PARTY POLITICS, PASSIVE STAKEHOLDERS AND VENGEFUL GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

Mike Opeyemi Omilusi¹

Introduction

Two months before the July 2018 governorship election in Ekiti State, Nigeria, precisely after the emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, the social media, local TV and radio stations and various informal discussions were already awash with an unusual "sloganeering" by APC members and "sympathizers", calling for a rehash of "the 2014 free and fair election" model believed to have been invented and choreographed by the then Federal Government for the victory of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) governorship candidate. This was a thinly-masked euphemism for a seemingly settled intention to assert the "federal might"² to deal with the opposition as allegedly done against the then incumbent APC government in the state in 2014. Indeed, the use of security agencies to intimidate and arrest opposition members and so-called photochromic technology³ — *in printing the ballot paper and the quality of the indelible ink* — to manipulate the outcome of voting — had been alleged in the 2014 election. Four years

¹ Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University. Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. E-mail: water-mike2003@yahoo.co.uk. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7201-9099>

² Federal Might, in Nigeria's political lexicon, depicts a case of employing apparatus of government at the centre, including financial resources and security, to influence the election outcome against opposition parties.

³ This was comprehensively explored in my previous work and considered alien to the country's electoral democracy while its authenticity has been questioned by curious observers (Omilusi 2016, 124). The allegation has not been proven by any technological or legal mechanism till date.

later, political gladiators were up in arms to slug it out in a contest that appeared to be a litmus test of not merely the popularity and acceptability of local politicians but also the prospects of the Buhari presidency ahead of the 2019 general elections.

It was expected that the APC would want to use Ekiti State to strengthen its chances ahead of the presidential election, but more compelling was the view that the President Muhammadu Buhari was eager to thwart the wish of incumbent Governor Ayodele Fayose of Ekiti State to retain the PDP's control of the affairs of the state (Adeoye 2018). In a consolidating democracy with a powerful executive such as Nigeria's, mid-term governorship elections obviously shed light on the extent to which a sitting president is willing to use 'federal might' or to tip the electoral scale in favour of his party, as was widely reported to have happened in the 2014 Ekiti State election. The governorship poll was, therefore, viewed by some people as the battlefield for a 'proxy war' between the President and the Ekiti State Governor. This means that, like with other mid-term governorship elections, the Ekiti polls provided an early indication of essential factors which could determine the conduct and outcome of the subsequent presidential race.

This study interrogates the 2018 Ekiti governorship election as a window to peep into the ruling party/opposition muscle-flexing in a stiff political contest and into the behind-the-scene engagements of some passive stakeholders⁴ in Nigeria's electoral politics. Can the so-called stakeholders be identified as the real drivers of democratic regime change in Ekiti? Are there other external variables impinging on the voters' choice of party or candidate? Are the variables mutually exclusive or complementary? Indeed, what is the underlying power structure that determines electoral outcomes in Ekiti? This study has the ambition to set the stage for the broader inquiry that is needed to find answers to these overarching research questions. Through the use of an analytic narrative and with the understanding of the "electoral model" of democratization as a technique of contemporary regime change, this work reveals that the Ekiti electorate is often influenced by the choices and strategies of different significant political actors and that the vigorous electioneering activities of these actors who seize the electioneering period to exploit voter vulnerability for mobilization and voting constitute a dominant feature of Ekiti political behaviour.

⁴ I am being particular about the civil servants, academics, media, security agents and civil society practitioners who, apart from their professed or statutory public engagements, are also partisanly involved in determining the outcome of the election.

Motivation and Concerns

The 2018 governorship election in Ekiti State presented an interesting opportunity for further analysis of electoral democracy. It attracted significant interest because of the anticipated keen contest expected from the major contending political parties and candidates, as well as concern about election-related violence. Even though the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) assured Ekiti people that it would ensure that the July 14 governorship election was conducted in a most transparent and credible manner (see *This Day*, May 19, 2018, 7), many sceptics still entertained fear, notably when the tempo of political activities in the state increased just as cases of assassination, destruction of campaign materials and violent rallies began to erupt. The hate speech campaign and the unfathomable level of propaganda in which party members were at loggerheads on social media were unprecedented in the state. Thus, the deafening shenanigans and boastful rhetoric that attended the election's prospects and outcomes served as a suitable barometer for speculating on the direction of the 2019 election.

