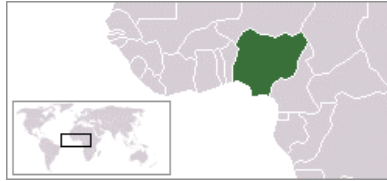


REGIONAL REPORT- NIGERIA



Recent National Elections in Nigeria

By O. Chima Okereke, PhD

The general elections have been held in Nigeria in April. The results have met with conflicting receptions in the different parts of the country. They are reportedly unacceptable to the international community, especially the Western observers. Hopefully, a handover may take place on the May 29th. This will be epoch-making if it goes through because it will be the first time a civilian government hands over to another in our country.

I think it is being unrealistic to condemn it completely without taking cognizance of the normal conduct and practices in our country. It is indeed being overly optimistic and idealistic to expect a free and fair election without the inbuilt and institutionalised systems to deliver it. It takes a country with the checks and balances to ensure and achieve accountability and transparency in its normal political and business activities to achieve a free and fair election.

Invariably, an election conducted in a country will be a reflection of the prevailing business and political values of the people. Nigerians are hardworking, and peace-loving. Yes, it is however difficult to find Nigerians who will agree that we have achieved acceptable accountability and transparency within the rank and file of our economic and political systems. It is thanks to the efforts of our country's foremost anti-corruption agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), that corruption, a major hindrance to our national economic development, is being gradually reined in. How then can the elections be free from corruption if we are still guilty of it?

Fully aware of our limitations, it is being objective to suggest that the Obasanjo administration has not done too badly in handling the elections. Why? The simple answer is that it is almost impossible to guarantee that there is anyone among the leading presidential contenders who could deliver a free and fair election if given the chance to organise it. In the current system, it is not inconceivable that if the election is repeated, as some people are clamouring for, it might still be rigged. As the president himself and some observers remarked, no major political party could claim to be squeaky clean in its conduct in the elections.

I would suggest that for a free and fair election, a sine-qua-non requirement is that the corruption in our national and political life should be checked such that we establish systems that should ensure transparency and accountability as normal aspects of our public activities. It is such practice of discipline in our conduct of business that we can carry over to the conduct of successful elections. We cannot condone indiscipline, by errors of omission or commission, in our normal national public and private sector operations and expect to achieve discipline in the conduct of our elections. It is being unrealistic.

Our present failures should cause us not only to look at the elections in isolation but we should see our unacceptable conduct as a glaring indication that all is not well with us. It should challenge us to build the systems that will provide the necessary checks and balances that should yield discipline in our normal national conduct and therefore lead us to better conduct and performance at elections. We have to start learning from our failures even as the democratically developed and advanced nations still learn from their mistakes.

It is equally in this flawed political and economic environment today that we conduct projects. We therefore wish to explore in the next month the impact that the discipline of structured project management could make in our nation. It should help us establish a transparent and accountable country in which our current shortcomings, including poor conduct of elections, could be minimised and eliminated with time.

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