

A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

After sixteen years of uninterrupted civilian rule, Nigeria appears to have made progress in her pursuit of the democratic ideal, particularly with periodic elections that are now adjudged to be free and fair by observers, and the emergence of an opposition that for the first time dislodged a sitting political party in power. Using this as an index, it is believed that the country is on course, politically, which had unfortunately being plagued by bad leadership, insecurity, corruption and impunity as in the last decade and a half. This paper that is conceived to examine the historical antecedents and dynamics of electioneering fortune in Nigeria is to dissect through a historical perspective, past elections in Nigeria which had been characterized by many undemocratic practices. The paper identifies factors that influence the outcome of elections, and issues that had come to play in Nigerian elections, especially, the presidential and gubernatorial elections. The paper then suggested ways for the conduct of credible elections that will enhance electoral sustainability and integrity in Nigeria and Africa in general.

Keywords: *Democracy, politics, political parties, election, e-voting.*

Introduction

This paper is primarily an analytical attempt to retrospectively appraise the factor that determine the outcome of the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. To put the paper in proper perspective, the paper will examine the history of political parties and elections in Nigeria before the factors that had overtime determined the outcome of elections in the country would be identified. In addition, an analysis of the core issues that had influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential elections and its implication for the growth and integrity of future elections will be carried out.

In the final analysis, the paper argued that considering the electoral frauds witnessed in the history of elections since she became independent, concluded that the 2015 general elections in Nigeria was, in view of some developments preceding the exercise, the conduct of the stakeholders, the outcome which could be considered as historic, a departure from the conduct and outcome of previous elections in the country.

Democracy

Democracy according to Okafor (1999), can be defined as a form of government and a way of political life in which the ruling power of a state is constitutionally vested on any particular class or classes, but in the members of the state as a whole and the people that exercise the power through their representatives, periodically elected by themselves in a free and fair election contested by political parties, which to the paper serves as a tool and process by which democracy operates.

Democracy has also been regarded by political scientists like Osaghae (2000), as a process of continuous struggle and engagement to make the state more responsive and accountable to the citizenry which makes the institutional requisite and processes more purposive and meaningful. The attempt by the two preceding political scientists to define democracy underscores the relevancy of the citizenry among whom we have the human resources that institutionalize the institution of democracy.

The existence of this multitude of definitions which cannot be exhausted here has made the definition of the term to be inconclusive. The inconclusiveness of these definitions is an indication that the democratic ideal remains a mirage or fantasy, because democracy as practiced in the Greek city states is no more feasible in the contemporary period.

The above assertion therefore, made it imperative to stress that in the contemporary sense, democracy has been largely appropriated in many literatures as a synonym for "liberal democracy", this is because it is the most practiced by a large number of countries of the world today.

Nevertheless, Thomas & Peter (1993), concluded that it is through constitutional democracy that the ordinary people in society are able to play important roles in the affairs of their government by exercising control according to the principle of majority rule through direct participation in a free and fair election.

Politics and Political Party

The term politics is subject to many definitions. Summarily, Lasswell (1993) viewed politics as "who gets what, when and how". Einstein (1965), in his view opined that politics deals with authoritative allocation of value in society. While Nnoli (1986), observed that politics has to do with the struggle for seizure, consolidation and use of state power. In his opinion, politics is concerned with the authoritative process which determines the goals of the society, mobilize its resources to realize these goals and distribute rights, duties, costs, benefits, rewards and punishment among the members of the society.

Politics involves power, authority, conflict and resolution of conflicts resulting from the interplay of differing forces that come to play. Political party according to Epstein (1967) is any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect government office holders under a given label. It seeks not to only influence government policies, but also undertake responsibility for the implementation of government policies different from such other organizations as trade unions, pressure groups and other interest groups. In summary, this paper will refer to as the "aggregation of interest."

Election

Election refers to the choice of representatives by the people to fill a position or political office by the method of voting. It is the medium through which a large number of people participate in the political process.

