



The 2019 General Election in Nigeria: Examining the Issues, Challenges, Successes and Lessons for Future General Elections

Babayo Sule^{1*}
Umar Adamu²
Usman Sambo³

¹Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Humanities Management
and Social Sciences, Federal University
Kashere Gombe, Gombe State, Nigeria.
Email: babayosule@gmail.com

Tel: +2347038653490

²Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Gombe State University, Nigeria.

Email: umaradamuti@gmail.com

Tel: +2348035799542

³Department of Political Science and
Administration, Faculty of Social and
Management Sciences, Yobe State
University Damaturu, Nigeria.

Email: ussambo2@gmail.com

Tel: +2347033760116

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Keywords:

Card reader
Challenges
Election
General election
Nigeria
Success.

Accepted: 24 February 2020

Published: 12 March 2020

(* Corresponding Author)

Abstract

The 2019 General Election is another milestone and a watershed in the efforts of Nigeria towards democratisation. It has been the six consecutive times that General Elections are successfully conducted in the Fourth Republic which has been unprecedented in the history of the country. This work investigated the major issues, challenges, successes and lessons learnt from the Election. It is notable that elections in Nigeria for over fifty (50) years remain a war-like affair and the phenomenon seem to be continuous despite the long experience of democratic practice in the current Republic. The research used both primary and secondary sources of data analysis. The primary sources consist of participant observation, data from the electoral body; the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and reports from observers and civil societies that directly participated in the exercise. The secondary sources include books, journals, internet and other existing literature on the subject matter of study. The data obtained were analysed and discussed using a qualitative approach method where themes and sub-themes were identified and discussed analytically. The research discovered that the 2019 General Election was heralded with several issues, various challenges and some level of success and that there are lessons that are learnt from the process for future General Elections' conduct in the country. The work recommends among other suggestions that for a better General Election in future in the country, some observed avoidable mistakes must be taken care of immediately and that the success part should be strengthened to ensure effectiveness.

Funding: This research received no specific funding.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

1. Introduction

General elections in Nigeria are constantly war-like and are envisaged in political rigmarole that threatens the polity of the nation (Sule, 2018). The 2019 General Election is an interested phenomenon in the country owing to the fears, anxieties, speculations, uncertainties and the nature of the politics which has been heat with a strong opposition and a campaign of calumny, accusations and counter-accusations (Sule, 2018). The 2019 General Election is vital in Nigeria's political history because it has a colossal political and socioeconomic impact on the future of the country. It is a constitutional right and exercise of the populace to determine who leads the biggest country in Africa for the sixth straight democratic peaceful handover through the electoral process which has not been obtainable prior to this Republic (Page & Tayo, 2018). Indeed, any general election that occurs in this Republic is a plus to the attempt at full democratisation in Nigeria irrespective of the problems that are usually encountered which are seen as the evidence of striving towards perfection in future.

The 2019 General Election was not the first time that the country found itself in political turmoil because of election in essence, election has been an affair that threatens to tear the country apart in the First Republic, the Second Republic, the Aborted Third Republic and even the present Fourth Republic. Elections in Nigeria

are characterised by violence, manipulation, allegations of rigging, imposition, intimidation, corruption, excessive spending, vote buying, godfatherism and other obstacles that discredit the process in most cases (Sule, Sani, & Mat, 2018). The 2019 General Election is expected to be an improvement upon that of the 2015 but it is not expected to be of much difference from what has been accrued in the previous elections in many aspects. This is because the terrain and the political game-play in the build-up towards the 2019 General Election reflect and replicate the past occurrence.

The process of electoral conduct globally is not free, fair and credible as it has always been speculated or reported. No election is hitch free in its conduct irrespective of the nature of the system and structures on ground. In Nigeria, the 2019 General Election came up with its own unique issues, challenges and successes that have not been witnessed in the previous five elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This work identified the potency and the urgency of exploring these issues and other matters arising from the proceeds of the election, investigate them, analyse them and present them for academic digestion as part of contribution to knowledge, practical policy implications and a foundation for future work of this nature. In this perspective, the research examined the 2019 General Election, the build-up, the conduct, issues that emanate from the process, the challenges that are encountered and the successes recorded and then plausible alternative were provided for future implications.

2. Literature Review

In this section, attempts were made to critically review the basic issues and activities as well as the processes that marked the conduct of the 2019 General Election from the existing works on the subject matter so as to enable for the identification of the area that requires attention for filling the gap of knowledge. In doing so, the section is divided into three main sub-sections: General Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the preparation towards the 2019 General Election and the process and conduct of the 2019 General Election in Nigeria.

2.1. General Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Election took place in the Fourth Republic six times in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and recently in 2019 (Sule, 2019). In 1999, the military administration of General Abdulsalami Abubakar set a quick transition to civilian rule in which fifty-seven million three hundred and sixty-nine thousand and five hundred and sixty (57, 369, 560) were registered as valid voters and three parties of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were registered by the newly established electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In the Presidential Election, only two parties, the AD and PDP fielded candidates for the contest in which the PDP candidate, Olusegun Obasanjo defeated his rival, Olu Falae in a landslide victory. In the Governorship election, PDP won 21 states, APP 9 states and AD 6 states. In the National Assembly, PDP secured 66 Senators, APP 23 and AD 19 while in the House of Representatives, PDP won 206 seats, APP 110 and AD 44 (Sule, 2018). This showcase the situation of early PDP dominance in Nigerian politics in the Fourth Republic which would stay for over fifteen years.

In 2003, another General Election took place which set the foundation for the consolidation and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria in the 21st century. The APP transformed itself into All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and had the strong politician joining the race in person of former General Muhammadu Buhari. Other parties were registered too such All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and many others but the contest at all levels remained between the ruling PDP and the opposition ANPP. The results indicated the following terrain and pattern of votes. In the Presidential Election, 19 candidates contested for the Presidential seat. The ruling PDP secured 58.20% of the total valid votes, major opposition ANPP scored 30.25% while the remaining parties shared the remaining 11.55%. at the Governorship level, PDP won 28 seats, ANPP 7 seats and AD 1 seat. In the National Assembly, at the Senatorial level, PDP won 76 seats, ANPP won 27 seats and AD secured 6 seats. At the Federal House of Representatives, PDP secured 223, ANPP 96 seats, AD 34, APGA 2, UNPP 2, NDP 1, PRP 1 and 1 vacant seat (Sule, 2018). This further indicated the continued dominance of the PDP in Nigerian politics in the Fourth Republic.