Apart from the visible party members and political gladiators, there were other significant actors whose activities shaped the electoral process. This study is, therefore, guided by an overriding question of what impact some passive stakeholders and anticipatory external influence, coded in federal might, generally had on the electoral outcome. In interrogating this, the researcher was interested more in how the interface of peoples' resolute in making political consensus and intervening variables could make or mar an election in a homogeneous community like Ekiti. As a researcher, however, his initial fear was how to maintain neutrality in accordance with research ethics in an election where he was formally and clandestinely multi-tasked. The other concern was for the stakeholders (hereafter referred to as informants) not to portray him as a spy in the eventual publication of this study even though specific names are not mentioned. Overall, one of the main arguments of this study is that irrespective of projected non-partisanship, their (passive stakeholders) impact on politics and society in the current democratic period cannot be underestimated. Also, the process of selection of candidates (and their presentation) by the voters had underpinnings in other factors including economic value, bandwagon effect and personal benefits.

Figure 1: Ekiti Map⁵

Methodology/Study Area

The study adopts the qualitative method of generating data. It employs the participant-observer method of data gathering. In some instances, the evidence for this study drew on *impromptu*, informal focus group discussions (FGDs), one-on-one chats and in-house activities of the *ad hoc* groups to which the researcher belonged. In a separate research with other colleagues, the researcher participated in the party primaries of three political parties while gathering data from party delegates. He also relied essentially, via media tracking, on Facebook, to extract posts by politicians and party sympathizers, particularly between May 8 and July 13, 2018. The evidence on which this study makes its most authoritative submission is primarily sourced from different key informants, including voters, politicians, media correspondents, security agents, academics, members of civil society groups and election observers.

Objectives of the Study

As a researcher with previous experience of working with civil society groups, policymakers and politicians in the state, it is realized that a combination of social, political, economic, and historical factors determine electoral consensus among voters in Ekiti, seemingly reinforcing their homogeneity at that level of collective decision-making. The objectives of the current study,

⁵ Ekiti State is in the Southwest geo-political zone of Nigeria, with Ado Ekiti as the state capital. The state was created on October 1, 1996, from the old Ondo State. It comprises 16 local government areas.

therefore, are to (1) examine the nature of electioneering within the context of the ruling party/opposition muscle-flexing in a political contest; (2) interrogate how the electoral power dynamics and relationships between Ekiti voters and political gladiators (elites) played out during the election; (3) explore the underlying power structure and socio-political factors that determine electoral outcomes in Ekiti; (4) examine the potency or otherwise of behind-the-scene engagements of some identified passive stakeholders as drivers of regime change in Ekiti electoral politics; (5) determine how mutually exclusive or complementary the external variables and Ekiti voters' *orchestrated consensus* were in the 2018 election.

The Nature and Nuances of a Vengeful Campaign: The APC Spiteful Comparison

Leaders of the two dominant political parties underscored the strategic importance of the Ekiti election. At a rally in Ado Ekiti, leaders of the PDP boasted that the defeat of the APC in 2019 would begin at the Ekiti polls (Oluwole 2018). Like previous electioneering campaigns devoid of issues and contestation of ideas, the two most visible parties resorted to propaganda and outright falsehood to convince the electorate. It was a vitriolic campaign from the very blast of the whistle. The tempo of campaigns stretched political ties to the limit. Besides the regular campaigns of promises, the gladiators resorted to outright blackmail and character assassination to paint their opponents black. The allegations and counter-allegations were well balanced across the lines. For the All Progressives Congress, (APC), the July 14 gubernatorial election in Ekiti was like the epic battle of two bitter, ancient football rivals (Akinsuyi 2018). As aptly captured by Alamu (2018a, 3):

Right from the beginning, the Fayemi campaign was projected as a grudge match with the governor-elect himself famously being quoted as saying that Fayose would be caged on Election Day. Looming in the background was an unforgiving presidency very much embarrassed not to say embittered by Fayose's endless taunts and often ill-bred tirades.

Though Fayose was not directly contesting the governorship election, the governor did not cloak his avowed interest in making sure that his deputy, Kolapo Olusola, succeeded him (Lashore 2018). Many political observers believe that the stage was set for an epic battle because of the belief among

the APC members that the 2014 governorship election in which Ayo Fayose defeated incumbent Fayemi was manipulated by then PDP Federal Government in favour of its candidate and that the 2018 exercise was payback time (Bello 2018).

Put differently, it meant: whatever Federal Might the PDP central government deployed to Ekiti to record that unbelievable victory (in all the 16 local government areas) against a sitting APC governor should be returned to that same Ekiti by the current APC central government (Nwosu 2018). For instance, observers alleged that the presence of the Minister of Defence, Mansur Dan-Ali in the National Campaign Council for the Ekiti governorship election was aimed at using the military to coerce, harass and intimidate the electorate and, ultimately, rig the election in favour of the ruling party. The same thing applied to the Minister of Interior who superintends over the Police, Para-military and security agencies.

