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Nigeria General Elections:
From Reforms to Transformation



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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Abubakar Momoh

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BACKGROUND

The use of technology in general elections in Nigeria is not new. However, before the era of Professor Attahiru Jega, Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), its use was half-hearted and inconsistent. Jega was the INEC chair from June 2011 to July 2015. The haphazard use of technology prior to Jega's tenure further deepened the electoral crises in Nigeria. For example, Nigerians had used temporary voters' cards (TVCs) instead of permanent voters' cards (PVCs) to vote at many general elections in the past, which became a recipe for monumental rigging of votes. The 2015 general elections were the first time that the leadership of the election management body showed determination to break with past tradition of use of TVCs and embraced the use of PVCs. The PVCs were to be verified by a smart card reader (SCR), and authenticated through a check on fingerprints and biometric data. This was to prevent impersonation of voters; it also provided an audit trail by keeping records of authenticated voters in the results from each polling unit (PU). The data were also used to analyse the demographics of voters (Nnam 2016, p.1).

This technology was innovative and revolutionary in the annals of electoral history in Nigeria. The move sent cold shivers down the spines of fraudulent politicians who sought to fight INEC and its leadership through all means – including legal, media, political and military. The entire apparatus of political control, from Parliament to the Council of State, from Service Chiefs to the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA), became panicky and almost paranoid. Some tried to stop the leadership of INEC from using SCRs, claiming it was illegal and unconstitutional to do so.

The 2015 general elections also saw the use of social media and new modes of campaigns and political marketing, and new issues of soapbox sloganeering and campaigning. This special edition of the *Journal of African Elections* seeks to focus on these issues as well as the SCRs.

The conduct of elections in Nigeria has always been challenging. The general elections held between 1999 and 2011 were described as increasingly worse than earlier elections. The 2003 general elections were frankly scandalous, whilst the 2007 general elections were nothing but mere allocation of votes to contestants or candidates. Indeed, the 2007 election was described as 'direct capture' of votes through political banditry and recklessness. The dimension and magnitude of vote-rigging was unfathomable. With respect to the 2003 general elections, Oddih (2007) avers:

The recorded cases are: multiple registration, hoarding of voters cards, under-age registration, destruction of voters cards, impersonation, forgery, block recruitment of agents, poor training of ad-hoc staff, employment of unqualified ad-hoc staff, non-payment of recruits as and when due, bribery to influence recruits, sponsoring of supporters to be among recruits, supply of poor quality material as electoral materials, poor management of logistic support, inflation of accredited numbers (sic), multiple voting, influencing voters, falsification of results, hijacking of materials, intimidation of voters/officials, collusion by law enforcement agents, incitement during campaigns, inflammatory speeches, slandering of opponents, ethnic/religious sentiments, kidnapping, withholding evidence, deliberate time-wasting in election tribunal etc.

(Oddih 2007, p. 160-161)

This scenario led the biggest beneficiary of the 2007 general elections, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, to openly condemn the outcome. On his inauguration as President, he set up the Electoral Reforms Committee (ERC), chaired by Hon. Muhammadu Uwais (retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria). The Committee made far-reaching recommendations that were very popular with citizens, but which the government lacked the political will to implement. One member of the Uwais Committee was Professor Attahiru Jega, who was later appointed by the government to chair INEC.

Jega's appointment came after the calamitous general elections of 2007, overseen by Professor Maurice Iwu (then chairman of INEC). Professor Jega and his new team were appointed in June 2011 and they had six months to prepare for the general elections. There were debates on various challenges, including the problems associated with voter registration, accreditation of voters, and voting, as well as a variety of electoral malpractices. Of particular importance are problems associated with security of electoral personnel and materials during these processes, and the reverse logistics. Thus, election results are often contested in courts and sometimes dissatisfaction with electoral outcomes have reflected in

post-election violence. This was the case in Kaduna and elsewhere after the 2007 general elections, in which over 800 people were killed (Karim 2014).

An important factor in the debate on how to improve the integrity of elections is the application of technology to modernise electoral processes and reduce challenges associated with them. It is believed that technology not only makes these processes cleaner, easier and faster but can also make the process more secure, reliable and sustainable. In place of manual registration which has to be repeated, electronic registration eases storage of registration data and facilitates continuous registration. Once a voter is registered, he or she can continue to use a PVC for subsequent elections. In the long run, it is quite cost effective.

Nigeria witnessed the first use of biometric registration in the 2007 general elections. However, there was no electronic verification during accreditation, and voters were issued with TVCs for use at the elections. The election turned out to be very controversial, with some scholars and observers describing it as the worst election in the annals of general elections in the country (Suberu 2007). In an effort to improve the standard of general elections, a major issue of debate – even within INEC – was whether the voter register system inherited from the days when INEC was led by Maurice Iwu should be used or jettisoned. Some supported its use, in light of the short time left before the elections. Others said the voter register was a major source of the rigging, malfeasance, malpractice and infractions witnessed on a grand scale in 2007.

In the end, biometric voter registration was conducted but TVCs were still used for the 2011 general elections. There were claims and counter-claims of exclusion by prospective voters. The voter turnout could not be reconciled with the total number of registered voters. It became apparent to INEC that the voter register was oversubscribed with fictive and non-existent citizens; many TVCs were cloned or fake. Using an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), INEC was able to identify about 870 000 duplications (INEC Report on the 2011 General Elections).

This experience in 2011 convinced INEC, now under the leadership of Professor Jega, of the necessity of using PVCs in general elections. The faults, leakages and loopholes of the TVC in previous elections, along with faulty and inaccurate voter register and the collusion of electoral officials (both permanent and ad hoc) and security personnel had all added up to undermine successive elections in Nigeria before 2011.

ROAD TO SMART CARD READERS

The need to clean the voter register, weed out fictive voters, and have an authentic and accurate list of voters resulted in INEC strengthening its ICT department. They

engaged a consultant to work with the ICT team and introduced an automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS), which complemented the direct data capture (DDC) machine in the pioneering effort towards the Anambra State gubernatorial election in August 2013.

In Anambra State (province) alone, AFIS identified over 88 000 fake voters prior to the conduct of the Governorship election. It became apparent to INEC that if the electoral process must be made credible then it should commence with its internal processes, mechanisms and institutions as far as permissible by law and under the INEC Guidelines. The reforms that the Commission had not been able to introduce before the 2011 elections had to begin to germinate in the next electoral cycle, heading towards the 2015 elections. For instance, in 2011, the total number of registered voters in Nigeria was 73 528 040 million people; by 2015, after the use of AFIS and registration of old and new or first-time voters, the voter register had dropped to 68 833 476 million people. These figures were cleared with the political parties through IPAC and with other relevant stakeholders, and nobody disputed the INEC figures. It is believed that the figures can be further screened to weed out fictive and fictitious names.

The use of SCRs in the 2015 Nigerian general elections was a most innovative deployment of technology aimed at enhancing and improving public trust in the electoral process. Nonetheless, the change occurred in the context of a large programme of electoral reform. These reforms had begun with preparation for the 2011 elections and included the new biometric register of voters, the remodified open ballot system (REMOBS), a revised framework for results collation and returns, and improved voter education and citizen engagement. There was improvement in the quality of sensitive electoral materials (serial numbering and colour-coding of ballot papers and results sheets, and security coding of ballot boxes). An inter-agency consultative committee on election security (ICCES) was created to ensure coordinated engagement of all security agencies during the election period (Jega 2014, p. 6).

POLITICS OF SMART CARD READERS

Once politicians realised that the AFIS had eroded their fictitious voters, the next point of focus was to play out the politics around the registration exercise and issuance of PVCs. Several politicians of various persuasions began to insist that INEC disenfranchised their supporters because they could not collect their PVCs. This became a major issue for the Senate, and together with other issues – especially the use of SCRs – resulted in the Senate summoning Jega to one of its sessions.

Jega was confronted with two core issues. The first was whether disenfranchising some people in order to have a credible election was far less hurtful than resorting to the use of TVCs – with a repeat of the situation in the 2007 general elections (or worse). INEC felt that under the circumstances of Nigeria's recent electoral history, it was better to tolerate a situation where some people (for both human and logistical reasons) could not collect their PVCs than to resort to use of TVCs, which was harmful to the electoral process. The total number of PVCs which INEC had was 66 890 131, while the total number of PVCs distributed nationwide was 58 201 135. A total of 8 688 996 PVCs remained uncollected in various INEC offices nationwide before the 2015 elections. This is not such an alarming figure, knowing that multiple registrations took place and this was the first major nationwide attempt to clean, print and distribute PVCs.

Some of the problems that affected non-collection of PVCs were high mobility of voters from one place to another, due to workplace transfers or new employment and the conclusion of studies by students, as well as the fear of being seen and caught for multiple registrations. Several reasons made it impossible for people to collect the over 8 million PVCs from INEC.

A total of 182 000 SCRs were purchased and deployed nationwide for the 2015 general elections. The SCRs were used to verify the PVCs and the authenticity of prospective voters. Once the political gladiators found out that INEC was determined to persist with the SCRs, they began to mobilise their arsenal – the media and public opinion – to discredit the process. This was done in several ways: legal, political and international best practice point of view. I will highlight a few of these issues.

