**THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN ISSUES OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTION IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF PDP AND APC**

**ABSTRACT**

This study unfolds the contributions of political parties in issues and challenges of free and fair elections in Nigeria with specific focus on Kogi State 2011 gubernatorial election. The study through the understanding of the typologies of political culture and political participation as frame work of analysis focuses on the concepts: political mobilization and education, party primaries and interparty contest as units of analysis for discussing the Nigerian electoral process. The study thus argued that the low turnout of electorates during elections which was less than 50% of registered voters during the Kogi State gubernatorial election is an indication of the poor mobilization and educative function of political parties which poses a major challenge to free and fair elections. The study further stated that, party primaries in the Nigerian state, especially in major political parties as manifested in Kogi State is often characterized by electoral manipulation and thereby adversely affecting aggregative function of political parties. This tends to have a far reaching implication on interparty contest as political environment in most cases is charged with divisiveness, party indiscipline, thuggery, ballot box snatching to mention a few.

 **CHAPTER ONE**

 **INTRODUCTION**

* 1. **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The history of elections in Nigeria can be traced back to 1922 as was conducted by the British Colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for greater participation in the colonial administration. Subsequently, Nigerians were offered the first opportunity to occupy certain political offices. Though the franchise was restricted and representation limited, it was nonetheless an achievement for the nationalists who were struggling for the enthronement of democratic order as a pre-requisite for greater participation of the people in the process of governance. After 1922, several other elections were conducted in different parts of the country to elect leaders at national, regional and local levels. However, it was the 1959 General Elections that paved way for the emergence of Nigeria as an independent state. Since then, various elections have been held either in transition from one civilian government to another or in transition from military regimes to civilian administration.

Organizing a free and fair elections in an emerging democracy such as Nigeria has been viewed as a challenging process that needs functional input from democratic bodies such as the political parties, the electoral body, the electorates as well as the political entities whose activities are geared towards controlling the machinery of government (Omodia, 2011a). Free and fair elections has also seen viewed as the mechanism that oils the democratic process which enables for democratic stability, and maturity (Ibodje and Dode 2007; Omodia 2011a). From the perspective of this paper, relating the first conception of free and fair elections to the latter as stated above, is indicative of the fact that although functional inputs are needed from political elites, the electoral body, electorates, political parties and in the Nigerian environment, to a great extent security agents, it is important to note that the structure, pattern and functioning of political parties tend to affect the institutions mentioned above. According to Omodia (2009) the structure of political parties: masses, elitist/cadre and mass-elite could vividly impact on the freeness and fairness of the electoral process in that: an elitist dominated process would lead to excessive monetization of the electoral process, experience the manipulation of the masses by the political elites for selfish and class benefits, an ineffective and restrictive political mobilization of the citizenry for voter registration and enhanced political participation in voting, a non-issue based political education that will not enable the electorate to make informed electoral decisions among others. The implication therefore is that it is important to accentuate that, the role of political parties in a competitive environment is of utmost importance to ensuring free and fair elections. This is because parties are expected to regulate the activities of their members by ensuring that they keep to rules specified by electoral body for hygienic contest. This is coupled with such other functions as; political mobilization and education of electorate, instilling confidence in the electoral process through an open and transparent conduct of party primaries, making sure that parties are represented at polling booths and collation centres by party agents among others.

The conception of free and fair election is an embodiment of a joint process where the people are the driving force and determinant of political representation or the outcome of the electoral process. In other words, the conception here is not only for inter-party elections to be free and fair especially in new democratic states of Africa, but, the need for electoral activities to be centered on the people in such a way that it would aid the emergence of political leaders at the intra party level, aid informed political decisions at the polling booth and where the people’s choice would be the major determinant of electoral contest. In order to achieve the above, political parties are expected to effectively perform the function of political education, political candidates or parties are not supposed to be restricted to access to mass media or any other functional means of political campaign, a candidate or party is not expected to be unduly financially advantaged through the use of state fund, the electoral body is also expected to be independent in such a way that it could effectively discharge the functions of transparent voter registration exercise, collation and declaration of electoral results among others.

* 1. **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Nigeria, a country with different ethnic groups and corrugated different political agendas ranging from the individual perspective to the political parties. The menace with Nigeria electioneering process is the wheel to be on power at all cost irrespective of the interest of the people, every political party that is on power want to retain power for their selfish interest, while doing this, they map out strategies that will enable them to rig the election either by crook or hook, this things are not mostly peculiar with the Nigeria system alone but is common due to the fact that most of the leaders even come out openly to declare their stands to fight with their last breath to win election.

Political malpractice has taken a new formation in the history of Nigeria, most of the country’s religious leader are now praise singers of politicians, they have ignore their vows and responsibilities to the people by preaching the gospel which proffers rather to rain encomium on politician(s) who come to their congregation for thanks giving to God. Instead of religions leaders playing their role of lordship over these politicians, by chastising any dubious person that warrant such in other to cleans the society from bad eggs. Thus, the focus of study is to unfold the role of political parties in enhancing free and fair elections in Nigeria with specific focus on Kogi State Gubernatorial Election of 2011.

