



INEC, Political Parties and the Politics of Inconclusive Elections in the 2019 General Elections in Southeast Nigeria.

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Abstract

Nigeria has witnessed an increase in the declaration of inconclusive elections by INEC, especially in the southeast. This study interrogates INEC: Political Parties and the Politics of Inconclusive Elections in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria especially in the southeast. The survey adopted a quantitative research design and experimental survey with multistage simple sampling techniques and applied Systems Theory as a theoretical framework. This study among other things discovered that; INEC contributed significantly to the inconclusiveness of 2019 general elections in the southeast region of Nigeria and attitudes of political parties gave rise to the inconclusiveness of 2019 general elections in the southeast geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study also revealed that the power of incumbency played a very significant role in 2019 general elections leading to the inconclusiveness of elections in the Southeast. For conclusive, free, and fair elections INEC must be non-partisan when conducting elections. Judges of the Election Petition Tribunals should be appointed by the Judicial Council of Nigeria instead of the executive arm of government; it is believed that if all these are put in place, Nigeria will be launched into a better political footing.

Keywords: INEC, Political Party, Politics, General Elections, Inconclusive, South-Eastern.

Introduction

Over the years, election fundamentally represents a modern and universally acceptable process through which individuals are openly and methodologically chosen to represent a body or community or government. Thus, election is one of the cardinal features of democracy and appears to be the only mechanism by which a democratic government can be realized and entrenched essentially in a democratic setting. In developing countries of the world, democracy is not just a system of

government. It is the vehicle conveying the people from despair and poverty to hope and security. Though electoral activity is judged by some scholars to facilitate democratic learning, consolidation is inevitably a much longer-term process (Omilusi, 2016).

In recent times in Nigeria, the process of elections has assumed a new but dangerous dimension, with its history becoming replete with inconclusive polls. According to Collier, and Lisa, (2008) elections in Nigeria have been

associated with irregularities and violence. With inconclusive election becoming a trend setter, a new vintage point has been unearthed in the Nigerian electoral landscape. Idike, (2016) summarizes that the imbroglio surrounding inconclusive election as a pervasive buzz word is that it lacks any scholastic cum academic definitions due to the fact that it has not been subjected to such rigors. Thus, inconclusive election played out in 2011 in the Anambra central senatorial constituency, the State governorship election in Imo and the Oguta senatorial constituencies were also declared inconclusive. Furthermore, in 2013 elections, 16 local government areas in Anambra State as well as the governorship elections were declared inconclusive. In all the above cases Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had to organize a re-run election to determine a winner.

Election essentially, election constitutes the strategic might to the democratic process (Nkwede, 2006). Thus, the fundamental principle of representative government is that the people should be governed by officers of their own choice. In a democratic setting, citizens are expected to take part in the work of the government by voting at the polls. Election therefore, is a mechanism by which people are elected into offices (Akena et al, 2004). Moreover, it is the procedure through which people are voted into power to represent the electorate in a democratic milieu. For Roger (1982 cited in Nkwede & Itumo 2016), election is the process by which an electorate chooses, by voting, officers either to act on its behalf or to represent it in an assembly, with a view to governing, and making good administration.

Similarly, election is the process of choosing or selecting qualified candidates for positions of office by vote. Election is very important in a political process simply because without the process of election, there would be the struggle for power which would either be in form of coup d'état or radical change of government. In a nutshell, elections are universally a means of choosing representatives in a political system (Nkwede 2016). Moreover, election has become the most acceptable method by which the citizens of an ever-increasing number of political systems choose their rulers (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008). Furthermore, according to Udu, Nkwede & Ezekwe (2015), election has been

widely and universally conceived as an accepted means through which individuals and leaders are openly and regularly chosen by voting to represent a body or community in a larger entity or government is one of the cardinal features of a democratic process. Heretofore, election is universally seen as the heart of democracy but there are other institutions which served as the essential mechanism through which a democratic government could be entrenched (Nkwede, 2019).