The legal argument was that the use of SCRs amounted to electronic voting, which was unconstitutional and not approved by the NASS. The political argument was that INEC ought to have piloted or tested the SCR in stand-alone elections, such as in Anambra, Ekiti and Osun State gubernatorial elections, to fine-tune its efficacy before deploying it for a general election. Hence, INEC was taking a gamble on a national scale that could result in political and electoral crises worse than those of 2007. It was also argued that from the point of view of international best practice, an election management body (EMB) must not be the arrow-head to disenfranchise people. Since many people did not get their PVCs, voters should be allowed to use their TVCs to vote. But the use of TVCs implied that the SCRs could not be used to verify and authenticate both the card and the voter's identity. Yet at the heart of rigging in Nigeria is that some voters engaged in multiple voting by presenting several TVCs.

The first argument could not stand because the DDC machine that was used by previous EMBs in Nigeria, including during the registration of voters for the 2007 elections under Maurice Iwu, was an electronic device. If the claim

of electronic voting can be made against the use of the SCRs then the same can be made against the use of DDC machines. To be sure, electronic voting can truly be said to have taken place if the ballot is cast by electronic device. However, this was not the case in Nigeria. The SCR is merely a means of verifying and authenticating the card and the voter. It is an irony that some politicians kicked against it. However, its use was at the core of the electoral success of the 2015 general elections.

Beyond all these, there are clear advantages and challenges associated with the use of the SCRs which need to be examined for the purpose of future elections. I will merely outline them here.

Strengths of using the SCR

1. It conferred credibility and integrity, and rekindled trust in the electoral process.
2. It drastically reduced ballot box snatching, over-voting and rigging.
3. In spite of all attempts by political gladiators they could not clone the PVC. All cloned cards were identified by the SCRs.
4. It made accreditation of voters seamless and less rancorous.
5. It has backup information, which can assist in electoral adjudication (in the same way that the PVC has a contactless chip which is not destroyable and contains all vital information about the voter).
6. It has paved the way for Nigerians to clamour for electronic voting in the 2019 general elections.

Challenges of using the SCR

1. The lack of experimental, incremental pilot runs with SCRs led to a lot of unmitigated challenges before and during the elections.
2. Hands-on training in the use of SCRs was taken for granted by many ad hoc staff, and time allocated to training was not adequate to master its use.
3. The inexperience and lack of diligence and attentiveness in the use and application of the device by ad hoc staff occasioned failure in many parts of South-East and South-South Nigeria. Such staff did not remove the cellophane seal on the eyes of the device where fingerprints are read, and did not adjust the date and time setting on the device.
4. There was sabotage and compromise by some ad hoc and permanent staff, which resulted in the Commission issuing a memo urging the use of manual accreditation wherever the SCR failed, during the presidential and NASS elections of 28 April 2015. This was taken by many to mean that INEC had approved the resort to manual accreditation for all elections. That assumption, however, was not correct. But if INEC had not taken an on-the-spot decision, the country could have been consumed by conflagration.

5. The SCRs were not protected in the same way that sensitive materials such as ballot papers and result sheets (Form EC 8 series) were protected. There is a need to properly safeguard the SCRs.
6. There is also the problem of storage of the SCRs in a humid climate. There is a need to think creatively about how to do this. If the SCRs are not well preserved and stored, it will amount to a huge cost for INEC during the 2019 general elections.
7. SCRs cannot be used without PVCs. Some people collected PVCs by proxies, some with the intent to impersonate, and others did not protect their PVCs. Hence the SCRs could not read some cards, leading to complaints lodged with incident forms.
8. PVCs were wrongly packaged and hence sent to the wrong states, but this was only discovered at the point of distribution. Politicians made political capital out of the errors.
9. There was data mismatch, whereby either biometric data or the bio data on the card did not correspond with the true information of the owner of the card.
10. Through negligence, some batteries were not fully charged and ran out fast.

(Adeshina 2016, p.17; INEC Report on the 2015 General Elections).

Chynwe Nnam summarised the operational challenges of the SCRs and how the EMB responded, as follows:

- In some cases the SCR could read PVCs, but the voter's fingerprints could not be authenticated.
INEC approach: If the PO/ APO (VP) is satisfied that it belongs to the voter, he/she should allow the voter to vote and fill in an incident form.
- With respect to sustained malfunction of the SCR.
INEC approach: Accreditation will be suspended until a replacement is provided. The problem created here was that the suspension caused delays in the voting process.
- Wherever a backup SCR was not provided at the polling unit by 1 pm on E-Day.
INEC approach: The PO or APO (VP) will inform the voters that accreditation and voting will continue the next day.
- Battery life: Some SCR batteries were defective whilst others were not fully charged; as a result they could not hold power for a long duration.
INEC approach: Batteries were taken from the backup SCRs and inserted into the SCRs being used, and were later taken for charging.

- Some SCRs malfunctioned because the secure access module (SAM) cards were faulty.
INEC approach: Some SAM cards were replaced from backup SCRs.
- Some of the subscriber identity modules (SIMs) inside SCRs had no network.
INEC approach: We had to use Internet WIFI to do the transmission.
- Some ad hoc staff handling the SCRs were not proficient at operating the device.
INEC approach: We had to do on-the-spot swapping of APOs with better and more capable hands who could handle the machines.
- Some SCRs were not properly configured or were wrongly configured.
INEC approach: On-the-spot reconfiguration was done in such cases.
- Some SCRs were wrongly deployed to different Polling Units (PUs) than those for which they were configured. Part of the problem had to do with a lack of diligence to crosscheck and do appropriate matching.
INEC approach: On-the-spot reconfigurations were done.
- Some SCRs lost their IP address because of a problem with the central server.
INEC approach: We had no solution for that except to change the SCR.
- Some of the SCRs could not read PVCs.
INEC approach: The then Chairman of the Commission, Prof. Jega, approved the use of manual accreditation in such circumstances.

Nnam 2016, pp. 4-5

The prospects of modernisation of Nigeria's electoral processes through technology call for deeper research into the problems and issues arising from the use of SCRs, PVCs and other electronic devices during the 2015 general elections. Such studies would enable remedial measures towards future elections and usher in electronic voting.

SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This edition of the *Journal of African Elections* focuses on the use of technology and smart card readers in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The authors are concerned mainly with issues arising from the use of technology for biometric registration and biometric verification, where this involved smart card readers and

permanent voters' cards. The general theme is the conduct of the 2015 elections. However, the discussions are situated within the context of electoral politics in Nigeria, and at least one paper examines this general context in some detail.

In the first article, Grace Ojekwe notes that political advertisement campaigns have become popular among politicians in relation to previous preference for personal contact and campaign rallies or speeches. Indeed, rallies are usually a carnival-like event suffused with instrumental music, popular choruses with political meanings, and dance. The size of the crowd at such rallies is often considered to demonstrate the popularity of the party and candidate in the locality where such rallies are held. Thus, politicians 'rent a crowd' to show off their electoral competitiveness and ensure that their rallies are huge enough to buttress their claim to popularity among voters. Politicians point to such crowds as a reflection of the eventual outcome of the contest.

Since 2007, the use of political ad campaigns has expanded in terms of the mode of delivery, type of language used, and forms of media used to communicate electoral messages. Whilst noting an overflow of both traditional and new media with political ad campaigns, Ojekwe tested the efficacy of campaigns in general as a strategy to attract voters in elections in Nigeria. She examines the extent to which voters' choices in the gubernatorial election in Lagos State were influenced by Akinwunmi Ambode's ad campaigns. She did so partly to determine the most effective campaign strategy used by the gubernatorial candidate, and partly to show that voters are becoming more aware about political information – including information on candidates and their manifestos, party policies and election guidelines – through the ads. Ojekwe concludes that political ad campaigns do not have a strong effect on the electorate's voting behaviour.

In the second article, Anthony Aduloju examines how youth in Nigeria redefined the 2015 general elections through the social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter. The youth left an indelible mark on the electoral system, at the same time carving out new directions for elections in the country. Aduloju argues that social media can play a potent role in galvanising the youth for political discourse, conscientisation and education.

The next three articles focus on the consequences of various technologies applied in the 2015 general elections. Aremu Ayinde and Idowu Aluko address improvements in the 2015 elections through innovations in Anti Electoral Fraud Procedures (AEFP), specifically the use of PVCs and SCRs to address security challenges. They argue that these technologies helped to reduce electoral malpractices to an acceptable minimum. Malpractices that were reduced included multiple voting, underage voting, voter impersonation, ballot stuffing, ballot snatching, irregular accreditations and general insecurity. According to the authors, these problems accounted for the positive perception by Nigerians of

their electoral environment and of INEC's level of preparedness for the elections, as reported by the Afrobarometer survey.

Alebiosu, in his article, examines the debate generated among election stakeholders before, during and after the 2015 general elections over the use of SCRs as a technological device to authenticate and verify PVCs on election day. He then considers the challenges and impact of the card reader on the elections. There are many gains to be derived from the use of card readers, including statistical analysis of demographic data of voters and voting – for purposes of research and planning, building public confidence and trust in election management, and reduction of electoral conflicts. Alebiosu concludes that deployment of the device ensured credible, transparent, free and fair elections in 2015 and thereby deepened Nigeria's democracy. In his view, SCRs and other election technology should be used for all future elections in Nigeria.

Leveraging on the assumption that the 2015 general elections were a clear success, Osita Agbu discusses whether the success could be attributed to a single factor or a combination of factors, thereby assessing the extent to which the use of the PVC and SCR contributed to the success of the elections. He explores the circumstances that occasioned the use of PVCs and SCRs, the polemics surrounding their use, and the significance for the 2015 presidential election. He argues that the use of PVC and SCR ensured free, fair and credible elections. These items made it extremely difficult for results to be manipulated, either by anonymous individuals or through arbitrary and fraudulent manipulation of figures. The electronic devices were very difficult to clone or compromise. Like Alebiosu, Agbu suggests that Nigeria should improve on the quality of future elections by improving and upscaling the use of technology.