* 1. **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The sole aim of this research is to examine the role of political parties in issues of free and fair election in Nigeria, the researcher intend to address the following sub objectives in the course of the study;

1. To examine the contributions of political parties to sustaining a free and fair election in kogi state.
2. To examine the performance of INEC in the management and conduct of 2011 general elections in kogi state.
3. To examine the level of success recorded by political parties at the end of the elections in kogi state.
4. To determine the problems associated with conducting a free and fair election in kogi state.
5. To proffer solutions to the problems and challenges mitigating against free and fair election in Nigeria.
	1. **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

 The researcher formulated the following null and alternate hypotheses to guide the study;

**H0:** there is no significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state.

**H1:** there is a significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state.

**H0:** INEC does not perform any management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state.

**H2:** INEC performs management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state.

**H0:** There was no free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in kogi state.

**H3:** There was a free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in kogi state.

* 1. **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The following are the significance will be achieve at the completion of the study;

This study will educate the general public on the activities of political parties with specific focus on the management role of 2011 general election in the state with a view of ascertaining the success and problems associated with free and fair election.

To political parties’ leaders and members, it will serve as a mirror of reflection on the need to represent not imposing representatives on the masses. The need for a credible election to be conducted, where every votes cast can be accounted for even in the nearest future.

This research will be a contribution to the body of literature in the area of the effect of personality trait on student’s academic performance, thereby constituting the empirical literature for future research in the subject area.

* 1. **SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited to the role of political parties in conducting a free and fair election, with specific reference to the 2011 general elections conducted in kogi State. It will also cover the successes and challenges associated with the 2011 general election in the state.

In the course of the study the researcher encountered the following constraint;

**Financial constraint**- Insufficient fund tends to impede the efficiency of the researcher in sourcing for the relevant materials, literature or information and in the process of data collection (internet, questionnaire and interview).

 **Time constraint**- The researcher will simultaneously engage in this study with other academic work. This consequently will cut down on the time devoted for the research work

* 1. **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Political parties:** A political party is a group of people who come together to contest [elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election%22%20%5Co%20%22Election) and hold power in the government. The party agrees on some proposed policies and programmes, with a view to promoting the collective good or furthering their supporters' interests.

While there is some international commonality in the way political parties are recognized, and in how they operate, there are often many differences, and some are significant.

**PDP:** this is an acronyms for Peoples Democratic Party in Nigeria.

APC: this is an acronyms for All Progressives Congress in Nigeria.

**INEC:** independent national electoral commission is an independent body that is saddle with the responsibility of voter’s registration and conduction of elections in Nigeria.

**Election:** An election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations

**Credible election:** The legitimacy of democratic government is established, in large measure, by genuine elections, and they are much more than what happens on Election Day. A genuine electoral process requires an open pre-election environment in which citizens can participate without fear or obstruction; political parties, candidates and the media can operate freely; an independent judiciary functions fairly and expeditiously; and electoral authorities operate impartially. Since its earliest days, NDI has been working with partners around the world to help ensure that elections reflect the will of the people.

**1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This research work is organized in five chapters, for easy understanding, as follows. Chapter one is concern with the introduction, which consist of the (background of the study), statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, significance of the study, scope of the study etc. Chapter two being the review of the related literature presents the theoretical framework, conceptual framework and other areas concerning the subject matter. Chapter three is a research methodology covers deals on the research design and methods adopted in the study. Chapter four concentrate on the data collection and analysis and presentation of finding. Chapter five gives summary, conclusion, and recommendations made of the study.

 **CHAPTER TWO**

 **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Election in a democratic country like Nigeria is one of the basic ingredients that oil the machinery of governance. It is the process for evaluating the political performance of the representatives of the people either for the purpose of returning back to political offices or replacing them with perceived better representation (Omodia, 2009). As a result, it is quite indispensable that for political representation to be more responsive in a democratic system there is need for the electoral process to be free and fair. The conception of free and fair election here is seen as an embodiment of a chain process where the people are the driving force and determinant of political representation or the outcome of the electoral process. In other words, the conception here is not only for inter-party elections to be free and fair especially in new democratic states of Africa, but, the need for electoral activities to be centered on the people in such a way that it would aid the emergence of political leaders at the intra party level, aid informed political decisions at the polling booth and where the people’s choice would be the major determinant of electoral contest. In order to achieve the above, political parties are expected to effectively perform the function of political education, political candidates or parties are not supposed to be restricted to access to mass media or any other functional means of political campaign, a candidate or party is not expected to be unduly financially advantaged through the use of state fund, the electoral body is also expected to be independent in such a way that it could effectively discharge the functions of transparent voter registration exercise, collation and declaration of electoral results among others. Moreover, it is expected that there would be a hyphen and buckle between people’s vote and electoral results. As a matter of fact, unfolding scenario especially in the Nigerian State of the fourth republic is such that, there has been a wide gap between people’s electoral choice and electoral results declared by the electoral body (Zimako, 2009; Omodia, 2010). This no doubt manifested in states like Edo, Ekiti, Ondo, Osun among others, where judicial courts had cause to nullify Gubernatorial results declared by electoral bodies in those states (Omodia, 2010). Conversely, it is important to state that the reasons for the above ugly situation have been attributed to multifactor such as: elitist manipulation, institutional fragility, poor political culture, excessive monetization of political offices among others (Omodia, 2007; Omodia, 2008; Bello, 2008). The perspective of this paper however, is to unfold the challenges political elites poses to free and fair elections in Nigeria with specific focus on the Nigerian fourth republic by synthesizing the nature of political contest, the purpose of political power, as well as the means of acquiring political power.

