The Conduct Of Elections And Electoral Practices In Nigeria

Being Paper delivered at the NBA Conference in Abuja on 24th August, 2004

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1 Introduction

"Those who make peaceful change impossible, make violent change inevitable."

To a very large extent, elections and electoral practices shape the fate of the modern nation state. The reason for this is not difficult to establish. Elections provide the medium, by which the different interest groups within the modern nation state can stake and resolve their claims to power through peaceful means. Elections therefore determine the manner and methods by which changes in the social order may be brought about. Where this method fails, individuals and groups may be left to their own means – including assassinations, coup detats, revolutions, insurgency and bush wars – to press their claim to power. It is this fact more than any thing else that makes the subject of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria so crucial today. As we are aware, the controversial elections of 1965 produced the coup detat of January 1966. Again the flawed elections of 1983 produced the military coup of December 31, 1983. Finally, Babangida's flawed elections of 1993 produced the Abacha palace coup of that year and paved the way to his memorable dictatorship. As we look now towards 2007 against the background of the failed elections of 2003 and 2004 the question naturally arises as to whether our country can arrive there in one piece or survive it in whatever form thereafter. In order to answer this question or suggest ways in which it can be answered so that we can arrive there, as one country with a renewed faith in the democratic process, there is a need to examine the nature of elections and its place in furthering democracy and development in a bourgeois social order such as ours.

2. Elections, Bourgeois Democracy and Development

Almost everywhere, the enlightened self-interest of the ruling class dictated that autocracy be replaced first by the classical form of democracy and that next, the classical form itself be replaced by its liberal form within the context of representative democracy. This is not to say that members of the ruling class voluntarily, willingly and at their own initiative conceded the right of elections. Even in the Greek city state with which the classical idea of democracy is most closely associated, only free men could participate in the debates and therefore influence the mode of governance of the city. Thus slaves were not allowed to participate in the debates – as the Greek city was divided between the nobility and subjects and freemen and slaves. The emergence of bourgeois society, not only produced struggles to redefine the meaning but also the practice of democracy. From the bourgeois point of view, democracy becomes:

…a political method, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. It is a method by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.. it is the competition for votes that is the distinguishing character of the democratic method.."
Further, democracy ensures:

...meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties, either directly or indirectly, for the major positions of governmental power, a "highly inclusive" level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded, and a level of civil and political liberties – freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organisations – sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation..." (Diamond, 1988:4)

It can be seen that the concept of elections or the vote and the processes associated with it are seen to lie at the heart of a system of representative democracy. The other elements are the guarantee of civil and political liberties and the existence of an institutional arrangement or government whose function it is to maintain the aforementioned elements through, among other things, the rule of law. This is not the place to undertake a critique of the theoretical postulations and hence practical implications and applications of the bourgeois concept of democracy (we have undertaken such a critique elsewhere - Iyai, 1995). What is important is that elections play a crucial role in the bourgeois understanding of democracy and that the stability of the bourgeois order is premised upon the credibility of its elections. Further, this understanding has provided the benchmarks against which democratic and hence electoral practices have been measured in all bourgeois contexts in the world (Dye and Zeigler, 1971).

As an index of the culture of politics in a context, these benchmarks also indicate that the integrity of the electoral process has major implications for the level of economic and social development that are possible or attainable in that context (Fayemi, Jaye and Yeebo, 2003). As Ake (2001: 1-6) has pointed out, that both the failure of development and the failure to put development on the agenda in Africa are largely attributable to political conditions. One of these more salient conditions is the conception of politics as 'warfare' by the politically active segment of the ruling class. The implication of this however is that there is a recursive relationship between political practices as engendered by the political system and development. A political culture that is defined by violence makes development impossible because by its very nature, such a political culture is destructive of the need and motivation for achievement. A culture of elections that is marked by violence and warfare is thus totally anathema to the possibilities of development.

In speaking of elections, it is important that we do not reduce the process to the vote. As Okoye (2003:vii) has pointed out in ‘Do the Votes Count? Final Report of the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria’:

...elections are a complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed on one another. It can be defined as a "formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour. It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. Elections are not necessarily about Election Day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities before, during and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access; it includes campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register; it includes the independence or lack of it of electoral agencies and organs. It includes the liberalization or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of elections.

An examination of the character of elections in Nigeria must thus deal with these issues, not simply in a theoretical sense but more in terms of the way in which they have functioned over the period. It is particularly important in this regard that such an examination deals with not one but all elections that have occurred in the context in order to discover underlying dynamics and thus to be sure that in suggesting the way forward, it deals, not with symptoms but with causes. For this reason we shall examine elections and electoral practices in Nigeria in four phases. These will be:

v Elections in the colonial period
v Elections in the first ears of independence (1960-1965)
v Elections during the years of military rule and autocracy
v Elections under civilian regimes in between the years of military rule and autocracy

3. Elections in the Period of colonial rule

A number of elections were held in Nigeria in the colonial period. These elections began with the legislative councils in Lagos and Calabar from 1922 (Akerele, 2003). The growth of the labour movement and the development of towns led to concessions by colonial authorities that culminated in these city and legislative council elections. By 1938, for example, the Nigerian Youth Movement, an organisation that was hostile to British colonial interests in Lagos in particular and Nigeria in general was able to win three out of the four available seats in the city council elections. In the same year, it also won all three legislative seats in the legislative council elections. Several other elections took place between 1951 and 1959. While the 1951 Regional Legislative elections took place under the Macpherson constitution of the same year, the 1954 elections took place under the new Federal Constitution. Whereas all constitutions up to 1954 limited the right of elections to certain members of the population, the Federal Constitution granted universal adult suffrage.

In the book, ‘British Administration in Nigeria: 1900-1950 – A Nigerian View’, Okonjo has provided a graphic account of the motives for and electoral practices of the period. In the 1951 and subsequent elections for example, the British colonialists worked assiduously to tilt the political scale in favour of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC). Coordinated by Sir Bryan who was to become the Lieutenant Governor and Governor of Northern Nigeria during the crucial run off period to flag independence, these efforts ensured that the genuine pro-democracy forces in the country did not acquire political power. For example, Sir Bryan confessed that in the elections of 1951, he not only helped to prepare NPC's manifesto, slogans and strategies but that “in the case of more than a dozen, I had to hold...
and guide the pen hand, after cajoling from them the names of those for whom they wished to vote”. He also confessed to election manipulations “even in areas where Muslims were in a minority” so that the Northern Peoples’ Congress could win 90% of the votes. Commenting on the 1951 elections and Sir Bryan’s role in it, Okonjo (1974:331) has observed that: “An American scholar has described Sir Bryan’s account of the 1951 elections in Kano over which the latter presided, as ‘revealing as it is obtuse.’ Sir Bryan became, in the last ten years of his Northern Nigeria service ‘the chief pillar of the administrative establishment’ in that part of the country. Under him and his other British associates in power, the defense of the status quo became much more than an official preoccupation. In the face of the threats from within the North represented by such “lunatic fringe” anti-British parties as the Northern Elements Progressive Union and the Middle Zone League, and represented from without by such parties as the Action Group or the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon, the British residents decided to throw their weight in support of the fledging Northern Peoples Congress, the only party in Northern Nigeria dedicated to the preservation of the status quo. The 1951 elections to the regional legislature, conducted under the Macpherson constitution, were conducted with the resident of each province as the chief electoral officer. Sir Bryan was the Resident of Kano province at this time, a province which had to select twenty of the ninety seats of the new Northern House of Assembly”.