The task of ensuring that election is credible, free and fair is still a daunting one and the failure of the first three political dispensations (First, Second and Aborted-Third Republic) in the history of Nigeria can be traced to the inability of the political class to organize credible elections. Election and party politics have been the most fundamental elements of modern day representative democracy. Both constitute the essential ingredients upon which the success of any democratic state in the world could be measured, in terms of its stability and sustainability. In this wise, it can be deduced that elections are very germane to the consolidation of democracy. Thus, elections are used as a measure of the consolidation of nation's democracy (Nkwede 2018). In line with this perception, Alapiki (2004) opines that election is, the barometer to measure the political maturity, health, legitimacy and stability of democratic governance. It is generally held to be the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of democratic governance. Heywood (2000) cited in Nkwede & Itumo (2016:17), conceptualized election as "a device for filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people i.e. the electorate". This suggests that election is the primary means by which citizens exercise their sovereignty. It should be noted that maintaining the sanctity of election remains cardinal to any assessment of democracy and democratic consolidation. While Political parties have long been recognized as requisite for any democratic political system (Kuenzi & Lambright, 2001), the critical role of political parties in promoting democratic stability and consolidation has been acknowledged by scholars (Omotola, 2008; Oyediran & Agbaje, 1998).

Essentially, Oyediran & Agbaje (1998) equally pointed out that political parties remain a requisite element of democratic governance. Perhaps, the factor for the success of democratic consolidation in a country depends on the effectiveness of political parties. Political parties can only discharge these roles adequately, provided that they live up to their responsibilities (Scarrow, 2004). In support of the above, Omilusi (2016) observed that internal party cataclysm has had and is still affecting democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Factors affecting democratic consolidation include political intolerance, electoral violence, political apathy, and proliferation of weak parties, legitimacy crisis, and image problem, retardation of growth and development, and violation of rule of law, among others, by political actors.

Appadorai (1975) conceptualized political party as a more or less organized group of citizens who act together as a political unit, have distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political questions of controversy in the State, and who, by acting together as a political unit, seek to obtain control of the government. Appadorai (1975) further observed that political party can be seen as “articulate organization of society's active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of government powers and who compete for popular support with another group or groups holding divergent views”. However, Kurfi (2005) argued that, a lot of people agree that political parties are organized group of people who come together to pursue specific policies and objectives with the motive of taking control of state power, by acting together as a political unit.

According to Alao, Alao & Nwogwugwu (2013) a political party is a group of persons bounded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible of government and its offices. In other words, political party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with a label, a party identification by which they are known to the electorates. In essence, a political party is a group of people organized together to further a political aim. These aims are based on the common interests of the members. Thus,

political party is generally described as an organized body of people who share common principles and cherishes certain common goals regarding the political system where they operate and seek political power through constitutional means to translate its policies into practice (Nkwede & Itumo, 2016). Oji (1997) observed that political parties are those organizations under whose ambit, people aspire to and acquire political power in a political system. Political parties according to Nkwede & Itumo (2016) act as a catalyst in the electoral process and also mold the political system towards peaceful conduct of elections.

In the same vein, Schumpeter (1961) opined that, the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the other in order to get into power or to stay in it. It is this goal of attaining political power that distinguishes political parties from other groups in the political system, although the distinction is rather blurred at times, especially in regard to pressure groups. Political parties are however defined here as formally recognized organizations whose members share certain common values, ideas and aspirations about how society should be politically, socio-culturally and economically organized for the common good. They aspire to translate these ideas and values through the control of government by placing their representatives in a competitive free, fair and honesty conducted elections, without harassment, intimidation and threat of violence (Kura, 2005).

The problem associated with inconclusive election is enormous arising from financial burden, insecurity, political apathy, lack of political awareness and mass education. Inconclusive election brings more burdens to the federal, state and local government. This also contribute to lack of reliability in the electoral process as was seen during the 2019 general elections re-run which the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was accusing INEC and All Progressives Congress (APC) of collaboration, and the PDP believed that the APC was using the power of incumbency to manipulate the electoral commission to their favor. All these accusations and counter accusations do not augur well with Nigerian democracy and Southeast as international community and independent observers were watching. Essentially, whenever there are

inconclusive elections in the country, the INEC gets the lashing for all manner of reason while the perpetrators of violence in instances where the inconclusive result is as a result of violence; get to walk free except when they are caught. This study is therefore premised on the need to find out the conspiracies or politics of INEC and political parties to the declaration of elections as inconclusive in the Southeast geopolitical zone. Against the above backdrop, this study sets out to examine the roles of INEC and political parties to the trend of inconclusive elections in the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria. The study aimed evaluating the roles of INEC and political parties in the inconclusiveness of the 2019 elections in the Southeast Nigeria. The work went on to assess the contributions of INEC in the inconclusiveness of the 2019 general elections in Southeast Nigeria. The study went further to investigate the roles of political parties in the inconclusiveness of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, especially in the Southeast geopolitical zone. Finally, it uncovered the circumstances under which some elections were declared inconclusive.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