it is important to state that, the focus of this paper is not embedded in the interaction of political structures vis-à-vis its functions (system theory or structural functionalism), nor in group pluralism vis-à-vis how group shapes political decisions (Group theory). Rather, this paper focuses on the purpose and means of power acquisition which justifies the utility of Elite theory as the theoretical perspective of this paper. Elitism as a democratic perspective unfolds the understanding that representative democracy is a function of the dictates and manipulations of the elites based on class organization and acquisition of political skill (Olaniyi, 1997; Varma, 2001). Thus, it negates the Marxian conception of masses control of democratic process because the masses lack the organizational and political knowledge which democratic leadership requires. Conversely, it is important to accentuate that the fact that there are various forms of elites-political, traditional, bureaucratic, military etc, is an indication that the elitist class is not as homogenous as envisaged by the classical elite theorists (Omodia, 2004). The result therefore, is the manifestation of elitist contradiction even within the political elite class when it comes to power acquisition. This scenario, no doubt, is obtainable in the Nigerian state in that one could argue that the greatest threat to the survival of the Nigerian state is the elitist contradiction associated with the competition for political offices by the political elites.

**2.2 THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

A political party is a group of people coming together to contest elections and hold power in the government. The party agrees on some proposed policies and programmes, with a view to promoting the collective good or furthering their supporters' interests.

According to the Electoral Knowledge Network, “A political party is defined as an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office” (Ukpabi, 2010).

Political parties can be conceived as an advanced form of pressure or interest groups. They are usually a set of highly organized groups of persons or individual who come together with often quite broad scopes and objectives. By this, we mean that political parties are much broader in scope and seeking to hold power (to the point of perhaps modifying some of its issues, positions if that will help control power). This is where interest groups are known to differ from political parties (Thomas, 2001) “The goal of the political party is to win political office, gain political power, and thereby control the policy making process” (Blondel and Cotta, 2000). Such political parties are usually open to the general public or to a particular class of people or membership.

Put differently, a political party is 'a social group' defined by Herbert Simon as “a system of interdependent activities characterized by a high degree of rational direction of behavior towards ends that are objects of common acknowledgment and expectation” Simon, (1962). It is different from other social groups, such as labor unions and other associations because of the unique functions which political parties performs for the system, such as organizing for public opinion, communicating demands to the center of governmental decision-making and political recruitment. This is why a political party is taken 'as a useful index of the level political development' (LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966:7). Hence the relationship between a viable party system and a democratic order is axiomatic. In a similar dialogue, Plato was known to have insisted in The Republic that.

**2.2.1 CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY**

The ancient Athenians were concerned about the direct rule of the people, but not notions of consultation and representation as currently practiced even in advanced democracies today. The Athenians were of the strong view that, a life deprived of direct involvement in ruler ship is without merit, because without their exercise of sovereignty, the purpose of life will have been defeated. In essence, “democracy means adherence to the principle of equality in the sense of occupying offices through lot, rotation and short tenure, and the rule of law as against the sit-tight policy for African political leaders”(James, 2010). The people in this definition are defined in terms of class, but largely in an abstract context as exhibited by the political elites. Aristotle therefore summed his idea of democracy as that which exists where the sovereign authority is composed of the poorer classes and not of the owners of property (Aristotle, 1981). There are several other related themes that have been developed from this idea which are also thought to be integral to what democracy stands for today.

Below are a few of them;

1. Democracy has to do with the scenario where the people govern themselves by regular elections through which their highest leaders are periodically determined (representative democracy) or policies governing them are chosen (direct democracy).
2. Democracy is also about granting exclusive rights to vote to the people. The right to vote here includes virtually all adults. This is an entirely modern addition. Not so long ago, governments were called democratic that excluded from the franchise all slaves, women, and free males that did not meet certain property or literacy requirements. Now it is considered perverse to call democratic any country so restricting the franchise, as for example, the South Africa apartheid regime that limited voting to minority whites.
3. Democracy should also foster the acceptance of certain so-called democratic rights, particularly the right to vote, the right to have one's vote count equally, the right to run for the highest office, and the right to organize political groups or parties.
4. In addition, there is above the state, a law to which all authorities adhere, that provides the framework for democratic rule, and that protects democratic rights. Democracy, therefore, now generally means that a people rule themselves through periodic elections of their highest leaders in which nearly all adults can participate, for whichever offices they are eligible, and under the rule of law.

**2.2.2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTION**

Elections being a central feature of democracy. For elections to express the will of the electorate, they must be ‘free and fair’.

‘Free’ simply means that all those entitled to vote have the right to be registered and to vote and must be free to make their choice. In South Africa every citizen over the age of 18 is entitled to vote. An election is considered ‘free’ when you can decide whether or not to vote and vote freely for the candidate or party of your choice without fear or intimidation. A ‘free’ election is also one where you are confident that who you vote for remains your secret.

‘Fair’ here means that all registered political parties have an equal right to contest the elections, campaign for voter support and hold meetings and rallies. This gives them a fair chance to convince voters to vote for them. A fair election is also one in which all voters have an equal opportunity to register, where all votes are counted, and where the announced results reflect the actual vote totals.

