

**FEDERAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION AND THE
CONDUCT OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN IGERIA,
1979-1983**

Atime Emmanuel Ihungwa and Daniel Terna Degarr

Abstract

The conduct of presidential election is a means of political recruitment and selection and an important aspect of democratization. In modern democratic institutions, the holding of periodic and regular presidential elections which has become part and parcel of the process of expanding and deepening the democratic space requires Election Management Bodies (EMBs) to conduct all elections within the polity. Between 1979 and 1983, FEDECO conducted two presidential elections in Nigeria. However, the performance of FEDECO during the presidential elections was unsatisfactory. The paper critically assesses the management of presidential elections in Nigeria. The work begins with the origin of FEDECO in Nigeria and examines its performance in the conduct of presidential elections in Nigeria from 1979 to 1983. The paper employs qualitative research methodology relying on both primary, secondary and tertiary sources to appraise the performance of FEDECO during the period under review. The main objectives of the research are, to trace the origins and rationale for the establishment of FEDECO in Nigeria, examine its performance in the conduct of presidential elections in Nigeria and the challenges it encountered in the conduct of presidential elections from 1979 to 1983. The research found that a combination of factors such as lack of independence and financial autonomy, inadequate preparation, lack of loyalty of the ad-hoc staff, the attitude of the political

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class, corruption and poverty, among others, were responsible for the poor performance of FEDECO. The work is an expansion of the knowledge on the role of FEDECO in the management of presidential elections in Nigeria from 1979 to 1983.

Introduction

Election administration occupies a significant and strategic position in the sustainability of democracy. Elections are central to liberal democratic politics and presuppose the existence of impartial election administration. However, election administration in many new democracies continues to generate controversies around the level of independence of Election Management Bodies (EMBs), their professionalism and the integrity of the election they conduct. In Nigeria, controversies and crisis have characterized election administration process engendered by the prevalence of electoral malpractices. The EMBs in Nigeria have been accused of partisanship in the electoral administration process. Yet arguments advocating the establishment of independent EMBs in the wake of global democratization highlight the importance of the independence of EMBs in the promotion of democratic sustainability.¹

The paper examines the role of Federal Electoral Commission in the management and conduct of 1979 and 1983 presidential elections in Nigeria. The paper apart from the introduction is divided into six parts dealing with the establishment of FEDECO 1977, preparations for the 1979 presidential election, management of 1983 presidential election, challenges of FEDECO during the 1979 and 1983 presidential elections in Nigeria, grievances and court cases arising from the electoral processes in Nigeria and conclusion.

The Establishment of Federal Electoral Commission

The promulgation of the Federal Electoral Commission Decree 4 of 1977 was followed by the enactment of the Electoral Decree 1977 (Decree No.73).² The Electoral Decree of 1977 was later amended by Electoral (Amendment) Decree 1978, and it spelt

out in greater detail the legal and administrative powers that the Commission needed to discharge its functions more effectively, especially in matters relating to political party registration and the formulation as well as the administrative and technical oversight of electoral regulations. A Federal Electoral Commission was established to serve as an independent and effective Election Management Body (EMB) committed to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections for sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

The promulgation of the Electoral Decree 1977 and the Electoral (Amendment) Decree 1978 was criticized on various grounds. Some objected to the promulgation of Decree 73 before the Constituent Assembly had finished its task, as a subtle attempt to influence the deliberations of the Assembly. An editorial in the *New Nigerian Newspaper* argued that,

...the Supreme Military Council (SMC) has nothing to lose if the sections of the decree dealing with elective offices and political parties had been withheld. Similarly, even though we support the single ballot system...the SMC should have allowed the Assembly to consider the draft electoral regulations on this issue before its promulgation.³

Organisational and strategic imperatives, however, necessitated the decentralization of the activities and structures of the Commission set up by FEDECO Decree 1977, if its presence was to be felt and effective at the state and local government levels. This provided an opportunity to underscore cooperative federalism in Nigeria in the area of inter-governmental cooperation between an organ of the Centre and organs of state governments and local government councils. The Resident Electoral Commissioners were posted to each of the state capitals and were provided with the necessary support staff.