There were fears that the not-so-cordial relationship between Fayose and President Muhammadu Buhari on the country's political developments may have prepared the ground for the so-called powerful cabal at the presidency to use the election to take their pound of flesh from the Ekiti governor (Bello 2018). Of a fact, some of the politicians in the state described the 2019 contest as "the bigger picture", contending that "the 2018 election in Ekiti would set the tone for what would eventually play out in the state in the 2019 general election" (Egbas 2018, 12). On Saturday, April 14, 2018, Fayemi took over Ado Ekiti and told the surging crowd on the streets that he forgot something in the government house that only he could retrieve. According to the then-candidate, "We will use local, state and federal power to take over Ekiti from a rapacious government being run by brigands in Ekiti" (Egbas 2018, 15).

As a matter of fact, the foot soldiers of various camps engaged in whatever means (right or wrong) to market and promote their principals, including personal attacks. It is important to stress that social media offer massive potential for freedom of expression, and this was maximally explored in the Ekiti election. Traditional posters were complemented by modern websites; potential voters were contacted through Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Because it is far easier to more precisely target potential voters with information online, either based on demographics, geography or associations or behaviour, party members and sympathizers concentrated more on social media. However, rather than promoting their candidates based on identifiable manifestos, many resorted to hate speech or what I referred to as vengeful campaign (being the focus of this study) to spite or denigrate opponents. Below are the captured campaign messages from *Facebook* between May 8 and July 13, 2018:

Table 1: campaign messages from facebook (May-July, 2018)

Bouuda Ayo Fayose, Olusola Kolapo Eleha, Peoples Destructive Party, Very Close to enter Red Sea of Ekiti Politics, July 14 stands for JKF/OBE

Just like in 2014, tell Fayose that we shall use Police and Soldiers in this election.

(Niyi Adebayo, former governor at APC rally on June 19)

Exactly four years ago today, Politicians sympathetic to APC cause were intimidated, harassed and Detained!

July 14 will be a return Match!!!

#Ekiti2018

Let the coward engage all the civil servants, artisans, okada riders today, he can't on election day. This is the end of a terror reigns in Ekiti. *JKF leekan si*

A governor that brought violence that almost took the life of Prince Adeyeye and Olubolade during primary is now placing a curse on who will bring violence to Ekiti during the election, why is he afraid of himself? It's Karma, what you do to people will be done unto you Mr dictator. Run from pillar to pole, cry from morning till the following morning, you're a goner already, your game is over. *JKF legbegbe, JKF leekan si.*

..If you think it was right in 2014, it is hypocritical to condemn it in 2018

Oshoko should know that a new Sheriff is in town, his name is Adam Oshiomhole... A veteran in the act of rough play.

What goes around, comes around. Back in 2014, Fayemi was also teargassed and heaven did not fall.

...In 2014, you were comfortable with soldiers, DSS and Mobile Police, but now, you are not. You can leave Ekiti!

...Just like the Ekiti 2014 governorship election, this one too shall be free, fair and peaceful. Nobody should be afraid of peacekeepers pls!

...Ekiti election practical is next week Saturday, imminent surprise looms. PDP set to meet their Waterloo

..It would be an injustice to see Army Personnel at my Polling unit in 2014 and not to see them in 2018..#I need soldiers#

...Revenge is always the sweetest

...2014 was for the thieves, 2018 is for the owners...Oshiomhole

Source: Compiled by the author.

The election was as intensely personal, as it was deeply polarising. Contextually, there was a measure of desperation on the part of the major combatants, partly because the APC required a victorious election to debunk the growing impression that it had failed to grapple with governance problems and that voters are ready to throw it out at the earliest opportunity (Olukotun 2018). Fayose and the PDP also fought what they considered to be the battle of their lives, partly because the party was eager to show that it had morphed into a serious alternative to the ruling APC and to flash the possibility of regaining power at the centre in 2019 (Olukotun 2018). On a general note, however, while the PDP premised its campaign on "Continuity", pleading with people to vote for Olusola in order to continue with the "good works of Fayose", the APC maintained that Ekiti would use the election of July 14 to "reject Continuity of poverty, hunger, maladministration and bad governance" (Adeyemi 2018, 7).

