

The 2011 General Elections and Current Development Trends in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

One major challenge that confronts the democratic regimes in Nigeria over the years has been the conduct of free, fair and credible elections which result can be attested to by a majority of the electorate and thus lead to generally acceptable results. Such a generally acceptable mandate can in turn give way to national development. This work set out to identify the relationship between elections and socio-economic and political developments in Akwa Ibom State, especially after the 2011 general elections. It is expected that with the forthcoming elections in 2015, some lessons may have been learnt by the political gladiators and others in the transition category. The study was a combination of descriptive, ethnographic and survey research, with data drawn from existing sources (desk research) and the field (observation and interviews). The research work which was largely empirical in nature unearthed a number of political challenges in the state. Some of these include: refusal on the part of Nigerian policy makers to adopt on a comprehensive basis, the report of the electoral reforms panel (chaired by Justice Uwais) that would have aided the EMB to conduct credible elections. Since the reward system is unprecedented in the world, Nigerian politicians do everything possible to win elections at all costs and by every available means. Apart from the ruling political parties, most of the other parties are not very much on ground to make the electoral contest a worthwhile activity. It is a reality that INEC still has the challenge of inadequate finance to contend with. Consequently, refusal by the policy makers to introduce the e-voting system gives enough room for the "business as usual" pattern of electoral malpractices, which has remained a major wound in the democratic history of Nigeria. Among others, the paper recommended a full implementation of the Uwais Panel report and a drastic slash or cut in the take home pay of political office holders across board.

Keywords: Campaign, Development trends, Elections, Marginalization, Party primaries

1. INTRODUCTION

The most urgent issue in contemporary Nigeria (in the midst of a number of national challenges) is the sustenance of democracy, understood not only as an end to military rule but also as the establishment of responsive and responsible political institutions which promote governments that are accountable, corruption free, have respect for human and civil rights and ensure popular sovereignty. Fifty four years and counting after Nigeria gained political independence, experience and history have demonstrated in clear terms, the fact that the country is yet to get it right, with regard to the conduct of elections and election related issues; the question of credible elections that are required for political legitimacy; an important ingredient for stable democracy, looks like a mirage. A logical argument which tends to have gained prominence in political discourse is the one that states that the heart of democratic government lies in the electoral process of the state. Elections are indeed believed to institutionalize participation in democratic governments. On the very essence of elections being the backbone or otherwise of any democratic state, Janda, Berry and Goldman (2005:202) have argued that:

"Elections are a necessary condition of democracy, but they do not guarantee democratic government. Before the collapse of communism, the former Soviet Union regularly had elections in which more than 90 percent of the electorate turned out to vote, but the Soviet Union certainly did not function as a democracy because there was only one party." Both the majoritarian and pluralist models of democracy rely on voting to varying degrees, but both models expect citizens to participate in politics in other ways. For example, they expect citizens to discuss politics, form interest groups, contact public officials, campaign for political parties, run for office, and even protest government decisions.

A historical analysis of the Nigerian State shows that elections and elections administration in the country was given a legal enactment in the Clifford Constitution of 1922 (Dode, 2014). This singular provision paved the way for elective principles and the formation of political parties. Essentially, the formation of the first major political party known as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded by the late Sir Herbert Samuel Macaulay in June 24, 1923 was at the instance of the Clifford Constitution. Since 1922, elections in Nigeria became highly acceptable by Nigerians as a procedure for choosing their politically preferred representatives to the parliament or legislature, especially in view of the reality of alien rule prevalent in the country at that time. However, many years after colonial rule, Nigeria's democratic experience has been disappointing to a large extent because of the activities of the country's political parties and indeed the ruling elite. The negligence of the civil society has equally contributed to the underdevelopment of politics in Nigeria.

