before the result will be announced and nothing will be done about it. All the candidates of PDP and their followers need to do is to come and join the APC's moving train.

This issue of imposition also caused a lot of acrimony within the ranks of both APC and PDP. There were knocks and protests against the process that produced the candidates in some quarters; the leadership of the party and the government seemed convinced that the post-primary rancour could be easily managed (Alemm-Oziourva, 2013). For instance, the Chairman of Ohordua Community Development Association, Lagos, Mr. Ehiabhi Ebehitamame, said:

In the Edo State APC primary election for selection of chairmanship and councillorship candidates was marred by protests following alleged imposition of unpopular candidates on the people. He added that the primary held on February 9, had been trailed by controversy because party leaders had, through their forged signatures imposed their candidates, adding that the party leaders behind the action were responsible for the imposition of the handpicked candidates (Ajala, 2013;ITV News).

As news fittered in that date for party primaries has been fixed, some APC members in Esan North East local government appealed to governor Adams Oshiomhole to ensure that candidates are not imposed on the people in order not to create crisis in the party because he (Oshiomhole) emerged as governor of the state due to his antecedents as a labour leader and not through imposition, insisting that it

is only by allowing the people to decide who leads them that can make the party maintain and repeat the election result of July 14, 2012. In a related development, some stakeholders in APC in Uhumwode local government led by Chief Sam Iredia, accused the Political Adviser to the Governor and the leader of the party in the area Mr. Charles Idahosa of imposing one Roland Alari as Chairmanship candidate of the APC without primaries (Ebegbulem,2013).

Though some of the leaders of the party had denied the allegation of imposition of candidates referring to it as a figment of the opposition's imagination (Ebhuomhan,2013). To justify the latter's argument, a Benin socio-cultural group, the Bini Truth Movement, (BTM), heaped praises on Oshiomhole over the conduct of APC primaries saying, "as an apostle of one man, one vote, he must be commended for the internal democracy recently experienced in Edo ACN" (Ahiuma-Young, 2013). As if to counter this claim, a member of ACN who happened to be a Chairmanship aspirant in Etsako East Local Government Area, Hon. Godwin Eshieshi, challenged the candidature of Mr. Abdulmalik Afegbua, who he said was not validly nominated by the party to contest the April 20 Local Government election in the area (Enogholase, 2013). On the issue of whether there is imposition in ACN or not, the then National Chairman, Chief Bisi Akande rejected the idea when he said in January 2011 that, "if election within our party is what you are trying to describe as internal democracy, then we reject such idea". He vehemently restated that there is nothing wrong with imposition (Aziken, 2013.)

According to the member of the House of Representatives of Owan Federal Constituency, Hon. Pally Iriase, rather than call it imposition, 'affirmation' was the best option for the ruling party. Yes, what we did is affirmation. People say they don't like the word consensus. He however agreed that the ultimate thing is to allow Nigerians make their choice (Ebhuomhan,2013). What these positions simply means is that within the APC, imposition is allowed. This explains the knocks, protests and infighting within the party arising from the manner with which candidates were imposed on the members, and to avoid defeat in the polls because of grievances of some members, a chieftain of the party in Edo South, Elder Sunny Uyigie, cautioned members to be vigilant, alleging plans by some aggrieved members of the party to vote against the party in favour of the PDP, particularly in Ovia North East where former PDP women leader, then ACN Chairmanship candidate, Barr. Mrs. Lucy Omagbon flagged off her campaign (Ebegbulem,2013). Concerned citizens of Edo state were jittery over candidates' imposition by the APC because pundits have since postulated that the Local Government election is a positioning strategy for the 2015 Presidential, State and National Assembly elections as well as the 2016 governorship election which would produce a successor to incumbent Governor, Adams Oshiomhole.

What is clear is that Oshiomhole wants to use the election to fortify the structure he had been building with the view to remaining relevant when it comes to picking successor and remaining so even after leaving office (Alemma-Ozoruvu,2013). There was also the issue of inter party squabble, mostly between the PDP and the ACN. True to this fear,a journalist, Osemwengie Ben Ogbemudia

reported that two persons were killed on April 16, 2013 in Fugar, Etsako Central Local Government as supporters of ACN and PDP engaged in a free for all. This happened 48 hours after the then Commissioner of Police, Folunsho Adebajo met with leaders of political parties and some Candidates on the need to ensure a peaceful local government election (Ogbemudia,2013). This probably explains the reason for the counsel by the Oba of Benin, Oba Erediauwa that all Chairmanship and Councillorship candidates should go about their campaigns peacefully in order to sustain the prevailing peace in the state (Ebegbulem 2013).