A crucial question here is when can we objectively say that elections are free and fair‘, in a polarized and fragile state, especially given that the phrase is often subjectively determined based on the vantage position of the speaker? (Goodwin-Gill, 2006). Article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights made it an entitlement for people to participate in the government of their country. That an election should reflect the will of the people has never been a contentious expression. What is contentious is the way this normative standard should be measured. Goodwin-Gill (2006:115) identified ten broad criteria and activities as markers or indices for measuring free and fair election‘. These are (1) Electoral law and system; (2) Constituency delimitation; (3) Election management; (4) The right to vote; (5) Voter registration; (6) Civic education and voter information; (7) Candidates, political parties and political organization, including funding; (8) Electoral campaigns, including protection and respect for fundamental human rights, political meetings, media access and coverage; (9) Balloting, monitoring and results; and (10) Complaints and dispute resolution.

Free and fair elections are a fundamental element of a healthy democracy. To be truly free and fair, however, elections require not only transparent and well-managed Election Day polling, but also a society that encourages full citizen participation, political parties to operate freely, independent media to flourish, and which builds a judiciary system capable of exercising independent and impartial authority. All 57 OSCE participating States have made commitments to holding free and fair.

**2.3 THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

Consequently the role of political parties, in a mature democracy, includes:

1. Socializing and educating voters and citizens on the functioning of the political and electoral system and the generation of general political values.

2. “Aggregating and articulating needs and problems, as identified by members and supporters.

3. Balancing opposing demands and converting them into general policies.

4. Activating and mobilizing citizens into participating in political decisions and transforming their opinions into viable policy options.

5. Channeling public opinion from citizens to government.

6. And recruiting and training candidates for public office.”

During elections, their functions expand to include the following tasks; nominating candidates for election to public office and structuring the voting choice. According to The Electoral Knowledge Network, this is achieved through the “internal processes of political parties, such as the personality of leaders and staff, the ideological foundations, party history, and internal political culture. If a political party applies the democratic principles of electoral politics within the party, the organization benefits from internal information and consultation processes, internal (formal or informal) rules and structures for organization and decision-making, and transparency in the party’s functioning at all levels. Party members may also take on more formal roles in administration like participating in internal polls for leadership positions or in selecting the party’s candidate(s) in upcoming elections. Such parties also work actively to enhance the role of traditionally under-represented groups in their organizations”. These policies, procedures, and processes usually result in positive public perception of political parties and consequently, in their electoral fortunes.

**2.3.1 BRIBERY AND TUGGERY**

Bribery is another cankerworm that has eaten deep into the electoral system, a lot of people are involve in collecting gratification from the politicians thereby selling their conscience and their votes, it is due to the fact that the economic situation is not stable, there is a lot of people dying of hunger and starvation in our communities, this is common in the past election most people even go to the extent of thumb printing on ballot papers throughout the night when official voting as not started, this is a cardinal point of rigging an election using the INEC officials to supply voting materials to top politicians in a particular area, hence a resident electoral commissioner of  INEC would visit a big name (Politician) in its territory of jurisdiction as a mark of loyalty to pave way for smooth flow of their corrupt tendency perpetuated at the pulls.

 Tuggery is rampant in the aspect of our youths, today most politicians have tugs whom they use to disrupt election and steal ballot boxes from pulling stations, this are jobless youths who are trying to earn a living from dubious antecedents, these are the same youths who they use in carrying out their nefarious activities ranging from political rallies, political assassination etcetera. The masses are appealing to such youth to desist from their evil way and turn a new leaf otherwise nemesis will cash up with them, most of the time this same politicians use and dump such youth, it is high time for us to protect our votes and work ceaselessly to protect our nascent democracy.

**2.4 POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND EDUCATION**

Political mobilization and political education are often used interchangeably or as synonyms. The focus of this review especially as regard the utilization of the concepts as unit of analysis is based on the need to distinguish between both concepts. As a matter of fact, on a manifest level, especially In the Nigeria state, it is common to see the people politically mobilized for political participation without the necessary political cum democratic institutions equipping them with functional education that will aid the development of the system. This no doubt could be attributed to the pattern or method of political mobilization being utilized in the Nigeria state. Thus one could vividly state that there is a sharp distinction between political mobilization and education just as one could say that the two concepts are interwoven in the term of activity. For instance, an effective political education could lead to enhanced political mobilization because when the people are well informed and convinced of the benefits of their involvement in the political process, such conviction will serve as a mechanism of mobilization (Almond et. al, 2000). Thus, political education is viewed as integrative of political mobilization.

Conversely, the people could be persuasively mobilized to participate in a political process, but in such participation political education may be lacking to the extent that mobilization does not impact qualitatively on the political process. This could be said to be synonymous with the Nigerian scenario based on the method of mobilization which is persuasive and not convincing on the part of the people. The method includes:

1. A favored political campaign method which focuses more on political debates, the use of jingles in the media at the expense of face to face or one to one form of campaign.
2. Intimidation and politicization of the use of voter’s card as a requirement for school enrolment and payment of salaries of civil servants. The implication therefore is that the acquisition of voter’s card and participation in voter registration exercise is done with the intention of meeting up with the requirement for either the payment of salary or for school enrolment if demanded by government.
3. Based on (ii) above, one could then argue that political mobilization is more of government propelled rather than party propelled and this could be attributed to the low level of turn out during elections. On observational basis, in the 2011 gubernatorial election in Kogi state, the above identified method was manifest in the electoral process in term of political participation. For instance, out of the 1, 325,272 registered voters only 518, 949 electorates voted, indicating a voter turnout of less than 50%of the total number of registered voters (Nigerian Tribune, 2011). Apart from the nature or method of political mobilization which is anchored on persuasive mobilization. Other factors that may have accounted for the low level of political mobilization during the December 3 gubernatorial election in Kogi state also include: the excessive militarization of the environment with the view of providing security to voters, lost confidence in the process through previous experience which was characterised by thugery, ballot box snatching to mention a few (Oddih 2007; Aper 2008; Bello 2011).