Contemporaneously, most political parties have become franchises of state governors (in power) under whose domain they are domiciled. The opposition parties which ought to serve as alternative parties are on the other hand, not alive to their responsibilities. They offer no clear political ideologies and are largely weakened by the ruling party; hence, there is hardly any demonstration of serious democratic competition. The parties lack internal democracy, and therefore, are incapable of manifesting those principles and practices in day-to-day governance. In Nigeria (recent times), being successful in politics depends a lot on doing very little to the benefit of the ordinary people, but much on bribing elites (god-fathers) and the loudest stakeholders, and more recently, chance and simple “good luck”. This is basically the tragedy of the Nigerian democratic system. It creates a big gully between the ordinary Nigerians and their leaders. This is the gap the military always sought to fill. Elections are not just conducted in a vacuum; they have to be administered. This implies the organization and management of men, materials and money for coordinating, mobilizing and aggregating people or group preferences for the achievement of accepted results. This process constitutes electoral administration. It is in pursuance of these goals that one agency that has only been renamed severally as Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), National Electoral Commission (NEC), National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by law at different periods in Nigeria. The EMB has generally been required to be impartial, transparent and fair to all parties in elections, in order to enthrone sustainable democratic practice.

This work thus sets out to find out to identify the degree to which citizens were allowed to discuss politics, form interest groups, contact public officials, campaign for political parties, run for office and protest government decisions in Akwa Ibom State; before, during and after the 2011 elections? This paper is thus a study on the 2011 elections in Akwa Ibom State, with the aim of making appropriate policy recommendations for improved conduct of general elections in Nigeria for sustainable development, especially in the wake of another round of elections in the first quarter of 2015.

2. CONTINUITIES AND CHANGE IN DEFINING DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN AKWA IBOM STATE

Akwa Ibom State politics from its creation in 1987 to date has to a large extent reflected a high level of political conservatism. Consequently, when the fourth republic began to unfold in 1999, majority of the state’s opinion and political leaders naturally pitched tent with the liberal-oriented Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP was to be preferred to the pro-northern All Peoples Party (APP) or pro-western Alliance for Democracy (AD). Hence, Victor Attah of the PDP clinched the governorship position of the state (1999-2007). Victor Attah is listed among the early founders of the PDP in Nigeria. It was because of Attah’s domineering status in the politics of Akwa Ibom State that the PDP won almost all the contestable positions in the state elections, during that era. That was an era when Akwa Ibom State was proclaimed as a “one-party state”.

The political climate of the polity however, began to experience some unprecedented change from 2006; towards the end of the second term of Victor Attah. The political atmosphere became hot and tense, following the nomination process within the ruling PDP for a candidate that would fly the party’s flag during the 2007 election. Among the notable aspirants for the governorship position of the state were Chief Don Etiebet, Dr. Ime Umanah, Senator Emmanuel Ibok Essien, Senator Itak Ekarika, Dr. Udoma Bob Ekarika, Mr. Isong Akpabio, Arc. Ezekiel Nyaetok, Mr. Larry Esin, Aniekan Etiebet and a number of others who raised the tally of aspirants to 56 on the platform of the PDP. Among these aspirants were some with bold claims of strong connections both at home and in the nation’s capital city (Abuja). Some had aspired for the governorship position before, while a few had the outright support of the then incumbent governor.

The political weather of the state experience a different movement when in October, 2006; a fresh entry into the governorship race was announced. This candidate’s declaration was the last of the several steps taken underground, which included the formation of a strong socio-political group known as the Akwa Ibom Peoples Forum (AKPF) in 2003. This new man on the political scene of the state was Godswill Akpabio. He came up with a unique campaign slogan “Let God’s will be done”. Unfortunately, shortly after the PDP nomination process (party primaries) that started at the State House of Assembly grounds and ended at the Ibom Hall, there was a great disenchantment by the so-called power brokers of the state who felt that their preferred aspirant should be favoured, even against the wishes of the majority. When it was clear that Akpabio would emerge the winner at the end of the party primaries, this group came up with the suggestion of selecting the party’s candidate through the consensus option. This idea did not go down well with the then members of the National Assembly from the state. This group was led by their Chairman; Chief Ndueso Essien, who after boycotting the ignoble consensus meeting in Uyo, led a delegation to the Party’s National leadership in Abuja where they made it clear that it was pertinent to allow the wishes of the people to prevail in that matter. They argued among others that if consensus were to thrive it should have been suggested before, not after properly conducted primaries.