Voting for the Devil you Know? The Cliché of *I-prefer-some-one-who owes-me-to-the-one-who-will-sack-me*

As several people have argued, fake news is not new, but what is new is its scale and participatory nature. It was, therefore, not surprising that politicians deployed propaganda, using persuasive allegations, messages, ideas, opinions, statements, accusations and exaggerations with the primary purpose of influencing, and, if possible, manipulating, the minds and emotions of the public or of those at which they are directed. The PDP counter-messages and propaganda or outright fake news readily encapsulated this assertion. For many of its supporters and members, it was a stratagem calculated to win more sympathy votes particularly among the civil servants and undecided voters — if any — at that material time.

Ayodele Fayose once declared that his performance would make the victory of his Deputy, Kolapo Olusola, an easy accomplishment in the July 14 governorship election (Ojomoyela 2018). He had framed it as a contest between good and evil, as a test of strength and power and will between himself and President Muhammadu Buhari, between the APC and the PDP, and finally between himself and Fayemi (Dare 2018). Weeks before Election Day, Fayose's well-oiled propaganda machinery had asserted over and over that the poll would be rigged by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the benefit of the ruling APC and the Federal Government (Dare 2018). Fayose alleged that the APC had plans to engage students of

the Federal University at Ado Ekiti as *ad hoc* staff with the main purpose of using them to rig the election. He called on the international community to intervene to ensure that the election was not rigged (Menas Associates 2018). He even told a visiting official of the United States Consulate, Lagos, Osman Tat, of plans by the All Progressives Congress-led Federal Government to use federal might to rig the election:

They are planning to do this because they know that in a transparent and credible election, the APC cannot win in Ekiti State. We are popular and our party, the Peoples Democratic Party, is popular because of our performance in government and my brand of politics (Vanguard 2018, 6).

That Dr Fayemi would sack teachers and workers if elected into office or that *okada* would be banned from operating in the state if Fayemi became governor reverberated among supporters of the PDP candidate and sent fear in the minds of the target groups. These alarmist claims by PDP left the APC with the huge task of reassuring workers, teachers and *okada riders* that their jobs were safe with Dr Fayemi in the saddle (Oluwole 2018). Some people thought that Fayemi lost the 2014 election partly because of the controversial competency test his administration intended for civil servants. The leaders of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) and the organized labour rose against Fayemi over the policy as they were of the view that the government intended to use the test to prune down the workforce.

The issue became a sing-song among the civil servants, especially teachers and local government workers, in the build-up to the election. The propaganda machinery was substantially oiled by the PDP campaign organization that had capitalized on this segment of the voters to coast home to victory. At a point, the Association of Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools in an online message to members directed all teachers to submit their names, voter cards, phone numbers and accounts numbers to their zonal chairmen as conditions for the approval of their running grants (The Eagle Online 2018). In early July, the DSS, acting on a tip-off, swooped on Olaoluwa Grammar School, Ado Ekiti and arrested three teachers who were alleged to be collecting PVCs from teachers (Ojomoyela 2018).

Expectedly, Fayemi lampooned Fayose for owing core civil servants, local government workers and teachers between five and nine months salaries, expressing regret that no worker had collected salaries meant for the year (2018). He said it was an act of irresponsibility and insincerity for the

governor to be calling himself a friend of civil servants and teachers and still owing them arrears of salaries despite getting financial reliefs from the Federal Government (Ani 2018). Fayemi affirmed that he never sacked a single worker but engaged doctors, teachers, civil servants and moved teachers in local government to where they could do better professionally to advance their careers.

The state government had sought to pre-empt the former Minister of Mines and Steel Development's governorship ambition, when it initiated a probe of his tenure as governor of the state, raising some allegations for which a report was issued, indicting and banning him from holding public office for ten years. Although this has become a matter for legal contention, the engagement and efforts by the Fayemi campaign to wipe off the smear from this singular attack from the Fayose continuity group had been enervating (Vista Post Nigeria 2018). Mr. Fayose also tried to sow the seed of discord between the APC and the people of Ekiti, accusing the APC of withholding funds meant to pay the salaries of workers. He had always boasted that he would not leave office owing a single Ekiti worker. When it became evident that paying all outstanding salaries was going to be difficult, he had offered the excuse of the "frustration" caused by the federal government in not releasing the funds to his administration.

The fear that the state's anti-open grazing law could be abolished and Ekiti land awarded as a cattle colony to herdsmen was also smuggled into the narrative against the APC candidate; thus portraying Fayemi as a Buhari loyalist that would most likely convert Ekiti's ancestral lands into cattle colony for herdsmen.

Passive Stakeholders and Behind-the-Scene-Critical Engagements

The quality of participatory politics and democracy might seem to be on the retreat globally, in North and South, in what has been called a "democratic deficit" or a "democratic recession" (Friedman 2008). Usually, election stakeholders include political parties, the elections management body, the civil society, elections observers drawn from various institutions, the media and the government. This study beams its searchlight on some passive election stakeholders. Of particular importance are the civil servants, partisan academics, civil society organizations, electors, the media and the security agencies.