In 2007, more parties were registered which officially turned Nigeria into a permanent multi-party system in the Fourth Republic. The tradition was maintained in which 18 candidates contested for the post of the President but the contest was a straight battle between the ANPP's Muhammadu Buhari and PDP's Umaru Musa Yar'adua. The PDP secured 69.82% of the votes while the ANPP scored 18.72% amidst controversy of massive rigging. At the state level, the PDP maintained its tight hold on power winning 25 seats, ANPP won 7, Action Congress which metamorphosed from AD won 1, APGA 1, LP 1 and PPA 1. In the National Assembly, at the Senatorial chamber, PDP won 85 seats, ANPP 16, AC 6, AP 1 and PPA 1. In the House of Representatives, PDP won 263 seats, ANPP 63, AC 30, PPA 3 and LP 1 (Sule, 2018).

In the 2011 General Election, additional parties were registered including the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) of Muhammadu Buhari. As usual, while there are 20 contestants, the PDP scored 58.89% and the CPC candidate scored 31.98% of the votes. In the Governorship election, the PDP won 23 seats, ACN 6, ANPP 3, APGA 2, CPC 1 and LP 1. Similarly, in the National Assembly, the PDP maintained dominance in

the Senate with 64 seats, ACN 21, ANPP 11, CPC 8, LP 3, APGA 1 and DPP 1. In the House of Representatives, the PDP secured 203 seats, ACN 69, CPC 38, ANPP 28, LP 8, APGA 7, AP 5, DPP 1 and PPN 1. The Election was accompanied with a terrible post-election violence as a result of perceived of the outcome by voters in Northern part of the country from the ruling PDP (Sule, 2018).

The 2015 General Election came up with a surprise and a history-making in Nigerian politics. It was the first time that an opposition political succeeded in defeating the ruling party. Fortunately, the Election was adjudged the most fair and credible in the Fourth Republic since 1999. There were many contestants as it was the usual tradition. This time, Muhammadu Buhari contested under the platform of the All Progressives Congress (APC) which was a merger of four mega parties and a faction of the PDP. Muhammadu Buhari of the APC secured 53.96% of the votes while his opponent President Jonathan scored 44.96%. in the Governorship election, out of the 31 seats contested, APC won 19 while the ruling PDP won 12. In the National Assembly, APC in the Senate won 60 seats while the PDP won 49 seats. In the House of Representatives, APC won 225 seats, PDP 125 and other parties secured 10 (Sule, 2018). The Election was commended, praised and regarded as credible by analysts, voters, the electoral body itself, international observers and political parties and contestants altogether.

The 2019 General Election deepened democratic practice in Nigeria and kept the hope of continuous civilian rule in the country. Like other elections in the past, it was accompanied with imbroglios and political confusion in addition to tension and perceived violence and threats. The INEC registered 93 political parties and 73 of them contested for the Presidency but the contest was a clear battle between the ruling APC of Muhammadu Buhari and the major opposition PDP of Atiku Abubakar. The results indicated that the APC candidate secured 55.54% of the total votes, the PDP scored 41.18% while other parties scored 3.28% (Sule, 2019). In the Governorship election, election was held in 29 states out of the 36 and the ruling APC won 15 while the main opposition PDP won 14. In the National Assembly, at the Senate chamber, the APC won a total seat of 65, PDP 43, YPP 1 making a total of so far as declared by the INEC during the time of writing this research. One seat is not yet declared. In the House of Representatives, APC has 217 seats, PDP 115, APGA 9, ADC 3, PRP 2, AA 2, SDP 1, ADP 1, LP 1 and APM 1. Eight (8) are yet to be finally awarded during this investigation. The results in general indicated a landslide victory for the ruling APC.

The General Elections in the Fourth have unique characteristics features that are associated with the process of the electoral conduct and after the election. These features among others include complicity and complacency from the electoral body in compromising the standard of the electoral conduct, ethnicity, religious exploitation, regional manipulation, violence and political thuggery by the ethnic and regional militias, rigging, malpractices, money politics, vote buying, bribery and corruption, violation of electoral rules and regulations and poor preparation leading to postponement (Sule, Sani, & Mat, 2018). The height seat in the country is always fiercely contested with ethnicity, religious manipulation, regional exploitation by the elites (Sule, 2019) and brazen bribery and corruption from the party primaries to the level of 2019 General Election. One distinguishing feature of election in the Fourth Republic and particularly in the 2019 General Election is the politics of restructuring which has become a rhetoric for power play by the national elite to press home their demand for power control (Abdulkadir & Maigari, 2018).

2.2. The Preparation towards the 2019 General Election

In preparation for the 2019 General Election, the total number of registered voters across the country increased with 15.3 million making a final number of valid voters to stand at 84, 004, 084 million. The male constitutes 53% of the total voters while female is 47%. Statistics indicated that the younger ones dominated the larger percentage of voters with those from the age of 18-35 constitutes 51%, 36-50 years 30%, 51-70 years 15% and 70 and above years 4% and this by implication indicated that 81% of the total registered voters are younger than 50 years of age. By occupation, the voters' registration showed that students are the highest with a total number of 22.3 million, farming/fishing 13.6 million, housewives 11.8 million, business 10.8 million, trading 7.6 million, civil servants 5.0 million, artisans 4.5 million, others 6.0 million while nobody indicated that he is a politician or public servant. The voters' registration by geopolitical zones indicated that the Northwest has the highest number of voters of 20.2 million, Northeast 11.3 million, Northcentral 13.4 million, Southwest 16.3 million, Southeast 10.1 million and Southsouth 12.8 million with a total polling units of 119, 973 across the country (Election Factbook, 2019).

