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Full Length Research

The language of politics and political behaviors; rhetoric of President Olusegun Obasanjo and the 2007 general elections in Nigeria

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Leadership succession in liberal democratic regimes is expected to take place under an electoral process that can be adjudged as free and fair and where citizens exercise their inalienable right to elect leaders of their choice. It can however correctly be inferred from President Olusegun Obasanjo's rhetoric prior to the 2007 general elections in Nigeria that the option for citizens to determine who rules them was foreclosed as he was determined to select his own successor. This is evidenced in the nature of the public statements and speeches that he made and the thrust of which tended to be abusive, intimidating, authoritarian and threatening. The President's rhetoric naturally evoked responses from the informed public with grave implications for the nature and conduct of the elections. The outcome of the elections has been adjudged by both National and International observers as "deeply flawed" as the entire process was marked by irregularities and violence with serious implications for the fledging democratic institutions and culture being built in Nigeria. The concern of this paper is to examine the relationship between the rhetoric of the President, as documented in purposefully selected Nigerian dailies, the reactions and counter rhetoric of leading political opposition leaders, institutions and agencies that are involved in the electoral process and the nature of the conduct of the elections and results.

Key words: Language of politics, political behaviour, political succession.

INTRODUCTION

The feature of democracy that has attracted various interests of groups and individuals across the globe is the opportunity it provides for citizens of a given State to among other things exercise their inalienable right to elect leaders of their choice in competitive, free, fair and periodic elections. Further more the electoral process is regulated by acceptable rules and regulations that accord legitimacy to winners of elections and acceptability of results by the losers. Politics therefore is played as a game where winners automatically are accorded the legitimacy to rule and losers accept defeat. The alternative to this is to by pass the rules and regulations governing the electoral process thus creating anarchy. Politics then becomes warfare; competition is reduced to a battle predicated on a zero sum game, where winners take all and competitors are regarded as enemies to be eliminated. Leaders who emerge from controversial elections devote much of their time to seeking to secure legitimacy and may even resort to the use of force to suppress opposition to its power base thereby endanger-ing political stability.

The April 2007 elections have been discredited both nationally and internationally as anything but free and fair. Specifically, Max Van Den Berg of the European Union (EU) observer team said he was "bitterly disap-pointed by the elections and that the union had released 'her' toughest ever statement about an election". The EU concluded that "any administration founded on this fraud cannot have legitimacy". The International Republican Institute (IRI) said "… the election fell below the standard set by previous Nigerian elections and International standards witnessed by IRI around the world". While the National Democratic Institute on her part observed that "the exercise was marred by so much malpractice that it was unclear whether its outcome reflects the will of Nigerians"(The Guardian, 18/4/2007; Daily Trust, 3/5/ 2007). Gani Fawehinmi, an avowed social critic discre-dited the polls as "a monumental fraud and veritable electoral robbery" (Daily Sun, 7/5/2007).

Another opinion concluded that the "April 2007 elections

was a monumental fraud of a kind that has never been experienced in the history of Nigeria. Its characteristics are organized thuggery, ballot box snatching, voter intimidation, result manipulation and wholesale subversion of the will of the people, all of which were planned and executed by the ruling party to perpetuate itself in power" (The Tell, 17/5/2007). While President Olusegun Obasanjo and Professor Maurice Iwu, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) chairman did not deny that there were irregularities in the conduct of the elections, both tended to excuse these by merely saying that irregularities had been a recurrent feature of all of Nigeria's post independence elections past and present one inclusive. The President even asserted that "the convention of controversies and disputations after any election is a part of the Nigerian culture" (The Guardian, 8/5/2007).

The question to ask then is what are the factors and forces behind the poor nature of the elections?

The position canvassed in this paper is that the rhetoric of Olusegun Obasanjo as President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a key factor that influenced the nature and conduct of the 2007 general elections. This is premised on the theory which the paper advances shortly establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between the language of politics that an actor articulates and his or her behavior in politics. In other words, the theory establishes a correlation between what people say and what they do. The President, Obasanjo's political language conveys his perception of politics and electoral competition. The President's most quoted dictum that "this election is a do or die affair for me and the PDP. This election is a matter of life and death for the PDP and Nigeria", depicts his perception of politics and electoral competition as a continuation of warfare by some other means. It is also in consonance with the Machiavellian principle of politics as a power game. By likening politics to warfare, as well as power game, Obasanjo tends naturally to see political opposition groups not as worthy competitors, but as enemies to be crushed. That view of politics therefore is a zero sum one where the winner must necessarily take all; the values of fairness, competition and moderation are discountenanced and the rules of the game have little or no relevance. What is emphasized here is the rule of force and struggle for power at all costs and by all means fair or foul and the results of competition as dictates of the powerful.