Civil Servants

The 50,000-strong workforce on the payroll of the Ekiti State government became a crucial deciding factor in the election. Consequently, a few weeks to the election, the civil servants became "beautiful brides" sought by all politicians. Promises and assurances of improving on the welfare of workers, prompt payment of salaries and allowances, training and retraining of workers, were made (Adeyemi 2018). Indeed, the expected block vote that could decide the election was attributed to that of the civil servants because they usually decide where the pendulum swings in Ekiti as manifested in the 2014 governorship poll. There was an *Osoko Mass Movement* WhatsApp platform comprising teachers, local government staff and sundry others. Some teachers were arm-twisted into joining the group. Many of my informants did not hide their preference for the PDP candidate, and they might have influenced their dependent relatives to vote for him. "At least, the devil I know is better than the angel I don't know", one of them told this researcher. As previously alluded to, while Fayemi was in office, there was a Needs Assessment Test he wanted teachers of public schools to partake in which did not go down well with them. He also introduced examination as a condition for promoting civil servants. This forms the basis of their rejecting his re-election in 2014 and resentment to his second attempt. One trending phenomenon in Ekiti was that, often, no one could differentiate politicians from civil servants as many of the latter openly canvass and mobilize for parties while a few privileged ones fund local party meetings.

Security Agencies

One area that attracted considerable interest was around the participation of security agencies, particularly the armed forces. Even though the role of armed forces and their influence in democratic settings has continued to raise concern, their involvement during elections is always assessed with mixed-feelings by the general public. The effectiveness of the security forces is significant as it often plays a role in how responses to elections' outcomes are managed. In Nigeria, as observed over the years, security agencies who are supposed to maintain law and order during elections are now ominously partisan. For the 2018 election in Ekiti, police deployed 30,000 operatives, two helicopters and 250 patrol vehicles, including five Armoured Personnel Carriers.

In some polling units visited, security agents colluded with politicians/party agents who openly distributed cash to voters to sway them to

their side. At a particular unit in Ado Ekiti where I interacted with some police officers, their indifference to vote-buying was ominous. One actually told me he was there only to "maintain security of voters and INEC materials and nothing more". Even when the ballot papers were snatched and torn by an overzealous party member during counting, they explained their helplessness with the fact that they were not armed for the exercise. One of my informants (a top security officer) alluded to the fact that the two dominant parties made financial assistance available to security agencies at different levels of authority/outfit considered more patronizing for possible "favour" during an election. A report had it that "in specific locations in the state considered to be PDP strongholds, a generous deployment of soldiers, many of them ditching the army camouflage, took pleasure in intimidating the electorate" (Soyombo 2018, 23).

Media

During the election process, the media remained at the forefront of presenting different opinions — leading newspapers, television and radio stations all presented different views, and carried opinions from political figures across the spectrum. The local radio stations were very often parochial. The state-owned radio and one private radio in the state played extremely partisan politics while hate speech almost became a daily menu with which they fed listeners. Because the residents/voters were addicted to radio programmes, it had always been a source of *authoritative news* outlet to them. My informal interaction with some print media correspondents in the state also unravelled their political leaning; so also, in their reportage, particularly feature stories. A call through to one of my informants (among the correspondents) on his post-election report attested to this observation when he said: "we need to respond to these people's insinuations about the election".

Partisan academics

At the Ekiti State University, a group of faculty members met in early June 2018 to strategize on how to support the APC candidate through the mobilization of University Staff and members of their communities. A WhatsApp group named JKF EKSU FORUM was created to coordinate effective communication. They met with students' organizations and various other unions within and outside the University. Adverts/Jingles were placed on the local radio stations canvassing for their candidate. Souvenirs were also provided and distributed to prospective voters. Few days before the

election, these academic and non-academic staff mobilized many students for an interface with the APC candidate at the centre of the state capital, damning all consequences in a society where witch-hunt is almost a norm.

At the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, a similar group had earlier been formed, and a WhatsApp forum created where information regarding the election was shared. Their activities, and that of other institutions in the state, were strategically complemented by the EKSU chapter. Though self-sponsored, the forum occasionally liaised with notable politicians for support. Because many of the group leaders are influential lecturers in the institutions, the potency of influencing students and co-workers may not be lost on the election process, particularly in the choice of voting for the opposition candidate.