In their respective articles, Hakeem Onapajo, Moses Aluigba, Ebenezer Oluwole and Chris Ojukwu return to the broader context of the 2015 general elections. Onapajo focuses on the factor of religion in elections. He argues that an analysis of the 2015 presidential election showed that religion played a central role in the pre-election period, but was less significant in the actual choices or voting pattern of the electorate on election day. Other factors, especially a candidate's profile and performance records, took precedence over religious and ethnic considerations. Voting patterns, according to Onapajo, revealed an increasingly sophisticated electorate and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Aluigba provides a litany of electoral malpractices experienced at the polls since Nigeria's transition to civil rule in 1999. He examines the consequences of these malpractices for democracy and governance, stressing at least five consequences. In general, malpractice leads to higher levels of voter apathy in a population. This is often the case because voters believe that their vote does not count. Malpractice therefore erodes the legitimacy of elections and fuels

insensitivity and lack of accountability by a government. Inordinate use of money in politics, especially vote buying, promotes the privatisation of public offices and diverts resources away from development, as politicians try to recoup their 'investment' once they are elected into public office. Malpractices also engender distrust in the political system and trigger protests, thereby leading to political instability. The employment of foul means by a dominant party to secure power, and the pervasiveness of autocratic party leadership, prevalence of patronage, party switching and defections, prevent the strengthening and institutionalisation of political parties as building blocks of electoral competition. Aluigba warns that electoral malpractice is a monster that must be killed by resolute steps to overhaul the entire electoral process.

In the final article, Oluwole and Ojukwu examine the salience of ethnic political associations and alliances in Nigeria's multiple transitions from dictatorship to democracy, and from electoral democracy to consolidation of democracy. They argue that while the manipulation of ethnic identity has been divisive, ethnic compensation (principles and constitutional provisions that promote inclusiveness) and balance of power tend to mediate such division.

This collection of articles provides an initial engagement with the bold application of technology in a difficult electoral context – one that is characterised by intense competition, weak political parties, pervasive electoral malpractices, hate speech and patronage politics. The lesson is that technological interventions can go a long way in curbing the pathologies of electoral governance. The various authors provide robust discussion of Nigeria's electoral experience with the use of PVCs and SCRs in the country's quest to advance the integrity of the electoral process, with modest success.

CONCLUSION

It appears that the use of PVC and SCR will continue in Nigeria. I base this assertion on the popular support the technology has received from the electorate, and the common-sense perception by many politicians that any further campaign against such technology will amount to a battle lost. However, urgent challenges include how to improve the ethical conduct and professional capacity of electoral personnel; how to further clean the bloated voter register to make it authentic; and how to improve reverse logistics on E-Day by e-tracking, e-collation and transmission of election results – all of which will reduce the chain and risk of snatching ballot boxes or rigging election results by party thugs. There is also the issue of diaspora voting and electoral voting. It is hoped that the next electoral cycle will include appropriate debate and programme design, proper strategic design, and fuller electoral training – including better training of security

personnel on election duty, and better voter and civic education. The appropriate legal instruments should also be revised, particularly the Electoral Act. If these steps are accomplished, there will be better electoral service delivery in the 2019 general elections.

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POLITICAL ADVERT CAMPAIGNS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR:

Akinwunmi Ambode's 2015 Election Campaign in Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, the use of political ad campaigns has become increasingly popular, as was evident in the 2015 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State. Advert campaigns of several candidates filled the media, which seemed to be a clear distinction from election campaigns in the past, in which the focus was mainly on political rallies and speeches. This led me to seek to understand the effectiveness of political ad campaigns in shaping the voting behaviour of Nigerian voters. Specifically, I examined political ad campaigns of the All Progressive Congress gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State, Akinwunmi Ambode. A field survey of eligible voters in Lagos State was carried out to further ascertain the efficacy of political ad campaigns on the electorate. From the field survey, results were collated, analysed and summarised using frequency tables. Findings from the study showed that political ad campaigns do not have a strong effect on the electorate's voting behaviour but still play a role in the electoral process. I concluded that political candidates and parties should concentrate on other election campaign strategies. I also recommend that further studies be conducted to better understand other factors that influence voting behaviour.

Keywords: electorate, political theme songs, campaign strategies

INTRODUCTION

For any democratic system to thrive, it is vital that political parties and candidates provide the voters with adequate information on party policies, clear-cut vision as

well as their political agendas to enable the electorate to choose their candidates based on full information. To achieve this, political parties use the mass media during campaigns. The media plays a major role in keeping the citizenry abreast of current events and raising awareness of various issues in any society. It also has an extremely important influence on the public's views and way of thinking. The media is the primary means through which public opinion is shaped and at times manipulated (CIHRS 2011). Simply put, for an election to be considered free and fair, the electorate must have adequate knowledge of the candidates, political parties and election policies.

In the past, election campaign strategies focused mainly on personal contact and political rallies. However, since Nigeria's transition from military rule to a democratic dispensation the use of political ad campaigns has become increasingly popular, which is probably a result of the awareness of the power of the media. Hence, political parties and candidates all around the world devote a lot of financial resources to political ad campaigns to sell themselves as the preferred brand to the electorate. Interestingly, most questions raised in elections are concerned with voting behaviour, that is, why voters voted for one candidate over others, and the implication of their choice.

Communication experts argue that when a politician crafts his or her campaign messages to reflect the fight to improve voters' lives, and if the messages have a good measure of integrity, voters are more likely to believe that politician (Feyipitan 2015). In other words, voters are most likely to trust candidates whose political ad campaigns offer to satisfy their basic needs, as opposed to those who dwell on their personal achievements. However, the same experts also argue that personality, appearance and language use do play crucial roles in political ad campaigns. The efficacy of political ad campaigns in persuading the electorate to vote in a candidate's favour is still questioned.

The 2015 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State witnessed political parties and candidates load various forms of media with ad campaigns, all struggling to win votes from voters. In the end Akinwunmi Ambode, who was the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), emerged as the governor of Lagos State. Before the elections, his ad campaigns had filled media airwaves, social media and billboards with messages for every class of people who made up the electorate. His jingles played on radio and television stations as well as social media sites, while his messages filled the print and outdoor media with promises to deliver. What role did these campaign strategies play in Ambode becoming governor?

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

In light of the increasing use of political ad campaigns in elections, especially in Nigeria, the aim of this research was to examine the efficacy of political ad

campaign use in elections in Nigeria. It also sought to understand the extent to which voters' choices in Lagos State were influenced by Akinwunmi Ambode's ad campaigns, and the most effective campaign strategy used by the gubernatorial candidate. This research also adds to the body of literature on the effectiveness of political advertising and voting behaviour in Nigeria.

Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) To what extent were the voters in Lagos influenced by Ambode's ad campaigns?
- 2) What was the most effective strategy employed in Ambode's ad campaigns?
- 3) To what extent did exposure to Ambode's ad campaigns facilitate his win in the 2015 Lagos State gubernatorial elections?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political advertising campaigns in Nigeria

That the mass media pervades our daily lives, including through advertising, has been well established by various scholars and communication experts. In politics, ad campaigns have become an essential tool used by candidates contesting for various positions, to persuade people to vote for them. Advertising and public relations occupy the centre stage of promotion of political candidates and parties vying for different political positions during campaigns. In recent decades, political advertising has changed significantly. Iyenga and Simon (2000) state that political advertising is increasingly the main element in political campaigns, rendering party machines and grass-root organisations less important than they were in the past. Diamond and Bates (1992) similarly posited that unlike political campaigns in the past, advances in media technology have streamlined the process, giving candidates more options to reach larger groups of constituents with little effort. According to boundless.com (2015) the growth of political advertising – especially in the United States – can be attributed to cable television networks and the internet. The boundless.com website states that

The growth of cable television networks heavily influenced political advertising in the 1992 election between incumbent President George H.W. Bush and Governor Bill Clinton, particularly in reaching new target demographics such as women and young voters. The

2004 election saw yet another, and possibly the biggest, change yet in political advertising—the growth of the Internet. Web-based advertising was easily distributed by both incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry’s campaigns, and both campaigns hired firms who specialized in the accumulation of personal data. This resulted in advertisements which were tailored to target specific audiences for the first time (a process known as narrowcasting).

In Nigeria, political advertising has grown immensely in the past two decades. This is probably a result of the growing awareness by political parties and their candidates of the usefulness of advertising to educate the electorate about a candidate as a ‘better brand’, and to communicate their offerings in form of manifestos to the electorate. Olujide (2010) notes that advertising has become the most commonly used technique to create a favourable image for the candidate and a negative image for the opponent. Before now, political parties and candidates channelled most of their resources into political rallies, speeches and direct contact to gather the support of electorates, as noted by Opeibi (2004).