That Chief Obasanjo ended up presiding over a monumentally rigged kind of elections was thus not surprising. The problem inhered not just in the contradiction between his being the President of all and the leader of a ruling party but more importantly in his paramilitarised approach to and zero sum conception of politics generally and electoral competition in particular.

The answer to the research question posed for this study therefore, is to critically assess the relationship between the rhetoric of Olusegun Obasanjo as the de facto overseer of the whole electoral process (from the pre voting phase through the voting to the post voting stages) as documented in purposefully selected Nigerian dailies, reactions and counter rhetoric of leading political opposition leaders, pro-democracy non-governmental organizations, National and International observers, institutions and agencies that were involved in the electoral process and the nature of the conduct of the elections and results.

The paper is divided into five sections. The introduction is followed by a presentation of methods of data collection used for the study. The third section presents the discourse on the notion of politics and electoral competetion as warfare. Obasanjo's perception of the notion of politics and electoral competition is discussed in this section. The fourth section presents the empirical materials illustrating the link between Obasanjo's rhetoric and his uses of State instruments of coercion in the April elections. The fifth section is the conclusion. This contains the summary of findings and recommendations reached from the findings.

Methods of data collection

Central to the discussion of this study is the language and rhetoric of Olusegun Obasanjo speaking in his dual role both as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and leader of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as documented in selected Nigerian dailies and the impact of this on the nature and conduct of the 2007 general elections.

The study emphasis what may be described as a discursive method of political analysis using a combination of primary and secondary materials as sources of data. The secondary ones include an analysis of relevant texts on the subject of politics as a vocation, as a competitive game and also texts on the subject of politics as a continuation of war by some other means. Any conversant student of the political science discipline can easily have guessed the kind of basic texts being alluded to here. These include Robert Dahl, (Modern Political Analysis) and Machiavelli, The Prince. For the primary sources used for deriving our data, we relied on three purposefully selected Nigerian dailies.

The dailies consulted include: The Guardian, Daily Trust and Daily Sun. The selection of these papers was informed by the spread of the paper and their availability on the internet. An attempt was made to reflect the geographical spread of the country in the selection of the dailies with a view to determining its effect on the way information is presented. The Guardian is generally adjudged an objective paper given its approach to the presentation of information. It is widely circulated and is on the internet. It is published in Lagos South-West Nigeria. Daily Sun was selected to capture the speeches of Obasanjo from the perspective of a strong opposition group as the paper is owned by Orji Kalu, one of the lead opponents to the President. The paper is seen generally to be pro South-East. Daily Trust has its base in the North and is published in Abuja. Daily Sun and Daily Trust are also available on the internet. While the study relied extensively on the three aforementioned papers for data, several other magazines and other newspapers with relevant data were consulted and duly acknowledged in the paper.

The period of systematic investigation was from January to April 2007, although references were made to Obasanjo's statements

prior to January 2007. The period January to April marked the height of campaigns for the elections. Specifically, the PDP campaign commenced on January 27th 2007. Obasanjo stated categorically while addressing PDP members in Abeokuta that he "will campaign" (Daily Trust, 12/2/2007). The period marked the period of his revealing rhetoric on the 2007 general election. The actual elections were on the 14 and 21 of April 2007. Data on the occurrences during the elections and the immediate responses of election observers, opposition groups and the role of security operatives and INEC officials were reported in the Dailies only after the elections. Some relevant data were sourced from some randomly selected dailies in May 2007 to reinforce the data on reactions and counter rhetoric of the President's opposition groups and observers. The limited number of dailies consulted for the paper and the relatively short period assessed was largely a response to the short period within which the paper was produced. We are however optimistic that despite the few number of dailies assessed and the limited time frame within which our study was made, the conclusions arrived at has to a large extent thrown enough light on the central area of focus of the paper which is an attempt to establish the relationship between what people say and what they do using the discursive method of political analysis.

The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework on which the study is based, assumes two things:

(a) Linkage between language of politics that an actor uses and his or her behavior as a political practitioner.
(b) A notion of politics in general or electoral competition in particular as the continuation of warfare by some other means.

Since both assumptions are very central to the arguments of the paper, it is important that we spend a little time to elaborate upon them.

(A) Relationship between language of politics and political behavior

Basically the challenge in this study is to investigate the inter-relationship between the language of politics that an actor uses and his political behavior. The concept of interrelationship naturally suggests a close interaction between two or more phenomena as to have an effect on one other. In a close relationship such as that of language of politics and political behavior it is generally difficult to discern which one influences the other. It has to be a chicken-egg relationship where both influence one another. The two are not only dependent but also have a causal linkage, as one will almost always have an effect on the other and vice versa. It is however almost always difficult to say which one of two interrelated phenomena ignite a reaction from the other.