Elections in any democratic nation as averred by Ehindero & Ehindero (2012), is very fundamental to her democratic development. To them, it also refers to the choice of representatives by the people to fill a position or political office through voting in an organized election, in which several candidates present themselves from which the people choose their representative.

The above view is in tandem with the submission of Ujo (2000) and other political scientists that any attempt in trying to tie the concept to a single definition will be difficult and also acknowledge that like most concepts in social science, it is a relative term.

As a way out, he prefers to adopt the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences'* definition which subscribes to the view that elections is a procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular choice of variables, and also a process of choosing between alternative candidates for specific positions of authority. Election into political office at various levels of governance can be done in practice only through forms of procedures generally accepted as binding within a political society.

That is to say that, when viewed from the organizational perspective. It could also be defined as a form of procedure recognized by the rules of an organization, whereby all or some of the members of the organization, society and country/state choose a small number of persons or one person to hold office of authority periodically and not in perpetuity.

Moreover, where elections/ bye-elections are conducted in accordance with the rules and regulations, it is said to be free and fair. This bequeaths integrity on the electoral process, because the electoral management body which had conducted the exercise had operated without any form of interference or intimidation that would have threatened its independence and functional autonomy in the organization and conduct of the election.

Periodic elections among its functions avail the electorate the opportunity of choosing their representatives in a democratic manner when several candidates present themselves from which the people choose the individual or individuals of their choice to represent them.

It also makes the executive and the legislatures accountable to the people, politicians are therefore conscious of their responsibilities to the electorates. This is because at every election year, the people reserve the right to vote out of office, representatives who previously had not delivered on their promises to effectively represent their interest.

Elections also serve as a means of assessing the level of democratic culture in a political system as politicians embark on campaigns thus indirectly educating the electorate on the issues that affect them.

Finally, elections make it possible for one government to succeed another one in an orderly manner. This is because a government adjudged to be ineffective can be rejected at the polls. In Africa, however, only very few governments have been defeated at the polls probably as a result of the "incumbency factor" which favors rigging and manipulation of election results through coercion with the employment of state security apparatus at their disposal.

Analysis of Elections in Nigeria

Past elections in Nigeria, had witnessed the desperate bid for political power by stakeholders with vested interest in the Nigerian electoral process, who engage in all form of electoral malpractices, which advertently make the electorate to lose confidence in the electoral process. This has been identified to be an impediment to deepening electoral democracy,

because if the citizenry does not believe in the fairness, accuracy, openness and basic integrity of the electoral umpire and the process, the very basis of a democratic society might be threatened. (Alvarez & Hall, 2008)

Electoral fraud according to Lopez-Pinto (2010) portends more serious political implications, in that it allows a party or candidate to take over public positions contrary to the popular will of the people. This undermines the democratic process and usually leads to electoral violence, and political instability. We may recall that the government of Cote d'Ivoire, Peru and Serbia were swept out of power in the year 2000 as a result of popular uprising against elections that were regarded as being fraudulent. In view of the negative impact of electoral malpractices, global attention had shifted focus on how to mitigate such undemocratic tendencies and improve the electoral process.

One of such strategies to combat electoral malpractices was the introduction of modern technology into the electoral process. Though the use of technology in elections is not an end in itself, but assists in the various aspect of electoral administration (ACE Project, n.d). It is against this background that an electronic technology based device; the Smart Card Reader, was introduced into the Nigerian electoral process for the 2015 general elections to help improve and deepen the electoral processes.

In Nigerian electoral history, for since independence, there hardly had been a national election devoid of judicial arbitration. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) contested the result of the 1979 elections and other subsequent elections even up to the Supreme Court. Again on June 12, 1993 election was annulled by the military administration of General Babangida over alleged "irregularities".

Elections had also exposed the fragile and sometimes contradictory nature of Nigerian politics. These usually serve as excuse for military intervention. For example, the acrimony that attended the 1983 elections was part of the reasons given to justify the military coup d'état that brought the military back to power. So also was the annulment of the June 12, 1983 election that almost led to the disintegration of the country.