This pattern of electoral practices was repeated in the subsequent post 1951 elections. Against the background of the Richards and Macpherson constitutional provisions which stipulated that 50% of the seats in Parliament be reserved for the Northern part of the country, it is not surprising that the Northern People’s Congress assumed control of political power at flag independence in 1960. In effect, the manipulation of the electoral process by the British ensured as Chief Anthony Enahoro (1985:21,22) has succinctly observed, that Nigeria became the only country “in the entire history of the anti-colonial struggles of our time in which those who fought for independence were not those who had the privilege and the historic duty of meeting the challenges of independence…The truth of the matter, which determined efforts to falsify history cannot forever conceal, is that the nationalists who were prepared to work, to fight, to risk, to dare – to die if need be – so that a new and democratic nation might be born, these people lost control of the situation and were displaced or succeeded by those who had remained untouched by the unifying and modernising flames of the new nationalism… When independence came in the fullness of time, neither the goodwill of progressive forces…nor our trade unions, nor our youth could prevent the inevitable course of events when those who were least disposed towards democracy became the official guardians our fledging democracy”.

4 Elections in the first years of independence: 1960 – 1965
Three sets of elections were held in the period from 1960 – 1965. These were the elections in the newly created Midwest Region in February 1964, the Federal elections of December 1964 and the Regional elections of 1965. The prelude to the December 1964 Federal elections was provided by the census exercise and the creeping crisis in the Western Region from 1962 onwards. The census results released in March 1961 had shown that the South had a higher population than the North. As the time of the Federal elections approached, the Balewa NPC government not only cancelled the 1961 census results but also slated a recount for 1963. Then just before the elections in 1964, the new census results were released. The results declared that the North had 55% of the population of the country. For the NCNC which had gone into alliance with UMBC, NEPU and its old adversary, the AG to form the United Progressive Alliance and therefore hoped to win the Federal elections because it anticipated the census results to revalidate the 1961 results, and because it was already in control of virtually three out of the four Regions in the federation, the census figures provided the last straw in a litany of pre-election measures by the NPC government that were aimed at frustrating the opposition. Ademoyega (1981:19) recounts that:

…As the elections approached, the NPC government of the North did not hesitate to frustrate the UPGA candidates in the North, so that many of them could not file in their nomination papers. Hence, before the elections, sixty-seven NPC candidates had been declared elected unopposed. That did not go down well with the UPGA leadership who called for an immediate postponement of the elections. But the Belewa Government rejected the idea of postponement. Thereupon, the UPGA led by Dr. Okpara, the Premier of the Eastern Region, called for a mass boycott of the election by its supporters. Again, the Belewa government ordered the election to go ahead in spite of the boycott. Thus, the elections of December 1964 turned out to be a farce. It was completely boycotted in the Eastern Region, where the NCNC Government used its powers to ensure that no election was held. It was also partly boycotted in the West, North, Mid-West and Lagos, with the effect that the election results lacked credit and were nationally unacceptable. However, while the UPGA rejected them, the NPC and its allies of the NNA, which single-handedly carried out the elections, accepted them. There followed a national stalemate”.

The October 1965 elections into the Regional Government of the West were no less farcical. Although the people clearly rejected the Akintola government at the polls and voted massively for the AG opposition party, “the Akintola government publicly (interfered) with the results of the elections. In very many cases, AG candidates who held certificates that they were duly elected in their constituencies later heard their names mentioned as defeated candidates through governmental news media” (Ademoyega, 1981:21-22). These developments, including the simmering TIV revolt in the Middle Belt, the political impasse at the centre, the resulting mass revolt in the Western Region by the people who felt rightly that they had been cheated at the polls set the stage for the first military coup of January 15, 1966.

5. Elections during the years of military rule and autocracy
The military rulers conducted three elections during their period of misrule. These were (i) the elections of 1979, under the first coming of Obasanjo, the 1992-1993 elections under General Babangida and the 1999 elections under General Abdusalami Abubakar. Commenting on these elections, especially on the first and the last, the EU Election Group, which monitored the 2003 elections has suggested that, ‘the most free, fair and peacefully conducted elections in Nigeria were those in 1959, 1979, 1993 and 1999, and the most chaotic, violent and disputed were those in 1964 and 1983. The reason for this is that the first three were ‘transition’ elections in which the regimes in power and responsible for organising the elections had to hand over power to a democratic civilian regime. So, in 1959 the British colonial regime wanted a smooth transfer of power to Nigerian self-government, in 1979 the military government of
General Obasanjo viewed itself as an interim fixture to ensure stability and then hand over to elected officials, in 1993 a combination of internal and external pressure forced General Babangida to organise the elections and in 1999, after the disastrous rule of General Abacha the military had no political credibility and wanted only to disengage as quickly as possible. In contrast, the other elections can be viewed as potential ‘consolidation’ elections, in which an elected civilian government was responsible for organising elections to hand over power to a successor regime. The failure of these elections to consolidate democracy (each led in fact to disruption and eventually a return to military rule) was due to the reluctance of the incumbent regime to allow a level playing field, in case they lost their grip on power."

Both the assessment of these elections and the reasons advanced for the judgement are greatly at variance with the historical facts, some of which we have already provided. The assessment is also greatly flawed by the assumption that voter behaviour on voting day is indicative of the fairness and peacefulness of elections. The colonial and military regimes were rooted in force and repression. Thus arrangements for voting were also highly militarised. The 1993 elections, for example, produced the 12 2/3 controversy, which the Obasanjo military regime resolved in favour of its interests. The elections of 1992-1993 were frequently delayed, cancelled, postponed and adjusted to produce a result predetermined by the military. In the event that this did not happen, the results of the June 12, 1993 were brazenly annulled by General Babangida on the excuse that the military was uncomfortable with them. The 1999 election results were also predetermined. Acting in concert with neo-colonial and imperialist interests, the dominant coalition within the local ruling class drafted General Obasanjo into a political process that ended with him being declared the winner of the process. All these processes occurred with flawed electoral rules, without legitimate and valid constitutions, with electoral agencies under the firm jackboots of military rulers. Thus it was public knowledge that Professor Henry Nwosu who replaced Prof. Awa as head of Babangida’s electoral agency was brutalised by security agents on account of the fact that he dared in 1993 to announce some of the authentic results. In 1993 as in 1999, the political parties were the creatures of the military despots. They were, as the late Chief Bola Ige characterized them, all leprous fingers on the same leprous hand.