Sympathetic civil society groups

In a chat with a friend in May 2018, he had drawn my attention to an election observers' recruitment advert placed on a Facebook wall by one of the NGOs in the state, pointing out the glaring preference of its Director for a particular candidate in his previous posts. He questioned the possible neutrality of such an exercise, asking me to engage him on the issue. My call to the said Director confirmed his fear: "don't mind them, let them continue to say whatever they like; everybody supports one candidate or the other".

Various civil society organizations, displeased with Fayose's style of governance, engaged in clandestine activities to rally support for the opposition party. A discerning mind may not find it challenging to identify the direction where their partisan pendulum was swinging. Similarly, those whose disenchantment with the central government of APC, arising from its inability to stem the wanton killings across the country, brought the sentiment to bear on Ekiti election with a preference for a man (Fayose) who seemingly represented a fearless voice of the opposition. This became obvious through different opinions expressed and political information shared by members, in a WhatsApp group channel, of the Coalition of Ekiti Civil Society Organisations (COECSO) — an umbrella body of CSOs in the state.

Election observers

In my nearly two decades of recruiting and training election observers in Ekiti State, we have always had difficulty in identifying (either by profiling or direct engagement) absolutely non-partisan individuals — without sympathy for one candidate/party or the other. Maybe it is a universal phenomenon.

In a politically active state like Ekiti, one only needs to opt for those who are not politicians in the real sense of the word. In the 2018 governorship polls, election observers were recruited and trained by prominent NGOs⁶ from within and outside the state. In my engagement with some of them during training, while the election was on-going and after the declaration of result, their (Observers) support, just like the practising politicians, were sharply divided among the two dominant parties in the state. This observation was reinforced by the fact that some of the candidates hitherto shortlisted for training as election observers ended up being INEC *ad hoc* staff or political party agents.

Ekiti Political Sociology, Impact of "vengeful campaign" and Emergence of "Orchestrated Consensus"⁷

Ekiti State is one of the most literate communities in Nigeria and adjudged to be a politically sophisticated entity within the federation. Expectedly, its politics becomes a research interest for political observers, policy-makers and scholars alike (Omilusi 2016). Judging from the intensity and almost fatalistic mindset that is often brought into discussing the affairs of their state on different fora, most especially the social media platforms, Odere (2018) contends that there is hardly any doubt that Ekiti State indigenes are intricately and unapologetically tied to its apron string.

However, an interesting cliché often quoted is the emergence of "a new sociology" of Ekiti that is worthy of further exploration by academia and other political observers (Sogunle 2014). One observable phenomenon among the populace in Ekiti, however, is that many people depend on the government and political appointees for daily survival. Politics, rather than the much-talked-about education, has become the major industry in Ekiti State, especially for the teeming youths — both the unemployed certificated ones and the unemployed. To many of them, it is more desirable to pursue

6 They include Africa Centre for Strategy, Alliance for Credible Elections, Leadership and Development, Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) and YIAGA, among others.

7 By this, I mean a consensus not occasioned by logical debates in formal stakeholders' gatherings/town hall meetings as it's the practice in advanced democracies, but rather a product of aggregate well-coordinated imposed narratives, crude propaganda, the commodification of votes and off-the-mill innuendoes projected by the political gladiators and party machinery — and gullibly bought into by the critical mass of the voters. While passive stakeholders do also exercise their franchise, they are categorized differently from the community of voters in this study.

a career in politics — which they pride as their chosen profession — to access free money in place of a career job or skill acquisition in entrepreneurship (Omilusi 2016). Oke (2018) observes that the Ekiti socio-political life is viewed within two prisms: agrarian and backward on the one hand, repository of wisdom and knowledge on the other hand. Each political leader, since the creation of the state in 1996, has chosen where to place the people from the two prisms. For Oke (2018), Fayose constructed and designed the state in the image of the former.

Social welfare consisted of spontaneous handouts to the needy and impoverished residents. For him, demagoguery was democracy by other means since neither he nor Ekiti people had the sophistication to understand or demand anything better. It worked, and Fayose became a local champion in the exalted seat of governor of the Kingdom of Ekiti State, where the policy was made on the hoof, and everything reduced to the lowest common denominator.

Little wonder, Alamu (2018b) contends that Ekiti lives on the old glory of having the highest number of professors *per capita* in Nigeria. "Today, with as many poorly educated young people as other states, the state matches the rest of the country ignorance for ignorance, and in the process manages to make their peculiar brand of ignorance even sexy" (Alamu 2018b, 3). Sogunle (2014, 32) adduces some reasons for this:

A cursory look will reveal that the current demographic composition of Ekiti state residents does not indicate the often touted [*sic*] typology of Ekiti being a hotbed of people of substantial educational accomplishments, with every household having at least a Professor. The reality of the situation is that these highly educated indigenes would have emigrated, with their 1st and 2nd generation offspring to other climes such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, even Ife, Ibadan etc. and abroad in US, UK, Germany, France, Singapore, UAE, Canada etc. in other parts of the world for greener pasture leaving at the base a substantial residual population and the influential electorate of people called NEET ("Not in Education, Employment, or Training") who are easily susceptible to bread and rice issues over rights.