Preparations for the 1979 Presidential Election

Delimitation of Constituencies by the Commission

Section 3 (2) (a) of FEDECO Decree 1977 assigned the role of delimitation of constituencies to the Commission. The

delimitation exercise aroused great interest, especially among prospective contenders for political offices. This was due to at least two major reasons. First the 1976 local government elections, although conducted without open political party campaigns, albeit discreetly tainted by old political alliances, had shown where the political sympathies of the electorate in the various electoral areas or constituencies lay. Consequently, all political groups and prospective political aspirants were condemned to fail, and were indeed suspicious of possible gerrymandering by the Commission. Secondly, ethnic sentiments or communal conflicts between different groups in some states were taken into account by the Commission in carrying out the delimitation exercise.

The 1973 census figures were rejected by the Commission as a basis for the delimitation exercise. A number of observers expressed concern that the delimitation exercise should be a way of avoiding the creation of gross disparities in the size of electoral wards. The Nigerian Tribune, for example, suggested in an editorial comment that:

The delimitation should be simple and easily recognizable. The constituencies should be compact and moderate in size... In other words, the paramount consideration of the Commission should be the convenience of the voter and the candidate rather than the satisfaction of statistical requirements. ⁴

On 22nd September 1978 the Commission released its delimitation report. The report divided Nigeria into 95 senatorial districts, 449 Federal constituencies and 1347 state constituencies for the purposes of the conduct of the 1979 election, one federal and 3state constituencies were reserved for the Capital Territory of Nigeria on its formally coming into being.

Registration of Voters by the Commission

Section 3 (2) (b) of the FEDECO Decree 1977 assigned to the Commission another specific task, namely: the registration of

voters, the preparation, and maintenance of a register of voters for the purpose of any such elections. As to be expected, this was a highly critical task to the success of the 1979 elections.

The task generated harsh criticisms of the work of the Commission. This was partly because there were, as yet, no political parties to mobilize voters for registration. It was also partly due to the need to ensure that eligible voters were not unnecessarily disenfranchised. Yet another reason for the critical nature of the registration exercise was that a high turnout during the election would enhance the legitimacy of the succession. As pointed out by the *New Nigerian* editorial:

If there is one article of faith upon which the credibility of the entire electoral process will be hinged... it will be found in the existence of an impeccable voters' list which will command the respect and acceptance of the vast majority of our citizens.⁵

The Commission released details of eligible voters who registered during the registration exercise in late March 1978. The figures showed that a total of 47,433,759 eligible voters were registered during the exercise.⁶ A revision exercise took place between September and November 1978. The aim of the exercise was primarily to give eligible voters who might have missed the earlier registration exercise another chance to register and therefore appear in the final register of voters.

It is doubtful whether the figure of 47,433,759 registered voters was an accurate reflection of the Nigerian voting public in the 1979 elections. To begin with, there are no reliable statistics of the Nigerian population or census data to which the registration figure can be related and measured. Attempts to ascertain the exact population of the country in 1973 failed as a result of the over-politicization and manipulation of the figures.⁷

Table1: Eligible Registered Voters during Registration Exercise

State	Male	Female	Total
Anambra	1,269,894	1,331,654	2,601,548
Bauchi	976,558	1,107,499	2,084,057
Bendel	1,139,639	1,236,771	2,376,410
Benue	730,927	832,486	1,563,413
Borno	1,319,744	1,433,656	2,753,400
CrossRiver	1,227,162	1,215,065	2,442,227
Gongola	998,197	1,286,303	2,284,500
Imo	1,728,164	1,737,034	3,465,198
Kaduna	1,623,419	1,797,420	3,420,839
Kano	2,443,163	2,731,284	5,174,447
Kwara	514,813	570,352	1,085,165
Lagos	989,194	822,779	1,811,973
Niger	503,300	537,453	1,040,753
Ogun	781,013	821,991	1,603,004
Ondo	1,180,812	1,241,902	2,422,714
Oyo	2,285,486	2,234,634	4,520,120
Plateau	794,578	823,800	1,618,378
Rivers	726,568	682,904	1,409,472
Sokoto	1,735,443	2,020,696	3,756,139
Total	22,968,074	24,465,683	47,433,757

Source: FEDECO Report, April1978.⁸

Table 1 shows that a total of 47,433,757 eligible voters from the nineteen states of the federation registered during the voter registration exercise in 1978. The distribution of the registrants by gender revealed that 22,968,074 males registered, while 24,465,683 females were also registered.