6. Elections under civilian regimes from 1983 onwards

From 1983 onwards, three sets of elections were conducted under the civilian regimes. These were the general elections of 1983 under the Shehu Shagari NPN government, the general elections of 2003 and the local government elections of 2004 under General Obasanjo. In the 1983 elections, the ruling NPN government perpetrated all sorts of electoral atrocities. The voting process, voter registration, and actual votes cast were all grossly distorted. To produce the so-called ‘landslides’, ‘moonslides’ and ‘bandwagon effects’, the order of elections was reversed and voters’ registers inflated. For example, whereas the order of elections provided that the Presidential elections be held last, the NPN government decided that these elections would come first. In Modakeke, a suburb of Ife, voter registration jumped from an original 26,000 voters to 250,000 thus making the voting population there more than the voting population of the whole of Ife. Indeed, at the national level, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) announced that voter registration had increased from 48,499,097 in 1971 to 65,304,818 in 1983. This was in spite of the fact that the 1979 figures had indeed been considered to be highly inflated. FEDECO and the state owned mass media became willing and active accomplices in the electoral frauds perpetrated by the NPN government in power. For example, FEDECO played an active role in deepening the crisis that engulfed such opposition parties as the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP). It also selectively accorded recognition and hence registration to political parties that would weaken the opposition to the NPN government.

The state owned media equally crude partisanship in playing its role. The Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) became, in effect, the campaign mouthpiece of the NPN government as it bandied around slogans that were meant to intimidate the opposition and assure victory for the NPN government in power. The NPN government also intimidated political opponents. Alhaji Shugaba was deported from the country on the ridiculous grounds that he was not a Nigerian. The Nigerian Police was equally used to intimidate the opposition. Thus ‘armoured vehicles were imported into the country for the police shortly before the elections’ (Sagay 1995:23) and were subsequently used by the police to perpetrate massive electoral frauds. Not surprisingly, the results of the elections were rejected by the opposition parties and the ensuing crisis provided the context for the military to stage another coup on December 31, 1983.

The final elections by a ‘civilian government’ were the general elections of 2003 and the Local government elections of 2004. Conducted under the Obasanjo government, these elections (including the various party primaries) will go down in history as the most fraudulent and equal only to a coup detat against the people. All commentaries on the 2003 and 2004 elections except those from the PDP government in power are unanimous in their verdict that all aspects of the elections were fraudulent. The following excerpts from the Report by the Transition Monitoring Group are indicative of the general texture of the 2003 elections:

“...Twenty-nine of the registered political parties that either contested or did not contest the elections have variously rejected the results as announced by the INEC declaring the results as fraudulent. Both Domestic and International Election Observers documented massive irregularities that characterised the elections and refused to endorse the elections as free and fair. Some political parties and their candidates decided to challenge some of the results before the various Election Petition tribunals and have gone ahead to do so while others declared “mass action” to pressure a government without popular mandate to abdicate power.

... It is now historical reality that no electoral instrument in the history of Nigeria has been so challenged and so thoroughly discredited like the electoral Act 2001. Its replacement, the Electoral Act 2002 has also had its own fair share of controversy and nobody can now say with certainty whether the operative law is the Electoral Act 2001 or 2002 Act. What we have is a situation where the political gladiators sought to use the instrumentality of any documents which best served their personal advantage, creating an uncertainty in the electoral process.

... It is self evident that elements within the political class and the different political parties drawing from their experiences during the 1998 voters registration process perfected the art of rigging the 2003 elections. The full import of their actions dawned on the country when INEC on its own excluded millions of names from the voters register. From the report of Domestic election Observers during the
2003 elections, there are so many voters’ cards that are still in the hands of “ghost” and underage voters. Those who sought to corrupt the electoral process used those cards effectively and to their advantage during the three strands of elections conducted by INEC.

... During the elections, the Nigerian people trooped out in large numbers to cast their votes. In fact, during the registration of voters, most state governments threatened residents of their various states with sanctions if they did not go out to register. The Nigerian people trooped out in large numbers to register. They repeated the same feat during the National Assembly and Presidential / Gubernatorial elections. They demonstrated patriotism and resilience. In some states, gunmen tried to chase them away from polling stations. In other states, political thugs simply made away with the ballot boxes and or stuffed the ballot boxes with unlawful votes. Yet again, in some states, “ghost” and under age voters took the centre stage while in others, “community leaders and other leaders of thought” did the voting on behalf of their communities.

... While the voters waited and persevered in the polling stations to cast their votes, the political class and the political parties had different ideas. The voters wanted their votes to determine the winner of elections while the political class wanted to corrupt the process and rig their way into elective offices. Besides the electoral malpractices and irregularities that characterized the elections in some states, other issues combined to undermine the process. The political parties on whose shoulders rested voter education and mobilization simply abandoned the duty to civil society groups and organisations. Party agents had to do the voting on behalf of the voters while in other places, security agents assisted those who could not identify the symbol of the parties they intended to vote for.

... INEC contributed its own fair share of electoral problems. The lack of clearly designated compartments for thumb printing undermined the secrecy of the vote and exposed the voters to the machinations of those that would have preferred “community voting”. INEC also did not make adequate arrangements for the transportation of sensitive election materials to polling stations and to collation centres. Result sheets disappeared and re-appeared in different forms at collateral centres while corrupt party agents simply sold unused ballot papers to the highest bidder. Following the reversal of the process for the order of the elections by INEC, voters deserted the State House of Assembly elections. Thus no real voting took place in these elections although winners emerged from the process…”

These massive electoral frauds so demoralised the public that by 2004 when the Local Government elections took place, the governments in power simply allocated votes to candidates as they wished. All the elections were characterized by threats of, or, actual assassination of political opponents. The security agencies either simply stood by while these crimes were being committed or took active part in facilitating electoral frauds in order to assist the government in power. Thus in many instances, political candidates who did not stand for elections were returned as having won elections. These events were helped by others, notably; multiple, ghost and underage voting, violence, intimidation and harassment, stuffing of ballot boxes, stealing and buying votes, disruption of polls, absence of electoral officers, intimidation of election observers, and justification of rigging by the President, Governors, ministers and party officials. (TMG, 2003).

7 Common Features of Nigerian Elections

As can be seen from this survey of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria over the period, elections in Nigeria have shared a number of common characteristics. First, they have been particularly characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation of political opponents and controversy. The governments in power have had their own designs and used the instruments of the state in penetrating electoral brigandage, thugsbery, violence and warfare. Secondly, while there has been continuity in violence and warfare, there has been lack of continuity in the political organisations through which both violence and warfare have been conducted. Each period has thus produced new political formations reflecting not only the penchant for lack of principle and shifting allegiance among members of the political class but also the total de-ideologisation of the issues on which members of the class were divided into antagonistic camps. For example, the major political parties in the 1951 – 1966 period were the NPC, the NCNC and the AG. Between 1979 and 1983, the major political parties in the field became the NPN, UPN and NPP. Between 1987 and 1993, the members of the political class were herded into the NRC and the SDP. During Abacha’s viara assisted ill-fated self-succession bid, the two herds metamorphosed into the famous “five leprous fingers on the same leprous hand”. Between 1999 and 2003, the five leprous fingers changed majorly into the PDP, AD and the ANPP.