The assembly men view expressed above was corroborated by that of the state’s party chieftains and

elders led by the late Obong Akpan Isemim. They stormed the Wadata Plaza in Abuja and literally handed over Godswill Akpabio to the then PDP Chairman, Dr. Ahmadu Ali, as the product of a rigorous process and collective will of the Akwa Ibom State people. They argued that the only alternative to Akpabio was political catastrophe and violence in the state. The wishes of the people prevailed, thus confirming the democratic axiom *vox populi vox dei* – the voice of the people is the voice of God. In the process of ensuring political reconciliation among the parties concerned, Nsima Ekere who was Akpabio's running mate was dropped for Engr. Patrick Ekpotu (from the Attah camp). Even with such a concession, the state had been launched into intense inter-party competition which would heat up the polity during the 2011 elections in the state. This is largely a product of the god-father factor in Nigerian politics.

3. PDP 2011 PRIMARIES IN AKWA IBOM STATE

Desk research and observations in the state demonstrate to a large extent that the events leading to the execution of the PDP primaries were worrisome. From the campaigns to the party primaries, huge cracks began to emerge on the PDP structure. It was widely alleged that all interested candidates (from state house of assembly to governorship) did not have equal and fair opportunities to explore their chances and that the political space was unfairly narrowed, thus favouring some persons or groups to the disadvantage of others. These feelings of marginalization led to massive decamping of PDP members, especially to the ACN and set the stage to politics of no compromise and political brawl that would prove to be too hot to control. Hence, political analysts expressed little surprise when mayhem was unleashed on public and private properties on March 22, 2011. On that day, supporters of PDP and ACN clashed at Ikot Ekpene (Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District) where they had gone on campaign tours ahead of the general elections. Some ACN members argued that they were attacked by persons suspected to be supporters of the PDP. At the end of the fighting that ensued, two persons were feared dead instantly, while many others sustained various degrees of injuries. The Ikot Ekpene attack would same day lead to what was calculated as a well-planned reprisal attack and outbreak of violence in Uyo (Uyo Senatorial District), which brought on its wake, colossal loss on the state. The losses on both sides included the death of 20 people, burning of 800 new cars and tricycles (parked at the Idongesit Nkanga State Secretariat), torching of a section of Senator Aloysius Etuk's 'Fortune High School, Uyo'. Also torched was the Goodluck/Sambo Campaign office along Abak Road, Uyo. Four PDP supporters reportedly lost their genitals, while 65 ACN supporters were arrested and charged to court (see *The Nation*, March 29, 2011, *Newswatch*, April 18, 2011 and <http://www.tribune.com.ng/sat/index.php/features/3728-day-of-inferno-and-missing-genitals-in-aibom.html>).

The state politics simply assumed an ethnic war of superiority in Akwa Ibom State. The truth though in Nigerian politics is that the average Nigerian politician hides under the banner of ethnicity to pursue his/her personal objectives(s). This was just a contest of superiority between two politicians; Godswill Akpabio and John Udoedehe and not an ethnic war between Ibibios and Annangs.

4. 2011 ELECTIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(i) CREDIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF VOTERS REGISTER:

To a large extent, voters' registers were available in the polling units (as reported by the field assistants). There were however, some flash points of omission of names from voter's register or some placed in polling units outside the place they registered. Such citizens were disenfranchised, but blamed for not showing up during the display of registered voter's exercise. The affected persons lodged their complaints with INEC officials who promised to lodge such matters with the State Headquarters.