The administration of Abdusalami Abubakar on 11 August, 1998, established Independent National Electoral Commission (Cornelius, 2012). The legal existence of the commission was incorporated into the 1999 Constitution which became operational on May 29, 1999 (Constitution, 1999 as Amended). The commission has conducted the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections respectively. Consequently, before the 2019 general elections, all other elections were marred with irregularities and electoral violence. In defense of these accusations, the then Chairman of the Commission, Attahiru Jega argues that the commission had learnt its lessons with the outcome of the November 16, 2013 governorship election in Anambra State (Okocha, 2013). The then INEC Boss, also declared that "subsequently elections in the country would be devoid of the irregularities that marred the State governorship election that eventually resulted in a supplementary (due to inconclusive elections) election on November 30, 2013" (Okocha, 2013). The lessons from previous elections and that of Anambra State

were not even enough to correct irregularities in Ekiti and Osun elections as claimed by INEC boss. For example, Ekiti state governorship election of July, 2018 was fraudulent (Nkwede, Nweke, Moliki and Dauda 2018).

The 2003 election was civilian to civilian elections, not only that the elections were marred by fraud/irregularities but it witnessed late registration of voters by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which brought condemnation to Nigerians as it was rated below minimum standard for conducting elections anywhere in the world (Nwoba and Nwose, 2013).

Inconclusive Election

The concept "inconclusive election" is a namby-pamby phenomenon which has attained the status of a new lexicography of electoral trite and clichés in Nigeria. Idike, (2016) noted that the imbroglio surrounding inconclusive election as a pervasive buzz word is that it lacks any scholastic cum academic definitions due to the fact that it has not been subjected to such rigors. In this study, attempt would be made to employ a legalistic approach at defining the seemingly ambiguous compound-concept of inconclusive election.

Abah and Nwokwu (2016) posit that inconclusive election is an emerging phenomenon in the Nigerian electoral process whereby elections are concluded without clear winners returned. It implies a situation where elections are held but due to cancellations of election results, winners in elections could not emerge. In other words, inconclusive election would occur when no candidate meets the condition for the declaration of a winner of the election after polls. Simply put, "he or she must satisfy all legal requirements, score the majority of lawful votes cast at the election in which all eligible voters have been given the opportunity to exercise their franchise. Where no candidate satisfies this requirement, the election is said to be inconclusive."

It is apt to make reference to Section 26 of the Electoral Act (2010) which provides that where an election is scheduled, but there is likely to be a serious breach of the peace or it is impossible to continue with the election, INEC should postpone the election. Quoting Sub-Section 26 (2) of the Electoral Act, "there shall be no return for the election until polling has taken place in

the area or areas affected.” Sub-Section 4 of Section 26 stipulated a proviso that a declaration might be made if the result in the affected areas would not affect the overall outcome of the election. Other reasons why an election can be declared “inconclusive” as stipulated in Section 53 (2) of the 2010 Electoral Act is over voting. When the votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of registered voters in that polling unit, the result of the election for that polling unit shall be declared void by the Commission. To this end, another election may be conducted at a date to be fixed by the commission where the result at that polling unit may affect the overall result in the constituency.

It is therefore pertinent to posit that from the statutory provisions, inconclusive elections could also arise out of natural disaster or other emergency such as violence, threats or breakdown of law and order and over voting, among others. In other words, Section 26 of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) recognized that elections could be inconclusive and made provision for what should happen in such cases. Uzzi, (2016) avers that it is quite unfortunate and alarming that the major elections held since April 2015 has been determined inconclusive. Obviously, various reasons being attributed for these inconclusive elections were not satisfactory to the populace. Some quarters are blaming the inconclusive elections on the incompetence of the INEC administration while others are pointing accusing fingers at ‘internal saboteurs’ within INEC and political party officials. Some are even saying that an incompletely constituted INEC cannot deliver conclusive elections (Abah and Nwoku, 2016).