Thirdly, what is striking about this pattern is that lack of continuity in the political platforms used by members of the political class to compete for power is not simply that the names of the platforms keep changing; it is rather that there is simply no pattern to the way in which members of the class change their political allegiance. This situation assumed such tragic proportions in the 2003 elections that an individual politician could and did change party membership three of four times on the same day. Over the years, this shifting political allegiance has meant that there has been no tradition of party building among members of the political class. Fourthly, the sudden shifts and turns in political commitments and orientations have meant that the parties have not been defined by ideological positions that set them apart from each other. And yet, such defining and at the same time limiting ideologies are crucial to the development of a genuine political culture for several reasons. First, they indicate the overall direction of development favoured by the different sections of the political class. They thus enable the electorate to make informed choices. Secondly, they permit reforms within the political parties themselves as the constant interaction between the favoured ideology and reality creates a permanent tension towards change and realignment of the different components of the ideology. In the process, the parties change and become more tuned to the demands of society. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, they prevent the seizure of the centre stage of political action and practice by calculations based on primordial and potentially divisive political orientations. Indeed, one clear consequence of the absence of an ideologically driven political competition among the political elite in Nigeria is the resort to ethnicity as the primary credential for qualifying for the stake to power. The practice not only reinforces primordial divisions; as a result of this fact, it also prevents the emergence of a national consciousness and national identity.

A fourth common denominator of elections and electoral practices is the increasing materialisation of politics. With each succeeding election, the financial stakes are raised to such a level that only those who have previously exercised state power or worked in close collaboration with the state in the process of the primitive accumulation of capital are able to back their political claims. In the 2003
general elections for example, we witnessed the scandalous spectacle where political candidates claimed not only to have budgets but in fact to have expended billions of Naira in the elections. These claims were preceded by comical fund raising activities where political office holders announced contributions to their campaign funds running into billions of Naira. A closer scrutiny of these fund raising events would simply reveal that they were used to announce the sums that the politicians in government house had appropriated from the coffers of the state to fund their elections. These billions were spent in perverting and corrupting all facets of the electoral process including the conscience and hence real choices of the electorate. To legitimise the materialisation of politics, political platforms and candidates were, like commercial banks, required by the ruling political party, using the INEC, to pay huge deposits to the state to guarantee their financial and political fitness to compete in the political process. In this manner, the ruling political elites have sought to exclude in each election, the patriotic and progressive forces from the competition for power.

Generally, and in addition to other observations that may be made, the incontrovertible and overall conclusion that can be drawn from the history of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria is that they have failed to promote the emergence of a democratic culture even within the limited application that it has within a bourgeois social order. Indeed, each set of elections seems to deepen the culture of violence, authoritarianism, abuse of human rights, corruption and crass materialism in Nigeria. Each succeeding election seems to perfect in an even more perverse sense, the abuses that characterised the earlier elections. Thus with each successive election, the ruling elites are not only more and more isolated from the people, they also come to relate with them increasingly through violence, contempt, repression and authoritarianism. Paraphrasing Ake (2001: 6), we can say that with each succeeding election, ‘the dominant faction of the political elite finds itself more and more isolated, increasingly relying on violence (and crass materialism), at war with the rest of society and with rival factions among its own ranks. Political competition increasingly assumes the character of warfare and paves the way for the ascendency of the specialists of violence, the military. The rash of military coups that accompany political competition essentially formalise a reality that is already firmly established. It is not the military that causes military rule in Nigeria by intervening in politics; it is the character of politics that engenders military rule by degenerating into warfare, inevitably propelling the specialists of warfare to lead the role’.

We may also say that if, up till now, a formal military coup has not taken place in the aftermath of the monumental fraud of the 2003 elections, it is not because the pattern we observed above has been broken or that military intervention in politics in Nigeria has become unpalatable as many erroneously believe; it is rather because in the present period, the specialists of warfare and violence have shifted the location for the deployment of tanks and troops from the Presidential Villa and radio stations to polling booths, the offices and homes of human rights and pro-democracy forces, the mansions and homes of their opponents and the supervisory electoral agencies. It is thus not a surprise that retired generals have today lined themselves up in a relay for control of the Nigerian state that they plan to take not only from 1999 to 2015 but also well into the forties and perhaps fifties of the present century. If this plan were to fail, it would be brought about not because credible elections occurred in Nigeria but because of one of two reasons: (i) either because serving generals believed it was their turn to replace the retired generals and assume more directly the mantle of state power, or (ii) the nation’s patriotic and progressive forces finally performed their historical duty and scuttled the plan.

8 Explaining the Failure of the Electoral System in Nigeria

At this point, we may be tempted to ask, what is to be done? How is this fate to be avoided? But asking this question is to run ahead and miss the most important step on the road to finding solutions to the problem. To answer the questions, ‘what is to be done’ and ‘how the impending fate is to be avoided’, we must explore the set of causes or factors that have turned elections in Nigeria into a mutually destructive warfare that threatens the very continuity and viability of the Nigerian state.

In seeking to identify such factors, much of the earlier discussions have pointed to the nature of the political parties, the nature and role of the press, the partisan use of state security agencies by the ruling section of the political elite, the character and action of electoral bodies and agencies, the provisions of electoral rules as contained, for example, in the constitution, and the appetite for power by the specialists of violence and warfare as being responsible for the failure of representative democracy in Nigeria. There is no doubt that these factors have played an important role in the failure of the electoral system in Nigeria. But it needs to be pointed out that these factors are not only causally related; they are themselves determined by other factors such as the historical context of processes of formation of the Nigerian state, the nature and character of the Nigerian state, the nature and character of Nigeria’s ruling class in terms of the political, economic and social values of members of the dominant coalition within the ruling class, the strength of oppositional pro-democracy forces in society and the character of the international economy and politics. To suggest lasting solutions to the failure of representative democracy in Nigeria, there is a need to understand the nature of these forces and their interrelationships. Such an understanding will also prevent us from focusing upon cosmetic solutions and challenge us to exhibit the courage and creativity necessary to deal with the situation.

The Historical Context of State Formation in Nigeria

Okonjo (1974) has provided one of the most compelling accounts of the historical processes of state formation in Nigeria. This account locates the dynamic of the character of politics in the flag independence years in at least two sets of interrelated factors. The first was the deep division and tension between the colonial administrators on the relationship that should exist between the North and the South after the amalgamation of the two protectorates in 1914. The second was the desire of the British to secure and preserve the Nigerian nation state as a safe haven for British economic and political interests in the post-colonial years. To these two, we must add a third dynamic which originated from the interaction between the first two – the failure of the colonialists to produce an indigenous ruling class with the economic credentials needed to support and push its envelope of political power after flag independence in 1960.