(ii) PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF VIOLENCE DURING THE ELECTIONS:

There were no remarkable cases of violence during the 2011 elections in Akwa Ibom State (apart from the March 22, 2011 pre-election violence recorded in the State). This was demonstrated by the fact that there were no recorded cases of gunshots. There were however, some sort of latent and psychological intimidation and harassment of voters who were perceived to be sympathetic to the opposition party. This observation was peculiar to some polling units dominated by ACN or PDP; although not the exclusive preserve of only one party. Such high level of harassment led to the cancellation of elections in certain polling units in Uyo Senatorial District (See *NewsLinK*, Monday, 11th - 14th, April, 2011).

(iii) ACCESS TO VOTING ENVIRONMENT:

Voters were allowed free access to voting areas (polling units). Most areas witnessed people moving in groups to polling units where they registered unimpeded, although in some places, they got apparently bothered by the poor arrangement, especially on the day of the postponed election (02/04/11). On that day, people hardly got the right information till about 1.25 pm when they were informed by INEC presiding officers that the day's election had been postponed.

(iv) CONDUCT OF ELECTION OFFICERS:

On each day of the three election days, election officials (EMB staff) arrived later than the 8.00 am prescribed. However, section 47 of the Electoral Act (2010) states that "voting in any particular election under

this Act shall take place on the same day and time throughout the Federation". On the average, their arrival time fell between 10.30 am and 11.30 am, with little or no explanation made to the electorate on arrival. Some arrived in very gay manner, unperturbed and unapologetic. Some demonstrated very poor public relations skills. Unfortunately, quite contrary to prescribed electoral norms, some electoral officers were conveyed to and from their polling units by party agents.

Party officials and agents conducted themselves properly to a large extent. They were sighted trooping in and out of polling units. An observable fact was that although there were no outright or manifest intentions to influence the election process displayed, there were moves suspected to be attempts aimed at facilitating such between party agents and election officials in some polling units. This was outside the observation in some polling units where party agents were sighted, offering money (ranging from ₦1,000.00 to ₦2,000.00) to prospective voters (this was observed in some ACN and PDP dominated areas respectively).

(v) EASE AND TIME OF ACCREDITATION AND VOTING:

As in (iv) above, accreditation in most polling units did not start until between 11.30 am and 12.20 pm because of late arrival of election officials and materials. On the last Election Day (09-4-11) however, some polling units recorded early arrival of personnel and materials, which enabled them to start accreditation as early as 9.20 am. By implication, voting started between 1.30pm and 2.30pm, depending on the polling unit. In most polling units, accreditation continued simultaneously with voting till about 3.00 pm against the regulation which states that Accreditation must end on or before 12.30 pm.

With regard to the voting exercise some respondents gave their impression, depending largely on what looked like their party leanings. At Unit 4, Mbiabong Ikot Essien (Uyo Urban), PU: 03/31/04/004, one Mrs Uko (adult female) confessed that she was happy to be casting her vote as a Nigerian for the first time. She however, observed that the process was too stressful. She suggested among others that the time between accreditation and voting should be eliminated completely in future elections. She recommended the adoption of e-voting. She however thanked her stars for witnessing a new dawn in Nigerian politics where women (unlike before) were allowed to turn out enmass to exercise their franchise.

The village head in that polling unit (Eteidung Edem Willie, 65 years old), when interviewed expressed satisfaction with the voting process because he like the other elderly who showed up for the election exercise, got preferential treatment during accreditation and voting. One Silas Timothy Udoh (adult male) of Ikot Ekpene, Urban Ward I, and Unit 3 expressed disappointment at the late arrival of election officials and materials. He equally berated the poor attitude of the election officials. Saviour Okon Edward (adult male) of Ikot Ekpene Urban, Ward 3, Unit 1 expressed similar sentiments by Udoh above, although he added that the election officials in his unit apologized for bringing their materials late, giving the excuse of logistics as a major problem. Some members of the electorate at Ikono complained of insufficient ballot papers and suspected foul play on the part of the electoral officers.