Between the 2007, 2011 and most recently the 2015 elections in Nigeria, the use of political ad campaigns has expanded with regard to mode of delivery, type of language used, and forms of media used to communicate these messages. The 2007 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State saw the overflow of both traditional and new media with media campaigns of the three strongest contenders, who were Babatunde Fashola (AD), Musuliu Obanikoro (PDP) and a new face, Jimi Agbaje (DPA). Because of the popularity of these three candidates amongst the electorate, campaigns became highly competitive. Each candidate tried to outdo the other using political ad campaigns. They came up with various jingles, such as ‘everybody loves Jimi Agbaje’, and slogans such as ‘Ekoonibaje o’. According to Nworah (2011), the 2011 presidential election between former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the PDP and General Muhammadu Buhari of the CPC had its peculiarities. Because Goodluck Jonathan had not been elected president during his first term, he was saddled with the responsibility of convincing the electorate that he was a better choice than his strongest opponent. This he did by investing a lot of funds into media campaigns, which included traditional media and the new media.

Although some scholars agree that political advertising is important to every election campaign, certain political consultants remain divided on the extent to which political advertising influences voting behaviour. In the past, political campaign researchers such as Iyenga agreed that political media campaigns had a great effect on voting behaviour. However, recent studies have shown a better

understanding of the effectiveness of political advertising communication in elections. Holbrook (1996) concluded that ‘variations in candidate support during the campaign season are largely attributable to the occurrence of campaign events.’ Iyenga stated that political advertising is persuasive rather than manipulative, and its messages inform voters about the candidates’ positions and allow voters to develop differentiated images of the candidates.

Interestingly, Nigerian voters are becoming ever more exposed to political advertising – a lot more than in the past, which in turn raises awareness about political decisions before they are taken. Voters are becoming more aware about political information, including information on candidates and their manifestos, party policies and election guidelines, through the continual use of political advertising in election campaigns in Nigeria.

Lagos political landscape

Lagos State, Nigeria was created on 27 May 1967 by virtue of State (Creation and Transitional Provisions) Decree No. 14 of 1967. The state took off as an administrative entity on 11 April 1968, with Lagos Island serving a dual role as both state and federal capital. However, with the creation of the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja in 1976, Lagos ceased to be the capital of the state, which was moved to Ikeja. Similarly, with the formal relocation of the seat of the Federal Government to Abuja on 12 December 1991, Lagos ceased to be Nigeria’s political capital. Nevertheless, Lagos remains the nation’s economic and commercial capital. According to extant political records, ‘Lagos is to the people of Nigeria, what the head is to the body of an individual’ (www.ekoclubhouston.com).

Lagos State is the smallest state in Nigeria yet it has the largest population, relatively speaking, at more than 5% of the estimated national population. According to the 2006 national census, the state has a population of over 9 million people out of a national estimate of 150 000 000. However, based on a United Nations study and the State Regional Master Plan, Lagos State is estimated to have more than 12 million inhabitants. Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria and arguably the most populous city in Africa.

Lagos State operates a multi-party political system (Adisa 2015; Ladigbolu 2000). The politics of Lagos State have been dominated by the APC since 1999 when Bola Tinubu became the first democratically elected governor of Lagos State, followed closely by the PDP (Olaiya 2015). Tinubu was succeeded by Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), closely followed by the candidate of the PDP, Senator Musilu Obanikoro. The issue of the next occupant of the Lagos House in Alausa has been a twisted one. According to Olaiya (2015), from the thorny issue of preparing the grounds for the emergence of a Christian governor to satisfying agitators from

the Lagos East Senatorial district, who were yet to be represented at the Lagos 'Oval Office', and finally managing the combustible reactions of losers – who had desperately eyed to be on the party's ticket – it was not a 100-metres dash race. If the APC thought they were nearing the finish line when against all odds they shrugged off internal schisms to sell Ambode's candidacy to Lagosians, the party sooner than expected woke up to the reality that there were many hurdles to cross. Their main challenger, the PDP, dug deep to present a formidable match in Jimi Kolawole Agbaje.

AKINWUNMI AMBODE'S AD CAMPAIGNS IN LAGOS STATE

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria, especially in Lagos State, witnessed massive use of both traditional media and new media in election campaigns. It was apparent that candidates and political parties devoted a fortune to media ad campaigns to inform, educate and gather support from the electorate. In Lagos State, the gubernatorial candidate of the APC, Akinwunmi Ambode, used widespread and consistent media ad campaigns. His campaigns were on radio stations, television stations, social media, newspapers, billboards and posters. He also used celebrity endorsements and representations by people from different social classes, from the elite to the common trader. Most popular in his campaign were his theme songs 'I believe' and 'Gbabe', which were both studded with Nigerian celebrities such as Banky W. and Ice Prince. These campaigns explored celebrity endorsements and emotions to appeal specifically to the younger voters. In the 'I believe' video, every social class and ethnic background was represented. They all chorused 'I believe' in unity, with a few people stating why they each believed in Lagos and the Ambode dream. Ambode, who was the character in focus, ended the campaign with 'I believe together we can build the Lagos of our dreams'. In an article in *The Nation Newspapers* (2015), Ambode was described as a core democrat who rallied people in the 'I believe' video, singing 'I believe in the power of you and I. I believe together, we'll fly. I believe in the power that comes from a world brought together as one.'

However, a survey showed that the Gbabe theme song seemed to feature more consistently than the 'I believe' on radio and television stations. This was probably because Gbabe was a much more catchy song with danceable beat. Daily, between radio or television commercials, 'Ambo oooo Ambo, Ekosese bereni o Ambo, GBABE' – which can be translated as 'Ambo ooooo Ambo, Eko is just starting o Ambo, GET IT' – was played constantly. The song was sung by almost everyone, whether supporters or not, young or old, elite or not, in most parts of Lagos. It was very pervasive.

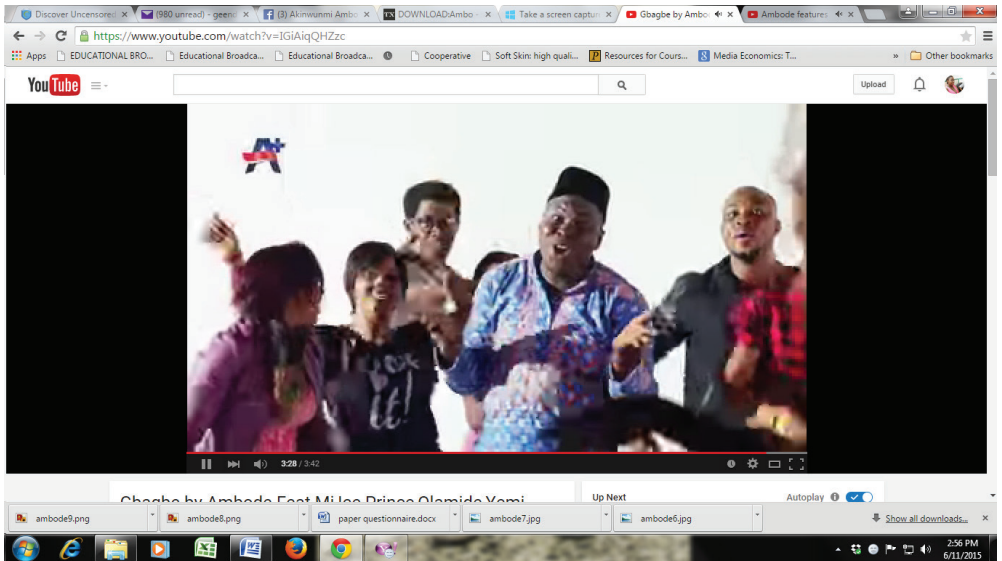


Figure 1: 'Gbabe' video

Source: YouTube, accessed 11 June, 2015.

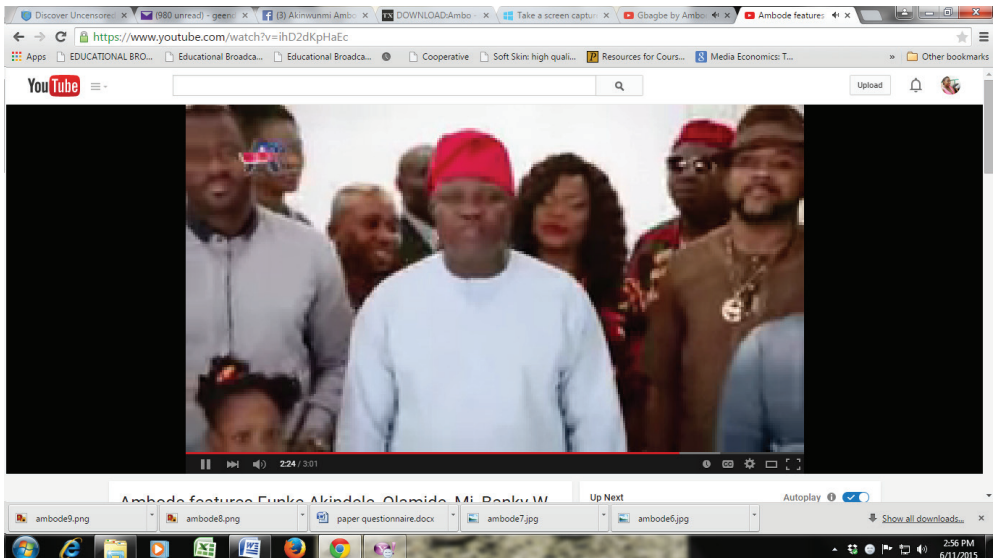


Figure 2: 'I believe' video

Source: YouTube, accessed 11 June, 2015.