President Olusegun Obasanjo was at the helm of affairs of the PDP controlled Federal administration from 1999 to 2007. But at this juncture we must point out that the election of 2003 and 2007 held within his tenure as president of the Federal Republic were all disputed by opposition politicians in Nigeria as not being free and fair. We should also note that Chief Obasanjo's successor in office, Umar Musa Yar'adua described the 2007 Presidential election that brought him to power as being electorally flawed.

The sum total of this historical submissions above is that since 1960, Nigeria has been embroiled in election controversies with the argument that nearly all the elections in Nigeria have been surrounded with tales of electoral rigging and manipulation and once we again are approaching election year and the possibility of the election being free and fair very slim.

Conclusively, this paper is of the opinion that this type of background information is necessary for a better understanding and appreciation of the problems that confronts the country to create the new political order for it to develop, and the question to be asked at this juncture is why have elections and election result been such problematic?

Factors militating against Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria

It is a pity that Nigerians (especially the political elites hardly learn from history. Hence, despite the commendable findings, efforts and recommendations of committed stakeholders, the electoral system has still not conformed to an enviable standard). Though complex, the answer to the question posed in last section are fundamentally germane to learning from the mistakes of the past to create a better future. Among the factors that offer themselves are:

The orientation of the Nigerian political elite of seeing politics as an avenue for amassing wealth is fundamental. To be in power is to control the resources of the state that are often converted to personal uses. Therefore, to remain in power, various strategies are employed to ensure that election result favors them, which often make the opposition to take legal and extra legal steps to redress the injustice. The scenario described above is responsible for the rigging, the violence, the confusion and chaos that have characterized most if not all Nigerian elections and their results.

Group fear, which is a form of deep-seated phobia, views the respectability of the group if it loses. Nwosu (1991) assert that this phobia has elevated the word “domination” to the forefront of our political consciousness. Politicians have consistently manipulated this factor to achieve their objectives. Unfortunately, this scenario is contemporarily playing out in the zoning controversy raging within the ruling party in Nigeria.

The nature of the party system is another factor that has impeded the evolution of a creditable electoral system. The basic function of the political system is the aggregating of interest, checking the excesses of one another and providing concrete and competitive alternative solution to the nation’s problem among others. But in Nigeria, political parties and their leaders once in power want to remain in power for ever brooking no opposition from any quarter.

Loyal party members are kept in line with patronage, while the intransigent ones are harried. It is this strategy that could be used to explain the ubiquity of carpet crossing by politicians in Nigeria over time.

In Nigeria, almost all elections from independence to date have been subjects of judicial dispute for one reason or the other. The problems of holding free and fair elections in Nigeria include the following:

- The absence of a reliable population census figure that makes it difficult to ascertain the number of eligible voters, adults of voting age and the spatial distribution of these figures. What more the compilation and absence of accurate voters register, on which adequate projection and planning of election exercises could be based, which often disenfranchised many prospect voters.
- Moreover, the questions over revenue allocation formula and the sharing of political offices often influence the final compilation of the voters register and subsequent outcome of elections. As a result of the uncertainties as to who gets what and which office goes to a particular area or part of the country, a lot of manipulations attend the compilation of voter’s registers and these usually have serious implications for elections and the candidates’ electoral fortunes.
- The high level of illiteracy and low level of political education is also an impediment of the electorate from exercising their civic rights to protest against any abuse of or

violation of their will as expressed in the choice and election of their representatives. This in turn breeds weak structures that can challenge the political manipulations of the electorate and the elections.

- Regional, ethnic and religious considerations are also an impediment to the conduct of free and fair elections in Nigeria. Going by antecedents, this potent factor cannot be discounted and it explains why political parties in the first republic enjoyed their largest support from the region of their leaders.
- The absence of an independent and impartial electoral umpire, as the government in power deploys all the known tricks in the book to manipulate the process for a favorable outcome. It could be by intimidation, inducement of various forms to electoral officials. It got so worse during the Western Region elections.
- In addition, the absence of an independent and impartial Judiciary that will not compromise its constitutional role of an arbiter of disputes that it ought to be in election petitions.
- Finally, the failure on the part of politicians to cultivate the spirit of political sportsmanship required for the sustainability of the democratic culture. But the poser here is, even if the other impediment were to be fixed, how many of the politicians on the continent would freely and openly concede defeat to congratulate their opponents as done in other climes?