(vi) ELECTION OBSERVERS:

Domestic and international observers, accredited by INEC were seen going about their assignment without harassment or intimidation. Some had with them, zoom cameras, while others made use of their cell phone cameras where necessary. This researcher observed however that these observers were mostly scattered around the urban centres of Eket, Uyo and Ikot Ekpene Senatorial Districts. Their presence was not significantly felt in the interior (rural) parts of the state. Most though were hardly sighted from 3.00 pm when the real heat of the elections were on. A list of domestic and international observers spotted in Akwa Ibom State during the 2011 elections include: Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Project Swift Count 2011, Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), National Democratic Institute (NDI), European Union, and National Association of Peaceful Elections in Nigeria, Nigeria Election Violence Report, Community Policing Partners and Alliance for Credible Election.

(vii) TRANSPARENCY IN THE COLLATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS:

Collation of result was done in varying degrees because of the differences in the time of arrival of officials and materials. Irrespective of variation in times of collation and announcement, the general observation was that these activities were carried out in the presence of all around the polling unit. The results were counted and announced to the hearing of all around, but in some polling units that was the end of the process; while other election officials pasted the results as required by law, others did not.

5. STATE INSTITUTIONS AND FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE:

The observable elements in Akwa Ibom State before and during the 2011 elections reveal some mixed bag. These factors demonstrate to a large extent some gross partiality and partisanship of state institutions during the period under review.

In the pre-election period, opposition political parties were not allowed free access to state institutions and infrastructures to among others, display their party symbols, posters and bills, whereas, the ruling party had an unhindered access to these. Of note too is the fact that in the area of mass communication (radio, television and newspapers), the state media did not create room for equal treatment of all parties. Apart from Radio

Nigeria, Atlantic FM, 104.5 which gave equal access time to all political parties that indicated interest, the rest; Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (Radio and Television) were more or less, outfits of the ruling party (PDP) (See *NewsLink*, Monday 11th – Thursday 14th April, 2011).

It is worthy to note the fact that shortly before the elections, a pre-emptive piece of legislature was passed by the State House of Assembly. That edict empowered the State Governor to order the detention of any individual for 14 days without trial for an assumed offence. Such tended to scare members of the opposition.

6. TRANSPARENCY IN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE EXECUTIVES AND EMB – INEC AND SECURITY AGENCIES:

In this regard, the popular argument is that in Akwa Ibom State, the State Governor has been overbearing and exerted so much influence on these agencies of government. Some local tabloids argued that if they accept the assumption that the posting of the REC (2011) was not influenced by the Executive arm, same can not be stated about Presiding Officers and some ad hoc staff of INEC in the State.

As regards the extent of freedom of campaign space for opponents of ruling parties, this work had alluded to identified, major restraints which opposition parties had to contend with. Such is simply captured by the March 22, 2011 event when ACN campaign team was deprived the use of a public infrastructure for campaign purposes. Section 96 (1) of the 2010 Electoral Act however, observes that “No candidate, person or group of persons shall directly or indirectly threaten any person with the use of force or violence during any political campaign in order to compel that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate”.

7. GENERAL ELECTIONS JUDICIAL PRONOUNCEMENT IN AKWA IBOM STATE BEFORE 2011:

The 2003 general elections declared results in Akwa Ibom State witnessed a number of election petitions, especially regarding the governorship position. However, a review of a number of newsmagazine commentaries about the subsequent judicial pronouncements indicate to a large extent that the tribunal members made pronouncements that were inconsistent with most legal provisions bordering on such matters. It proved that some of the tribunal members compromised their positions. This allegation was confirmed and led to the National Judicial Commission (NJC) recommending the sack of three such judges that served in Akwa Ibom State.

In 2007, an almost similar experience played out in the post-election tribunal processes in the State. These observations show that the Nigerian Judiciary, though making some positive strides, has not fully insulated itself from undue influence from politicians upon whose cases they have to adjudicate.