Another rationale for apprehension was the imposition of fees on aspirants. The state Chairman of Labour Party, Elder Sam Omede, had challenged the governor to assure the people of his sincerity to conduct free and fair elections, alleging that the demand by the state Board of Internal Revenue of tax clearance fee of ₦466,000 from Councillorship aspirants and ₦750,000 from Chairmanship aspirants was a ploy by the ACN led government to scare away contestants from other parties in the state (Ebegbulem,2013). In the same vein, the state PDP Chairman, Chief Dan Orbih, queried the rationale behind EDSIEC charging ₦100,000 for Chairmanship aspirants and ₦ 50,000 for Councillorship aspirants before they could obtain EDSIEC nomination forms to contest the said election. He said:

There is nowhere in Nigerian constitution on the conduct of local government election, where aspirants are required to pay money for collection of form. He used that medium to serve a notice on EDSIEC to start returning all the money it collected from aspirants in the name of form (Enogholase, 2013; Orbih,2013).

The PDP then took a legal action against EDSIEC, an action its Chairman said was to compel the electoral body to refund what he called 'illegal fees' (Otabor, 2013). The fees became illegal when a High Court sitting in Benin ordered EDSIEC to refund the monies paid by the aspirants rather than parties' nominated candidates to the commission as nomination fees to enable them participate in the Local Government elections. Justice Nongi Imoukhuede gave the order based on the suit filed by the Edo state PDP seeking a declaration that section 16 (e) of the Edo State Local Government Electoral Law 2012 and paragraph (5.1) of the guidelines issued by EDSIEC are unconstitutional, null and void (Channels TV, 2013). Another issue that accounted for apprehension came when members of Edo Youth Congress (EYC), a body accredited by EDSIEC to observe the electoral process, visited the EDSIEC headquarters on the eve to observe how electoral materials were distributed. They discovered to their bewilderment that one Ovia South West Electoral Officer, Mr. Idahosa Jimoh Andrew was replaced by Mr. Fred Obaretin in less than 24 hours to the election. When contacted, he said:

I was replaced because I refused to sign that I have collected all election materials when actually I was only given electoral materials without result sheet and was told to go and conduct the

election. I have just two years to retire from the service and would not want to dent my image.

The major challenge during the election was logistical issues which borders on last minute rush preparation for the election; deliberate attempt by EDSIEC to delay the election; late arrival of materials and officials; and in some cases, elections did not hold at all due to absence of officials and materials. For instance, at the polling station in Ikpoba Okha Local government area ward 5, unit 23, a voter that was interviewed was quoted as saying:

I arrived at about 7:30am on the 20th after a long wait along with other voters, it was later announced that the election had been postponed to the following day due to some logistic problems. On that day adhoc staffs and materials did not arrive until past midday. By the time they arrived, there was no result sheet, though it was later supplied by the Supervisory Presiding Officer (SPO).

In a similar manner, a female voter from Akoko-Edo observed thus:

I was at my polling unit at about 8am on April 20, the said date for the election when EDSIEC adhoc staff arrived without result sheet for the election. The opposition PDP members insisted on no result sheet, no election. This tensed situation persisted till 3pm when the SPO then brought the result sheet. Whereas accreditation ought to commence at 8am and end at 1:30 pm while voting will start at 2pm and end at 5pm, the election official had to allow accreditation simultaneously with voting. This is in contravention of the Edo State Local government law and Guidelines issued by EDSIEC for the conduct of the election. This phenomenon disenfranchised many intending voters who got tired of waiting and left before the arrival of the election officials.

Another area of challenge that put a dent in the election was the issue of inadequate publicity with regards to the election. The 2013 local government election in Edo state lacked the necessary publicity. The only publicity was misleading information and violent acts perpetrated against some journalists in the state. According to (Galadima and Omar, 2013), a fundamental component of a vibrant electoral democracy is an informed and engaged citizenry. The level of public awareness during pre-election processes can often foretell the level of trust and understanding a citizen has on Election Day. Some of the voters interviewed on their level of awareness with respect to the election expressed disappointment. A female electorate said in the local parlance that:

I no know say dem one even do election for this local government. Nobody tell me. I go comot go market for morning, come back for evening. Cook for my husband and children before I go sleep. How I want take know? Na wen APC and PDP members come call me make I follow dem go Igarra for rally, n aim I take no say dem one do election.