Specifically, for Obasanjo, it would appear to be correct to say that judging by his antecedents, what he does is a reflection of or influenced by what he says. Obasanjo's background as a military general, his years of experience as a military practitioner would seem to have had a lot to do with his conception of and approach to governance issues. Although long retired and appeared to have returned to the Presidency as a Chief instead of a General his transformation can be described as cosmetic since that change of title did not appear to have changed his mindset and world views. His conception, attitude and orientation about politics appear already formed. His colored perception of politics and electoral competition largely determined what he did as a political actor throughout his foray into politics. There is therefore a casual relationship between Obasanjo's perception of politics and his actions as a political actor. This fits into the interrelated functional model that is being built in the study.

(B) Politics as warfare

Other interrelated concepts examined in the paper are that of the politics as warfare and its relevance to Obasanjo's perception of politics. I owe much of the analysis in this part of this sub- section of the paper to Professor 'Bayo Adekanye's insights from personal discussions. Adekanye describes Obasanjo as a Machiavellian Prince in action. For like Machiavelli, and Mao Se Tung, Obasanjo believes that politics is a continuation of warfare by some other means. In reference to the Prince, Adekanye (1997) concluded that for the Machiavellian school of thought, the act of politics is merely an adaptation of the general rules and principle of military discipline and heroism laid down. In a war situation, the end justifies the means and for the military, heroism lays in winning the war at all cost and by any means as part of ones commitment to the pursuit of "duty, honor and country." Adekanye has shown that this central point about the substitutability of political and military roles in Machiavelli is also very much what Obasanjo believes in. For both Obasanjo and Machiavelli, politics and warfare are two sides of the same coin. When Obasanjo therefore uses the phrase a "do or die" "enemies" of the nation, he necessarily implies a zero sum conception of politics as a battle not competition between groups or individuals unrestrained by any rule and aimed at a total annihilation of ones opponents.

In the kind of liberal democratic framework that the 1999 constitution envisages, politics is meant to be a competition, you win some and lose some and all are "part-winners" at the end of the day. A key aspect of politics in that kind of constitutional framework is that there is commitment to the values of trade-offs, sharing, conciliation, accommodation, balancing among competitors, and above all some agreed rules of the game. The Obasanjo presidency would have none of this. For Obasanjo politics is total. It is a battle where there is no room for accommodation, value sharing and tolerance; ones opponents are enemies and the end should be the rules and dictates of the powerful for the final outcome and the battle is conquest. His view of politics and electoral competition is obviously not in keeping with the underlying ethos of the constitution.

On the face of it, the military as a profession appear to share the view about the generalized need for morality in politics. For the military is about honor and certain things are not considered good for the professional soldier. Some military officers (Adekanye: 1999 pg: 67) consider politics as a dirty game that is not good for the military profession and not honorable for a soldier whether in or out of uniform. That view of politics sees the latter vocation as characterized by "crookedness" "lies and deception" "jostling for positions" "political bickering" "cross carpeting" "rumbling discourses" "circumlocutions" "electoral chicanery" "thuggery and hooliganism" "crass materialism". This is the view held by most professional soldiers about politics and the politicians.

Yet in April 2007, as in deed in all past elections held after the successive military regimes from 1978 to 2003, an increasingly large number of top retired military generals had always participated. A few examples include late General Shehu Musa Yar'adua (rtd), General Ibrahim Babangida, Major. General Abdul Kareem Adisa, Major. General Mamman Kontagora and Major. General David Jemibewon among others. More example of this can be obtained from Bayo Adekanye's recent book (1999 pg: 192). Also, in the rise of Retired General Obasanjo to the Presidency in 1999, among his major political financiers were Generals Ibrahim Babangida, Lt. Gen T.Y Danjuma (rtd), Major. General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau (rtd), his special advisers from 1999 to 2007 included Major. General Abdullahi (rtd), Major. General Aliyu Gusau and Major. General Abdullahi Sarki Mukthar (Adekanye 1999;

Addendum).

The National Assembly at the same time included top retired military representatives like General David Mark, General Tunde Ogbeha and Major. General Ike Nwachukwu (rtd) of these, the first has since not only been "returned" after the April 2007 election but became the President of the Nigerian Senate, that is the no 3 person in the land (thanks to the helping hand of the departing Obasanjo presidency). Under Obasanjo, the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had Retired Colonel Ahmadu Ali as the chairman after two civilian figures-Chief Barnabas Gemade and Chief Audu Ogbeh successively presiding over the party's affairs had been shown the way out. Colonel Ali was one of the chief architects of the PDP's "success" in the April 2007 election. Finally, of course, Chief Obasanjo did not leave office on May 29, 2007 until he had concluded arrangements that ensured his being personally installed chairman Board of Trustees of the PDP. The whole scenario raises the question, are retired military officers actually different from the civilians, or does their involvement in politics automatically change their orientation?