8. THE USE OF STATE MACHINERY AND PARAPHERNALIA TO INTIMIDATE VOTERS, OBSERVERS/MONITORS OR CREATE PANIC:

During the 2011 elections, the general observation in Akwa Ibom State showed a serious commitment by the Nigeria Police Force to comply with the conditions of the Electoral Laws that individuals should not get to polling units escorted by Police orderlies, except for the specified number of government officials. Consequently, the Police Force or any other state paraphernalia was not used to intimidate or harass voters, observers and monitors. This observation does not foreclose the fact that some members of the major opposition party (ACN) in the state later argued that a number of government officials were sighted, using government vehicles and Police escorts in and outside some polling units (See *News-link*, Monday 18th April, 2011) and by so doing, had some advantage over their opponents.

9. THE MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) AND ELECTION SUCCESS IN NIGERIA:

As already alluded to in the body of this work, the best thing that happened to Akwa Ibom State politics, with regard to free access to the media by all parties, was the introduction of Radio Nigeria, F.M. 104.5 in the state, few months before the 2011 elections (although that station closed at 6.30pm daily because it was on test transmission). Before this introduction, access to the state owned media outfits (AKBC Television and Radio) was highly discriminatory in nature. Such did not appear to have given equal slots to all contestants and parties. Radio and Television slots were dominated to a large extent by candidates of the ruling party, PDP.

The print media owned by the state government (*Pioneer Newspaper*) did not act any differently from the mass media display referred to above. But as a reaction to such brazen restriction by a news media, a lot of local tabloids sprang up. A review of most contents of these local dailies and or weekly papers displayed a high level of unprofessionalism with regard to the manner of presentation and authentication of facts before publishing same. While some served as veritable sources of information and education materials for the masses (as we have reviewed quite a number and referenced some in the body of this work), others amounted to junk

materials that displayed partisanship and bias; depending on the political leanings of their owners.

The new social media (twitter, facebook, websites and sms) were used to varying degrees as campaign sources by some political parties. This is with special regard to the use of bulk SMS sent to citizens of the state, especially by the PDP. This researcher received five different types of SMS containing strong arguments why the incumbent governor (PDP) should be re-elected; for continuity and consolidation. Some of these groups bore such titles as “Integrity Group”, “AKS Voices”, and “Ati Annang” respectively.

The religious bodies in Akwa Ibom State displayed some level of maturity in handling politically related matters of the state; before, during and after the elections. It was common to hear churches preach and pray for peace during the elections. Some preachers on television and radio spoke against electoral malpractices and violence. It is however, an observable fact in the state that the leadership of the state Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) (Bishop Cletus Basse) displayed unhidden support and approval of the ruling PDP government. Many in the state interviewed, frowned at this development, arguing that as a spiritual leader, he ought to take a posture of father to all, not taking sides. In fact, some respondents chided the Bishop as “Government House Preacher”.

10. AN ANALYSIS OF CLASS, ETHNO – RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

In the area of a level playing ground in Akwa Ibom State politics before and during the 2011 elections, the observable trend was that although it was not openly demonstrated, the set of politicians who had served under the government (2007 – 2011) became power – brokers in their various local government areas.

A typical example of how this played out was when the PDP party primaries into various positions were conducted in the State. It was largely argued that although all interested candidates were given the go ahead to purchase the forms and canvass for votes (level playing ground), at the end, only candidates favoured by the incumbent governor and his aids got the nominations to Senate, House of Representatives and State House of Assembly. This practice led to the decamping of a number of these candidates who were not so favoured to other parties, especially the ACN.

As alluded to in this work, ethnic identity came to play a major role in Akwa Ibom State 2011 election. Politicians used this factor to their advantage, thus making it look like an ethnic war between the Annangs and Ibibios. An evidence of this element was the March 22, 2011 mayhem unleashed on innocent citizens and property. Such was unprecedented in the history of Akwa Ibom State, because although their dialects sound slightly different; they trace their ancestry to a single source.