Factors that Determine Outcome of Elections in Nigeria

For brevity, these factors and strategies had been identified and listed which the paper may not be able to discuss exhaustively and comparatively in relation to other countries on the continent, but which had come to play in their electoral history in one form or the other are summarized below:-

- i) Incumbency factor
- ii) Name recognition score
- iii) Tenure achievement and challenges
- iv) Party platform
- v) Religious affiliation
- vi) Ethnic considerations and agenda
- vii) Brawn and balls
- viii) Level of voters education
- ix) Mobilization by political parties, associates and candidates
- x) Campaign appeal i.e. manifesto, symbols and slogan
- xi) Financial capability
- xii) Godfathers
- xiii) Campaign thrust i.e. media and of recently the social media networking, and finally,
- xiv) Legal option
- xv) Bandwagon effect and desire to belong to mainstream political camp for the derivation of maximum patronage from elected party and politicians; and,
- xvi) Influence and support of organized labor union, private sector and Civil Society Organizations.

2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria: An Analysis

At independence, Nigeria was projected as capable of taking the global community by storm considering the available natural and human resources which were vital assets that made nations great when properly harnessed. But more than five decades after, the then fledgling democracy was still crawling. The leadership failed to lay a solid foundation for a united nation. Thus, the colonial legacy was threatened by disintegration. In the seventies, there were signs that the country would become an economic miracle, but in the eighties, the economy lay prostrate.

Unfortunately, five decades later, Nigeria is yet to resolve its national question where many citizens perceive themselves not as Nigerians bounded together by common destiny, but tribesmen projecting the antagonistic pursuits of rival ethnic groups in an atmosphere of lopsided federalism and the frittering away of huge resources which had made the citizens expectant of a government that will embark on a clean-up of the Augean stable of corruption through the introduction of probity and prudence in public financing.

In Nigeria, according to Gbadegesin, no election is considered as important as the one that elects the president of the federation (The Nation, 2014). To buttress the above reality, he quoted a former Speaker of the United States of America House of Representatives, O'Neil's dictum that remains true that, "all politics is local, but the Presidency is in a league of its own," and in Nigeria's case, which is federal in name only the reality is not lost on the citizens.

Nigeria paradoxically has a constitution that prioritizes the central government at the center, giving it control over her natural resources and the ability to control what of the amount of the statutory allocations accruable to levels of government gets to them and when, which made the center a disproportionate beneficiary of the revenue allocation formula.

Before the election, there was vigorous campaign from the political parties, with two of them taking the center stage; The People Democratic Party (PDP) which was in power, and All Progressives Congress (APC), not only to sell their candidates and their manifestoes to the electorate, but to canvass their personal positions on the issues at stake in this election and how they intend to resolve them.

In the view of this paper, in a political clime like Nigeria where elections are not merely won by theoretical postulations, the issues at stake in the 2015 presidential election are corruption, governance, insecurity, corruption and the economy, which demands quick resolution from any of the candidates that is to mount the saddle of leadership in the coming dispensation. This is because security in all ramifications, ranging from food to health, to life and property, cultural etc. are the basic minimum that a citizen must expect his country to provide for the simple reason that it is the state that has the monopoly of power and resources to tackle these problems.

To prepare for the election, fund raising dinners were organized and at a single event at the Presidential Villa, over ₦21 billion was raised through individuals, entities and government Ministry, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) donations for the 2015 Presidential campaign, which is in contravention of relevant and extant laws as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic and the 2010 Electoral Act (as Amended).

This act of profligacy came against the backdrop when the government had imposed austerity measures and devalued the Naira due to falling oil prices which had further weakened the purchasing power of the already impoverished citizenry. Besides, Forums such as Governors forums and MDAs made impressive donations when civil servants at all levels of governance were being owed salaries for upward of six months for which they were gearing up for an industrial action.

