

## **Alternation of Executive Power and Democratic Governance in Nigeria: The Role of Independent National Electoral Commission, 1999-2014**

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**Abstract :** Buzzword in Nigeria is that democracy has “come to stay”. Politicians in their usual euphoria consider democracy as already consolidated in the country. Politicians linked this assumption to three fundamental indicators - (a) multiparty system; (b) regular elections and (c) absence of military coup after 15 years of democracy in Nigeria. Beyond this assumption, we intend to empirically verify these claims and assumptions, by relying on Huntington’s conceptualization of democratic consolidation. Though, Huntington asserts that multipartism, regular elections and absence of any major obstacle leading to reversal of democracy are significant indicators of democratic consolidation, but the presence of those indicators must result to alternation of executive power for democratic consolidation to occur. In other words, regular conduct of election and existence of multiple political parties are not enough for democratic consolidation, rather free and fair elections. Past elections were characterized of massive fraud and irregularities casting doubts on integrity of electoral management body (EMB) to conduct free and fair elections in Nigeria. There are three existing perspectives that have offered responses to the emasculation of independence of EMB. One is a more popular position indicating that the incumbent party, more than the opposition party, influence the EMB activities with the aim of rigging elections; the other is a more radical perspective that suggests that weakening of EMB power is more associated with the weakest party than with the incumbent; and the last, is that godfather(s) are in direct control of EMB members thereby controlling the process of electoral process to the advantage of the godfather(s). With empirical evidence sourced from the reports of independent election monitors, (European Union, Election Observation Mission in Nigeria) this paper shows at different electoral periods that, in terms of influencing election outcomes, the incumbent and godfather have been more associated with influencing election results than the opposition. The existing nature of executive power in Nigeria provides a plausible explanation for the incumbent’s overbearing influence thereby limiting opportunity for free and fair elections and by extension undermining the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

**Keywords :** political party, democracy, democratic consolidation, election, godfatherism

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