Apparently, this woman is a non-party voter. In a similar vein, a male voter argued that:

This election lacks adequate publicity. EDSIEC failed to perform its function of voters education, neither do any of the political parties. Only those around city centres with access to television, internet and newspapers that were well informed. While those in the rural areas lacked the information. This is not good for our democracy.

The last and most worrisome of all was the composition of adhoc staff by EDSIEC. Its Chairman had announced that not less than 8,000 personnel would be deployed to man various aspects of the task to enthrone democracy and good governance at the Local Government level in Edo State. He said no stone was being left unturned in a bid to make the election free, fair and credible (Otabor, 2013; Ebhuomhan, 2013).

The state PDP through its Publicity Secretary alleged that Edo State government had recruited and deployed adhoc staff from among their loyal party members of APC for use by EDSIEC as officials to conduct the elections in most of the councils in the state and vowed that the party will raise issues from the election outcome if EDSIEC permits its integrity to be compromised in the unethical ways described above (Enogholase, 2013). This allegation came just as the leadership of PDP in Etsako East Local Government Area rejected the list of ad hoc staff displayed by the Commission on the ground that over 90% of the staff were card carrying members of APC (Onoirhibholo, 2013).

This allegation seemed not to be far from the truth as alleged by a civil society activist:

The Chairman of the Commission once asked a member of Conference of NGOs (CONGOS) in Edo State and Chairman Civil Society Alliance (CISA), to submit names of NGOs to be used as ad hoc staff for the elections. This witness' (name withheld) name was submitted for the position of Supervisory Presiding Officer (SPO). As a follow up, EDSIEC on the 18th of March sent a telephone message that reads, "U are invited for a chat with EDSIEC in respect of the conduct of the April 20th 2013 LG election @ plot 116, Oko Ogba road, Wednesday 20th March 2013,

10am prompt”. We were all there as scheduled. The meeting was held. “We were however taken aback when we found out that none of those invited (at least those known to us) for a chat made the list of the ad hoc staff.

A lecturer in the University of Benin who had applied for the position of SPO for the election told us that:

In the week of the election, he was informed by a friend who happened to be a leader of APC in Orhionmwon Local Government that names of adhoc staff are being compiled in Agbado Primary School, and since he applied for the position of Supervisor, they should go there together. On getting there, the compound was filled up. The most striking thing was when the man in charge started asking them one after the other, ‘who recommended you?’ While his friend entered the hall, he was asked to go home.

This action of EDSIEC aroused suspicion. The Chairman on realizing this suspicion and apprehension, assured that there will be a level playing field for all parties. He maintained, “we have no doubt that we will conduct an election that will be a reference point in this country. We would like to assure you that as an unbiased umpire, the Commission will provide a level playing field for all Candidates. This is our state and we have vowed to carry out our assignment satisfactorily as our contribution to the development of our people” (Otabor, 2013; Oise, 2013; Ebhuomhan, 2013).

Conclusion

The pernicious influence of this botched and manipulated 2013 Local Government election has taken Edo state thirty years back and even beyond. Apart from its image problem, it will and continues to impart negatively on the politics and governance of the state because many years from now, reference will still be made to it. The 1983 imbroglio (Otoghagua, 2004), the aftermath of which Dele Giwa (1985) explained that, “in the Second Republic, politics turned physical, not intellectual, warfare and other means. Political violence was on the increase. There were clashes and clashes. The NPN against UPN, NPN against NPP and NPN against GNPP; the NPN being the only recurring decimal in these political battles” and the era of do or die politics (cited in Otoghagua, 2004) which needed to be avoided were all in vogue.

All the negative features that were prevalent in previous elections were brought to bear. The principle of free, fair, credible and acceptable elections and the one man, one vote adopted by President Jonathan and INEC in the conduct of the July 14 and October 10 2012 governorship elections in Edo and Ondo states respectively was jettisoned in the election under study. This is not the best and it may not augur well for our future elections. Local Government election is supposed to be an avenue

of encouragement for grassroot mobilization, participation and development. As Abutudu (2011) enthused, "Local Government is an avenue for training and inculcating the habits of democracy at the grassroots. These habits are construed to encompass political participation, mobilization, accountability, responsiveness and self-governability".

Hence, we have argued that the conduct of Local Government elections should be transferred to INEC, while State Independent Electoral Commissions should be outlawed if we are to get our democracy right. This is in a bid to avoid infiltration by Governors and other government officials. Local Governments must be alienated from State Governments. It must have a life of its own. That is, it must be a strong autonomous third tier of government. Local Government must have a National Uniform Tenured System (NUTS), defined by periodic elections so as to replicate other elected political offices across the country.

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