Ambode’s ad campaigns not only featured in broadcast media: the print media, outdoor media and new media were equally employed. He appeared in different outfits and had several messages, which appealed to different types of audiences but were prominently youth focused. His ad campaigns and messages were drawn to suit a specific crowd. For example, he was dressed as an Igbo man, a sports man, wore a suit and tie, and addressed Christians and Muslims. To emphasise his love for children, his ad campaigns were highly focused on children. However, awash with different messages across the board, Ambode’s unique selling point was clear: he promised competence and continuity. In addition to celebrity endorsements, a challenge was extended, linked to his theme song. Members of the public were asked to send their versions of the theme song in exchange for a music deal with one of the celebrities who endorsed Ambode, and a grand prize to shoot the musical video. The combination of posters, billboard ads and his theme song – which rocked every radio and television – made it a tough race for Ambode’s opponents.



Figure 3: Ambode’s poster and billboard ads

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The scientific study of voting behaviour can be classified into three research schools. These are the sociological model, which focuses on influences of social factors; the psychosocial model, which posits that party identification is the major factor behind voting behaviour; and rational choice theory, which is also referred to as a model of economic voting. This study was underpinned by the sociological model of voting behaviour proposed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944).

The theoretical assumptions of the sociological model are identified in three works, namely *The people's choice* (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), *Voting* (Lazarsfeld and colleagues), and *Personal influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955). Research conducted by Lazarsfeld in 1944 used a questionnaire for the first time in studying the US presidential elections. According to Rossi (1964), Lazarsfeld had two main objectives in this research: firstly, to study the effects of exposure to the media – that is, how voters arrive at their decisions and the role of media in this process; and secondly, to test a new methodology of successive interviews with a panel of subjects and a control group. Lazarsfeld's previous interests were the study of psychological mechanisms involved in the processes of choice, and the effects of publicity, advertising and mass media on consumer behaviour.

The 1944 study began by characterising the supporters of two main political parties in the US, using a panel of 600 subjects who were interviewed seven times over the seven months of the campaign. The researchers then identified voters who changed their position during the campaign period, and compared three groups: those who decided their vote before the campaign began, those whose decision was taken during the party convention, and those who decided their vote only at an advanced stage of the campaign (Antunes 2010).

The premise of the theory by Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) centred on the fact that voting is an individual choice that is largely affected by the voter's personality and the voter's exposure to the media. That is, voters' choice of candidates is greatly influenced by the amount of media they are exposed to and the kind of persons they are. In the case of Akinwunmi Ambode, this explains his immense use of political ad campaigns to influence voters' choice in his favour. It is common knowledge that both media and advertising are pervasive in nature, and influence their audience to behave in a certain way.

METHOD

To gain a better understanding of how political ad campaigns influence voting behaviour, I used a survey questionnaire with a simple randomised selection of the sample. A random sample means every member of the population has an equal

opportunity to be chosen. I used this technique because a study sample should be an unbiased representation of the population under study. Hence every class, age group and gender had an equal chance of being represented in the sample. Because the study was an assessment of Akinwunmi Ambode's ad campaigns in the 2015 Lagos State gubernatorial elections, the sample was drawn from all eligible voters in the state. Bulk emails were sent to people aged 18 and older, who were eligible voters, inviting them to participate.

The research instrument was a 12-item questionnaire which was distributed online using Google Forms, an easy-to-use online survey platform. Google Forms made it easy to reach respondents in different locations of Lagos State, which in turn made a fair representation of eligible voters all around the state. From the online survey, 180 respondents correctly filled and submitted the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that respondents who were between the ages of 18 and 27 comprised 14.6% of the sample; those aged 28 to 37 comprised 56.9%, those aged 38 to 47 comprised 17.1%, those aged 48 to 57 comprised 8.9%, and respondents who were 58 or older comprised 2.4% of the sample.

Table 1
Survey responses (n=180)

Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage % (n=180)
Age:		
18-27	27	14.6
28-37	103	56.9
38-47	31	17.1
48-57	16	8.9
58 and older	3	2.4
Gender:		
Male	86	47.6
Female	94	52.4
Active in the 2015 Lagos State gubernatorial elections?		
Yes	94	52.4
No	86	47.6

How involved?		
Very active	23	13.1
Active	61	33.6
Passive	64	35.2
Indifferent	32	18
Exposure to Ambode's ad campaigns		
Yes	159	88.3
No	21	11.7
Medium of exposure:		
Billboards	72	59.5
Posters	76	62.8
Radio adverts	73	60.3
Television adverts	72	59.5
Newspaper adverts	41	33.9
Social media adverts	54	44.6
Ads remembered, whether heard or seen:		
Billboards	46	37.7
Posters	41	33.6
Radio adverts	65	53.3
Television adverts	53	43.4
Newspaper adverts	9	7.4
Social media adverts	28	23
Reason for remembering ads:		
They were interesting	27	22.3
His appearance appealed to me	17	14
You believed his promises	12	9.9
They were everywhere, I got used to them	53	43.8
His theme song stuck in my head	73	60.3
Indifferent	3	2.5
Influence in voting for Ambode:		
Yes	38	21.1
No	86	48
Indifferent	56	30.9

Were Ambode's ad campaigns better than that of his opponents?		
Yes	68	37.7
No	63	35.2
Not sure	38	21.3
Other	11	5.7
Did campaigns foster his victory?		
Yes	40	22.3
No	99	54.5
Not sure	41	23.1

Out of the 180 questionnaires, 47.6% respondents were male and 52.4% female. When asked whether they were active in the gubernatorial elections, 52.4% said yes and 47.6% said no. In terms of how involved they were, 13.1% were very active, 33.6% percent were active, 35.2% were passive, and 18% were indifferent. When asked whether they had been exposed to Ambode's ad campaigns, most respondents (88.3%) affirmed they had been and 11.7% said they were not. Table 2 shows that 59.5% of the respondents were exposed to billboard adverts, 62.8% to posters, 60.3% to radio adverts, 59.5% to television adverts, 33.9% to newspaper adverts, and 44.6% to social media adverts. With regard to adverts that were always remembered by respondents, 37.7% chose billboards, 33.6% chose posters, 53.3% chose radio adverts, 43.4% chose television adverts, 7.4% chose newspaper adverts and 23% chose social media adverts. When asked why they remembered Ambode's ad campaign, 22.3% of respondents said they were interesting, 14% that his appearance was appealing, 9.9% that they believed his promises, 43.8% that they grew used to them because the adverts were everywhere, 60.3% that his theme song stuck in their heads, and 2.5% were indifferent.

Regarding the question of whether their choice to vote for or against Ambode was influenced by the adverts, 21.1% of respondents said they were influenced, 48% were not influenced and 30.9% were indifferent. When asked if Ambode's ad campaign was better than that of his opponents, 37.7% said yes, 35.2% said no, 21.3% were not sure and 5.7% chose the 'other' response. When asked if Ambode's win was fostered by his ad campaign, 22.3% said yes, 54.5% said no and 23.1% were not sure.

To what extent was the electorate influenced by Ambode's ad campaigns?

A large number of respondents (48%) said they were not influenced by Ambode's ad campaign, and another large group (30.9%) was indifferent, leaving 21.1% who said they had been influenced by the ad campaign. This finding suggests the

electorate was not largely influenced by Ambode's ad campaign, which in turn suggests that all political ad campaigns might have little effect on an electorate's voting behaviour. If that is the case, irrespective of whether political candidates advertise or not, the electorates have a preconceived choice of candidate and exposure to ad campaigns of other contestants does little to change that choice. Such convictions could be a result of party affiliation, word of mouth, strong opinion leaders, simple personal appeal or many other unknown factors. This would seem to contradict the sociological model of voting behaviour (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), which states that the electorate is influenced by exposure to the media.

What was the most effective strategy in Ambode's ad campaign?

Although a large percentage of respondents said they were not influenced by Ambode's ad campaigns, a whopping 60.3% of them said Ambode's theme song was stuck in their heads. (This could have been 'I believe' or 'Gbabe' or both.) This finding suggests that political advertising must still play some role in voting behaviour. It further emphasises that the effect of political advertising could be subliminal, without the receiving electorate being aware of its effect, or that it could be conscious, with the electorate being fully aware of the effect. Nearly half (43.8%) of respondents stated that Ambode's ad campaign was everywhere, so they had no choice but to get used to the songs. This also emphasises the pervasive nature of advertising: whether an audience is interested in a message or not, they receive it anyway.

Interestingly, this finding also suggests that radio and television are still very powerful media of advertising. Ambode's theme songs were very popular because they were played on both radio and television stations. According to respondents, the use of theme songs in political ad campaigns is an excellent strategy that Ambode made use of.

To what extent did exposure to Ambode's ad campaigns facilitate his win?

Also interesting is that 48% respondents were of the opinion that Ambode's ad campaign did not foster his victory in the 2015 Lagos State gubernatorial elections. A further 21.1% believed his ad campaign did foster his win, while 30.9% were indifferent. Given the finding about the effect of Ambode's ad campaign on voting behaviour – that is, it has a modest to weak effect on voting behaviour, it seems safe to say Ambode's ad campaigns did not foster his win. This means the choice of candidate was based on other factors independent of political ad campaigns. In this study some respondents chose reasons such as continuity, political pedigree, party affiliation, and experience to explain why Ambode was the preferred candidate, whereas other respondents were of the belief that he was the wrong choice of candidate, citing reasons such as plain preference of opponent, and dissatisfaction with party affiliation.

CONCLUSION

In this study I aimed to deepen understanding of political ad campaigns and voting behaviour. I also wanted to evaluate the effect of Akinwunmi Ambode's political ad campaigns on voters' behaviour in the 2015 gubernatorial elections in Nigeria. An online survey was carried out using a simple questionnaire to gather opinions of eligible voters in Lagos State.