The "sins" of politicians listed above that make them detested by the military profession are known and applied in military strategy. The professional soldiers turned politicians know that some of their political strategies are not alien to the military profession after all. Within the military, stratagems such as keeping ones objectives, strategies and options closer to ones heart, getting ones opponents guessing about one's intention, dissimulation, trickery and deception and coming up with surprise moves and application of brutal force are recognized and applied within the military profession. The retired military men in politics under Obasanjo and including Obasanjo himself know some of these strategies and have put them to good use. For example, throughout the "third term debate" Obasanjo left everyone guessing as to what his position was on tenure elongation. (Lai Olurode (ed) 2006). For the 2007 election, Obasanjo painted a picture of a preparation that would guarantee a level-playing ground for all interested parties. In a broadcast to the nation on the occasion of the 46th independence of Nigeria, Sunday 1st October 2006, President Obasanjo stated that "… if we are to make steady and sustainable progress, we must collectively resolve to fight political corruption and violence, election manipulation, the imposition of candidates, the culture of empty politicking and the marginalization of women in the power and political process…" He also said "we must see politics not as an end in itself but as a means of getting the very best for the society to provide service for all."(Vanguard, 2/10/2006). This statesman like speech could not have prepared anyone's mind for the crude principles the President adopted in the 2007 elections. The President's rhetoric prior to the election was matched by the unbrazen use of State instruments and institutions of coercion to prosecute the April 2007 election. The language of politics as used in this study refers to the consequences of language on the political process. The Language of Politics is well documented in the conflict discourse as a major course of conflict. There is considerable evidence that political leaders adopt negative language in the political process to intimidate political opponents especially where they are unwillingly to quit political office. We proceed in the next and more substantive section of the paper, to provide detailed empirical materials for illustrating the central thesis of the paper: namely the link between the President Obasanjo's rhetoric about power and the wantonly rigged results of the April 2007 General Elections in Nigeria.

Empirical materials illustrating the link between Obasanjo's rhetoric and the April 2007 general elections in Nigeria

As already indicated, the rhetoric of Obasanjo suggests that far from being a civilian democrat his military background has a great impact on his perception of politics and electoral competition. His declaration on the 10th of February 2007 while addressing a PDP stakeholders meeting in Abeokuta, Ogun State, that the 2007 election is "a do or die affair for him and the PDP" (Daily Trust, 12/2/2007), his assertion at the PDP rally in Kano (February 2007) that the PDP would "fight" (Daily Sun, 26/3/2007) to win Kano, his declaration that the rumored death of the PDP flag bearer Yar'adua was carried by "the enemies" of the Nation (The Guardian, 10/3/2007) - all these clearly convey his perception of politics as warfare. This perception has several implications for the nature of the conduct and results of the election.

First, in a state of war there must be something in contention. In the case of the 2007 general election, what was in contest was who controlled political power at all the tiers of Nigerian Government from Federal through State to Local Government levels. Like Machiavelli, for Obasanjo the preservation of the state is a do or die affair for the leader. Obasanjo (2005) has declared as sacrosanct the preservation of the unity of the Nigerian State as one indivisible entity for the State to make progress. Obasanjo was reported to have declared that "we want an economy that will be among the 20 largest in the world by the year 2020" (Vanguard, 2/10/2006). For Obasanjo the economic reform programme is the only viable option for attaining this goal.

Obasanjo has often spoken with Messianic fervor of his God ordained mission to put right the wrongs in Nigeria and his avowed love and readiness to lay his life for the preservation and progress of the Nigerian State (Vangurad, 28/11/2006). In Obasanjo's view the new economic reform programme that he initiated has laid a solid foundation for the progress of the country and must be continued. The whole gamut over the third term agenda was to allow Obasanjo continue as President so as to consolidate on the gains of the economic reform programme. When the Senate on May 26th 2006 threw out the controversial bill that sought among other things to prolong the tenure of the President it would appear that the President designed an alternative route to realizing his mission for the Nigerian State by choosing to appoint his successor. At the earlier mentioned meeting with PDP stakeholders in Abeokuta, Gani Fawehinmi reported that Obasanjo categorically stated that "he would not handover the reins of power to anyone who he believed would not continue with the economic reform agenda even if the person wins the elections". Obasanjo was later to declare "Yar'adua as a worthy successor and the "only and most capable person to succeed him in 2007" (Sunday Sun, 16/4/2006), after having successfully manipulated the PDP Presidential primaries to ensure the emergence of Yar'adua as the PDP Presidential flag bearer. This singular declaration had set the tone for the nature of the 2007 elections as the installation of Yar'adua as Obasanjo's successor became a "do or die" affair for Obasanjo and the PDP.