Election studies, as posited by Oculi (2014), have claimed that specific indicators of economic development, notably: industrially-based urbanization; the spread of private wealth in the hands of capitalists and a high income-earning middle class; high rates of literacy, and increased capacity for the organization of campaign and voter mobilization "facilitated political action and increased citizen capacities for sustained political action" (Gins-

berg apud Oculi 2014, 262). As voters and politicians became fractured in pre-election desperate reactions that appeared like the last kicks of a dying horse; they were engulfed in "peddling of cheap lies, counter-accusations, deepening conspiracies, gang-up and the threat of the use of violence" (Opeyoluwa 2018, 5). The vengeful campaign had prepared voters for any eventuality and authenticated their worry about whose favour the "federal might" might work for⁸.

It is in this light that the pre-election campaign in Ekiti is examined. Previous research has shown that voters' perception of electoral fairness has an impact on their attitudes and behaviours. This may also influence the choice they make in subsequent elections. Apart from generating tension before the election, the "vengeful campaign" could be said to have impacted on the electoral process particularly concerning the undecided voters who felt aligning with the power/government at the centre would be a better decision. And for politicians who considered being out of power (seat of government) for four years a suicide mission, defection was an option with a foreseeable commensurate reward after election. It reflects the politics of clientelism that pervades many African countries. The "good" government is one that can reward individuals at the detriment of the public good. In other words, for the defecting politicians, the only form of "accountability" is the level to which those who helped get the leader and his faction "re-elected" can benefit.

For the citizens, their preferences and aggregate demand for public goods are not fixed. They are the strategic outcomes of enterprising politicians who set the terms of public choice employing persuasion and discussion. Such demand may also pave the way for temporary incentives during an election. For the elites too, the incentives that move them to push for regime change are not only shaped by their probability of gaining or losing power, but also by their material well-being under the existing regime. The acquisition of material patronage thus indicates the importance of elite cadres within the ruling coalition. This accounts for, as a temporary measure, the incessant defections from one party to the other — a sort of alignment to guarantee economic benefit until next election. The level of defections prior to the 2018 governorship election appeared unprecedented in the state, particularly from the ruling party. Though defectors were always dismissed as "paper weight" or inconsequential, they brought celebration to the receiving opposition party.

⁸ Some voters expressed their worry about the intimidating nature of such posts on social media, lending credence to the allegation of suppressing opposition as it was done in 2014. However, rather than dissuading voters from coming out, the turn-out was higher than the 2014 election. This is indicative of the fact that "federal might" as an instrument of intimidation was a flux during the election.

Capitalizing on the vulnerability of the electorate, who ironically have a much stronger preference for private transfers than for public goods in making an electoral choice, the political gladiators usually find a willing manipulable political community in them. For instance, while Governor Fayose, two weeks to the election, approved the promotion of 46,000 workers and made available employment forms for 2,000 new recruitment, Fayemi promised to pay workers a backlog of salaries within six months if elected. Even when it appeared unrealizable in the face of economic doldrums in the state — where the government owed five to eight months' salary arrears — the workers/electorate found those issues alluring. Curiously, for the promotion interview, while the exercise ought to have been both in form of written and oral interviews, going by the civil service rules, the written aspect was jettisoned, and the only oral question was "who will they vote for during the election?" (Adeyemi 2018, 15). One of the promoted civil servants confirmed that:

Almost all of us were asked the same question, and once you assured them you would vote for Eleka, you have passed the interview. I just received my letter, but we all know that it's all politics because he cancelled all promotion exercises Fayemi did shortly before his election (The Guardian 2018, 7).

What then guided the electorate's decision in choosing their candidates despite the glaring dishonesty? Was it a collective or individual decision? According to Cohen (1998), a decision is collective when it emerges from arrangements of binding collective choices that establish conditions of free public reasoning among equals who are governed by the decisions. Mouffe (2000) is of the view that provided that the procedures of the deliberations (political discourse) secure impartiality, equality, openness and lack of coercion, they will guide the deliberation towards generalizable interest, which can be agreed upon by all participants — thereby producing legitimate outcomes. Chambers (2012) argues that deliberation must be practical — in the sense of being aimed at a binding decision — in order for citizens to invest cognitively into the process. Even when such a deliberation does not take place between persons authorized to take a binding decision, it must at least be motivated by a concern about *what to do* about a subject that affects them. The Ekiti election, as could be deduced from the initial submissions, provides the basis on which desperation, political clientelism and flexibility of the critical mass of the electorate can be measured.