On political education, it is important to accentuate that this functional input could best be provided by political parties and this could be effectively done in an atmosphere where party members are made to feel as major stakeholders in the parties (Olujide 2010; Omodia 2010). In other words, when parties are masses based and to a great extent ruled by party dues, members would be fully integrated into party processes and programmes including political education on what the party stand for, the party logo, the choice of the logo, how to vote and how not to waste their votes and therefore be able to sell these principles and electoral education to others who though are not party members but are sympathetic to their cause. This form of education at present exist inform of minimal political culture in the Nigeria state and this account for why votes are often nullified during elections. For instance, in the just concluded December 3, 2011 gubernatorial election in Kogi state, out of the 518, 949 votes, 484, 168 of the votes were valid while 34,781 votes were nullified. (Nigerian Tribune, 2011). Although this number (34, 781) could be said to be insufficient considering the fact that winner Idris Wada of People’s Democratic Party (PDP) got 300, 372 votes when compared to the 159, 913 votes of Abubakar Audu from Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) who was the closest to the declared winner (Nigerian Tribune, 2011). It is of immense importance to say that on observational basis, the number could have been more than the total nullified votes if not for assisted votes where polling assistants had to aid uneducated and uniformed electorates in voting the party of their choice through the mentioning of the party or candidate. Of utmost importance is the fact that the assist was abused by the polling assistants in favor of their preferred candidates and parties hereby undermining the fairness of the process.

**2.5 POLITICAL PARTY PRIMARIES**

Party primaries are indispensable mechanisms which defines the internal democratic process of the emergence of party candidates. As a matter of fact, the democratic cum electoral culture of political parties could be measured based on the internal electoral processes leading to the emergence of candidates. These processes are indispensable to the freeness and fairness at both intra and interparty elections in that it could either aid to instill confidence in the electoral process and thereby, enhance political participation and development or disadvantaged the process through lack of confidence in the system and thus witnessing political apathy that threatens the survival of democratic governance in a fragile polity. In the Nigerian state of the fourth republic, party primaries especially in the major Political parties- People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), tend to be keenly contested and in most cases tend to snowball into scenario where the processes leading to the emergence of candidates are often challenged in courts (Isa and Zakari, 2008).

In minor political parties however, the scenario is more of an adoption of a single candidate as consensus candidate. And in most cases, the consensus candidate of the different political parties are attracted from the major ones with the purpose of providing them the platform for contesting elections when they lose out of the internal contest leading to the emergence of candidates in the major ones. Based on the cross-carpeting of party members for the purpose of having a platform for seeking elective offices, the point is that this scenario is often propelled by the dissatisfaction with the process leading to the emergence of party candidates in major political parties. In other words, party primaries in the Nigerian political parties, especially the major ones, though keenly contested, but the processes are in most cases not free and fair (Tenuche, 2011) In Kogi state for example, the emergence of Idris Wada as PDP candidate of the September 22, 2011 party primaries for the December 3, 2011 gubernatorial election was challenged by the winner of the January 2011 party primary (Jibrin Isah) and his supporters based majorly on the followings;

i. The earlier emergence of Jibrin Isah as the PDP candidate from the January 2011 party primary exercise for the April 26 gubernatorial election that was barred by court judgement and subsequently fixed for December 3, 2011 by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Jibrin Isah and his supporters strongly felt that the party should have should simply honoured the earlier submission made to INEC in which he was presented as the party candidate instead of the leader of the party in the state, Governor Ibrahim Idris anointing another candidate through a cosmetic party primary in September 22, 2011.

ii. That Idris Wada, the declared winner of the September 22, 2011 party primary was not a card carrying member of the party as at the time he was invited to contest party primary.

iii. The electoral process was fraudulent as a result of the manipulation of delegates’ lists in favour of Idris Wada the governor’s anointed candidate.

The implication of the above is that the PDP was like a house divided against itself and this could have affected its capacity to fully mobilize both party members and non- members to come out and vote for its candidate in December 3, 2011 election although the party was able to win by securing 300,372 votes out of the 484,168 valid votes (Nigerian Tribune 2011). At this juncture, one could convincingly say that party primaries especially in the Nigerian state constitute a major challenge to free and fair elections in that the process for the emergence of party candidates is often characterized by the manipulation of the process by the incumbent in favor of his preferred candidates during contest, or in favour of himself when contesting. This no doubt tends to have far reaching implication on inter-party electoral contest.