Ezenwa, (2016) maintained that the idea that inconclusive elections have existed only recently is a myth. The fact remains that inconclusive elections have existed throughout the lifecycle of Nigeria’s democratic experiment. Pointer cases include: 1979 Presidential election, Rivers state gubernatorial election (1999), Imo state gubernatorial elections (2007 and 2011), Anambra state gubernatorial election (2014), Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi and Taraba states gubernatorial elections (2015), to mention but a few. According to Oni et al (2013) the history of inconclusive election dates back to the June 12, 1993 presidential

poll. This was the forerunner to what has lately occurred in Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo North Senatorial zone. Perhaps, the only difference between the June 12, 1993 election and that of Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo North in 2015 is that the voting process on June 12 was concluded throughout the length and breadth of the nation, but while the then National Electoral Commission of Nigeria, under the watchful eyes of Professor Humphrey Nwosu, commenced state by state announcement of the results of the presidential election, it was suddenly stopped midway by the then military administration under General Ibrahim Babangida.

The election, which has since remained a watershed in the history of the country, featured the candidates of the defunct Social Democratic Party, late Chief MKO Abiola and Alhaji Bashiru Tofa of the then National Republican Convention. In the view of Oyeade (2002) the military regime of Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon was busy implementing its war against indiscipline (WAI) programme when it was overthrown on August 27, 1985 by a new military government led by General Ibrahim Babangida. The Babangida administration held sway from 1985 to 1993 with intermittent democratic experiment at the state and local levels in 1989-1993. The transition programme of General Ibrahim Babangida from 1985 to 1993 only succeeded in organizing elections into the 21 states, state Houses of Assembly, House of Representatives and Senate on the platforms of the two government registered political parties – the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) from 1991-1993 (Oyeade, 2002).

Oni, Chidozie and Agbude (2013) assert that one of the major causes of inconclusive election is poor logistics on the part of INEC and in most cases; it is the complete responsibility of the Commission. Berating the poor logistical set up of INEC, Olayiwola, (2014) and Ojo, Adewunmi, and Oluwale (2013) opined that in most other situations INEC is responsible for failure to deliver election materials on time. However, unless materials arrive extremely late in the afternoon, election will still be held in the polling unit that day. This means that logistics is very rarely a major contributor to not holding elections in a polling unit unless as in cases

where security concerns did not permit materials to be delivered within a reasonable time. Bamgbose (2016) maintained that the two leading parties in Nigeria today are the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). These two parties are both well-funded, strong, have ubiquitous networks and control significant numbers of states and seats in the state and federal legislature. The implication of this is that every election will be more keenly fought and contested for, meaning closer margins of victory. Akhaine (2015) and Salih (2016) allude that efforts must be made to reduce and possibly eliminate voided votes. These can only be done with technology as manual thumb printing will always leave some margin of error as long as the majority of the populace is illiterate. This is the new reality of the Nigerian electoral space and it is a dynamic that needs to be well understood and reflected in the INEC guidelines. For Ezeilo (2016), inconclusive election is one of the many cases of the weak institutional base of political parties in Nigeria. The lack of depth and capacity of Nigerian political parties has been largely attributed to its weak institutional base. Omotola, (2008) asserts that Nigerian political parties are not organizational platforms for alternative views and programmes of governance and development but associations, factions, cliques, and networks for power and resource struggles, 'bereft of clear ideological identity and commitment, and issue based politics. Nigerian political parties are lacking in ideological content as a platform for action, identification, mobilization, legitimization and conflicts management.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Systems Theory propounded by Von Bertalanffy (1969). Systems theory is an interdisciplinary theory that is concerned with every system in the society and several scientific domains which places much premium on the understanding of a given phenomenon through adoption of a holistic approach (Capra, 1997). The main concern of systems thinking is a shift of attention from the part to the whole (Checkland, 1997; Jackson, 2003). Thus, systems theory places much emphasis on the relationships between parts themselves and the events they produce through their interactions because system elements are rationally