Registration of Political Parties by the Commission

Section 3(1) (b-c) of the FEDECO Decree 1977 and Sections 76-86 of the Electoral Decree 1977 granted the Commission specific functions and powers regarding the registration and conduct of political parties. The role of the Commission in this regard must be understood within the context of the CDC's conception of the nature and function of political parties.

It was inevitable that the ban on party politics would be lifted as part of the plan to return the country to civilian rule.

The ban was lifted on 21st September 1978. This action paved the way for the Commission, on 28th September 1978, to publish the procedures that must be fulfilled before any party could be registered.⁹

On 22 December 1978, Chief Michael Ani, the Chairman of the Commission, announced in a nationwide television broadcast that the Commission had recognized five parties for the 1979 elections. These were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), and the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP)¹⁰. The decision to register these political parties was based on the reports from its State Resident Electoral Commissioners.

The 1979 Presidential Election

The Commission laid great emphasis on conducting a hitch-free election. This emphasis reflected in part a desire to avoid electoral malpractices which had been characterized by most general elections in Nigeria. The task of ensuring a “hitch-free” election required massive effort by the Commission in ensuring foolproof registration of voters, security printing and preservation of ballot papers and ballot boxes. It also included the establishment of water-tight voting procedures to prevent rigging, massive public enlightenment campaigns, and the selection, screening, and orientation of electoral officers.¹¹

The conduct of the voting generated more widespread complaints, especially where parties fell short of the vote they had expected. Following the first crucial round of voting for the Senate, which set the pattern of expected electoral alignments for subsequent elections, “the various parties complained of fraud, victimization, and all kinds of electoral malpractice perpetrated in places where they had not won”.

More credible sources of information indicated that irregularities were not limited to a single area or party. Adamu and Ogunsanwo concluded that a large number of people who wanted to vote were disenfranchised in 1979 – partly because of deliberate sabotage of the voter’s list by local FEDECO

officials, but also partly because many voters did not check their names on the list when requested to do so. Some of the confusion declined in subsequent elections as a result of FEDECO's efforts at public enlightenment.

The 1979 elections were relatively free of the violence and chaos that had plagued previous national elections. As Herskovits observed: "During (the senatorial) and subsequent elections, a tour of the polling places revealed scenes of impressive order: queues, scarcely an argument, and most of all, no violence."

However, all was not sweetness and tranquility. There was evidence of intimidation from a number of sources in different states, arrests for disorderly conduct and assaulting officials at polling stations, and complaints by Chief Awolowo during the presidential election about the arrests and detention of some of his polling and counting agents in the Northern States. Many voters in certain states appeared to have given up on the 1979 elections when they could not locate their names and polling stations in the first election.

The detailed results of the presidential election, which was held on 11th August 1979, showed that Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the NPN obtained 5,688,857 votes, or 33.77% (one-third) of the popular votes cast, as shown in Table 2. He also received at least 25 percent of the votes cast in twelve states, as revealed in Table 2.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the UPN leader, came second in the race with 4,916,651 votes (29.18 percent of the popular votes cast). He also got at least 25 percent of the votes cast in six states. Table 3.2 also shows that the NPP candidate, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, received 2,822,523 votes (16.76 percent of the popular votes) and scored at least 25 percent in three states.

Meanwhile, Alhaji Aminu Kano of the PRP received 1,732,113 votes (10.28 percent of the popular votes cast) and received at least 25 percent of the votes in two states. The GNPP leader, Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, scored 1,686,489 votes (10.02 percent of the popular votes) and scored at least 25 percent in three states. More credible sources of information indicated that

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Table 2: Presidential Election Result