Results from the survey showed that political advertising almost certainly plays some role in influencing the electorate. However, this effect is weak and could be a conscious effect or subliminal effect. From this, it is inferred that political ad campaigns have little effect on voting behaviour. In addition political ad campaigns remain pervasive, which means they are still useful in the election campaign process; radio and television remain the most effective means of advertising. The findings also show that the use of theme songs in political ad campaigns is effective in seizing the electorate's attention, which could in turn mean a change of choice of candidate.

Based on these findings, I would recommend that political candidates should invest more on other election campaign strategies rather than spending huge funds on political ad campaigns. This does not mean political candidates should ignore ad campaigns totally. However, it is important that candidates use the most effective means possible to influence voting behaviour. In addition, after political candidates and parties have chosen the best media to reach out to the electorate – which are most likely radio and television, they should also consider using a theme song strategy such as that of Ambode, to gain measurable popularity. Further studies should be carried out to understand other factors that influenced Nigerian's voting behaviour.

Finally, electorates should be open to receiving political advertising information so they can make better informed choices. Sticking to a party or candidate they have chosen from the start might mean they turn down the opportunity to understand the strengths of other candidates – who might actually be better options.

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YOUTH NETWORKS ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER DURING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In this study I used secondary sources of data to examine how Nigerian youth formed socio-political networks on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter, and how these media influenced the 2015 general elections. I purposively selected four Facebook accounts and four Twitter handles of politicians, political parties and news agencies. The Facebook accounts were those of Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, Channels Television and Sahara Reporters. The Twitter handles were those of Femi Fani-Kayode, Doyin Okupe, Rueben Abati and Nasir El-Rufai. The Facebook accounts and Twitter handles were selected based on their number of followers and likes. I performed an archival study of posts and tweets between 1 January 2015, when the election campaign started, and 30 April 2015, when all election results were declared by INEC. I also purposively selected five posts and tweets each from the Facebook accounts and Twitter handles, from among myriad posts and tweets, according to which had the highest number of replies on political issues from 1 January 2015. All data obtained were analysed using descriptive analyses. The findings showed that not all followers of political parties and politicians on Facebook and Twitter are their supporters. Moreover the platforms raised the consciousness of Nigerian youth during the 2015 elections in the area of constructive and destructive arguments directly with politicians, which gave birth to new socio-political movements of followers and antagonists. The results also showed that youth networks helped to shape the 2015 elections in terms of exposing and preventing insecurity and fraud. I concluded that social media play a potent role in galvanising Nigerian youth for political discourse, conscientisation and education, which in turn can facilitate effective transformation of electoral processes in Nigeria.

Keywords: electoral violence, youth restiveness, political propaganda, democracy, social media

INTRODUCTION

Periodic elections have become recurrent in Nigeria, following the successful historic transition of the country from military despotic rule to democracy in 1999. Although conflicts, rigging, and low turnout by electorates have marred past elections, the 2015 general elections were a watershed in Nigeria's democratic process, owing to the rousing commendation the outcome drew from domestic and international communities. The main concern of these communities was the successful transition from one democratic administration to another, which was accomplished with consummate ease. Also this was the first time since 1999 (when the military handed over power to civilians) that the opposition had a realistic chance of dislodging the ruling party (Adibe 2015).

The 2015 general election happened when Nigeria was caught up in the dilemma of opportunity and challenge, more than at any other point since the country's first decade of independence. Hate speech and soapbox rhetoric were heating up the social and political system. The mandate of the electorate carries a high stake for governance, security, and the economy (Thurston 2015). These stakes largely defined the interests of the international community, which was visible in its ultra-careful support for the successful conduct of the election. Hopes were high that the most populous black nation in the world would once again conduct an election that would mean development, unity and peace – not only for Nigeria but for Africa at large. This aspiration was noticeable in visits by the United States' Secretary of State and other world leaders to the two main contenders for the apex executive office in Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, to obtain their views on the conduct of violence-free elections. This clearly showed the role of the international community as a neutral actor.

Within the domestic community, the election bred a large socio-political movement among Nigeria's politically literate. Civil society groups such as the Civil Liberties Organization; Campaign for Democracy; Nigerian Union of Journalists; Centre for Democracy and Development; Nigeria Labour Congress; Transition Monitoring Group; Electoral Reform Network; National Coalition on Affirmative Action; Gender, Electoral and Constitutional Reform; and Committee for the Defence of Human Rights amongst others (Uadiale 2011; Omede & Bakare 2014) all pledged their usual roles. Omede and Bakare (2014) believe these roles are *sine qua non* for the sustenance of a nation's development, especially during elections. Nonetheless, the general elections resulted in an unusual or new movement by Nigerian youth on social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter.

Until the 2015 elections, the participation of youth in Nigeria's electoral processes was mediocre owing to their being resigned to the notion that the

electorate's vote does not count. In addition, studies on the participation of youth in elections in Nigeria have identified the high rate of youth illiteracy, deprivation and unemployment as factors that led youth to be involved in vices such as political thuggery, violence, assassination, intimidation, harassment and election rigging (Obi 2006; Inokoba & Maliki 2011; Bamgbose 2012; Abdullahi 2013; Halliru 2013; Aduloju & Pratt 2015; Fasakin 2015). Surprisingly, youth in Nigeria redefined the 2015 general elections through the social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter. These left an indelible mark on the electoral system, and at the same time carved out new directions for elections in the country.

YOUTH ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER IN NIGERIA

Social media represent an internet-based platform, which shares most if not all of the following characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness (Mayfield 2006). It is one of the driving forces of globalisation and has validated the statement that the world is a global village. The main characteristics of social media, as highlighted in the definition above, make these platforms useful not only to the business world (owing to its tendencies of making millionaires and billionaires) but also to politics, religion, academia and all other walks of life. The notion of participation and openness gives an opportunity to every individual – regardless of age, gender, race, background and social status. If there is anything humans desire most it is the opportunity to belong and have access, which the notion of participation and openness affords. With regard to other characteristics in the definition above, the notion of conversation, community and connectedness speaks to the human need for identity. People always want to communicate, to listen and to be heard. Social media platforms give people this sense of identity.

According to Mayfield (2006), the concepts of participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness corroborate the study by Pescosolido (2007, pp. 208-211). Pescosolido works with the sociology of social networks, and believes that the sociological nature of humans is to form ties to maintain contact. She also posits that relationships or ties are the fundamental building blocks of human experience, mapping the connections that individuals have to one another (Pescosolido 1991). Consequently, from the sociological perspective, social media platforms are extensions of human nature: to maintain contact with one another. To maintain this contact, humans over time invented social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Blog, WhatsApp, Myspace, LinkedIn, YouTube and Flickr.

In a survey carried out by Pew Research in 2013, Facebook and Twitter were the predominant players in social media network platforms (Duggan & Smith 2013), though Facebook is the most popular and has the highest number of users

across the globe. The Pew Research survey of 2015 showed that 71% of internet users use Facebook, while a substantial number of users also use Twitter (Duggan et al. 2015). The reason for this is fairly simple. The platforms afford individual or groups the opportunity to access and exchange information, share comments, and engage in conversations.

In Nigeria, the popularity of Facebook and Twitter has grown over time. Nigeria, with an estimated population of over 167 million, is at the forefront of internet users in Africa. According to Seal-World (2014), internet users in Nigeria are frequently on social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, and the country is thought to have the most Facebook and Twitter users in Africa (*Business Day* 2013). A study by the Business Day Research and Intelligence Unit showed that Facebook and Twitter are Nigeria's most active social media platforms.

If the above trends are accepted as a given, it could be inferred that social media is largely the domain of the youth. If one considers the features Mayfield highlighted in his definition of social media (participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness), one may deduce that the social mentality of youth is driven by these features. There is no doubt that young adults live in a world of their own making and social media has helped them to create that society. Evidently today youth's quest to socialise with one another has led to this era being dubbed the 'jet age', 'social-media generation' and 'Net-generation'. Their voracious appetite for acquiring information and sharing it shows the influence and relevance of social media, which Facebook and Twitter platforms in particular offer.

According to the United Nations Population Fund, 'half of the world's population of 6.3 billion people are under the age of 25.' On Facebook and Twitter the youth comprises 70% of active users (Ogunlesi 2013, pp. 21-22). The Nigerian National Youth Policy (2001) defines youth as all young persons aged between 18 and 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Ogunlesi (2013) calculated a breakdown of youth statistics and reported that 75% of Nigeria's population is under 35 years, with about 50% of them being 18 years old in 2013 (*ibid*, p. 23). Consequently, Nigerian youth are conspicuous among Facebook and Twitter users in the country. It is not surprising that this digital age belongs to them and their contemporaries across the world.

On Facebook, young people are not restricted in sharing information or pictures, or in choosing friends or liking pages where they can discuss and follow their curiosity. Twitter similarly affords them the opportunity to share pictures, send brief information in headline form (popularly known as a 'tweet'), have followers and follow pages of their choice. The ease of access to own an account on both Facebook and Twitter platforms permits youth to interact, socialise and connect. From this they form networks based on circumstances and dictates of their environment. My study and observations showed that it is common, on these

platforms, for young people to review or raise arguments about the lifestyles of celebrities in the entertainment, fashion and sport industries – such as musicians, actors and actresses, and sports men or women. Recently, Facebook and Twitter have influenced young people’s mindset on political issues that have over time impacted on Nigeria’s political landscape. Generally, circumstances and events in the social environment dictate the use of Facebook and Twitter by the youth.