Second in a war situation, there must be leader or commander to lead the war. Thus, Obasanjo took on in addition to his role as President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the leadership of the party and added to that the "leader" of the PDP campaign team. Gani Fawehinmi summed up the views of several reports on Obasanjo's role in the campaign when he said "since the PDP kicked off its Presidential campaign on Saturday January 27th 2007, General Obasanjo has turned the entire exercise to Obasanjo Presidential campaign. He has failed dismally to draw a line between official presidential duties and the electoral campaign for a Presidential candidate of his party, the PDP. He has virtually put Governor Musa Yar'adua in his pocket like an Australian Kangaroo, using presidential jets, presidential security, presidential financial vote and all other paraphernalia of presidential authority to conduct the elections" (Fawehinmi, 2007).

The instruments of coercion deployed by President Obasanjo in the 2007 general elections examined in the paper include:

(A) The PDP.
(B) Anti corruption crusade.
(C) State security agencies.

(D) INEC.

The militarized pdp as an instrument of coercion in the April 2007 general election

As the leader of the campaign team, for the PDP, Obasanjo used and brazenly deployed State institutions and agencies to prosecute the "war". The first was the PDP itself which the President subjected to his control and directs to act according to his whims and caprices. President Obasanjo has never hidden his preference for a one-party system and what the almost 99.99% "victory" achieved by the PDP in the April 2007 general elections did was to deliver that preference of President Obasanjo's for one- party rule. For example, The News Magazine reported that in his book, Constitution for National Integration and Development, Obasanjo wrote that a one party State "appears to be the only procedural mechanism through which we can transcend the divisive and centrifugal forces tearing us apart and diverting our attention from the monumental task of integration and nation building…" Obasanjo concluded that "in some countries, their one party structure had been responsible for the enduring political and governmental continuity they are enjoying" (The News, 14/5/2007) . It would appear from this statement and several other ones that for Nigeria, Obasanjo is convinced that the PDP is the party that can guarantee political stability. Addressing the 35th National Executive Committee meeting of the PDP on Tuesday November 21st 2006, he stated that "it would be a calamity for Nigerians if the PDP lost the 2007 elections."(Vanguard, 23/11/2006).

Another report, quoted the President as saying "no PDP, no Nigeria" (The Guardian, 3/1/2007), the ultimate end for the 2007 elections being for the PDP to "capture" all the 36 states of the federation plus Abuja the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and of course the Presidency at all costs and by all means whether fair or foul. Obasanjo had by then set out to enthrone the supremacy of the party under his control for party members. The President was later to declare at the policy retreat organized for the newly PDP elected National and State Assembly members and Governors on, Friday May 18th 2007 which was relayed on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) that "party supremacy will reign in PDP". The party policies would be executed at all levels of Government and in the President's words "that is how it would be". At a get together organized by the PDP to celebrate its victory, at the polls May 2007, Obasanjo declared that "it was abnormal for a National Assembly comprising mostly of PDP members to oppose a PDP led executive." Obasanjo asserted that there must always be collaboration between elected PDP members. As in his words "it has to be that way because the PDP is the one that produces you to elective office. So, you must (emphasis mine) have allegiance to the PDP and the nation. You did not just drop from the sky" (Vanguard, 12/5/2007). It is widely speculated that the recent amendment to the constitution of the PDP making Obasanjo Chairman Board of Trustees of the party, is designed to allow him assume a higher responsibility in the PDP hierarchy. Satisfied with the amendment of the party's constitution and his role in the post May 29 PDP structure, the President further reiterated that "the era of disloyalty to the party is no longer acceptable". Obasanjo had stated categorically that "I am too big to be put into anybody's pocket as President of this country" (Vanguard, 13/5/2007).

The cumulative implications of these statements provide an insight into the successive changes in the Presidents of the Senate and Chairmen of the PDP as all occupants of the posts who attempted to challenge the unlimited powers of the President were booted out of office. The statements could also be used to explain why members who were considered "loyal" were rewarded with electoral victory even where they lost at the 2007 elections and "disloyal" members were not allowed to contest and even where they contested and won elections, were denied victory. Several examples can suffice to support this position. In Imo State, although Ifeanyi Ararume won the PDP primaries, he was not put up as the gubernatorial candidate for the party. The electoral act stipulates that, for any political party who intends to change any of its candidate it shall "give cogent and verifiable reasons." The only reason given by the PDP for substituting Ararume's name with that of Charles Ugwuh, who secured 36 votes and took the 14th position in the primaries was that Ararume's name was submitted in "error" (Vanguard, 20/09/2006). When Ararume took the matter took the matter to court he was suspended from the party. The party brazenly declared that it was not submitting any name for the gubernatorial seat in Imo State (The Guardian, 11/4/2007). Following the Supreme Court's verdict that Ararume remain the PDP gubernatorial candidate, he lost largely because the PDP denied him "support" as his course was not "a do or die" affair. Ugwuh confirmed the flawed process when he stated that "I did not win any election, I did not defeat anybody. I was selected" (Vanguard, 13/5/2007).