State	Key Voters	GNPP	UPN	NPN	PRP	NPP	Total Vote Cast
Anambra	2,601,548	20,228	9,053	163,164	14,500	1,002,082	1,209,028
Bauchi	2,084,059	154,218	29,960	623,989	143,202	47,314	998,683
Bendel	2,376,410	8,242	356,381	242,320	4,939	57,629	669,511
Benue	1,563,413	42,993	13,864	411,648	7,277	63,097	538,879
Borno	2,753,400	384,278	23,885	246,778	46,385	9,642	710,968
Cross River	2,442,227	100,105	77,775	425,815	6,737	50,671	661,103
Gongola	2,284,500	217,914	138,561	227,057	27,750	27,856	639,138
Imo	3,465,198	34,616	7,335	101,516	10,252	999,636	1,153,355
Kaduna	3,420,839	190,926	92,382	596,302	447,771	65,321	1,381,712
Kano	5,174,447	18,468	14,960	243,643	907,136	11,041	1,195,248
Kwara	1,085,163	20,251	140,006	190,142	2,376	1,830	354,605
Lagos	1,811,973	3,943	681,762	59,515	3,824	79,320	828,364
Niger	1,040,753	63,273	14,155	287,072	14,555	4,292	383,347
Ogun	1,603,004	3,974	689,655	46,358	2,338	2,343	744,668
Ondo	2,422,714	3,561	1,294,666	57,361	2,509	11,752	1,384,788
Oyo	4,520,120	8,029	1,197,983	177,999	4,804	7,732	1,396,547
Plateau	1,618,378	37,400	29,029	190,458	21,852	269,666	548,405
Rivers	1,409,472	15,025	71,114	499,114	3,212	98,754	687,951
Sokoto	3,756,139	359,021	34,102	898,994	44,977	12,499	1,349,593
Total	47,433,757	1,686,489	4,916,651	5,688,857	1,732,113	2,822,523	16,846,633

Source: FEDECO Report, 1979 .¹⁷

According to FEDECO, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared to have satisfied the provision of Section 34A, Subsection (1)(c)(i) of the Electoral Decree to win one-quarter of the votes cast in twelve states and one-quarter of two-thirds, that is, at least one-sixth of the votes cast in the thirteenth state. On 16th August 1979, FEDECO formally declared Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the NPN the winner of the presidential election.

In comparative terms, the 1979 elections represented a significant democratic progress over the elections of the 1950s and 1960s, whether that progress could be maintained without the steel frame and veiled threat of military rule. Adamu and Ogunsanwo concluded thus:

Within the context of bourgeois democracy and against the fiascoes of elections the country had witnessed in the past, the

1979 exercise must be considered a higher level of success. The presence of a military government which rounded up potential party thugs and effectively checked their activities created a peaceful atmosphere for the elections. The willingness of the party leaders to utilize legal and constitutional devices to resolve disputes also contributed to the peaceful elections witnessed in 1979. None of these could be guaranteed in future elections.¹⁸

MANAGEMENT OF 1983 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The 1979 Constitution provided for regular elections at four-year intervals for the President and Vice President, State Governors and their deputies, the Senate, House of Representatives, and State Houses of Assemblies.

The Electoral Act of 1982 contained many detailed provisions designed to prevent the various forms of rigging that Nigeria had experienced in previous elections. Most of these provisions were carried over from the Electoral Decree of 1977, which governed the 1979 elections. However, some were new, such as the limit of 500 voters per polling station, aimed at preventing massive ballot box stuffing, and the controversial creation of a media National Advisory Council. This Council, consisting of one member from each political party, would control all federal and state-owned mass media for three months before and one month after an election. Several other provisions in the Act sought to thwart past irregularities and forbid unfair practices.

Registration of Political Parties

The first major task facing FEDECO in preparation for the 1983 elections was the registration of political parties. Unlike in 1979, where no parties existed, five parties were already registered by 1979: the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), and the People's Redemption Party (PRP).

The PPP was indisputably the largest and broadest of the eleven associations that responded to FEDECO's March 1982 invitation to apply for political party registration.

However, FEDECO recognized the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) and ruled that the PPP did not qualify because some of its officers were already holding offices in the existing three parties. The Commission Chairman, Justice Victor Ovie-Whiskey, was quoted as saying that if two or more political parties wanted to merge to form a new political party, they had to first dissolve their old parties.