connected (Luhmann, 1990). Put differently, the idea behind systems theory is that we cannot fully understand a phenomenon by simply breaking it up into elementary parts and reforming it; rather we need to adopt a global vision to analyze its functioning. Apparently, for one to understand a phenomenon, although he can start from the analysis of the constituent parts but to fully comprehend the phenomenon he invariably has to take a holistic view or observe it from a higher level (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). As pointed out earlier, the fundamental assumption of systems theory is interactions. That explains why Von Bertalanffy (1956), sees a system as a complex of interacting elements. In other words, a system is composed of constituent parts which interact to function at optimal level. Any dysfunction of a part or more can have a considerable adverse effect on the whole system. In an open system, there are exchanges of energy, matter, information etc with the external environment. The system receives inputs/feedbacks from the environment which are processed in order to produce acceptable outputs.

The relevance of the theory to the present study is that the conduct of free, fair and credible election is a shared responsibility among several critical institutions (election management body, security agencies, political parties, politicians, electorates, civil society organizations, etc). For any election to be free, fair and credible devoid of inconclusiveness, these critical stakeholders should be alive to their responsibilities. Any malfunction in any or combination of some of the stakeholders is capable of undermining the conduct of the election as desperate politicians or their thugs could cash in on the lapses to disrupt the elections. For instance, failure of security agents to enforce electoral laws before, during and after each election has been severally implicated for massive electoral violence that disrupt the election exercise, thus leading to cancellation of substantial election results. More so, desperation on the part of politicians to win elections at all cost have equally vitiated our collective effort to enthrone enduring democracy as violence has often been fingered as the main reason behind election results cancellation. To this extent, it can safely be argued that inconclusive election stems from institutional failures on the part of any or a

combination of critical stakeholders in the conduct of election exercises in the country.

Methods

The present study was conducted in South-eastern Nigeria. Survey design was employed in this study. Survey method essentially possess a number of identifiable characteristics such as involving the collection of data from large samples of people too large to be dealt with, presenting respondents with a series of questions to be answered and lastly, it generalizes its findings. Under the survey design, the researchers adopted a multistage simple sampling technique. The essence of this is because South-eastern Nigeria is made up of five (5) states vis-à-vis Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo respectively. Out of the five states in the zone, Abia, Ebonyi and Imo were selected with reason that inconclusive elections were witnessed in Abia South Senatorial District, Imo North Senatorial District, Ezza North and Izzi East federal constituencies of Ebonyi State. The researchers used the three senatorial zones in the three states as the population of the study instead of the entire five states because Anambra and Enugu states were not affected, hence, the application of multistage survey method for the selection of population size. Further, adopting the Southeast geo-political zone of the country as format of this study is to enable the researchers to be on

ground/ with those states were inconclusive elections were witnessed within the zone instead of going to other zones where security was not guaranteed. This approach assisted the researchers to obtain clearer statistical interpretation and analysis of data obtained from each of these states. However, one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents of each of the selected states using the constituencies where inconclusive election was declared. To this end, a total of 450 questionnaires were used for the study.

Similarly, it was not only cheap since a sample was chosen from the population of the state but also accessible to the collection of data in the area of the study. A reliable and validated data collection was sourced from both primary and secondary sources, through structured questionnaire adopted on a five Likert scale administered, and from documentary instrument essentially from existing relevant texts, journals and published works keeping in mind the research objectives. The data collected from the field survey were analysed by using content, percentages, Chi-square statistical tool and SPSS.

Results

Hypothesis 1: INEC contributed in the inconclusiveness of 2019 general election in the South-eastern Nigeria.

Table 1: INEC contributed in the inconclusiveness of 2019 general elections in the South-eastern Nigeria.

Responses	Frequencies	Percentage (%)	χ^2	df	Remarks
Agreed	140	36	119.88	3	Significance
Strongly Agreed	183	46			
Disagreed	40	10			
Strongly Disagreed	37	8			
Total	400	100			

Calculated $\chi^2 = 119.88$, t – value = 7.82, $df = 3$, $p > 0.05$

Table 1 above indicates that 40 representing 10% of the respondents disagreed on this notion, 37 respondents representing 8% strongly Disagreed, while a huge number of 183 respondents representing 46% and 140 respondents representing 36% invariably

concurred with this notion through Strongly Agreed and Agreed respectively.