As a result of the above, we discovered that people hardly voted on the basis of issues (party ideologies), but on personalities. The final result for the State House of Assembly demonstrates this analysis in clearer terms. Of the 27 seats available, only one (Uyo) was clinched by ACN because of the ethnic background and strength of its governorship aspirant (Udoedehe) in that state constituency (Udoedehe is an indigene of Uyo). PDP won in the remaining 26 State constituencies. Ideology hardly plays a major role in Nigerian politics. Analysts have argued that of the more than 65 political parties in existence, only the CPC seem to be ideology driven. Others just flank the “Progressive” banner.

11. POST ELECTION RESPONSES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

After the 2011 elections, the ACN governorship candidate (John A. Udoedehe) announced a rejection of the result declared for the office of the governor by the State INEC Returning Officer, Prof. Comfort Ekpo. He promised to undertake consultations with his lawyers before filing a suit with the Tribunal. His main gross revolved around the argument that the PDP applied different fraudulent means to subvert the people’s wishes during the elections. These fraudulent means, according to him included outright bribery and sharing of monies and bags of rice to election officials and some citizens (See *Insight Newspaper*, April 24 – 30, 2011). He went ahead to contest the result of that election, but lost out.

Prior to the above announcement though, there was a twist in the political atmosphere of the state. On April 30, 2011, the AKBC News at 8.00 pm telecasted a recorded programme on television showing the party chairmen of ACN and the Labour Party (LP) in the state in Government House, with congratulatory messages for the PDP re-elected Governor (Godswill Akpabio). They among others, promised not to challenge the outcome of that “free and fair elections” in court. The ACN State Chairman was Mr. Aniekan Akpan while his Labour counterpart was Mr. Emmanuel Etim.

In another reaction on May 3, 2011, (broadcasted by Atlantic FM 104.5), the ACN leadership in Akwa Ibom State announced the suspension of its Party Chairman over his visit to the State Governor and for misrepresenting the party in the eyes of the people. He was subsequently replaced by an acting chairman.

12. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to identify the relationship between elections in Nigeria generally and the 2011 exercise in

particular and development trends in Akwa Ibom State. It went historical by attempting to highlight the electoral antecedents in Nigeria from 1922 to date. This analysis set the tune for the understanding of how the average Nigerian was allowed to discuss politics, form interest groups, contact public officials, campaign for political parties, run for office and protest government decisions in Akwa Ibom State, before, during and after the 2011 elections.

The study adopted the descriptive, ethnographic and survey research methods to gather information. The history of the creation of Akwa Ibom State was spotlighted, reflecting some socio-economic endowments. This was followed by a breakdown of some continuities and change in defining development issues in the state, especially those that fall out of the various political contestations recorded in the state.

The paper proceeded to do an analysis of events in the state, before, during and after the 2011 general elections. That section ended with a review of the research objectives, with the major elements listed one after the other. This review, done empirically, with raw data derived from the field was used to demonstrate how the electoral process either encourages or slows down the pace of development in developing economies like Nigeria.

The recommendations of this study are based on the observations and findings of the 2011 elections in Akwa Ibom State. To stem the tide of some irregularities observed and contribute to the conduct of hitch-free elections in future, the following measures are strongly recommended:

- Government should fall back on the report of the Electoral Reforms Committee headed by Justice Mohammed Uwais, which inter alia, recommended that political office holders (incumbent) should step – down three months to proposed elections. This will help check mate the inordinate ambition of incumbents who may want to use their offices and state institutions to their advantage.
- Remuneration, incentives and privileges of political office holders should be reduced drastically, to reflect the model of U.S.A. and other working democracies.
- Political parties that could not win at least one seat at the National Assembly should be relegated to state or regional parties, never allowed to contest national elections, except they form coalitions.
- The time between accreditation and the actual voting should be completely eliminated. In fact, Nigeria can best get it right if the e-voting option is adopted. This process would require an immediate amendment of the 2010 Electoral Act.
- Voter registration exercises should be a continuous process, to accommodate citizens as soon as they attain the minimum age (18 years) for registration.

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