Registration of Voters

No less controversial was the much more massive task of registering voters for the 1983 elections, slated for the last two weeks in August 1982. By the time the registration exercise concluded at the end of August, the process was drowning in complaints of incompetence, partisanship, and fraud. Though rejecting most complaints as frivolous, the FEDECO chairman was sufficiently troubled by the controversy to suggest that free and fair elections in 1983 might require the participation of the Army. Though this idea was roundly criticized by the press at the time, it would gain increasing support as tension and distrust deepened.

Fresh controversy erupted in March 1983 when the preliminary list of voters was displayed for the statutory period of claims and objections. In fact, the preliminary register, processed in Great Britain by computer, was revealed to be in a state of chaos. Names of several voters were discovered in constituencies far away (often in different states) from where they registered. So manifestly serious was the mangling of the voters list that the FEDECO chairman was forced to extend the period of claims and objections by a week to accommodate the complaints. On July 27, ten days before the beginning of the polls—and thus five days beyond the time limit imposed by the Electoral Act—FEDECO finally produced the final list and the registration figures for each state. But with the release of the list, controversy quickly shifted from its tardiness to its size.

The key question about the Voters' Register was whether the figures were even possibly consistent with estimates of Nigeria's population. Projected state and national populations

for 1983 were based upon the 1963 census figures of 55.7 million. It was almost certain, however, that this figure was heavily inflated and that the population at that time was much closer to the original 1962 count of 45.6 million, which itself was clearly inflated in at least some sections of the country.

Preparation for the Election

Following months of debate and speculation, Justice Victor Ovie-Whiskey announced on March 23, 1983, FEDECO's decision on the timing and sequence of the elections. It had indeed decided to hold the Presidential election first, followed by the Governorship, Senate, House of Representatives, and State Houses of Assembly. In a carefully reasoned defense, Justice Victor Ovie-Whiskey noted that the provisions of the Constitution made the 1979 election sequence utterly untenable in 1983.

As in 1979, it was the task of FEDECO to determine which candidates were qualified for election under the provisions of the Constitution. Each party, by virtue of section 28 of the Electoral Act, was to deliver its list of nominees to FEDECO, which was mandated to clear or disqualify each name within 21 days of receipt. Dates for the submission of nominees in the five elections were fixed for three-week periods ranging from mid-May to early July.

In this area of electoral administration, the 1983 elections appeared to have been conducted significantly more fairly than those of 1979. However, the most important issue in the eyes of the opposition parties was where the votes would be counted. Opposition leaders had felt that the transportation of uncounted ballot boxes to counting stations was the weakest link in the nation's defense against electoral fraud in 1979 and resolved to correct this in the Electoral Act of 1982. On June 24, its chairman announced that the votes would be counted at the polling stations, and that FEDECO would purchase two hurricane lanterns for each polling station to ensure that they had sufficient light to accomplish the task.

Conduct of the 1983 Presidential Election

Nigerians went to the polls on August 6 in a mood of acute apprehension and suspicion. For months, the press and the politicians had sharply questioned the competence and integrity of the Federal Electoral Commission. The disastrous state of the Preliminary Voters' Register and the later release of the final Register, along with persistent press reports of administrative chaos in electoral preparations, appeared to confirm these doubts.

Before the announcement of the Presidential election results on Wednesday, August 10, 1983, the national leaders of the NPP, UPN, PRP, and GNPP emphatically denounced the conduct of the election. The re-election of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as President was not surprising or difficult to explain. Most independent observers had expected him to win, and several factors were operating in his favor, including immense federal patronage, his own personal qualities, the NPN's adroit manipulation of ethnic and religious cleavages in the North, and the inability of the opposition parties to present a common candidate. The President more than doubled his 1979 vote and increased his margin of victory from 34 to 47 percent.²⁴