This is similar to a reporter's assertion that Yar'adua's victory in the PDP presidential primaries was "not an election but a coronation" (Daily Trust, 18/12/2006). President Obasanjo and the top party hierarchy therefore had total control over who contested elections and who did not. For example the President's grouse with the impeached PDP Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State and the Labor Party gubernatorial candidate of Ondo State Olusegun Mimiko was that they refused to abide by the President's directive that they should not contest the election. For Mimiko, the President declared at a PDP campaign rally in Ondo State that "Mimiko came to join us from AD; I even made him minister without telling the Governor. But when he came to ask to be allowed to contest for the gubernatorial elections, I advised against it" (Daily Sun, 10/2/2007). Since he refused to step down, the President stated that the EFCC will be after him. A number of "loyal" PDP candidates won elections because they had the support of the President and the PDP. Specifically, the Global Rights alleged that in Delta State the PDP gubernatorial candidate was declared as winner of the Election by INEC headquarters in Abuja while collation and counting of votes were still going on in the State (The Guardian, 18/4/2007). In Ondo State, Olusegun Mimiko alleged that the gubernatorial result for the State was announced first in Abuja by the INEC headquarters even before the final collation of the results by the Resident Electoral Commissioner in the State (The Guardian, 18/4/2007). In another development the result of the gubernatorial elections in Imo State, where the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA's) candidates was leading was cancelled on account of electoral violence by INEC although the State House of Assembly election held at the same time and venue were not cancelled as the PDP won 26 of the 27 seats in the State (The Guardian, 18/4/2007).

Anti corruption crusade as instrument of coercion in the April 2007 general elections in Nigeria

The anti corruption crusade of the Obasanjo administration was also effectively deployed to hound "disloyal" members and "enemies" of the PDP and the President.

President Obasanjo's avowed commitment to fight corruption in Nigeria right from his first day in office on May 29 1999 culminated in the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) a decision that was hailed both nationally and internationally. Contrary to expectations of Nigerians the EFCC in particular was deployed as one of the instruments of coercion launched at opponents of the President and the PDP during the 2007 General Elections. A major requirement for contestants to qualify as candidates for elections was passing the EFCC screening. The criterion for passing was not to be indicted by the EFCC. The Senate President had cause to remind

the EFCC chairman, Nuhu Ribadu when he was summoned to appear before the Senate on Wednesday, 27th September 2006 that the "Enabling Act establishing the EFCC required the agency to periodically submits its report to the National assembly" (Vanguard, 20/9/2006). This not withstanding the EFCC made submissions to the Presidency on the basis of which contestants were screened out of contest in the 2007 elections.

Arising from Atiku Abubakar the Vice President's desire to succeed Obasanjo as President in 2007 and his strong opposition to the tenure elongation bill, the President was determined to disallow Atiku Abubakar from contesting the election. After a court order foiled the President's unilateral move to remove the Vice-President from office through the declaration by his agents and the PDP that the Vice President's declaration to conduct the 2007 polls on the platform of a party (Action Congress) other than the party on whose platform he ascended to office amounted to his vacation of office, the EFCC indicted the Vice President Of Official corruption, a charge that was ratified by an official administrative panel appointed by the President. This resulted in the removal of the name of the Vice President from the ballot papers despite several court rulings to the contrary. The name of the Vice President was only reinstated three days to election and this was as a result of intense pressure from within the country and the international community. Obasanjo directed the EFCC to clamp down on several opposition candidates.

In Ondo State for example, because Mimiko did not adhere to the Obasanjo advice not to contest the election, the President declared that the "EFCC are looking at his books in his ministry to determine the extent of his corruption" (Daily Sun, 10/2/2007). The EFCC was also used to threaten the Governors of Kano, Borno, Lagos, Taraba and Abia States among others. While addressing a PDP rally in Maiduguri on Monday April 9th 2007 Obasanjo said "the EFCC is a continuous exercise, all of us who have been mentioned by EFCC will remain not cleared until the EFCC clears us. Until we get a clear ticket from the EFCC, the indictment will continue to dangle over our heads". He continued "Nigerians need to replace leaders who had fears on them with others of integrity, decency, honor and not polluting the atmosphere" (Daily Trust, 10/4/2007). These remarks of Obasanjo are against the background that the Governor of Borno State, who was the gubernatorial candidate of an opposition party ANPP, was indicted by EFCC.