The electoral body; INEC released that a total number of 22, 643 candidates are contesting for 1, 504 position in the 2019 General Election. The election is scheduled to hold for the Presidential and National Assembly on 16th February and for the 29 affected states and their houses of assembly on 2nd March. However, the elections were postponed for both the Presidential and National Assembly and for the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly with an addition of one week from the initial date due to logistic problems according to INEC (The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 2019). This phenomenon of election postponement has become a part of the Nigerian political culture taking place in 2007, 2011, 2015 and recently in 2019. An important issue which is a challenge to the success of the election is the security situation in the country particularly in the North. The Boko Haram insurgency continued to occur frequently in the Northeast, armed banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling threatened the Northwest while farmers-herders

conflict affected the Northwest. Although, the situation is becoming better ahead of the election, it is still alarming and is expected to affect the outcome of the election (Page & Tayo, 2018).

The security situation ahead of the Election was assessed by CLEEN Foundation (2019) and the findings revealed that the security threats is spread across the country as follows: that 11 out of the 36 states are in potential security threat risk, 22 states across the country are on red zone. The security threats in summary across all the flashpoints identified include godfatherism and money politics, violent campaigns, hate speech, insurgency, ethno-religious conflicts, political thuggery, political parties' clash, illegal armed groups, incapacitated security agencies, media incitement and an obviously unprepared electoral body.

The election suffered from a serious logistics problem because of many factors but the most influencing is the number of parties and candidates that participated in the election. About 93 political parties were registered for the election and 73 of them contested for the Presidential seat which made the ballot paper and the result sheet cumbersome and costly. The election is the most expensive in the history of the country financially which cost N 249 billion higher than the N 125 billion in the 2015 (Sule, 2019). The Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room in their assessment of the environment of the 2019 General Election in Nigeria reported that they have a serious concern on the effectiveness of the following; non-partisan security agencies, voter register integrity, card readers failure during election, transparent results collation, efficient and accountable election administration, political parties, fair play campaign ground for all parties and contestants and violence mitigation and electoral accountability. The Report further expressed concern that unless all the above critical issues are handled properly, it may affect the success the of the election (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

The United States Institute for Peace (2019) reported ahead of the conduct of the 2019 General Election that the potential risks for violence in the process are evidenced in social and economic inequalities, ethnic and religious divisions, structural weakness, corruption, insecurity and intra and inter party conflicts. One vital issue that will affect the process of the 2019 General Election is the politics of decamping in which a mass exodus of boat jumping were taking place from the ruling APC to the opposition PDP and from the opposition PDP to the ruling APC as observed by Sule and Yahaya (2018) in their study of the situation. In general, the election is predicted and expected to be in the usual situation of electoral conduct in Nigeria's Fourth Republic despite the significance success that was recorded in the 2015. Most of the challenges that affect the previous elections in the country still manifest in their full force.

2.3. The Process and Conduct of the 2019 General Election in Nigeria

The 2019 General Election was conducted in an atmosphere of tension and challenges. The electoral process was welcomed with an undesired obstacle of election postponement. Due to logistic problems, the INEC was compelled to shift the election from 16th February 2019 for the Presidential and National Assembly election to 23rd February 2019 and from 2nd March 2019 for the Governorship and States Houses of Assemblies to 9th March 2019. The 2019 General Election was characterised by previous challenges and similar shortcomings that affected the past elections in Nigeria. these include recorded violence, vote buying, opening of polling units lately. These challenges did not compromise the credibility or acceptability of the election by the voters and observers but the country failed to use the opportunity to improve on its election conduct and improve its quality. The voters' turnout declined from that of 2015 and 2011 to 39.09% in comparison with that of the 2015 of 46.5%. this is inspite of the highest voters' registration and Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) collection prior to 2019 (Yiaga Africa, 2019).

The reports from the conduct of the election so far revealed some repeated scenarios that occurred in the previous elections. For example, the report by the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR) expressed dismay over the overall conduct of the election because of what they referred to as serious lapses including election postponement on the pretext of logistic challenges, security lapses, violence, compromise of INEC officials in some places, delayed in the commencement of the polls, failure of smart card readers in various places despite the continued assurance from INEC, partisan security operatives and unethical conduct of major political parties (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

Similarly, another joint report by National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) reported serious irregularities and violence at various levels of the conduct of the election across the country. The group also noted the heavy presence of military which led to disruption of electoral process in various parts of the country. The group also observed the excessive use of money, vote buying, hate speech, violent campaign, political thuggery, violent party primaries and imposition and violation of due process. The group recommended that there is need for the creation of appropriate institutions to oversee political parties and prosecute electoral offences (IRI and NDI, 2019). The 2019 General Election revealed the following pattern of voting at different levels as shown in the following tables below.

In the 2019 Presidential Election, a total number of 73 parties contested. There was a total registered voters of 84, 004, 084 million, a significant 72, 775, 502 PVCs were collected by the electorates, total votes cast was 28, 613, 925, total valid votes was 27, 351, 583, the rejected votes was 1, 289, 607 and the voters' turnout was 39.09% (Sule, 2019). The final results or scores by each party or candidate are presented in Table 1.

Table-1. Results of the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria scored by each party.