To public affairs commentators like Odunfa in *The Nation* (9th July, 2015), the presidential election was perhaps, one of the most hotly contested and less divisive in the annals of Nigeria's electoral history, which finally took place after a controversial six week postponement, following the insistence by Security Agencies citing security reasons of the Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country.

When it became increasingly apparent that the ruling party is fast losing ground with the massive defection of its members to the opposition camp, every attempt were made through many avenues to frustrate the introduction and deployment of the electronic (e-Voting) system. The first attempt was the rejection of the deployment of the Smart Card Reader which was a critical component in the electronic process as used in several countries of the world. (Engineering Network Team, 2015)

This device that was to be used for the first time in the electoral process of Nigeria, is a technological device set-up to authenticate and verify a Permanent Voters Card (PVC) on Election Day, was to be issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure credible, transparent, free and fair election in order to deepen the country's democracy.

In what was seen by analysts to be a desperate bid by the government in power, demonstrations were organized on the excuse that if the elections was not postponed, they claim that majority of prospective voters from the conflict geo-political zone stand the prospect of being disenfranchised, the perceived shortcomings of the e-voting system, and the general insecurity that was pervasive in the country.

But, the election turned out to be a revelation to Nigerians on how to effectively exercise their franchise and the effectiveness of the utilization of the biometric capabilities of the permanent voters' card and card readers which made the polls Nigeria's first technology compliant election, with greater success, despite initial hitches and distraction and opposition to the deployment of the new technology.

The election was historic because for the first time in the country's history, an incumbent President who was defeated at the polls exhibited a rare sense of sportsmanship, statesmanship and patriotism by accepting defeat when it was obvious that the opposition was leading and further refusing to challenge the outcome of the election through "litigation" or "digging in" in the face of defeat, thereby saving his country untold consequences.

Secondly, the country witnessed in 2012 a change in her democratic development for the fact that an opposition party replaced an entrenched government in a free and fair election is indicative of the consolidation of her democratic system.

Further, the citizens of the most populous black nation on earth had demonstrated that it can remove incumbent leadership and people at the helm of governance through the electoral

process and the accountability of leaders to the people will be given greater priority. Poor performance can henceforth be sanctioned through the polls and not by military interventions or political upheavals and by implication serve as role model to other developing countries of Africa and the world in general.

Also important to note is the emergence of what optimists regard as a unified (?) opposition platform in the Nigerian political terrain, as previous attempts has always being unsuccessful. This time around, the emergence of a virile opposition in the form of APC made it possible to challenge and defeat the PDP after sixteen years in of virtual one party rule at the federal level.

Elections in Nigeria: Lessons of History

In fifty-five years Nigeria, the ninth most populous “nation” on earth had witnessed fifteen administrations until 2015. It had been ruled by eight military regimes and witnessed the foisting of an inexplicable interim contraption; a mixed grill of soldiers and their collaborators, and five democratically elected governments which could not make much deference. The big question being asked is how will the present one in power that won the historic 2015 election at the federal level succeed where others had not measured up.

The bitterest lesson Nigeria must have learnt from the 2015 General elections that had left some significant milestone in her electoral history is that, as it has not been possible to successfully change a government through free and fair elections without calling its integrity to question, Nigerians had realized that the political elite that is torn between factional and fractional cleavages and had proven itself to be a selfish class blinded by the lust for power is ready to violate the constitution, democratic institutions and the electoral processes at every opportunity. Their actions and inactions reflect the fact that it’s an insecure class, conditioned by the socio-economic structure of Nigeria and re-colonization to seek political office as a means of consolidating itself materially, even at the expense of the basic assumptions that have guided the electoral process.

Furthermore, another lesson is that sovereign power resides with the people and their desires expressly canvassed must be the basis of political wisdom and public policy.

In addition to the above is that in a multi-cultural system, respect for democratic norms also requires respect for diversity and complexity of the polity.

Another lesson is the persistence of ethnic politics and religion as factors in electoral behavior and politics, is a problem which is still much with the Nigerian electorate and which had defied several solutions has become a ready tool in the hands of the political elite.