**2.6 INTER POLITICAL PARTY CONTEST**

The manipulations and divisions within the PDP arising from the September 22 primary election created two major manifestations during the December 3, 2011 gubernatorial elections:

1. There were pockets of thuggery and sporadic shouting in Dekina Local Government Area which was the local government of the declared winners ,of the January 2011 PDP primary (Jibrin Isah) April 26, aborted gubernatorial elections and declared winner of the September 22, 2011 PDP primary (Idris Wada) who emerge as the party candidate for the December 3, gubernatorial election. Although this factor could not be said to be the singular factor that propelled electoral vices in the area during the elections but there is no doubt that there were manifestations of the party indiscpline by supporters of Jibrin Isah to manipulate the process in favour of the opposition ACN in some wards of the local government in order to pay for the non- emergence of their principal Jibrin Isah as the party candidate (Nigerian Tribune 2011)
2. It also create impression especially by the opposition members that the PDP under the leadership of the incumbent Governor- Ibrahim Idris, was bent on manipulating the electoral process in favour of anointed candidate Idris Wada, based on his emergence and therefore set a stage for the rejection of results especially if PDP is declared winner of the gubernatorial election (Bello, 2011).

Thus, the election which was characterized by accusations and counter accusations by majorly the PDP and ACN, was contested by 19 political parties with PDP emerging as the winner with 300, 372 votes while the ACN secured 159, 913 votes to emerge as the closest to the PDP. Although the electoral process was believed not to be free and fair by the opposition ACN who described the machination of PDP in electoral manipulation during the exercise as “Scientific Rigging” (Nigerian Tribune 2011). This is coupled with the interim statement of the Election working Group that: presiding officers and polling clerk had difficulties conveying electoral materials from ward distribution centres to polling units due to lack of mobility, adding that some of the party agents behave in a manner that was inconsistent with the conduct of free, fair and transparent election………it also noted that there were identified cases of electoral malpractices, such as ballot snatching and intimidation of electoral officers (Nigerian Tribune 2011, P.2). Conversely, the identified challenges and electoral vices notwithstanding, the election was believed to be a reflection of the wishes of the people. Hypothetically, one could state that the following factors may have accounted for the outcome of December 3, 2011 election in favour of the PDP:

1. The movement of Prince Abubakar Audu formally of the ANPP to ACN who had little or no structure in the state because of the sectional nature of the party as a party associated with the south western zone of Nigeria.
2. The newness of the party in the state which is in the North central zone of Nigeria.
3. The involvement of the presidency in reconciling the differences arising from the September 22, 2011 party primary before gubernatorial election which may have cemented the division in the party to an extent.
	1. **CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The constitutional and legal framework guiding the administration and conduct of the 2011 General Elections can be found and has been laid in the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and the 2010 Electoral Act (As Amended) though much still needs to be done. True, it is that the Electoral Reform Committee chaired by former Nigerian Chief Justice Muhammadu Lawal Uwai s 27 had made far-reaching recommendations to guarantee the independence and operational efficiency of INEC (such as amending Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution by removing INEC from the List of Federal Executive Bodies and ensuring that election expenses and recurrent expenditure of the Commission including personal emoluments of members of the Commission shall be “first charge” on the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation. The 1999 Constitution (As Amended) through the First and Second Alteration Acts brought significant improvements in the operations of the Independent National Electoral Commission, particularly the election timeline, financial autonomy and administrative independence from the Executive Branch. Section 153 (2) of the Constitution states that the power to appoint the Chairman and twelve members of the INEC and thirty-seven Resident Electoral Commissioners is vested in the P resident of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in consultation with the Council of State, and subject to confirmation of the Senate pursuant to Sections 154(1) and 154 (3) of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended). Section 155(1)(c) of the 1999 Constitution provides that a member of the Commission shall hold office “for a period of five years from the date of his appointment,” an d pursuant to Section 157(1) of the Constitution such a person may only be removed from that office by the president acting on an address supported by two thirds majority of the Senate praying that he be so removed for inability to discharge the functions of the office (whether arising from infirmity of mind or body or any other cause) or for misconduct. “Misconduct,” as stipulated by the Constitution, means breach of the Oath of Allegiance or oath of office of a member or breach of the provisions of this Constitution or a misconduct of such nature that amounts to bribery or corruption or false declaration of assets and liabilities or conviction for treason or treasonable felony. In order to demonstrate INEC‟s impartiality and neutrality in the discharge of its onerous responsibilities under the law, the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) as contained in Part I of the Third Schedule of the Constitution provides that members of the Commission including Chairman, National Electoral Commissioners and RECs shall be “non-partisan,” be person “of unquestionable integrity and shall not be a member of any political party.” Indeed, Section 160(1) of the Constitution states clearly and unambiguously that the powers of the INEC to make its own rule or otherwise regulate its own procedure shall not be subject to the approval or control of the President.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

* 1. **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The researcher used descriptive research survey design in building up this project work the choice of this research design was considered appropriate because of its advantages of identifying attributes of a large population from a group of individuals. The design was suitable for the study as the study sought to examine the role of political parties in issues of free and fair election in Nigeria.

* 1. **SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION**

Data were collected from two main sources namely:

(i)Primary source and

(ii)Secondary source

**Primary source:**

These are materials of statistical investigation which were collected by the research for a particular purpose. They can be obtained through a survey, observation questionnaire or as experiment, the researcher has adopted the questionnaire method for this study.

**Secondary source:**

These are data from textbook Journal handset etc. they arise as byproducts of the same other purposes. Example administration, various other unpublished works and write ups were also used.