Hypothesis 2: Attitudes of Political parties gave rise to the inconclusiveness of the general elections in the South-eastern region of Nigeria.

Table 2: Attitudes of political parties gave rise to the inconclusiveness of 2019 general elections in the South-eastern Region of Nigeria.

Responses	Frequencies	Percentage (%)	χ^2	df	Remarks
Agreed	135	42	115.6	3	Significance
Strongly Agreed	243	54			
Disagreed	13	3			
Strongly Disagreed	9	1			
Total	400	100			

Calculate $\chi^2 = 115.6$, t – value = 7.82, $df = 3$, $p > 0.05$

From table two below, 135 respondents representing 42% agreed and 243 respondents representing 54% gave a Strongly Agreed response, while 13 respondents representing 3% Disagreed and 9 respondents representing 1% Strongly Disagreed showing that Attitude of political parties and politicians constituted

the inconclusiveness of 2019 elections in the South-East.

Hypothesis 3: Power of incumbency contributed to the inconclusiveness of 2019 general elections in the Southeast.

Table 3: Power of incumbency contributed to the inconclusiveness of 2019 elections in the Southeast.

Responses	Frequencies	Percentage (%)	χ^2	df	Remarks
Agreed	140	38	187.56	3	Significance
Strongly Agreed	204	51			
Disagreed	35	6			
Strongly Disagreed	21	5			
Total	400	100			

Calculated $\chi^2 = 187.56$, t – value = 7.82, $df = 3$, $p > 0.05$

The analysis of the above table revealed that power of incumbency or federal might played a very significant role to the inconclusiveness of 2019 elections in the Southeast. This could be attributed to the fact that the Federal government (incumbent) has the enormity of powers to appoint the Chairman of the electoral umpire even the power to also appoint the Chief Justice of the Federation (CJN) and members of the election Tribunal. Evidently, 140 respondents representing (38%) Agreed and 204 respondents representing (51%) Strongly Agreed that Power of incumbency contributed to the inconclusiveness of 2019 elections in the South-East while 35 respondents representing (6%) Disagreed and 21 respondents representing (5%) strongly disagreed respectively.

Discussion

From the findings made through the instrumentality of questionnaire, use of secondary data collections, the states in the South-Eastern Nigeria affected by the 2019 inconclusive general elections were able to vent their grievances, opinions and registered their malfeasance on the side of INEC and Political Parties that have fuelled the spate of 2019 Inconclusive Elections in the South-Eastern Nigeria.

The study has keenly found that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) played roles that led to the 2019 inconclusive elections in the South-Eastern Nigeria as shown in Table 1, where 10% of the respondents disagreed on this notion, 8% strongly Disagreed while a huge number of 46% and 36% invariably concurred with this notion through Strongly Agreed and Agreed respectively that the ineptitude of INEC

led to the 2019 inconclusive elections in the South-East. Electorates in South-Eastern Nigeria noted that delay in accreditation and voting, postponement of election on the election day, election rigging leading to over-voting, receiving of bribes, lack or untimely provision of election materials, partisan activities or roles of INEC as the election management body (EMB) contributed to the inconclusiveness of the 2019 general elections in the South-East. By implication, when INEC fails to timely accredit voters, deliver election materials, electorates tend to leave their various voting points or Areas due to hunger, starvation and lack of shelter leading to low or poor voters' turnout. When this happens, the number of electorates who patiently waited and voted will be hugely lesser than the number of registered voters which constitutionally leads to inconclusive election because the number of votes gotten by contestants at the end of the sorting and computation of the election results would have a very little margin leading to declaring the election inconclusive because of the principle of lead margin as witnessed in Abia South Senatorial District. Importantly, section 26 and 53 of the Electoral Act and paragraph 41(e) and 43(b) of the INEC regulations and guidelines amplified this very clearly. More so, when INEC postpones an election on the election-day, electorate would undoubtedly not have the same energy as at the postponed election to the new date thereby leading to poor voter turnout and in turn leads to inconclusive elections due to the principles of lead margin. It is crystal clear that when INEC conspires with the politicians, this could lead to untimely delivery of sensitive election materials or delay its arrival especially when they envisage that the outcome of the election will not be in the best interest of their paymasters or favour of the power that be or political parties they are siding.