On the first point, the tension between the colonial administrators in the North and the Governor General in Lagos centred on the degree to which the North would be allowed to maintain its institutions as a single, monolithic and almost self-autonomous centre of power within British colonial Nigeria. As formulated and originally applied by Lugard, indirect rule came to mean for the British colonialists in the
North, a separate political administration freed from the authority of the Governor General in Lagos. The British colonial residents, Lieutenant – Governors, Governors and Chief Commissioners in the North not only became emotionally attached to this idea, they also came to believe that it was their duty to identify with the interests of the ruling class in the North in order to advance the interests of the latter in a Nigerian federation that included the North. Okonjo (1974: 319) has in fact described the relationship between the British in Northern Nigeria and the Northern ruling class of the period as a ‘passionate love affair’. This passionate love affair led to a situation in 1953 where “a British officer in the Kaduna Secretariat” drafted “the eight-point programme for a common services organisation hastily put up by the leaders of the Northern People’s Congress at the height of a national political crisis”. But the passionate love affair produced more fundamental consequences for the political structure and hence politics of the country.

First, it led to a situation where the North remained a single monolithic political group after 1939 even while the Southern provinces were split into two and the TIVs in the Middle Belt were up in revolt against their subordination to the feudal ruling class in the North. The second fundamental consequence was that, to secure the cooperation of the British political officers in the North and hence of the North to a union with the rest of Nigeria, Sir Bernard Bourdillon who became the Governor General of Nigeria in 1935, proposed in 1942 that the Northern Province should be granted ‘an equal voice or 50% of the seats in any (Nigerian) central legislature’ involving both the Western and Eastern provinces (Okonjo, 1974:310). This guarantee was subsequently written into the Richards constitution of 1946 and formed the basis upon which the subsequent pre-independence elections, including the crucial one of 1959 were held. Okonjo (1972:310) suggests “that practically all the political difficulties which Nigeria has experienced before and after independence has something to do with the fact that one region of the federation could, by virtue of the number of parliamentary seats allocated to it, dominate, dictate to and hold to ransom all the others.” Certainly this factor enabled the NPC to assume power at the centre in 1960; it also enabled the NPC to use that power in deepening the crisis that rocked the Western government in 1962. Finally it enabled the NPC as the government at the centre not only to intervene in the Western Regional elections in 1964 but also to seek to continue in power following the federal elections in December 1965. As we have documented, these elections were massively rigged by the government in power and led not only to massive boycotts and popular revolt but also to the first military coup in Nigeria in January 1966.

Political developments in Nigeria and hence the character of the Nigerian nation state were shaped in the colonial and flag independence years not only by the partisan relationship of the British administration with the ruling class in the North: but also by the specific desires of the British colonialists to preserve Nigeria as a secure and safe location for the transaction and expansion of British interests in the post-colonial years. Indeed, this desire more than anything else explains “the passionate love affair” between the British and the ruling class elements in the North. These ruling class elements in the North were understood by the British colonialists as providing the best guarantees for the preservation of British interests. The pan – Nigerian political activists in the NCCNC of the period such as Herbert Macaulay and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe were deeply resented and feared by the colonialists. The British thus skewed political processes and arrangements, including elections against these forces in favour of the ruling class elements in the North as represented by and in the NPC. The political arrangements – the constitution, the structure of the federation based on divide and rule and the economic arrangements were all designed to preserve the Nigerian nation state as a fertile ground for continued British influence under the control of a trusted local ally. Although ethnic and nationality tensions had existed in these lands prior to their declaration as a formal British colony from 1900 onwards, the system of British government exploited, sharpened and deepened these divisions in order to make the territory more amenable to its rule. The emergence of ethnic consciousness and politics in the years before independence, which was a radical departure from the orientation of nationalist politics as conducted by NCNC in alliance with the labour movement and students in that period, can be traced largely to the efforts of the British colonialists in their relationships with the North and other parts of Nigeria. Today, ethnicity and nationality constitute major factors that are fed into the electoral process and, which therefore also lead, to many of the observed distortions.

The final dynamic which has shaped the nature and character of the Nigerian state and hence its politics resides in the specific manner in which the colonialists produced an indigenous ruling class in Nigeria. While the dominant coalition within this ruling class assumed political power at independence in 1960, it was a class that was, however as a whole proletarianised (Iyayi, 1986a). In essence, the class had or aspired to political power but did not have the economic means to actualise itself as the ruling class in the situation. The efforts to resolve the proletarianisation problem, especially in the flag independence years turned the competition for the control of state power into a do or die affair. This was so because control of state power provided the only access in the situation to the economic resources needed for the primitive accumulation of capital – the process by which a class of capitalists is produced. The continuing looting of state funds by members of the ruling class and other sections of the state officials has been a consequence of this development. But the development has had major implications for the efforts to enthrone representative democracy as the political culture in Nigeria. It has fuelled electoral frauds and electoral violence as state power has become the defining road to accumulation of economic resources. It has also interacted with the other two dynamics to produce Nigeria’s unique brand of warfare politics.

The Nature and Character of the Nigerian State

The character of the state is crucial in defining the nature of politics, democracy and politics within a given polity (Adejumobi, 2000; Joseph, 2003; Buijtenhuijjs, R. and Rijnierse, E., 1993). From our analysis of its historical evolution, the salient features of the Nigerian state should be obvious. These features have also been discussed by many writers and include the fact that it is (i) capitalist, (ii) neo – colonial, (iii) dependent, and (iv) underdeveloped. Other features include the fact that the Nigerian state is highly authoritarian and violent in relation to the Nigerian people and other sections of the political class within the ruling class that are out of control of state power. Neo-colonialism and dependency mean that the independence project has not been completed; that foreign interests and models dominate and dictate the political and economic choices of the Nigerian state and that in situations involving conflict of interests between the Nigerian people and global, international capital, the Nigerian state will act to defend the interests of global capital against those of the Nigerian people (Olorode, 1998).

The neo-colonial and dependent status of the Nigerian state has its roots in history, part of which we have already recounted. However,
This relationship and the ‘apparent’ or ‘perceived’ protection which it offers is partly responsible for the current presence of American military forces and interests in Nigeria and elsewhere. For example, the British government sought to preserve its political and economic arrangements in an independent Nigeria when in 1962 it sought a Defence pact with the NPC Belostra led government. It is also widely believed that the reversal of Gowon’s decision to take the North out of Nigeria following his counter – coup of 1966 was based upon intelligence advice from the British Government. Similarly, it is widely believed that both British and USA intelligence were involved in the assassination of General Murtala Mohammed and in the subsequent reversal of the patriotic course of his government. The Babangida reversal of the Political Bureau’s recommendation for a patriotic course for the country was also based upon pressure from international capital and their home governments. The death of Abacha in 1997 and the murder of Abiola shortly after have also been credited to the handwork of British and USA intelligence. Finally, although widely suspected at the time it has now been confirmed by the accounts of Nigerian politicians who were in exile during the dark years of Abacha’s rule, that General Obasanjo was selected and installed as President of Nigeria by both British and USA intelligence working in collaboration with members of the dominant coalition of Nigeria’s ruling class. These interests have also been involved in maintaining the hold of his government in power. Finally, it is an accepted fact that the global capitalist institutions of the World Bank and IMF have now assumed direct control and management of the Nigerian economy.