* 1. **POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

Population of a study is a group of persons or aggregate items, things the researcher is interested in getting information on the study the role of political parties in issues of free and fair election in Nigeria. 200 staffs of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), PDP and APC members in Kogi State were selected randomly by the researcher as the population of the study.

* 1. **SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

Sample is the set people or items which constitute part of a given population sampling. Due to large size of the target population, the researcher used the Taro Yamani formula to arrive at the sample population of the study.

n= N

 1+N(e)2

n= 200

1+200(0.05)2

= 200

1+200(0.0025)

= 200 200

1+0.5 = 1.5 = 133.

**3.5 Instrument for data collection**

The major research instrument used is the questionnaires. This was appropriately moderated. They party chaimen were administered with the questionnaires to complete, with or without disclosing their identities. The questionnaire was designed to obtain sufficient and relevant information from the respondents. The primary data contained information extracted from the questionnaires in which the respondents were required to give specific answer to a question by ticking in front of an appropriate answer and administered the same on staffs and members of the selected bodies. The questionnaires contained about 16 structured questions which were divided into sections A and B.

* 1. **VALIDATION OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The questionnaire used as the research instrument was subjected to face its validation. This research instrument (questionnaire) adopted was adequately checked and validated by the supervisor his contributions and corrections were included into the final draft of the research instrument used.

* 1. **METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected was not an end in itself but it served as a means to an end. The end being the use of the required data to understand the various situations it is with a view to making valuable recommendations and contributions. To this end, the data collected has to be analysis for any meaningful interpretation to come out with some results. It is for this reason that the following methods were adopted in the research project for the analysis of the data collected. For a comprehensive analysis of data collected, emphasis were laid on the use of absolute numbers frequencies of responses and percentages. Answers to the research questions were provided through the comparison of the percentage of workers response to each statement in the questionnaire related to any specified question being considered.

Frequency in this study refers to the arrangement of responses in order of magnitude or occurrence while percentage refers to the arrangements of the responses in order of their proportion.

The simple percentage method is believed to be straight forward easy to interpret and understand method.

The researcher therefore choose the simple percentage as the method to use.

The formula for percentage is shown as.

% = f/N x 100/1

where f = frequency of respondents response

N = Total Number of response of the sample

100 = Consistency in the percentage of respondents for each item contained in questions.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

 **PRESENTATION ANALYSIS INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Efforts will be made at this stage to present, analyze and interpret the data collected during the field survey. This presentation will be based on the responses from the completed questionnaires. The result of this exercise will be summarized in tabular forms for easy references and analysis. It will also show answers to questions relating to the research questions for this research study. The researcher employed simple percentage in the analysis.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected from the respondents were analyzed in tabular form with simple percentage for easy understanding.

A total of 133 (one hundred and thirty three) questionnaires were distributed and 133 questionnaires were returned.

Question 1

Gender distribution of the respondents.

TABLE I

|  |
| --- |
| **Gender distribution of the respondents** |
| Response | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Male | 77 | 57.9 | 57.9 | 57.9 |
| Female | 56 | 42.1 | 42.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 133 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |

From the above table it shows that 57.9% of the respondents were male while 42.1% of the respondents were female.

Question 2

The positions held by respondents

TABLE II

|  |
| --- |
| **The positions held by respondents** |
| Response | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| **Valid** | Election commissioners  | 37 | 27.8 | 27.8 | 27.8 |
| Adhoc staffs  | 50 | 37.6 | 37.6 | 65.4 |
| PDP members  | 23 | 17.3 | 17.3 | 82.7 |
| APC members | 23 | 17.3 | 17.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 133 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |

 The above tables shown that 37 respondents which represent 27.8% of the respondents are election commissioners, 50 respondents which represents 37.6 % are adhoc staff, 23 respondents which represents 17.3% of the respondents are PDP members, while 23 respondents which represents 17.3% of the respondents are APC members.

**TEST OF HYPOTHESES**

there is no significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state.

**Table III**

|  |
| --- |
| **there is no significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state.** |
| Response  | Observed N | Expected N | Residual |
| Agreed | 40 | 33.3 | 6.8 |
| strongly agreed | 50 | 33.3 | 16.8 |
| Disagreed | 26 | 33.3 | -7.3 |
| strongly disagreed | 17 | 33.3 | -16.3 |
| Total | 133 |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Test Statistics** |
|  | there is no significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state. |
| Chi-Square | 19.331a |
| Df | 3 |
| Asymp. Sig. | .000 |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 33.3. |

Decision rule:

There researcher therefore reject the null hypothesis that state that there is no significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state as the calculated value of 19.331 is greater than the critical value of 7.82

Therefore the alternate hypothesis is accepted that state thatthere is a significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state.

**TEST OF HYPOTHESIS TWO**

INEC does not perform any management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state.

Table V

|  |
| --- |
| **INEC does not perform any management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state.** |
| Response  | Observed N | Expected N | Residual |
| Yes | 73 | 44.3 | 28.7 |
| No | 33 | 44.3 | -11.3 |
| Undecided | 27 | 44.3 | -17.3 |
| Total | 133 |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Test Statistics** |
|  | INEC does not perform any management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state. |
| Chi-Square | 28.211a |
| Df | 2 |
| Asymp. Sig. | .000 |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 44.3. |

Decision rule:

There researcher therefore reject the null hypothesis that state that INEC does not perform any management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state as the calculated value of 28.211 is greater than the critical value of 5.99

Therefore the alternate hypothesis is accepted that state that INEC performs a management role in conducting a free and fair election in kogi state.