The Ekiti journey to civic culture, as posited by Alamu (2018b, 56) is undoubtedly "flawed and unprincipled, but they have admirably and co-in-

cidentally manifested the right democratic characteristics of reserving the right and independence to change their governments". However, the intervening variables, essentially vote-buying⁹, provided a strategic and influential underpinning on the choice made by the electorate in the 2018 election. Such distortion makes the genuineness of their choice inaccessible particularly when they are too weak, too disparate and dispirited to make deliberative consensus outside the elite overbearing influence. In 2014, in spite of the federal might earlier alluded to, there seemed to be a consensus among the voters to reject the candidature of the then incumbent, making a 16-0 defeat across the local governments a novelty in Nigeria's electoral politics.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made to interrogate some pertinent variables that shaped the 2018 Ekiti election and their impact on the electoral process. The study further provides for elaboration and building on the body of knowledge by mainly focusing on electioneering and covert or overt activities of some passive stakeholders. This is not an exhaustive account of what constitutes passive stakeholders who may have influenced the election outcome. Still, I hope that giving an insight into the inner political workings and antics of this group reveals a significant part of our electoral democracy.

However, the central hypothesis addressed in this study asserts that political actors, such as politicians, political parties and other elites of established political institutions usually find a willing manipulable political community in the Ekiti voters — who ironically have a much stronger preference for private transfers (gains) than for public goods in making an electoral choice. Yet, elections should be part of a broader political framework that promotes good governance, the rule of law, and equal participation in politics. The 2018 election in Ekiti may have undermined this prism given the motivating factors impinging on the voter's choice. It is also established that when the disempowered citizens and groups are confronted with the choice of changing their condition through the ballot, such intervening variables as espoused in this study, inhibit/accentuate the process; with the election outcome suggestive of "orchestrated", rather than deliberate consensus, by

⁹ Though no election is possible without the funding of activities around it, unbridled deployment of money can derail its primary purpose, which is to ensure that the electorate cast their votes freely and that candidates who get the majority of votes will be declared winner. All major political parties freely participated in vote-buying, and this ensured that elections went to the highest bidders, which invariably were those with bottomless pockets.

the voters. Going by the bandwagon effect, the Ekiti election did have a significant bearing on the 2019 presidential election when, for the first time since 2003, another party other than the PDP, won in the state. Indeed, a repeat of the 2015 general election took place as APC won all federal and state constituencies, leaving the PDP with nothing.

Overall, it is established that electoral processes are an essential element of democratic change, consolidation and stability. Although the organization and occurrence of elections tend to boost political trust for a short while, the electorate are inclined to register their disenchantment through other means particularly in young democracies because political actors often derail from the path of accountability and service delivery. For the often-incredulous percentage that periodically graces the electoral polls, they do vote against incumbents — for various mundane issues — than a genuine interest in voting for someone else. This, descriptively, epitomizes the Nigerian electoral democracy after almost three decades of authoritarian military rule. A symptom of this observable trend also manifests in the rapid regime turn-over in Ekiti State, having produced fourteen governors/administrators/acting governors in the first eighteen years of its existence unlike other states created at the same time.

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ABSTRACT

The current study interrogates the 2018 governorship election in Ekiti State as a window to peep into the ruling party/opposition muscle-flexing in a stiff political contest and into the behind-the-scenes engagements of some passive stakeholders in Nigeria's electoral politics. It examines how the electoral power dynamics and relationships between Ekiti voters and political gladiators (elites) played out during the election. The study also explores the potency or otherwise of some identified passive stakeholders as drivers of electoral regime change and the underlying power structure and socio-political factors that determine electoral outcomes in Ekiti. Data were primarily sourced from different informants, including voters, politicians, media correspondents, academics, security agents, members of civil society groups and election observers. Through the use of an analytic narrative and with the understanding of the "electoral model" of democratization as a technique of contemporary regime change, this work reveals that the Ekiti electorate is often influenced by the choices and strategies of different significant political actors. Thus, the vigorous electioneering activities of these actors who seize the electioneering period to exploit voter vulnerability for mobilization and voting constitute a dominant feature of Ekiti political behaviour.

KEYWORDS

Election. Vengeful Campaign. Stakeholders. Party Politics.

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