YOUTH, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER IN THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

In preparation for the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, Facebook and Twitter played myriad roles, especially in the areas of electioneering, political campaigns, mobilisation and enlightenment of the electorate. Political parties, politicians and news agencies used social media to disseminate information and to solicit support and sympathy from the general population who constituted part of the electorate. During the period of elections, notably on Facebook and Twitter, hashtags of trending news and events were created for easy access to news and information. For instance, news agencies, civil societies and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) made use of the hashtag *#NigeriaDecides* to categorise information. The electoral umpire, INEC, constantly used the hashtag to disseminate information on the elections through social media platforms. Politicians and political parties also explored this means to pursue their ambitions and to propagate their names in order to gain popularity among Facebook and Twitter followers.

According to Gambo (2015), voters aged 18 to 34 make up 65% of the voting population in Nigeria. Individuals within this age bracket also constitute the largest Facebook and Twitter population in Nigeria. Hence young people in the country made use of Facebook and Twitter during the general elections. The power with which internet literacy equips the youth was effectively deployed in persuading stakeholders during the election to use social media platforms. A substantial number of politicians and political parties have Facebook and Twitter accounts where they outlined their manifestos and motives for vying for political positions. Through the inquisitive and voracious nature of young people, they subjected the manifestos and motives of politicians and political parties to interrogation. They mandated political parties and their candidates contesting elective positions to clarify their various manifestos.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the data used for this study, including the method of data collection, sampling techniques and data analysis. As already explained, the

research focused on Nigerian youth and the socio-political networks that were formed on Facebook and Twitter around the time of the 2015 general elections.

Study area

The study area was Nigeria and the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Nigeria is located in the western region of Africa. Facebook and Twitter define the borderless contiguity of the world, and have equally been part of the main propellants of globalisation and technological revolution of the current era. The importance of these topics to the study was not only the large concentration of youth; they also served as defined locations of abode for Nigerian youths during the 2015 general elections.

Nigeria has had challenging times transiting from one democratic regime to another. During the period of the 2015 elections, the youth population – both on social media and within the country – formed a movement to press for free and fair elections, to campaign and support the candidates and parties of their choice, and to create awareness and advocacy on issues that troubled the elections.

Study population

'Population' denotes a large group from which a study sample is taken. It also entails the subjects a study seeks to investigate (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 1972). To ensure that reliable and adequate data are obtained to investigate the research problem, the researcher must locate a population sample that is adequate for the study. It is important that such a sample gives a true representation of the population under study. The population considered in this study comprised youths who were followers of selected Facebook and Twitter accounts. Youth are the largest active population on the selected social media platforms examined in this study, according to the findings of a pilot survey conducted in the first part of the research. Ogunlesi (2013) opined that Nigerian youth constitute 70% of active social media users in the country.

I estimated the total number of youth based on their responses to posts and tweets. I checked their profiles to be sure that they were young people, and if I could not be sure of the user's age then I ignored their comments. Tables 1 and 2 show the demographic representations of the social media accounts I selected. Based on the total number of likes and followers, I agreed with the estimate of 70% youth among the accounts I studied.

Table 1
Facebook population of politicians and news agencies selected for the study

Official name of Facebook account	Total number of likes (P, population)	Estimated number of youth on account (70% of P)
Goodluck Jonathan	1,864,143	1,304,900
Muhammadu Buhari	121,949	85,364
Channels Television	455,278	318,695
Sahara Reporters	1,631,565	1,142,096

Author's survey, 2015

Table 2
Twitter population of politicians and political parties selected for the study

Official name of Twitter account	Total number of followers (P)	Estimated number of youth on account (70% of P)
Doyin Okupe	69,867	48,907
Rueben Abati	251,121	175,785
Nasiru El- Rufai	579,249	405,474
Femi Fani-Kayode	146,060	102,242

Author's survey, 2015

Sample size and selection

In this study I solely used secondary data, obtained through purposively selected posts on specific Facebook and Twitter accounts during the 2015 general elections. Four Facebook accounts and six Twitter handles of politicians, political parties and news agencies were chosen. The Facebook accounts were those of Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, Channels Television and Sahara Reporters. The Twitter handles selected were those of Femi Fani-Kayode, Doyin Okupe, Rueben Abati and Nasiru El-Rufai. The selection of Facebook and Twitter accounts of these individuals was informed by their popularity (number of youth followers and likes on their Facebook and Twitter accounts), the sensitivity of their posts, and how youths responded to them during the general elections.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

For the purpose of this study I analysed 70% of all comments and replies on the selected posts made by youth, shown in Tables 3 to 10 below. This was based

on the premise that youth constitute 75% of the total population in Nigeria and account for 70% of active social media users in the country (Ogunlesi 2013). According to Gambo (2015), 65% of voters in Nigeria are young people. Tables 3 to 10 also show the dates of posts and tweets examined in this study, as well as the total comments provided, and the number of comments estimated to have been made by the youth (calculated as 70% of the total comments). In addition, the first 200 comments, or the first 50 comments if the total comments were 199 or less, were analysed. Where posts received fewer than 50 comments these were also analysed. Simple descriptive analysis was used to analyse the archival data from the selected Facebook and Twitter accounts, with posts and tweets being quoted and discussed.

Table 3
Selected posts by Goodluck Jonathan

	Jonathan's Posts	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1	'Earlier today, I participated in the Presidential Debate organized by the Nigeria Elections Debate Group (NEDG). I am convinced that anyone who desires to lead Nigerians must first be prepared to address issues raised by Nigerians. I also believe we must encourage a culture of debate and conversation to grow our democracy. GEJ.'	March 22, 2015	10, 454	7, 318
2	'When I first assumed office as President of Nigeria on the 6th of May, 2010, I promised Nigerians that elections under my watch will be free, fair and credible. Since then, I have taken deliberate steps to ensure that that promise translates to reality. Gone are the days of do or die elections. Gone are the days when the world looked down at our elections. Together, we have ensured that elections in Nigeria are a manifestation of one man one vote, one woman one vote and one youth one vote. You can be sure that as long as Jonathan is President, your votes will count and be counted. I have directed our security services to ensure that your right to vote is fully facilitated. So have no fear on Election Day. Come out and vote for the candidates of your choice. Remember, we are all brothers and sisters from the womb of one Nigeria and as long as Nigeria wins, we have all won. GEJ.'	March 25, 2015	8, 571	6,000

3	'My dear friends on Facebook, As we celebrate Easter and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I want to celebrate all Nigerians for keeping faith with democracy which is the only vehicle for the continuous growth and stability of our dear nation. Easter is the culmination of the Lenten season, a time to imbibe Christ's teachings of reconciliation with God and each other. This year's celebration of Easter is taking place at a period of very critical national choices and decisions, during which we must all be prepared and willing to make sacrifices for greater unity, peace, political stability and progress in our beloved country. As a nation, we must accept that the Presidential elections are behind us and reconcile our differences as children born from the womb of one mother, Nigeria. I am confident that we will do this. Happy Easter and may God bless Nigeria. GEJ.'	April 4, 2015	40, 784	28, 549
4	'We waited patiently to vote in these elections, now I want to urge all Nigerians to also wait patiently for the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, to collate and announce results. We must ensure that we do not get involved in acts that breach our peaceful co-existence that we patriotically demonstrated during the elections. May God bless Nigeria. GEJ.'	March 29, 2015	14, 545	10, 182
5	'Today, I visited the Northeastern part of our Country. I was with our soldiers and interacted with the officers and men of our gallant armed forces. I am very proud of their patriotism and the valour they have demonstrated as they fight to protect our citizens and our territorial integrity. The sight of Nigerian citizens returning to towns once occupied by insurgents was most fulfilling. May God continue to bless Nigeria. GEJ'	February 27, 2015	13, 835	9, 685

(Author's survey, 2015)

Table 3 shows the five selected posts, the dates they were posted, the total number of comments, and the estimated number of youth's comments. I studied the first 200 replies by youth to the posts quoted above, and found an estimated 80% in the first post that praised the personality of Goodluck Jonathan for attending the presidential debate, from which his major opponent, Muhammadu Buhari, had absented himself. The remaining 20% were indifferent about Muhammadu Buhari attending the debate and needed explanation on certain issues (corruption, unemployment and insecurity) in the country.

The second post came a few days before the election and it sensitized the people on how to make their votes count. In the first 200 comments that followed this post, 55% of them were campaigning and affirming their support for Jonathan, while 45% were against him and rather campaigned for his opponent, Muhammadu Buhari – even on Jonathan’s own Facebook page. The third post was made after the election result was declared by INEC. It attracted a lot of sympathetic comments from the youth. It was an Easter message from the president, and over 99% of the first 200 comments expressed sympathy and praise for President Jonathan for conceding defeat to his opponent in good faith. For the fourth post, the first 200 comments showed that 50% supported Jonathan and were confident that he would win the election, while the other 50% anticipated victory for the opposition candidate. Lastly, the fifth post enjoyed commendation in comments that followed, with 80% praising Jonathan’s visit to the troubled Northeastern Nigeria, while 20% commented otherwise.

In studying the comments following each post, I discovered there were also replies beneath some comments. In these replies, abusive comments and complimentary remarks were made by those who were either against or in support of the posts, respectively. Some of the comments have about 500 replies in addition to the comments on the post. This created a sub-network of pros and cons.