S/No.	Parties	Scores	Percentage
1	A	19, 209	0.07
2	AA	14, 380	0.05
3	AAC	33, 953	0.12
4	AAP	8, 902	0.03
5	ABP	4, 523	0.02
6	ACD	11, 325	0.04
7	ACPN	7, 223	0.03
8	ADC	97, 874	0.36
9	ADP	54, 930	0.20
10	AGA	4, 689	0.02
11	AGAP	3, 074	0.01
12	ANDP	3, 104	0.01
13	ANN	16, 779	0.06
14	ANP	3, 586	0.01
15	ANRP	4, 340	0.02
16	APA	36, 866	0.14
17	APC	15, 191, 847	55.82
18	APDA	26, 558	0.09
19	APGA	66, 851	0.25
20	APM	26, 039	0.09
21	APP	3, 585	0.01
22	ASD	2, 146	0.00
23	AUN	1, 092	0.00
24	BNPP	1, 649	0.00
25	CAP	1, 111	0.00
26	CC	2, 391	0.00
27	CNP	1, 874	0.00
28	DA	2, 769	0.00
29	DPC	5, 242	0.02
30	DPP	14, 483	0.05
31	FRESH	4, 554	0.02
32	FJP	4, 174	0.02
33	GDPN	41, 852	0.15
34	GPN	4, 924	0.02
35	HDP	1, 663	0.00
36	ID	1, 845	0.00
37	JMPP	1, 853	0.00
38	KP	1, 911	0.00
39	LM	1, 438	0.00
40	LP	5, 074	0.02
41	MAJA	2, 651	0.01
42	MMN	14, 540	0.05
43	MPN	2, 752	0.01
44	NAC	2, 279	0.01
45	NCMP	1, 378	0.00
46	NCP	3, 799	0.01
47	NDCP	1, 192	0.00
48	NDLP	1, 588	0.00
49	NEPP	1, 524	0.00
50	NFD	4, 096	0.02
51	NIP	2, 248	0.01
52	NNPP	6, 111	0.02
53	NPC	10, 081	0.04
54	NRM	6, 229	0.02
55	NUP	5, 323	0.02
56	PCP	110, 196	0.40
57	PDP	11, 262, 978	41.39
58	PPA	21, 822	0.08

59	PPC	8,979	0.03
60	PPN	4,622	0.02
61	PT	2,613	0.01
62	RAP	2,972	0.01
63	RBNP	1,792	0.00
64	RP	2,388	0.00
65	SDP	34,746	0.13
66	SNC	28,680	0.11
67	SNP	3,941	0.01
68	UDP	3,170	0.01
69	UP	1,561	0.00
70	UPN	1,631	0.00
71	WTPN	732	0.00
72	YES	2,394	0.00
73	YPP	21,886	0.08
74	Total	27,214,380	100

Source: Sahara Reporters (2019) (computation of percentage was made by the author using the score of each party divide by the total votes multiply by 100. The two major contenders of APC and PDP were indicated in the table with red mark for easy identification).

The Governorship election took place in 29 out of the 36 states of the Federation. The remaining 7 states have a different schedule for their election because of timing, circumstances, litigations and other factors that altered their dates from the General Election. States like Edo, Ekiti, Ondo and Osun had their governorship election hold in 2017 and 2018 respectively with that of Bayelsa, Kogi and Anambra to take place later in 2019 and beyond. The results of the governorship election revealed that the seats were shared nearly equally between the ruling APC and the main opposition PDP while no other party has secured any seat apart from them as indicated in the following Table 2.

Table-2. Results of 2019 governorship election in Nigeria.

Party	Seats	Percentage
APC	15	51.72%
PDP	14	48.28%
Total	29	100%

Source: INEC 2019 retrieved from www.inecnigeria.org (compilation and computation into percentage was made by the author).

One undesired phenomenon in the conduct of the governorship election in the 2019 General Election is the issue of inconclusive election. Elections were declared inconclusive in seven states in Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Plateau, Rivers and Sokoto based on the rules of conduct and interpretation.

Table-3. The 2019 national assembly election results.

Party	Seats (Senate)	Percentage
APC	65	59.63%
PDP	43	39.45%
YPP	1	0.92%
Total	100	100%
Party	Seats (Reps)	Percentage
AA	2	0.56%
ADC	3	0.83%
ADP	1	0.28%
APC	217	60.28%
APGA	9	2.50%
APM	1	0.28%
LP	1	0.28%
PDP	115	31.94%
PRP	2	0.56%
SDP	1	0.28%
Undeclared	8	2.22
Total	360	100%

Source: INEC 2019 retrieved from www.inecnigeria.org (compiled and computed by the author into percentage).

The rule of election conduct according to INEC is that if the total votes cancelled are more than the margin of win between the winner and the runner-up, the election is declared inconclusive and is to be conducted in the cancelled areas before the winner is determined. The 28th of March was set for the

supplementary election by the INEC which later turn out to be violent, manipulative and full of tragedy of rigging and disenfranchisement especially in Benue, Kano and Rivers.

In the National Assembly, the General Election further replicate the landslide dominant victory of the ruling APC in both the upper and lower chambers. Few parties made an insignificant effort in securing some seats but the major business is straight away between the APC and PDP. The results are analysed in the [Table 3](#).

The above results at the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and State Houses of Assemblies are challenged by the defeated contestants at various levels in the Election Petition Tribunal. The interpretation of this development is that the manner in which the election was conducted was faulty and full of irregularities. For example, the electoral body INEC has withdrawn certificates of return from 25 from members of the House of Representatives and transferred them to other contestants due to court order just barely two months after the election. There may be possibility of more seats being withdrawn in the near future as reported by Premium Times online on 20th May, 2019.

3. A Framework of Analysis: Game Theory

Election is a competition and struggles for power in a democratic system and politics is a game play in which the players or political actors compete fiercely for political power using all available means to secure victory or to win just like a football competition where various strategies of play are employed against the opponents to outsmart them and win. This study identified the 2019 General Election in Nigeria as a gameplay and this has been the rationale for adopting the Game Theory as a framework of analysis for explaining the literature and context of the work.

Game Theory is a series of matrix in political analysis that espouses the logics and techniques of decision-making which illuminates how political competition and the game of power is played in modern politics. Game Theory depicts the analyses of decision-making in domestic and international politics. In the domestic politics, election and competition or struggles to secure power is part of the game and is played based on the culture, pattern, structure and nature of the environment of the political actors. The philosophical or intellectual background of the Game Theory is from the propositions of [Neuman and Morgenstern \(1944\)](#).