The authoritarian and violent nature of the state means that those in control of the state apparatus see themselves as standing above the people (Cabral, 1969); that they do not see the state as deriving its legitimacy from the people; that they believe that the state needs to exercise power through the repeated demonstration of its capacity for violence. The wielders of state power do not therefore understand the meaning of the sovereignty of the people. Attempts by other interest groups in society to create this understanding and persuade the wielders of state power to redefine their basis of legitimacy are defined as oppositional, adversarial terms and as calculated to undermine the security and stability of the social order. In this situation representational politics comes to have limited, or at best symbolic, relevance. The controllers of state power see it as their duty to decide and choose who should be added to their ranks. In elections, deciding and choosing who should be included in the house of power means that those in control of the state can allocate rather than count votes or that if votes are counted the figures can be falsified; that individuals who did not even contest elections can be issued with Victory Certificates and given strategic positions in governance institutions. It means that those in control of state power can show absolute contempt for the sovereignty of the people.

It is within the context of these features of the Nigerian state that we can understand several political processes such as the authoritarian and arbitrary nature of constitution making, the repressive role of security agencies such as the armed forces, the police and state security services not only in 'normal' times but especially during periods when the various sections and fractions of the ruling class are 'allowed' to contest for state power under rules made by the faction in power. It is also within this context that we need to understand the biased and partisan role of state-owned media and of state created electoral bodies and agencies.

**Developments in the International Economy and Politics**

Processes of state formation and the actions of interests groups within the nation state occur within the context of a global political economy. The existing state of affairs within this global political economy is consequential for action in individual nation states (Wallenstein, 1976; Offiong, 1980; Ofonagoro, 1979). Since the early 1990’s when global capitalism with its neo – liberal ideology became the undisputed dominant force in the world, we encounter a paradoxical situation where the growth in the movement for democratisation has been accompanied by more authoritarianism of the state and therefore less freedom for members of the society as a whole (Toyo, 2003; Fasina, 2003). In its Human Development Report for 2001, the United Nations Development Programme not only drew attention to this paradox but also warned that it was getting worse in several countries in the Third and First Worlds. The reason for this paradox is not hard to find. While global capitalism extols the values of freedom and democracy, it also insists on the end of ideology. In effect, while celebrating the freedom of global capital to exploit subordinated classes in all contexts, it seeks to do so in ways that cannot be challenged by the victims of exploitation. To do so is interpreted as being ideological.

Against the background of the dominance of the neo-liberal capitalist ideology in the world, the direct involvement of international capital, British and USA intelligence in the arrangement of economic and political choices in Nigeria and elsewhere has worked to make the question of security and stability of the state a matter of overriding concern. This is because security and stability are the defining requirements for the protection of the activities of international capital in the Third World. In the process, concerns about the democratic ethos of the state recede far into the background. For this reason, even while claiming to be champions of democracy and freedom, transnational capital and the states of the advanced capitalist countries have either supported or installed dictatorship and dictatorial regimes around the world. The situation prevailing today in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, and in the USA itself speaks eloquently to this paradox.

The implication of this in Nigeria for the members of the dominant coalition within the ruling class has been that demands by opposition groups and civil society for human rights, electoral freedom, representative democracy and people centred governance have been interpreted as threats to the security and stability of the social order. State sponsored assassination of political opponents, electoral frauds and violence have been rationalised on these grounds. In the face of these events, international capital and the states of the advanced capitalist countries have either looked the other way when these developments occurred or in fact justified them as the means necessary for achieving and securing ‘development’ in Nigeria. This attitude has had the consequence of further encouraging the ruling class elements in power to take other actions and measures that weaken and subvert the prospects for good governance and democracy in Nigeria. The governments of the advanced capitalist countries and their observers concluded, for example, that the 2003 elections in Nigeria were the most fraudulent ever conducted in Nigeria’s political history. However, these governments did not consider it necessary as they done in the case of Zimbabwe to reject the results of the elections because the current regime in power in Nigeria not only does the bidding of international capital; international capital has become persuaded that it is in the best position to guarantee its profits from its rapacious exploitation of Nigeria, its peoples and resources.

This relationship and the ‘apparent’ or ‘perceived’ protection which it offers is partly responsible for the current presence of American
troops on Nigerian soil without a national debate or parliamentary approval; it also partly explains the arrogance of the Executive in relation to civil society and the Nigerian people as a whole. This arrogance arises from the belief of the members of the dominant coalition within the political class that they need the consent not of the Nigerian people but that of foreign intelligence agencies, their home government and international capital to govern. With this type of orientation, elections become symbolic events against the broader canvass of neo-liberalism and its fanatical emphasis on end of ideology and hypocritical commitment to democracy.

Strength of Progressive Forces in society

Patriotic and progressive forces play a crucial role in resisting oppression and therefore the degree to which members of the ruling class can arbitrarily exercise power in society (Oluwide, 1993; Momoh, 1999; Tokunboh, 1985). In the earlier period of British colonial rule, these progressive forces were limited largely to the working class movement, or more specifically, the wage labourers and the trade unions. From the mid 1930s, nationalists and patriots joined these forces. These forces were largely active in the students’ movement and in the political groups and parties of the period such as the Nigeria Youth Movement, the NCNC and NEPU. After flag independence in 1960, the ranks of the progressive forces were swelled by committed intellectuals in the various professions and in the educational institutions.

Nigeria’s patriotic and progressive forces played a decisive role in ending British colonial rule in Nigeria (Momoh, 1999; Mohammed, 1989). After independence, these forces successfully campaigned against the Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact, the continuation of the military in politics in 1979, 1993 and 1999. These forces also successfully campaigned against the direct hand over of the economy to the World Bank and the IMF through SAP in 1987 and also won the debate on the future political direction of the country during the Babangida yeas of terror. While the members of the political class within the ruling class found reason again and again to collaborate with the military usurpers of power, the patriotic and progressive forces ensured through their actions, that some modicum of respect existed for human rights in the country. Therefore the strength of these forces determined, at every historical moment, the limit of the arbitrary exercise by the state of its illegitimate power.

In recognition of the potential of these forces to alter the status quo in favour of the oppressed, successive regimes repeatedly and continuously targeted them for attack, neutralisation, deradicalisation, and even destruction. Thus, throughout the colonial period, the British waged a continuous war that was at times hidden and at other times open against the progressive forces in Nigerian society (Ake, 2001; Iyayi, 1986b; Oluwide, 1993). The partisan and repressive activities of the colonial rulers ensured that at independence in 1960, these forces were marginalized. After flag independence in 1960, these forces were further continuously repressed. Several of their organisations were banned again and again; many of their leaders were assassinated, detained or dismissed from their jobs. This physical assault went hand in hand with an ideological assault aimed at discrediting not only progressive ideas but to present them either as dangerous and subversive or out of date and inapplicable to our circumstances. This explains the frequent deployment by the state of the armed forces against students, workers, intellectuals, peasants and other groups campaigning for the rights of minorities, true federalism and the need to invest the state with a democratic character.