Retrospectively, the polls have lifted Nigeria to a higher political pedestal, this is in the sense that it had albeit controversially facilitated a successful transition from one civilian administration to another thus consolidating on democracy.

Finally, the lesson here for the APC is that political parties longevity and success in power depends on its capacity to provide good and sustainable democratic ideals and dividends of democracy to Nigerians, if not, it will go the way of most other African Countries’ ruling party in power, that oftentimes adopt the “sit-tight” strategy” to stay in power when their time is up, and which are replete all over the African continent as analyzed elsewhere by Ehindero (2013). History is still unfolding and it is not over yet. This is why the APC must undertake a

constant reality check as the only tonic that drives the modernity process is the unrelenting drive for further modernization.

To conclude this section, this paper is of the view that all stakeholders had to effectively learn from the lessons of history and correct the lapses pointed out by what critics claimed had compromised the integrity of elections in Nigeria. It is hoped that the subsequent perfection of the biometric voting system in Nigeria would clearly improve the integrity of future elections in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In any society where meaningful steps to modernity and political rationality have taken place, the electorates have never being politically passive object of history, but active participants in the perpetual drama of human existence.

This is true of Nigeria, where it is in post-independence period of Nigeria era that all meaningful steps taken towards emancipation and the journey to self-actualization have taken place when the whole citizenry or a significant section rises in unity for the actualization of a common cause.

This can be seen in the battle against civilian autocracy in the first and second republics, the intellectual and civil society siege against military despotism as encoded in the struggle to entrench the will of the people after the June 12, 1993 and the struggle against a corrupt political oligarchy and nascent ethnic hegemony whose outcome was the historic election. Indeed, it is a milestone in the country's century old journey to self-actualization, which political analysts had been quick to posit is not to be a terminal, but only a crucial and historical reference point in the long journey to freedom.

Finally, other African countries should take a cue from what had happened in the Nigerian 2015 elections, that good governance dedicated to the service of their entire country is necessary for creating a sense of belonging among the citizenry, and that the overriding objectives of electing political parties or candidates into public offices should be the enhancement of security, elimination of corruption, and the pursuit of the well-being of the citizenry.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the prescribed sanctions and punishments for the violation of Section 91 (9) of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended), in respect of limit of donations by individuals, maximum campaign expenses and prescribed sanctions, and Section 221 of 1999 Nigerian Constitution that prohibits some categories of associations, This paper therefore recommends that:-

- Sterner punishment should be prescribed for such electoral related offences, as nobody had ever been prosecuted or jailed for the violations of these laws or other election related electoral offenses In Nigeria.
- Aggrieved politicians should be encouraged to employ only legal means, as seen in the recent past to address grievances.
- The continued adoption, usage, retention and perfection of the bio-metrics devises and electronic voting (e-voting) in Nigeria would clearly improve the integrity of future elections in Nigeria.

- Known and acknowledged traditional avenues of rigging should be blocked through the use of a computerized electoral register as done in other climes.
- The open/Secret ballot system of voting should be sustained to reduce ballot stuffing and hijacking as votes are subsequently counted in the open view of the voters which is to be subsequently electronically transmitted immediately to the collation centre.
- In view of all these, political parties must embrace reforms that will ensure genuine internal democracy leading to the selection of only those found suitable for elective and appointive positions. The era of anointing candidates (mediocre) without consideration for their ability to deliver upon their campaign promises should be discontinued.
- The employment of the social media should be maximally explored by both the electorates, politicians, and political parties to educate the electorates on their manifestos, antecedents and capabilities to deliver the socio-economic deliverables to the electorates in addition to its creation of a greater effect on the outcome of future elections, which by implication will make Nigeria's democracy more competitive, stronger and definitive.
- More importantly, it is also urgent to radically interpret democracy within the Nigerian context in a manner that will make elections less of "war of spoils and winner takes it all" and more of a modality of popular expression. For it is within this redefinition that stakeholders like the Law Enforcement Agencies, the electoral bodies and the press can play a role approximate for the conduct of free and fair elections.
- There is the need for the reversal of the negative perceptions in the public domain through a more pro-active voter education about the electoral processes and law.

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