**TEST OF HYPOTHESIS THREE**

There was no free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in kogi state.

Table VI

|  |
| --- |
| **There was no free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in kogi state.** |
| Response  | Observed N | Expected N | Residual |
| Yes | 73 | 44.3 | 28.7 |
| No | 33 | 44.3 | -11.3 |
| Undecided | 27 | 44.3 | -17.3 |
| Total | 133 |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Test Statistics** |
|  | There was no free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in kogi state. |
| Chi-Square | 28.211a |
| Df | 2 |
| Asymp. Sig. | .000 |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 44.3. |

Decision rule:

There researcher therefore reject the null hypothesis that state that there was no free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in kogi state as the calculated value of 28.211 is greater than the critical value of 5.99

Therefore the alternate hypothesis is accepted that state that there was free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in Kogi State.

 **CHAPTER FIVE**

 **SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is pertinent to note that this research was aimed at examining the role political parties’ plays in sustaining peace and harmony during general elections in Kogi State, thus the topic “the role of political parties in issues of free and fair election in Nigeria”.

In the preceding chapter, the relevant data collected for this study were presented, critically analyzed and appropriate interpretation given. In this chapter, certain recommendations made which in the opinion of the researcher will be of benefits in addressing the challenges associated with electoral violence in Nigeria.

**5.2 SUMMARY**

This study the role of political parties in issues of free and fair elections in Nigeria with specific focus on Kogi state from functional perspective of political mobilization and education, the conduct of party primaries for the purpose of instilling confidence in the electoral process as well as the fairness of inter-party contest. Thus, the mechanisms for enhancing free and fair elections in the Nigerian state with specific focus on the role of political parties was anchored on the above stated factors.

This study argues that political parties are well placed in enabling functional inputs into the electoral system through political mobilization and education-which would aid electorates to make informed political decisions or through a well-functioning aggregative mechanism that would check dysfunctional politicking.

From the comparative studies done in the literature review of this research so far, it is clear that Party Politics is conceived as political acts and principles directed toward the interests of one political party or its members without reference to the common good. Party politics is therefore mainly for the benefit of the party members. This is even more so where corruption and nepotism are the motivating factors for forming such political parties and seeking elective offices. The first hypothesis concludes thatthere is a significant relationship between political parties and conducting free and fair election in kogi state, while the second hypothesis concluded that there was a free and fair election during the 2011 gubernatorial election in Kogi State. The researcher had no time to argue how valid the second hypothesis was, based on his interview with INEC official from the state.

**5.3 CONCLUSION**

 In Nigeria’s still-fledgling democracy, political parties are important for performing system maintenance functions such as maintaining decorum through the promotion of afree and fair election. Although free and fair election is generally viewed as the process of voting and making such vote count. Yet, the Nigerian Political parties have been high jacked and privatized by money bags who appear in the guise of godfathers and godmothers. This is now a sociological phenomenon so powerful to the extent that they can abrogate, manipulate or subvert the electorates will during elections. As such, there is hardly any level playing field for the electoral politics.

The argument of this research is that democratic activities and processes in the Nigerian state are antithetical to free and fair form of democratic representation because of elitist manipulation which throws-up political leaders that are not true representatives of the people. This no doubt constitute a major challenge to democratic survival in the Nigerian state which could be checked through informed political education on the part of the civil society, the academia and the citizens themselves through experience acquired in political participation that span over a period of time.

The researcher concludes that for party primaries to be free and fair there is need for political parties in the Nigerian state to be restructured in such a way that parties would encompass people of like minds and the aggregative mechanism of the party structure is functional to the extent that party positions are integrative of the people. This could be achieved when parties are people oriented in formation, operation and goal rather than being elitist and excessively monetized in operation.

**5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. INEC needs to explore the use of various platforms to initiate dialogue with relevant stakeholders to generate useful debate. It would also require rigorous sensitization of the electorate around the need to accept the outcome of the vote as the legitimate representation of the aspiration of the majority of Nigerians; while not taking lightly any polling contestations.

2. Nigeria’s government should clearly demarcate the boundaries between government and political party activities. Merging the two confers undue advantages on the ruling party, disproportionately skewing the political playing field against the opposition.

3. The government should also take steps to ensure that all political parties, especially the biggest ones, conduct their electioneering with decorum, based on issues and devoid of foul language and blackmail tactics. The parties should also honor the peace accord to which they willingly subscribed. This requires appealing to their supporters to eschew all forms of violence before, during and after the elections.

4. The Nigerian CSOs could do more to intensify efforts to push for positive reforms in the country’s electoral processes. Regular interventions by the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, a coalition of leading CSOs which includes the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) and Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), among others working on governance and democracy related matters, is particularly noteworthy. Their periodic advocacy activities and media briefings on preparations for and issues relevant to the electoral process should be more sustained. There is also potential for them to intensify voter education for enhanced citizen participation and chances of maintaining peace.

5. Political mobilization and education by political parties should be an ongoing activity which is not restricted to election periods. As a matter of fact, political mobilization and education should encompass a process whereby policy decisions could emanate from the grassroots through party structure as well as a device through which party members are fully aware of governmental decisions, policy alternatives, as well as the reasons why policies should be supported or otherwise.

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