Partly as a result of this generalised repression, imposed and sometimes self-inflicted divisions among these forces, the weakness of their resource base and the existing general conditions relating to the contest for power, they found it difficult to intervene decisively in determining the course of political choices at those moments when it came to regime change through elections. In effect, those forces against which they had waged their struggles organised and dressed themselves in new robes to emerge as the inheritors of state power. The weakness of the progressive forces has meant that they have been unable to intervene at those historical moments when the rules of political engagement were being enacted or applied in the most bizarre forms in the election process.

The Nature and Character of Nigeria’s Ruling Class

The nature and character of the ruling class is crucial in the determination of the rules for and process of political competition. This character shapes the forms of political organisations or parties that emerge or that are allowed to participate in the competition for state power. In discussing the nature and character of the ruling class a number of factors are important such as the degree of patriotism of the class, the nature of the values that it subscribes to as a class, the degree of its ideological cohesion or, on the other hand, differentiation, its level of tolerance for diverse political views, its degree of maturity and independence, the level of its grounding in the historical challenges confronting the people not only as members of a given nation state but also as members of a larger racial group and humanity as a whole.

There is general agreement that the ruling class in Nigeria has always been fractious, unprincipled, grasping, cowardly and unpatriotic. It is also characterised by ‘arbitrariness, insensitivity, greed, dishonesty, abuse of power’ (Sagay, 1995), the ‘tenacity for office’ (Awolowo, 1974) and two paradoxical complexes: a superiority complex in relation to subordinate interest groups and classes in Nigeria and an inferiority complex in relation to the members of the ruling classes in the advanced capitalist countries. The members of Nigeria’s political class have a total abhorrence for commitment to principle in politics and national life. Thus members of the class are bought and sold, have no loyalty to ideals and seek to be in politics largely to obtain any form of gratification. Members of Nigeria’s ruling class have a proclivity for corruption. Indeed Andreski (1968) has gone as far as argue that African rulers have a naturally strong desire to steal. As he put it, “the newly independent African states provide some of the closest approximations to pure kleptocracy that have been recorded. The use of public funds for private enrichment is the normal and accepted practice in African states and the exceptions are few and inconclusive.” Andreski has been rightly attacked not because his pinpointing of corruption as a major value of the governing class of African rulers is wrong but because he then proceeds, from a decidedly racist point of view, to locate the cause of corruption in the psychology of the African. The proclivity for material gratification through corruption precludes members of the ruling political class from committed political praxis. Indeed, in terms of anomie and unprincipled conduct, members of Nigeria’s political class can be ranked as perhaps the worst in the world. Marx (1978) has noted that the ruling ideas in any age are the ideas of the ruling class in that age. It is thus not surprising that a generalised state of anomie also pervades the Nigerian nation and its politics.
In the face of these long recognised needs, needs that were continuously pressed and articulated by the country’s patriotic and serious citizens, there has always been a continuing and expressed demand for a conference of the peoples of Nigeria to be held. The need for credible elections that reinforce the confidence in the process, better funding, and fair rules of conduct as well as devoting more time to articulating and marketing their programmes and political lines will lead to improvements in some areas of our experience with elections.

For example, more independence for the electoral agency will make it more impartial in mediating between competing political claims; its better funding will lead to improvements in logistics and the handling of the elections. The non-interference of security agencies in the elections will lead to greater freedom in the exercise of voters’ choices and, in fact, assure those interests groups that are out of power that they can invest greater trust and legitimacy in Nigeria. All these and more reforms are desired and necessary for the survival of the social order, its direct beneficiaries and the nation as a whole.

Unfortunately, however, though necessary and desirable, these reforms cannot and will never be achieved until there are fundamental changes in the set of factors that we have already reviewed and which provide the background for electoral mediation, processes, rules and practices. Thus it would be wishful thinking for us to expect that INEC can be made independent or more independent by a dominant political elite that practices politics as warfare, that privatises state power when it captures it, operates on the basis of ethnic identity and sees opposition as an enemy that must be destroyed. INEC will or may become better funded but such better funding will be related to the need for INEC to do better the bidding of that section of the ruling class in control of state power.

In the course of preparing this paper, I had cause to go over several publications that were made over a period going back to the colonial period. I was struck as I went through these papers by the fact that the issues that have divided the country since the beginning of its founding have not changed and that the remedies prescribed and adopted by the ruling class in addressing these issues have also not changed. The need for credible elections that reinforce the beliefs of the populace in the social order has always been one of such issues. The need too for Nigeria to become a truly independent nation, whose leaders are inspired by the need to serve Nigerians rather than foreign masters, has always been on the table. The need for a united, strong and indissoluble Nigerian state, the strength of the progressive forces in Nigerian society and the nature and character of the Nigerian ruling class have served to determine the character of Nigeria’s politics and its elections. They have determined the nature of the rules for political engagement, the political platforms mounted for appropriating power, and the political practices of members of the class. Thus to answer the question of what has to be done to alter the character of politics and elections in Nigeria, action needs to be taken on this set of determining factors.

10 What is to be Done?

In response to the crisis of representative democracy as exemplified by the chronic failure of the electoral system in Nigeria, various individuals and groups have, over time, proposed numerous solutions (Mahadi, A., Kwanashie, G. A., and Yakubu, M., 1994; Olorode, O. 1998; Mahadi, A. and Kwanashie, G., 1998; Fashina, O. 1998; Elaigwu I. 2000; Onimode, B. 1999; Osuntokun, A. 2000; Soremekun, K. 2000). The national electoral body, for instance, especially in the aftermath of the 2003 elections has called for its greater independence and better funding. The Transition Monitoring Group as well as the European group of observers that monitored the 2003 elections have also called for various reforms that have included specific recommendations on the INEC, the use of security forces, conduct of the political parties, the programmes of the parties, the electoral laws, and timing as well as sequencing of the elections. There is no doubt that working with and implementing some of these recommendations will lead to improvements in some areas of our experience with elections.
progressive forces, the different sections of Nigeria’s ruling class lined themselves up behind their different foreign masters or which ever as in the present period, became the dominant foreign master, and with cudgels supplied these masters and others locally made descended on their own people not only with a vengeance but also without mercy. This has happened irrespective of whichever section of the ruling class was in control of the power of the state apparatus. Thus it has not mattered whether the military wing of the ruling class was in power or whether it was the Northern, the Southern or the minority wing of the ruling class that was in power.