In Kano, where Ibrahim Shekarau was the gubernatorial candidate for the ANPP, the President declared that "Magana taki be kare ba". The EFCC was to continue investigation into the 4 billion naira fertilizer probe against the Kano State government (Daily Sun, 26/3/2007). The President's anti-corruption crusade was used as basis for the freezing of accounts of State governments that were led by "enemies" of the President and the PDP. The accounts of Taraba State Government were frozen for months on allegation of misappropriation of funds levied against the Jolly Nyame administration (Vanguard, 13/9/2006). Arising from the negative role played by the EFCC the Senate as already indicated had to call the organization to order. Other security agencies including the Police, the State Security Service (SSS) and Army were used extensively by Obasanjo to prosecute the "war" of the 2007 General Elections. It was no surprise that the security agents gave full backing to the PDP to win the "war".

Uses of state security agencies in the April 2007 general elections in Nigeria

International observer groups observed that the security agents collaborated with the PDP to rig elections in a number of states. Specifically, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in its preliminary report on the 2007 election results observed that "ballot boxes and other voting materials were snatched away by political thugs and other election criminals despite the presence of security agents in several places" (The Guardian, 18/4/2007). In another report, the Nigerian Bar Association accused "security" agents of connivance with party thugs to commit electoral malpractices" (Daily Trust, 27/4/2007). Observers also reported that the presence of fully armed security operatives scared voters from even exercising their civil rights. All this is against the backdrop of politically related killings that occurred in the build up to the 2007 general elections where security operatives could not apprehend the killers. The murder of Funsho Williams in Lagos June 2006 and Ayo Daramola in Ekiti State in August 2006 both PDP gubernatorial candidates were among a recorded 280 reports of election-related deaths over an eight-week period ending in March 2007 (Human Right Watch, 2007) These necessarily generated fear among citizens as police were neither able to identify assassins nor presented people for prosecution.

There were also reported cases of police interference in the rights of candidates to campaign and hold rallies across the country. The DPP gubernatorial candidate in Kebbi State alleged that the commissioner of police gives and deny permits for rallies to favor PDP candidates (Vanguard, 30/9/2006). Human Rights Watch in its April report confirmed several other such allegations.

There were also reported cases of police harassments and beatings of opposition party members during the April elections. In Plateau State, the Joint Committee of Political Parties alleged that "the PDP connived with INEC and the security agents at various polling units amidst resistance (from the electorate) which was met with beating and intimidation by the agents on duty who were already settled and instructed by government" (The Guardian, 10/4/2007). "In Oyo State, the gubernatorial candidate of the ANPP Abiola Ajimobi said "the police, who are expected to be unbiased in the elections, took side with the PDP in the State to engage in electoral malpractices…" (The Guardian, 18/4/2007).

The build up of arms by the police (Human Right Watch, 2007) to ensure security during the elections it seems were used to provide security for the ruling party to rig the elections in her favor.

The use of the independent national electoral commission as an instrument of coercion by the PDP in the April 2007 general elections

The Independent National Electoral Commission that was expected to be an independent umpire as organizer of the 2007 elections was militarized and like the EFCC and the PDP deployed as an instrument of coercion to perpetuate abuses in the electoral process. A lot of criticism trailed the INEC's conduct of the elections and release of the election results from Nigerian Civil Society groups, political parties as well as international observer groups. Among the salient criticisms levied against INEC were first, the claims by INEC that it had the powers to screen and ban candidates from contesting elections unless instructed otherwise by the courts (Human Right Watch, 2007). Although the Supreme Court and other lower courts ruled that INEC lacked the powers to bar candidates from contesting elections. INEC disobeyed court orders and ensured that candidates who appeared to be threats to the PDP candidates in some states were not allowed to contest elections. For example, Abubakar Audu the ANPP gubernatorial candidate for Kogi State had his name cancelled from the ballot paper with a blue marker a few hours before the commencement of voting (The Guardian, 16/4/2007) . Chris Ngige of Anambra State Action Congress, Ibrahim Bepetel of Action Congress in Adamawa State, Nicholas Ukachukwu of the ANPP in Anambra State, among others were disqualified from the polls despite subsisting court orders to the contrary.

The commission insisted that it would not conduct fresh elections in the States where leading opposition members were disqualified in spite of the Supreme Court ruling and the huge public outcry. Briefing reporters on Tuesday April 17 2007 on the outcome of the

Commission meetings on the Supreme Court judgment against INEC's action, the INEC National Commissioner in charge of Information and Publicity, Philip Umeadi said, INEC would not conduct fresh elections in the affected States because according to him, "At the time, we were exercising our rights to disqualify candidates pursuant to the judgment of the Court of Appeal. For all intent and purposes, the Judgment was the substantive law, so we were acting within the law" (The Guardian, 16/4/2007). It is generally believed that the blatant disobedience of court rulings displayed by INEC was because they received the backing of the President- Obasanjo.