The Theory assumes that players adopt different strategies in the pursuance of their interest in their efforts and struggles to outsmart each other. The Theory can use mathematical matrixes to explain the gameplay and that the previous experiences from the outcome of the results of the game can shape and influence the complex process of decision-making in the game. Game Theory is assuming to be a mathematical and logical process of decision-making. The Theory assumes that the major rationale of the actors is to win at all cost. Individual players can be emotional, rational, irrational and selfish in their actions all in order to win. Players studied the situation, analyse it and predict before making a movement for a final decision ([Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1971](#)).

The Game Theory has five basic characteristics which consist of:

- i. Every game has two or more players who are competing to outsmart each other.
- ii. There is a pay-off based on the players norms and preferences.
- iii. There are set rules and regulations for the players in the operation of the game.
- iv. The competing players possess diverse information and data on their opponents' movements and strategies.
- v. Competing movement interact in the game.

The Nigerian politics is a zero-sum game in which the winners take all and losers lose all. In this regard, election is turn out to be a fierce struggle and competition for power at all cost. The 2019 General Election is not different from the previous elections in this perspective. It was once reported in 2003 that the former President Olusegun Obasanjo stressed that election is a war. The ruling APC realised how determined the opposition PDP is to wrestle power from it at all cost and as such, it became extraordinarily determined to hold firm onto power at all cost. This created the political gameplay of intense competition which resulted in violence, vote buying, money politics, hate speech, violent campaign, political thuggery, intra and inter party conflicts, massive decamping, sabotage and espionage in the process. This political gameplay affected the preparation, preparations and outcome of the electoral process as reported by the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (2019) and IRI and NDI (2019).

The stiff competition in the 2019 General Election led to desperation by the key players who are the top contending politicians in their bid to outwit and outsmart each other for power gain and control. Just like the major players in a Game Theory as assumed, the players especially in the two major parties of APC and PDP have a clear knowledge of the environment where the political competition and gameplay is taking place. This is perhaps, the reason why gubernatorial election in some states in Nigeria in 2019 was characterised with violence, malpractices, rigging and manipulation specifically in Kano, Rivers, Benue, Kogi and Bayelsa as reported by international observers (International Republican Institute, 2019) (NDI 2019, NCSSR 2019 and European Union 2019) because the actors or game players are determined to win at all cost taking into consideration the nature of Nigerian politics which is zero-sum game in nature and perspective.

4. Method and Study Area

The study area is Nigeria which is estimated to have a population of approximately 200 according to National Bureau of Statistics. The active section of the study population is the registered voters who collected their PVCs which is 72, 775, 502. The country is the largest West African state neighbouring Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic. It is also the largest African country and 7th most populous country in the world. A study of democratic process like election in Nigeria is relevant in an overall understanding of democratisation and election in Africa. This is the justification for chosen the study area.

The research used the primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary sources consist of participant observation involving the researcher who served as a Collation Officer in one of the Local Governments during the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and State House of Assembly elections. The work also used data from the INEC website, reports from different national and international organisations such as the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR), CLEEN Foundation, International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and YIAGA Africa. The secondary sources include books, journals, newspapers and internet sources.

The data collected was presented and analysed using thematic analysis for discussions and interpretations. Sub-themes were identified based on the major issues of discussion in the study and analysed as findings for future implications.

5. Discussions and Findings

This section is divided into three major themes with other sub-themes under each theme. The sub-themes are the examination of the issues in the 2019 General Election, the challenges of the conduct of the 2019 General Election and the successes in addition to the policy implications.

6. The Issues in the 2019 General Election

There are many issues that emanated from the preparations, conduct and aftermath of the 2019 General Election which should draw the attention of all stakeholders involved in the process and which should be identified and analyse for future line of action. These issues are discussed below in detail.

6.1. Level of Preparations

It is observed that the level of preparations for the 2019 General Election is not encouraging. It started from the inability of the executive arm of government to secure an earlier approval of the cost of conducting the election. The electoral body; INEC submitted a proposal of N249 billion as the cost implication for the conduct of the election. The National Assembly or the legislature played a detrimental politics with it delaying the approval until nearly two months or less than before the election time. Financial constraint affected the preparation. Another constraint in the preparation is the nature of the registered parties. The INEC registered 93 parties most of them contested at various levels. For instance, 73 parties contested for the Presidency alone. The gathering of the names of the contestants, different litigations from party primaries delayed the INEC in its preparation apart from making the ballot paper and the result sheet heavy, awkward and cumbersome. The provision of the logistics from the electoral body itself was not commendable which eventually led to the postponement. This scenario has been reported by many observers including IRI (2019), [National Democratic Institute \(2019\)](#), [CLEEN Foundation \(2019\)](#) and [Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room \(2019\)](#). The Game Theory is played here because the executive-legislative feud was what led to the delay in the approval of the fund for the electoral conduct in their efforts to outsmart each other in the political gameplay.

6.2. Party Primaries

The process of party primaries in the preparation towards the 2019 General Election constituted a stumbling block to the election proper. The party primaries in the major contesting parties of the APC and PDP and even other smaller parties were heralded with chaos, violence, bribery, money politics, vote buying, imposition, godfatherism and violation of internal party democracy. The implications of the party primaries were court cases, massive decamping, anti-party activities, ill-preparation and depriving the electorates or party members from nominating for their preferred candidates. The Nigerian politics is enshrouded always in the crises of intra-party conflicts which led to the decline of the PDP as the ruling party and the same situation was obtainable during the preparation for the 2019 General Election ([Sule, 2018, 2019](#)). Other agencies ([Page & Tayo, 2018](#))([IRI, 2019](#), [NDI, 2019](#)) also reported that the party primaries in the preparation towards the 2019 General Election especially by the APC and PDP threatened the survival of the parties and the election proper. This phenomenon can be adequately explained by the Game Theory in which it assumes that politicians are like footballers or game players who employed all sorts of tricks and strategies to win at all cost. The politicians perceived that if they secure the nomination of APC and PDP, they are cruising towards victory in the General Election which motivated the crisis in the primaries in their bid for winning at all cost.