Table 3: Results of the 1983 Presidential Election

State	GNPP	NAP	NPN	NPP	PRP	UPN
Anambra	36,165	27,511	385,297	669,348	16,103	23,859
Bauchi	37,203	18,979	1,507,144	65,258	54,564	98,974
Bendel	11,723	8,653	452,776	53,306	7,358	566,035
Benue	19,897	10,573	384,045	152,209	6,381	79,690
Borno	179,265	15,698	348,974	26,972	26,996	120,138
Cross River	16,582	10,967	696,592	46,418	8,229	506,922
Gongola	25,530	37,318	282,820	148,055	81,205	160,720
Imo	52,364	32,694	398,463	1,064,436	18,370	22,648
Kaduna	80,862	37,368	1,266,894	225,919	300,476	225,878
Kano	35,252	14,207	383,998	274,102	436,997	48,494
Kwara	7,670	6,056	299,654	16,215	3,693	275,134
Lagos	11,748	8,636	126,165	119,455	6,570	1,367,807
Niger	12,984	8,182	272,086	112,971	8,736	15,772
Ogun	6,874	2,862	43,821	5,022	4,449	1,198,033
Ondo	11,629	10,566	366,217	20,340	7,052	1,412,539
Oyo	15,732	9,891	885,125	34,852	9,174	1,396,226

Plateau	18,612	10,490	292,606	280,803	11,581	38,210
Rivers	12,981	15,061	921,664	151,558	4,626	251,825
Sokoto	46,752	22,152	2,605,935	63,238	24,280	75,428
FCT (Abuja)	1,103	977	127,372	4,156	641	1,102
Total Vote Cast	640,128	308,842	12,047,648	3,534,633	1,037,481	7,885,434

Source: FEDECO Report, 1983.²⁵

Table 3 shows the performance of the five political parties that participated in the 1983 presidential election. The results of the election revealed the following:

- **Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim** of the GNPP scored 640,128 votes.
- **Tunji Braithwaite** of NAP scored 308,842 votes.
- **Alhaji Shehu Shagari** of NPN scored 12,047,748 votes.
- **Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe** of NPP scored 3,534,633 votes.
- **Alhaji Aminu Kano** of PRP scored 1,037,481 votes.
- **Chief Obafemi Awolowo** of UPN scored 7,885,434 votes.

From the analysis of the election, it was evident that the NPN showed an upward trend in electoral success compared to 1979.

Conducting the 1983 election in a free and fair atmosphere was beyond the capability of Justice Ovie-Whiskey and his team. While the team appeared honest, they were politically naïve in the discharge of their duties. Commenting on the election results, particularly the presidential and governorship elections, the Ahmadu Bello University Students' Union said:

When the present historical epoch of Nigeria is documented, the year 1983 will stand out as the culmination of the most consistent and well-organized political and economic betrayal of the honest yearning of our people. And the so-called presidential election as well as the gubernatorial elections concluded will remain at the nadir of an era dominated by traitorous and dastardly actions of a ruling class which know nothing but looting the nation's treasury and lacerating the political sentiments of our people for democracy.²⁶

Challenges of FEDECO during the 1979 and 1983 Presidential Elections in Nigeria

The 1979 Presidential Election

The **Electoral Decree of 1977** contained several restrictions on the eligibility of candidates, disqualifying those who could not demonstrate payment of their due share of income tax for the past three years, as well as anyone imprisoned or removed from public office on any grounds involving dishonesty. These provisions were not inherently prejudicial to any political party or orientation and, therefore, did not necessarily imply unfairness. However, political bias was perceived by many **Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP)** and **Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)** supporters as the motive behind the disqualification of their respective presidential candidates. The effective reinstatement of these candidates by the courts, however, blunted a serious challenge to the fairness and legitimacy of the 1979 elections.

Section 3(2)(b) of the **FEDECO Decree 1972** empowered the Commission to undertake the registration of voters, as well as the preparation and maintenance of the register of voters for the purpose of elections. This was a critical task for the success of the 1979 elections. The **Voter Registration Exercise**, scheduled to start on December 3, 1977, and end on January 15, 1978, did not actually commence until January 14, 1978. The exercise brought to light a number of administrative, technical, organizational, and strategic challenges. The task itself was formidable, and it was questionable whether it could be satisfactorily completed in the 5–6 weeks allocated.