Observer groups also accused INEC of partisanship in favoring the ruling PDP Government in the elections. Observed irregularities in the elections which observer groups traced to the doorstep of INEC include (The Guardian, 18/4/2007): one, late commencement of voting arising from late arrival of INEC officials and election materials; two, announcement of some results by the INEC Headquarters in Abuja even where results were being collated at the State levels; three, disenfranchisement of voters as they could not find their names in the original voters list that INEC used to conduct elections; four, missing sensitive election materials like result sheets, stamps required for the collation of results at collation centers which precipitated violence that resulted in the attack of INEC offices; five, INEC reported voter turnout in excess of 90% even in many areas where voting failed to take place; six, stuffing of ballot boxes with ballots marked in favor of the ruling PDP in full view of the public; seven, INEC declaration of results where there were reported cases of ballot snatching and missing ballot boxes and eight, refusal to conduct re-run elections in areas where elections were marked by open rigging and violence.

INEC's refusal to accept that the elections were generally flawed as already indicated was largely due to the fact that it had the backing of the President as the end results turned out in favor of the President's PDP. The President dismissed the criticism against INEC and the overall results. He opined that even in advanced countries, elections are not perfect. Speaking at the commissioning of phase 3 of the National Assembly complex, he said "No election has taken place in Nigeria since 1959 when I started witnessing election as an adult that was not followed by controversy and disputations. If that is our culture, we must accept it; nobody from outside and inside must come and say rubbish" (The Guardian, 8/5/2007). He further advised incoming leaders whose legitimacy would be threatened by the results of the flawed elections that "there will be threats, there will be intimidation, there will be blackmail, and those who want to lead should just shrug their shoulders (emphasis mine) and remain focused" (The Guardian, 8/5/2007).

This open support for INEC by Obasanjo as President, his threat and use of EFCC, his open declaration that it is either "PDP or no Nigeria", the blatant use of force by other security agents, all support our initial proposition that the rhetoric of Obasanjo largely influenced his political behavior. Our theoretical framework advancing a relationship between political statements and political behavior is therefore established.

Conclusion - summary and

recommendations Summary

The paper set out to examine the relationship between language and political behavior using as a case study, the public statements and speeches of Obasanjo as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the nature of the conduct and results of the April 2007 General Elections in Nigeria. The study found out that the rhetoric of Obasanjo conveyed his perception of politics as warfare and as such all arsenals available to Obasanjo as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that is, State powers were deployed to prosecute the war. His language in most cases informed the actions he took and actions taken by State agencies. In a number of cases his political behavior was explained by his rhetoric as was his justification for the poor handling of the electoral process by INEC.

Obasanjo like most other African leaders was reluctant to relinquish power even after staying in office for the constitutionally approved tenure of two terms. Having failed to realize his ambition, he tactfully deployed military tactics to install his own successor and in the process crushing any opposition. This is a pointer to the fact that succession in Africa is still problematic and also problematic is the search for the best possible option for instituting the democratic culture among political leaders and citizenry in Africa. A flawed electoral process produces a leadership that lacks legitimacy and an electorate that is apathetic to future participation in the electoral process. This necessarily breeds instability that has continued to present a major challenge to African States today.

Recommendations

As Obasanjo rightly observed, the electoral process has always been flawed in Nigeria, although SEAN Mc COMACK, spokesman of the United States, State Department observed that the 2007 elections is the worst so far recorded by international observer groups. There is the urgent need for the country to make amends before 2011. The suggestions arising from the findings in the paper are:

1) The Federal Government and particularly the Presidency had total control over INEC in terms of appointments and funding. If INEC is to be impartial it must be independent. This can easily be done if INEC is funded from the consolidated funds. The headship of INEC should be a man of proven integrity and with a track record of exhibiting independent mindedness in handling sensitive assignments.

2) There are ample examples to show that ruling parties in government are almost always interested in self elongation. Once in power during elections they will tamper with the electoral process. The paper subscribes to an earlier recommendation by Adekanye that elections should be declared as emergencies where an impartial body and not the ruling party preside over elections. In Pakistan for example, Adekanye observed that the Supreme Court oversees the electoral process.

3) The long term solution to flawed electoral processes is a commitment by the rulers and the ruled to imbibe the democratic culture. For democracy to thrive, a lot needs to be done and this should include eradication of poverty,

mass mobilization, economic development, education, eradication of unemployment and the demilitarization of the polity. Such will facilitate the gradual build up of a democratic culture. It will be easier then to get the populace to invigilate, monitor and defend elections so that their votes count and are not stolen. In a number of States where voters resisted their votes been stolen in April 2007, election results were less controversial even though lives were lost.

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