6.3. Politics of Decamping

The consequences of party primaries tantamount to the seasonal politics of decamping in Nigerian politics which has been the norm with Nigerian politicians. Nigerian political parties lack ideology and politicians lack principles. Their main bid in the political game in Nigeria is to have access to power at all cost to enrich themselves and their cronies from the public treasury. To realise that objective, they discard moral and ethical considerations in their political dealing and embark on power-play to get nominated and win the final election. Whenever such an opportunity is missed, they resorted to what is termed cross carpeting, decamping, party switching, boat jumping and other terminologies globally. A study [Sule and Yahaya \(2018\)](#) discovered that in the preparation to the 2019 General Election, there are more than 200 cases of decamping recorded from APC to PDP and from PDP to APC and other competing parties. Such phenomenon is weakening the electoral process and the Nigerian democracy and there should be measures to contain it or else Nigerian parties may shrink and collapse in the near future leaving the polity without one of the fundamental pillars of democratic operation. This is political gameplay that is discussed in the Game Theory in the framework of analysis of this work.

6.4. Campaign Process

Many reports ([Page & Tayo, 2018](#)) (CLEEN Foundation, 2019 and United States Institute of Peace, 2019) disclosed that the campaign process for the 2019 General Election is violent, bedevilled with insecurity, political banditry, intimidation, non-partisan security agencies and hate speeches as well as campaign of calumny. The campaign process was also mired with excessive use of money and violation of the rules and regulations as stipulated in the Electoral Act 2010 and Sections 225 and 226 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution as Amended. Politicians declared abusive and insulting pronouncement, they demonstrated the politics of zero-sum game, they incite their supporters to exhibit and unleash violence against their opponents, religion was exploited to manipulate the followers and ethnic politics remains relevant in the politicians' aspiration for power. Militias clashed in various parts of the country especially in states like Rivers, Kano, Benue, Taraba and most parts of the country who are supported by politicians with weapons and financial support for the evil act. In essence, the campaign process in the 2019 General Election is a phenomenon that should be revisited immediately by the electoral body to avoid its occurrence in future even though, the Nigerian election is normally characterised with it since the First Republic. The Game Theory explains here the rationale for the politicians' evil motive which is the adoption of the strategy to win power at all cost for personal motive.

6.5. Religious Manipulation

One of the sad events that dominated and occupied the 2019 General Election in Nigeria is religious manipulation and the use of religious clerics to woo voters to support corrupt politicians who bribed the clerics to speak in their favour. This has been observed evidently and physically by all the observers, international agencies and all stakeholders in the electoral process including the author himself. Indeed, the Presidential Election revealed a new dimension of religious manipulation in Nigeria. The two major contenders are Muslims, Fulani and both from the North but the religious clerics decided to support the APC candidate overwhelmingly identifying him as moral, pious and incorruptible while they portrayed that of the PDP as corrupt, amoral and irreligious. The previous situation obtainable was that of the Muslim against Christian in which the Muslim clerics and Muslims supported the Muslim and the Christian clerics and Christians supported the Christian candidate. A new dawn has surfaced in which even among the same followers of a religion, religious clerics will identify the most pious. Many in the country before the election perceived that the religious clerics will maintain neutrality on the ground of the major candidates being both Muslims but unfortunately it was not so. The same scenario occurred at the National Assembly and state levels in which the religious clerics were allegedly bribed to identify in most cases the APC candidates as the best and most religious. The religious manipulation is a political gameplay in an exact replica of the Game Theory in which the politicians use the strategy of religious belief to win not for the sake of serving the religion but for the purpose of personal ambition.

6.6. Corruption Allegations

Corruption has been the norm in Nigerian society institutionalised and officialised for any decades. Corruption in the electoral process involved vote buying, buying of delegates during the party primaries, bribery of electoral officials and security agencies, violation of electoral process and other irregularities and misconduct ([Sule et al., 2018](#)). In the 2019 General Election, corruption played a vital role in which the observers discovered all forms of electoral corruption identified by the study above ([Sule et al., 2018](#)). During the party primaries, candidates for the Governorship seats bought each delegate ranging from the sum of N100, 000, N200, 000 and N500, 000 ([Sule, 2019](#)). In the PDP Presidential Primaries, there was recorded the case of candidates who bought each vote of the delegate at the cost of \$1000, \$2000 and even \$5000 by some of the contenders ([Sule, 2019](#)). In the APC national convention for the declaration of President Buhari as the party's flagbearer, each party Governor in the party was allegedly asked to provide a sum of N250 million for the event ([Abati, 2018](#)). The money might have been sourced from the public treasury. The same allegations

were reported in the 2015 General Election by Sule et al. (2018) and the issue evaded all solutions in the 2019 General Election. Apart from the bribery allegations, there was the allegation of excessive spending above the set maximum limit by the law and the use of public purse for the campaign. Corruption is one of the issues that are discrediting the Nigerian election for many decades and it is affecting the transparency and accountability of the democratisation process which is still ongoing. The Game Theory is self-explanatory here because it is depicting the strategies and games used by politicians at all cost to win including the violation of the set rules of the game which is maximum financial spending.

7. The Challenges of the Conduct of the 2019 General Election

The 2019 General Election in Nigeria encountered any challenges which are being countered by the previous elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic but which are peculiar and unique in the case of the 2019. These challenges required urgent attention and practical policy implications against future general elections in the country that is why they are identified here.

7.1. Political Parties

Nigeria operates multi-party system in the Fourth Republic which enables for numerous parties to be registered but there is a criteria set for the party registration in the 1999 Constitution which stipulates that a party must have offices and membership in all the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory Abuja and also in the 774 local government areas. Many parties prior to the 2019 General Election were registered which established an unprecedented tally of parties in Nigerian political history up to 93. This bizarre rigmarole created difficulties for the electoral body in the production of ballot papers and result sheets and the compilation of the nominated candidates by all the parties. The same situation suffered the parties themselves in the conduct of primaries and campaign. The voters suffered in determining or identifying their parties of choice from the ballot paper or the party logo visibly. This is the unique challenge that the 2019 General Election faced which has not been faced previously. Many electorates wasted their votes in this process. For instance, there are parties with closer abbreviation to APC and PDP which secured many stray votes from the confused voters such as APA, ADC, APM, ADP, AAC, PCP, PPA and PPC. It was speculated that some top guns from the two major parties of APC and PDP sponsored the registration of the other numerous parties to acquire stray votes of the electorates and reduce the chance of winning from their opponents through this process. Parties that failed to show any significant effort in securing a seat in the House of Representatives, Senate, Governorship, State House of Assembly should be scrapped while a stringent procedure should be put in place to avoid the haphazard registration of non-performing parties in the future.