Furthermore, available data have revealed that activities of Political Parties and Politicians aided the 2019 inconclusive elections in the South-East as shown in tables 1, 2 and 3 above and has been supported by scholars like Barkun (2003), Young (2010), Bamgbose (2016), and Ezeilo (2016) when they argued that the result of a secret plot by exceptionally powerful and cunning conspirators to achieve a malevolent end is always imminent in election situation. This could be in form of political violence

witnessed in Ezza North and IZZI East in Ebonyi State, vote buying, rigging activities of political parties such as bribing the Election Management Bodies (INEC) to rig an election to their favour, buying and selling of votes, causing violence in an election (as witnessed two days after at the INEC office in Isiala Mbano Local Government Area when the senatorial district was set ablaze by persons suspected to be political thugs) led to the inconclusiveness of the 2019 general elections in the South-Eastern Nigeria. Candidates through the instrumentality of their party militia institute violence during an election by snatching of ballot boxes, causing fear and intimidation especially when they suspect that the outcome of the election will not favour them. When violence or crisis takes place, by implication, it breaches the provisions of electoral laws on declaring an election inconclusive. Political parties adopt this strategy having known that the election will disfavour them.

Individuals or persons used by political party to cause electoral violence are not merely trumpery illiterates and poor youth who do not know the punitive measures against such act due to lack of electoral education and poverty but mostly the political taut-taut, the chief taut, the corporate taut, and the supreme taut respectively (Nkwede, 2019). Also having known that INEC and security operatives and election observers are on the side of their bosses, they feel covered in all ramifications thereby instituting or instigating violence during an election and making such an election inconclusive. For instance, the Independent National Electoral Commission declared these Senatorial elections in Imo North inconclusive. This came two days after at the INEC office in Isiala Mbano Local Government Area in the senatorial district was set ablaze by persons suspected to be political thugs. Allegations of snatching of ballot boxes, kidnapping of electoral officers and manipulation of the process had trailed the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We have indeed carried out a critical investigation on the activities of INEC and political parties that lead to the inconclusive elections in the 2019 general elections in southeast geo-political zone. We however arrived at the finding that the inability of the

interacting political parties to strictly adhere to electoral guidelines essentially resulted to inconclusive elections in the southeast Nigeria. In the southeast geo-political zone in particular, political parties conduct her activities and violate laid down rules with impunity thereby orchestrating inconclusive elections. This ugly trend poses a fundamental question on the capacity of the Nigerian state to avert inconclusive election since political parties, INEC officials and the regime in power were all involved as the study revealed. The study therefore concludes that for Nigeria to deepen democracy devoid of inconclusive elections, Political parties, election management body and the regime in power should shun all manner of electoral irregularities. There is an evidence support that INEC and Political parties significantly influenced inconclusive election during the 2019 general elections in southeast Nigeria. The study also revealed that power of incumbency is a major factor in instigating inconclusive election in Nigeria.

Sequel to the above findings, the study made the following recommendations as way of averting the recurrence of the spate of inconclusive elections and its attendant consequences particularly in the Southeast and Nigeria in general;

- INEC must be non-partisan in a bid to conduct free, fair, violent-free, transparent and conclusive elections in Nigeria. They should be impartial umpire in every election thereby avoiding corrupt practices and manipulations or conspiracies that could lead to inconclusive elections. INEC in collaboration with the legislative arm should try with regime in power or government to create election commissions to punish electoral offenders
- Political Parties and regimes in power should play the game of politics according to its rules and regulations. Politicians should use the platform of political parties to sensitize or educate electorate about the activities or act that may lead an election to be declared inconclusive thereby avoiding electoral violence, bribery, rigging, vote buying and selling, manipulations of INEC and uneducated youths to constitute violence during elections and equally accepting the outcome of an election with good team spirit.
- The Chairman of INEC should evolve from principal staff of the establishment rather than being appointed from outside by the Executive arm of government. This is because he who pays the piper dictates the tone.
- Also it is advocated that Judges of the electoral Tribunals should be appointed by the Judicial Council of Nigeria. This, if done, will definitely give the judges level of independence in the administration of justice and service delivery.
- It is evidently clear that Nigerian electoral process and institutions are weak. This study therefore advocates that Nigerian government should build virile institutions that would drive the political process devoid of intrigues and manipulations.

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