One of the results of the constant beating down of the Nigerian people is the system of fraudulent elections. But it would be a mistake to isolate elections and to think that by taking action on this issue alone, the nation including its elections will be cured. The disgrace of Nigerian elections is only part of and is inter woven with our disgrace in other areas. Thus whether we take the area of sports, the comfort and safety of our roads, the size of our dreams in education, the health in our hospitals, the security in our homes and on our streets, the quality of the products we say we manufacture, the amount of light in the electricity bulbs in our houses, the handshakes we seek to make within and across our borders and the rulers we use for measuring the value of our lives, we find nothing but disgrace, failure, monumental frauds, irresponsibility and a total, appalling absence of consciousness or sense of history on the part of our rulers.

I am convinced, based upon the evidence of Nigeria’s political and economic history that the road from today to 2007 and beyond for a strong, united, and democratic Nigeria even within the limited bourgeois understanding and application of democracy has to lie in a process and set of actions whose goal must constitute a radical departure from the existing state of affairs. Indeed, I want to state that nothing short of a revolution is required. The goals of such a revolution must include:

1. The completion of the Nigerian independence project
2. The subordination of the Nigerian state, the ruling class in general and the political class in particular to the will and sovereignty of the Nigerian people
3. The creation of a new political class whose defining values will support both democracy and development in Nigeria
4. The creation of a politics that is values driven and therefore truly competitive; that enables the separation between interest groups and their political platforms on the basis of their defining ideologies and hence programmes
5. The creation of conditions of genuine equality and a shared sense of collective ownership of the Nigerian project among all classes, nationality and ethnic groups within the Nigerian nation state

I am convinced that it is only within the framework of this sort of radical change that we can begin meaningfully to address the question of righting the historical and current wrongs in our electoral processes, practices and results. I am also persuaded to come to this conclusion by the experience of other countries. For example, there is now general agreement that the current progress being made in building a democratic culture in Ghana, a culture, which has also resulted in a higher pace of economic and social development for Ghana as compared with many other countries in Africa including Nigeria, has been made possible because of Rawlings ’second coming’ which partially cleaned the Aegean stables of Ghanaian politics. Also reviewing the East Asian economic miracle, the World Bank in 1993 maintained that the miracle was made possible because there ‘was a de facto social compact made among the elites and between the elites and the people. First, leaders had to convince economic elites to support pro-growth policies. Then they had to persuade the elites to share the benefits of growth with the middle class and the poor, the leaders had to show them that they would indeed benefit from future growth’ (Ake, 2001:156). This social compact was constructed on the canvass of a number of values to which the East Asian elites collectively subscribed. These included accountability, transparency, the rule of law and negotiated consensus. The new context of the social compact and the supporting value system constituted a radical departure from the old East Asian society.

I want to emphasise that attaining the goals as I have outlined them cannot be left to members of the current political class. This is because they constitute the greatest impediment to any change that would save the Nigerian nation state from fulfilling the prophecy in the ‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’. Like the French ruling class in the period of Louis XIV, the Nigerian ruling class has learnt nothing and forgotten everything in its ninety odd years history. This history shows that the Nigerian ruling class of today cannot be reformed; and that that the nation needs to be saved not only from it but also that this class needs to be saved from itself.

To attain the desired goals therefore, there has to be and foremost, a realignment of the political forces in the country. All patriotic and progressive forces must come together on a common platform, a platform whose slogan should be ‘To Defend and Save Nigeria’. In terms of party politics, several of these forces are today splintered across the different political parties. Also, in terms of civil society, many of these forces are organised around different NGOs, professional associations and trade union groups. Some of these forces are also to be found in the executive, the judiciary, the legislature, the bureaucracy, and in the security and armed forces. To create a common platform, consultations must be coordinated between these scattered forces by way of meetings and conferences. This patriotic platform must then engage members of the current political class using all just means. This task is urgent and needs to be embarked upon without delay if the crooked road currently being constructed towards 2007 by the political class is to be straightened in time to prevent it from leading the nation to disaster.

11 Conclusions

Over the past many years, and especially from 2002 when the prospect of the 2003 elections emerged on the horizon, many voices expressed great hopes that given the historical experiences of the past, the incumbent governments in power would work to ensure that the elections would be conducted in such a way that they would lead to a strengthening of the prospects of representative democracy in Nigeria. The NBA was one of such voices as was the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). In the NBA conference that took place on the subject in Sheraton in 2003, I expressed the contrasting view that what was unfolding would be a repeat of history and that the members of the dominant coalition within the ruling class would foist a civilian coup on the
The history of elections and electoral practices show conclusively that representative democracy of even the bourgeois variety has failed in Nigeria. This history also shows that this failure cannot be reversed by simply tinkling with the process of elections, the behaviour and powers of electoral bodies and the like. To have any meaningful change in these areas, a proper Nigerian constitution is required. It would also be wishful thinking to assume that what the military handed down in 1999 with the preamble, ‘We the people of Nigeria’ is indeed a constitution by the people of Nigeria. However, to have a proper Nigerian constitution, there is need for a fundamental change in the political, economic and social values, attitudes and orientations of members of the dominant coalition within Nigeria’s ruling class in particular and the ruling class in general. Today, there appears to be no compelling reasons to believe that the values, attitudes and orientations will change either in the near, or indeed, much farther into the future.

Some groups, seduced by the reformist philosophy of a globalising neo-liberalism in the Third World constantly caution patience on the part of the subordinated groups in society. The general hope which these groups try to hold out to the people in Nigeria, is that given time, the ruling class will mend its ways and that Nigeria will somehow, ultimately get it right. This hope is as dangerous as it is false. The Nigerian ruling class will not mend its ways unless it is compelled to do so. And that compulsion has to apply to those who currently constitute the class because the sweet smell of looting and power is so strong for them that like wax, it has totally sealed their ears and blinded their eyes.

A major departure is therefore required. That departure must lead to a change of guards and a change of course. If you should ask me how that change of guards and change of course is to be brought about, I will answer that while many roads are possible, the choice of the appropriate road has to be a matter for the collective wisdom of all the patriotic and progressive forces in Nigerian society, among which fortunately, your association, the NBA is one today. But one fact is clear and indisputable. With all its historical baggage, total ineptitude, lunatic greed, prideful shamelessness and leprous treachery, the current version of the Nigerian ruling class is doomed. The Nigerian people, led by its patriotic and progressive forces have the historical responsibility of removing it and saving the Nigerian nation. We see this conference by a patriotic NBA as a contribution to the efforts required in the long road to social justice, true freedom and genuine democracy in our country.

Thank you.

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Therefore, a body to conduct the election known as electoral commission should be made to be independent and non-purism. Thirdly, it analyses the problems and equally provide suggestions to enhance the future conduct of elections in Nigeria. Finally, it casts French light on the positive and negative impact of secret ballot system on Nigeria.

1.5 HYPOTHESES

Few hypotheses are adapted to the questions already posed. The history of the electoral commissions/ bodies in Nigeria can be traced back to the establishment of the first post-independence electoral commission in Nigeria, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), in 1960. Several electoral bodies have been set up after FEC to conduct elections in Nigeria. Here is a list of all the electoral commissions in Nigeria, their active years, chairmen and as well as the elections they conducted. Electoral Commission | Date | Chairmen | Election(s) Conducted


2. Federal ...