7.2. Election Postponement

The phenomenon of election postponement has been re-occurring in Nigerian politics especially in the Fourth Republic in which it happened in the 2007 General Election on ground of logistics, in 2011 on ground of logistics, in 2015 on ground of insecurity and in 2019 recently on the pretext of logistics again. The case of 2019 General Election is worrisome considering the fact that all the financial requirements and logistics that the electoral body (INEC) demanded were granted unassailably even though, the financial aspect was delayed by the National Assembly due to political gameplay as observed above. The INEC Chairman Professor Mahmood Yakubu severally in conferences and public conversation reiterated their commitments and expressed confidence on their level of preparation and readiness even when he was severally challenged by different stakeholders that they lacked confidence in the preparation. The election was abruptly postponed on the night of the election day or even morning from 16th February 2019 for that of the Presidential and National Assembly to 23rd February 2019 and from 2nd March 2019 for that of the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly to 8th March 2019. This scenario had discouraged many from participating in the election who travelled from far away and even from abroad to exercise their constitutional right leading to low turnout and it has led to the loss of money worth billions of Naira according to many analysts (Page & Tayo, 2018)(CLEEN Foundation, 2019, IRI, 2019, NDI, 2019 and United States Institute for Peace, 2019).. This particular case must be avoided and stopped henceforth, in Nigerian electoral process through prompt and adequate preparation strategies.

7.3. Card Reader Failure

There are reports of the failure of smart card readers to function in various parts of the country which delayed the conduct of the election and announcement of final results. The INEC itself disclosed its disappointment with the card readers in many places despite the several assurances that it has tested their efficiency and it expressed confidence in them (www.inecnigeria.org, 2019). Many observers (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019, CLEEN Foundation, 2019, IRI, 2019 and NDI, 2019) expressed their dismay in their reports on the failure of card readers in many parts of the country during the process of election conduct in 2019. The INEC provided standby but still the problem could not be addressed accordingly. In some places, the card readers started working but then defaulted. In other places, they failed to operate at all. One of the regulations for the conduct of the 2019 General Election by INEC is one must be accredited by the card

readers and the election too must be held using the card readers and any failure from the voter's card or the card reader will simply disqualify the vote (www.inecnigeria.org, 2019). In this regard, in some places, the election had to be postponed and re-conducted the following day after back up were supplied. In other places, the election started lately and the results were delayed which in return delayed the overall final announcement of the results. In other cases, the voters were disenfranchised. This phenomenon took place in 2015 which made the electoral body to gear up for the prevention of its re-occurrence but unfortunately, it has occurred again. It must be tackled squarely.

7.4. Violence and Political Thuggery

Elections in Nigeria are generally characterised with violence and political thuggery at all levels. The 2019 General Election is expected to be progressive in which violence and activities of thugs are anticipated to be minimised but unfortunately, the activity continued unabated. There was a prediction of violence across the 36 states by CLEEN Foundation (2019) and United States Institute for Peace (2019) during the 2019 General Election but it was never expected to be volatile to the extent that was recorded. In some states, the election was declared inconclusive particularly in Rivers, Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, Benue, Bauchi and Adamawa. The supplementary elections in these states especially in Kano and Benue turned out to be a war rather than election. Thugs were sponsored brandishing and unleashing all forms of local weapons against any perceived opposition of the constituted authority in the respective states. Voters were disenfranchised, wounded and even scores were reportedly killed in Kano, Benue and Rivers. Other reports of violence were reported across the entire country but that of Kano and Benue were exceptional cases. These sad developments were reported by domestic and international observers and were even recorded in videotape by BBC Hausa correspondents displaying the thugs chasing away voters in Kano from polling units, displaying lethal weapons and ballot snatching and stuffing. This is the Game Theory in Nigerian politics in practical application where the politicians adopt all strategies possible including violence to secure power at all cost including lives and properties of the electorates.

7.5. Money Politics

Money politics in Nigeria has been a decisive factor in who wins in an election because of the political culture of an expensive election in the country. The 2019 General Election though is adjudged an improvement on that of 2015 in terms of spending, it is still far from being transparent in party financing in which right from the party primaries at all levels, money politics played an influential role in determining who secured the party nomination (Sule, 2019) and it has also played a decisive role in identifying who wins in the General Election. Votes were bought at different levels and in different states from N500 up to N15, 000 for a single vote. This is the case of the competition and struggle for power in a gameplay at all cost because the politicians realised that they can comfortably win if they used their resources at disposal to woo voters' votes for victory. Money politics is threatening the survival of democracy in Nigeria because the good candidates or leaders are screened out from the process right from the expression of interest in which the fees for the nomination forms are pegged beyond the affordability of the average politician. It should be addressed immediately.

8. The Successes of the 2019 General Election

With the existence of several issues and challenges that affected the performance of the 2019 General Election, it still recorded some appreciable level of successes which are discussed below.

8.1. Fair Process

The process of the conduct of the 2019 General Election is not hitch free or without irregularities and challenges as observed above. However, despite the challenges, the INEC had succeeded in making the process fair for all the parties without displaying partisanship or favouritism for the ruling party or any other party. The parties were observed to have been treated equally as in the case of where the ruling APC was denied from fielding candidates in the Election in Rivers State, Zamfara States and other places in certain seats or elective position. In the past, precisely during the heydays of the PDP rule, such fate will never occur. The laws would be violated without regard to prudence and the electoral body would have been bypassed in that era. In this regard, the Election is a success and it is recommended by observers for that triumph (European Union Election Observer Mission, 2019).