Section 72 of the **Electoral Decree 1977** dealt with disqualification for election and outlined the requirement for tax payment as a condition for qualification to contest in elections. The interpretation and application of this provision became controversial with respect to the candidacies of two presidential candidates: **Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe** of the NPP and **Alhaji Aminu Kano** of the PRP. The controversy arose from

the Commission's decision not to recommend the two candidates for additional security coverage because they had failed to pay their income taxes as stipulated by the **Electoral Decree of 1977**.³¹

The 1983 Presidential Election

Registration of Political Parties

The **Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)** was faced with the task of registering political parties. Five parties were already registered from 1979: The **National Party of Nigeria (NPN)**, The **Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN)**, The **Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP)**, The **Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP)**, The **Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)**³²

Registration of Voters

The **registration of voters** for the 1983 elections was scheduled for the last two weeks of August 1982. By the end of August 1982, when the registration exercise closed, complaints of incompetence, partisanship, and fraud were raised. The Commission reported a total of **65,304,818 registered voters**, which was greater than the entire population of the country in 1963 and represented an increase of eighteen million from the 1979 register.

Preparation for the Election

FEDECO laid the physical groundwork for the elections, producing not just an electoral register but hundreds of millions of ballots over more than one hundred thousand polling stations, along with the training of perhaps half a million electoral officials—all amidst various logistical and social obstacles. Throughout its preparations, FEDECO made several decisions that proved to be controversially unavoidable, including when and in what order to schedule the five elections, which candidates to certify as qualified, and where to count the votes.

On **June 24**, its chairman announced that the votes would be counted at the polling stations, and that FEDECO would purchase **two hurricane lanterns for each polling station** to ensure that they had sufficient light to carry out the task.

Grievances and Court Cases Arising from the 1979 and 1983 Presidential Elections in Nigeria

1979 Presidential Election

Section 72 of the **Electoral Decree 1977** outlined the requirements for election qualification, specifying tax payment as a condition to contest. The interpretation and application of this provision became controversial with regard to the candidacies of **Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe** of the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) and **Alhaji Aminu Kano** of the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). Dr. Azikiwe challenged the Commission's decision in court, asserting that he had paid his income tax as required.

In an election petition submitted to the **Presidential Election Tribunal** in Lagos following the election of **Alhaji Shehu Shagari** as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, **Chief Obafemi Awolowo** contended that Shagari's election was invalid due to noncompliance with the provisions of **Part II of the Electoral Decree 1977**.

1983 Presidential Election

The second presidential election in Nigeria was held on **August 6, 1983**. The result was a victory for the incumbent **Alhaji Shehu Shagari**, who won **47.5%** of the votes cast. This result was challenged by **Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim** at the **Election Tribunal**.

Conclusion

This paper examined the role of the **Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)** in managing and conducting the **1979** and **1983** presidential elections in Nigeria. The **1979 presidential election** was particularly significant as it marked the beginning

of the **Second Republic** after thirteen years of military rule. An appraisal of the 1979 election reveals that it was generally considered successful. Much of its success has been attributed to the fact that the military regime that conducted the election was not a contestant.

From Nigeria's historical experience, the **1983 election** was not better than the **1979 presidential election**. It is clear to most Nigerians that, in terms of the conduct of the election, it was not an improvement over the 1979 election. In important respects, the 1983 elections were worse than those of **1964** and **1965**, where the electoral register was manipulated, polling agents were prevented from observing voting, counting agents were denied access to the counting centers, and blatantly false results were announced.

The **1983 presidential election** was characterized by excessive falsification of results, to the point where FEDECO lost the ability to reflect, even roughly, the relative strength of the parties. The outcome was so controversial and contested that the military once again seized the opportunity to oust the civilians from power on **December 31, 1983**.

It is the contention of this paper that reforms in the electoral process will make the conduct of elections more acceptable to political parties, candidates, and the international community. The introduction of innovative technological tools will help reduce cases of electoral impunity and guarantee the sanctity of the vote.

The enforcement of existing legislation on **campaign finance**, which seeks to regulate the functions of political parties, the ban on the use of state resources for political, personal, or campaign purposes, as well as the regulation and strict enforcement of provisions for equal airtime space to all political parties and candidates, should be adhered to.

Political elites have a pivotal role in the electoral reform process by distancing themselves from misconduct and mutual mistrust among politicians and parties. Vote buying and voter intimidation should be discouraged. Deliberate steps should be taken to develop a political culture that supports democratic

norms and practices, equity, justice, and transparency to deepen and sustain Nigeria's democracy. There is a need to introduce **E-voting and electronic transmission of results in real-time.**

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