8.2. Access to Media

One of the significant achievements of the 2019 General Election is the fair play process in the preparation and campaign process for both the ruling and opposition parties. Although, there were some outcries on the side-lined of the opposition from the public-owned media outlet, still the reports from domestic and international observers revealed that a fair play process is enabled which gave advantage for the parties to sale their manifestoes adequately. The private and independent media both printed and electronic were not meddled with or prevented from providing a space for all parties and contestants to air their views, criticisms

and campaign finances. This fate has been a dilemma in the 2015 General Election in which both the public and private media outlets were impeded from opening up for the opposition to sale their manifestoes and reach the voters. This is commendable in the 2019 Election and it should be improved in the future (Sule et al., 2018).

8.3. Minimising the Incidence of Rigging and Manipulation

There was a good sign of progress in the process of electoral conduct where rigging and manipulation were drastically further minimised. In the 2015 General Election, the rigging was drastically curbed through the introduction of card readers. In the 2019 General Election, the rigging was further diminished. The previous elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011 were identified as controversial and faulty for alleged rigging and manipulation. The INEC built on the success of the 2015 General Election and consolidated the use of card readers. In the 2015 General Election, card readers were introduced but they were not made compulsory for the election conduct (Sule et al., 2018). In the 2019, they were upgraded and were made mandatory for the electoral conduct. In addition, RATEch were employed as ad-hoc staff of the INEC who assisted the Collation Officers in the collation of results in which the total number of valid votes cast must be ratified using the e-collation before the results were verified and accepted for transmission into the final stage. This process helped in preventing manipulation.

8.4. Increased Voter Awareness and Transparency of the INEC

One of the successes recorded in the 2019 General Election is the increased voter awareness and transparency from the INEC. The INEC used widespread media in indulging the voters to register and it displayed the voters' registration for rectification of issues prior to the election time. The INEC engaged media across the nation in calling for the electorates to collect their PVCs. Total number of registered voters was made known, percentage of each geo-political zone, gender frequency, occupational distribution of the voters and other relevant information. Apart from the INEC, there was arguably no election in Nigeria as observed by the researcher and many stakeholders that mass enlightenment took place in comparison with that of the 2019. The author of this work himself attended several public awareness campaigns and deliver lectures more than ten (10) times just in one state of Gombe alone during the build-up to the Election. This has helped in making the electorates more aware of their role and responsibilities in the electoral process which succeeded in making them to participate actively (European Union Observer Mission, 2019).

8.5. Reducing the Influence of Money Politics

Elections in Nigeria are generally perceived as a money bazaar and electoral season is seen as the period of free-money and manna by the electorates and the politicians as well as the electoral officials and security agencies.

The emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as President in 2015 is influential in minimising the impact of money in Nigerian politics in particularly in the 2019 General Election. He is seen as a man of integrity and an incorruptible leader who has a zero tolerance for corruption. He refused to use money during his electioneering campaign. Equally, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) collaborated with INEC to monitor the financial activities of politicians and parties during the Election. The author of this work participated in live radio programmes in local stations where the EFCC sent sterned warnings to the politicians and parties against vote buying and bribery and corruption during the electoral process. The process succeeded in minimising the influence of moneybags during election but, there is a long way to go because still there were reports from every part of the country of using money in vote buying and bribery during the election even in the areas where the author himself served in the election as a participant observer. Many organisations (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019, IRI, 2019 and NDI, 2019) reported the cases of the use of money during the 2019 General Election. A study by Sule (2019) reported the same scenario.

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

The work is a comprehensive and a precise attempt which studied one of the biggest elections in Africa and in the world at large. The pattern and issues of election in Nigeria since 1999 has been replicating in a unilinear way albeit, there are some improvements in the 2015 and 2019 General Elections. The 2019 General Election in Nigeria is seen as a success to a lesser extent in comparison with that of the 2015 General Election. In the 2015 General Election, the election was overwhelmingly remarked as credible, fair and transparent in the process and conduct. However, the 2019 General Election recorded an unfortunate setback with violence and manipulation in addition to an open vote buying and bribery. The Election proved to be a little sliding backward as a result of some issues, challenges and perennial problems that are not overcome. The study concludes that the Election would be accompanied with series of litigations and many political office holders may likely lost their seats to their opponents since right now there are hundreds of cases in Election Petition Tribunals in different states all emanating from the faults and irregularities in the process. As anticipated, many top political office holders had lost their seat from the outcome of the litigations and many may still

continue to lose. This is an indication or a prove of manipulation and violation of the process. The research also discovered that the 2019 General Election is unique and witnessed a different pattern from the previous elections such as numerous parties never recorded before, mandatory use of smart card readers in the process, fielding of two major contenders for the Presidency from the same region, the same religion and the same ethnic group and other related issues. The multiple parties that contested in the 2019 General Election made the electoral process expensive, cumbersome and multi-tasking which eventually led to postponement and this process had affected the voter turnout. This work suggested the following for an improved general election in Nigeria in future:

1. The INEC should prepare for the general election at least four months before the election date to avoid the serially recurring postponement issue.
2. All parties that could not secure a strong seat either at the State House of Assembly, Governorship, National Assembly and Presidency should be deregistered and for any party to be registered in future, it should undergo a temporary surveillance in the local council election by the INEC to monitor their performances in order to avoid confusion and overtasking of the INEC, electorates and the electoral process.
3. Religious clerics should be called for an organised national retreat on their role in politics to curb their manipulation by the politicians to secure power at all cost.
4. Voting process should make e-collation of results mandatory in future.
5. The budget for the conduct of election should be presented by the executive at least two years before the election time to prevent for the delay of the electoral process.
6. Card readers should be provided in back-up for each of the polling unit in case of malfunction.
7. The EFCC should be empowered to include its duties in the investigation of bribery and corruption involving parties, politicians and the electorates and the culprits should be punished severely to deter future occurrences and reduce the use of money in Nigerian politics.

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