Table 4
Selected posts by Muhammadu Buhari

S/N	Buhari’s Post	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1	Many thanks to my supporters for the #BabaWhileYouWereGone updates thisweekend. They have made my day #GladToBeBack I am heartened to see that good humour and resolve rest deep in the hearts of those who seek Change Despite the sticks and stones, we choose to remain focused and direct our energies into forging a bright future The troubling issues that face the nation continue unabated - plummeting power production & naira value, petrol queues Our collective strength, our ability to forge ahead in the toughest of times is what will allow us to restore Nigeria I am #GladToBeBack to make the Change needed Pick up your PVC by 22 March and vote for APC on 28 March & 11 April. Let’s bring the Change Nigeria needs – GMB	March 9, 2015	294	206

2	Nothing can stop a change whose time has come #ThingsWILLChange	February 18, 2015	136	95
3	'The countless man hours that will be spent at petrol stations today, will reduce our productivity as a nation. This should not be so. In my time as NNPC chairman and Petroleum Minister in the late 70s, 2 of our 4 refineries were built, and domestic consumption catered for. But over the last several years our refineries have declined, and we are at the mercy of imports. We must reject a system that has turned one of world's largest crude exporters into an importer of petrol. Things must change. - GMB'	March 4, 2015	386	270
4	'A step towards the journey begins.'	March 28, 2015	351	246
5	Happy Valentine's Day everyone! Keep believing. Today, there is an outpouring of love for Nigeria. We are inspired! #ThingsWILLChange #FeBuhari	February 14, 2015	123	86

(Author's survey, 2015)

As shown in Table 4, I analysed five selected posts by Muhammadu Buhari, the main opponent during the 2015 general election. With an estimated 206 youth comments on the first post, some 15% among the first 200 which I studied doubted the authenticity that Buhari manages his own Facebook account, while 85% of comments expressed support for his candidature through the use of photos. The second post was photographic with a short message and a hashtag for change. About 30% of the comments below it were campaigning for continuity of the opposition, and about 70% were in support of the post, with photographic comments to affirm the message posted. In the third post, about 40% of the comments doubted Buhari's intellectual capability to lead Nigeria. A close look at Buhari's post indicated an error of either topographical or grammatical nature, which gave opponents more grounds to discredit and dismiss Buhari's candidature for the presidency of Nigeria. However, 60% of comments defended and campaigned for Buhari. The fourth post was sent at the time Buhari cast his vote. Attached with the short message was a picture of Buhari being accredited to be able to vote. In the first 200 comments studied, about 98% were optimistic that Buhari would win the presidential election, while the remaining 2% were not. It was difficult to notice the comments of the opposing 2% because of the confidence displayed by the 98%.

The fifth post in Table 4 was sent on 14 February, Valentine's Day, and the message was for youth to enjoy the day. About 80% of comments that supported Buhari did not speak to the message, rather campaigning for him. Of those commentators who were against Buhari, about 20% were skeptical of the content of the message and wondered if Buhari believed in Valentine's Day. (I mentioned earlier that there was also doubt expressed in the comments to the first post, about the authenticity of Buhari's management of his Facebook account.) The findings in Table 4 show that the youth were able to question the originality and authenticity of Buhari's ownership of the account.

Table 5
Selected news headline posts by Channels Television

	Channels Television headline post	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1	LIVE: APC Presidential Candidate @ ThisIsBuhari Meets Organised Private Sector In Lagos. Tune in @channelstv via m. channelstv.com	February 2, 2015	40	28
2	MUST WATCH! Former Super Eagles player, Joseph Yobo speaks in support of Goodluck Jonathan, as he campaigns for a second term in office. For more information log on to http://www.channelstv.com	January 8, 2015	197	138
3	President Goodluck Jonathan, has met with state Governors elected on the platform of the PDP to strategise on how to win in the March 28 and April 11 general elections.	March 3, 2015	57	40
4	The Chairman of INEC, Prof Attahiru Jega, is expected to appear before the Senate today to explain reasons for the postponement of the general elections by six weeks.	February 19, 2015	14	10
5	The Peoples' Democratic Party Presidential Campaign Organization (PDPPCO) has alleged plans to frustrate supplies of petrol to fuel stations as an initiative from the opposition (APC).	March 2, 2015	304	213

(Author's survey, 2015)

Table 5 comprises selected posts by Channels Television. The first post was about a live presidential campaign organised by the All Progressives Congress for Buhari. The post intended to attract an audience to watch live campaign rallies on the internet, wherever they might be. Surprisingly, some of the comments that followed interrogated the absence of Buhari at the presidential debate prior to the programme aired live on Channels TV. Of these, 55% of comments doubted his credentials, eligibility and fitness for the office of President of Nigeria, while 45% were supportive of his actions and therefore campaigned for him. This post sparked the use of foul language against one another. The second post was a video attached with a short statement by Joseph Yobo, former captain of the Nigerian national football team, the Super Eagles. In the statement he claimed that Jonathan helped them win the African Cup of Nations hosted by South Africa in 2013. Of the comments that followed, 96% contained abusive statements about the former captain of the Super Eagles and also faulted technical and professional input in the Peoples' Democratic Party's campaign. Roughly 4% of comments campaigned for Jonathan and justified Yobo's statement to exonerate him from criticism.

The third post (see Table 5) stated that Jonathan had met with PDP state governors to strategise on how to win the elections. Of the comments that followed, 85% were directed at faulting and doubting the competence of the adopted strategy through photographic comments. Another 15% commented on their confidence that PDP would eventually gain a landslide victory at the polls. I noticed that some comments attracted replies because of their sensitivity. Some replies were full of vile language as counter-reactions in response to the comments made to the post. Through this the study revealed a trend among youth to bully each other on social media.

The fourth post was a headline about the summons of INEC Chairman by Nigeria's Senate to respond to questions raised, which centred on the postponement of the general elections scheduled earlier. Almost 100% of comments on this post interrogated the Senate's pretence of not having enough information about the postponement beforehand. A substantial number of comments affirmed support for INEC and expressed trust in the Commission's capability to conduct free and fair elections in Nigeria. The fifth comment stated the claims of the Peoples' Democratic Party Presidential Campaign Organization (PDPPCO) that APC had masterminded a fuel scarcity in the country at the time. About 98% of the comments that followed criticised the stand of PDPPCO on the issue of fuel scarcity. The remaining 2% did not comment on the statement but rather campaigned for Jonathan.

Table 6
Selected news headline posts by Sahara Reporters.

	Sahara Reporters headline post	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1	PDP Governors Blame National Chairman, Muazu, For Electoral Defeat, Demand Ouster Of National Working Committee.	April 30, 2015	328	230
2	'From the look of things the mathematics don't add up for PDP. The mathematics adds up for APC.'	February 28 2015,	375	263
3	'We make no apologies for saying that government must have direct intervention on poverty.'	March 16, 2015	131	92
4	'I think some of these things are creation by people for one interest or the other.' – Pres. Jonathan #MediaChat	February 11, 2015	225	158
5	Photo of Buhari arriving at Chatham House for today's talk.	February 26, 2015	1, 743	1, 220

(Author's survey, 2015)

Table 6 shows five selected posts by Sahara Reporters. Of the first 200 comments, 90% disagreed with the position of PDP governors on their failures during the general elections. Instead, commentators blamed the PDP for failing in their duties across the country. Only 10% of the comments supported the statement issued by PDP governors. On the second, third and fourth posts, there were over 80% of comments in favour of APC and its candidate for the presidential election. Only 20% believed that the PDP candidate would win in the election. In some of the comments that favoured PDP, there were opposing replies and disagreement among the commentators on the various political positions and issues, which they defended. The merging of three posts on this table is deliberate, owing to the fact that youth responses to each post were inter-related.

The last post was about the issue of the APC presidential candidate's visit to Chatham House in the United Kingdom. Of the first 200 comments on this post, about 75% believed that Buhari would win the election and they campaigned for him. The remaining 22% of the comments interrogated his competence to rule Nigeria based on his eligibility to contest the election. They claimed he did not have the educational qualifications required by law. This topic attracted a round of replies from APC sympathisers in defence of their presidential candidate. From

this trend I noticed a movement of pros and antis forming another network on the platform and defending their opinions.

Table 7
Selected posts by Nasir El-Rufai

S/N	El-Rufai's Tweets	Date	Total number of replies (R)	Estimated number of replies by youth (70% of R)
1	ALERT: Just spoke to one of the INEC officials in Jos and PDP has offered them 200m this evening to rig the ...	April 13, 2015	52	36
2	Alleged plan to destabilize PDP: APC slams Metuh, offers him crash course on his new role The All Progressives ...	April 17, 2015	12	8
3	The regional impact of Nigeria's presidential election	April 16, 2015	4	3
4	The Saturday polls goes beyond Twitter. You need to pick up your PVC step out of your house and vote for #Change. #ElRufai2015 #APC	April 6, 2015	48	33
5	This is one of the few days that poor language, disrespectful comments and uneducated abuse of @elrufai bring me awesome joy & satisfaction!	March 28, 2015	19	13

(Author's survey, 2015)

Table 7 tweets enjoyed acceptance from the youth population, as indicated in their responses. In spite of the fact that the replies under the tweet are fewer, a substantial number of them were in support of El-Rufai regarding his stance in his tweets. Approximately 99% of replies from all his selected tweets were congratulatory and supportive. Only 1% of replies were abusive and opposed to his stance; however, they were overwhelmed by the overall support that El-Rufai enjoyed from his Twitter population.

Table 8
Selected posts by Doyin Okupe

S/N	Okupe's Tweets	Date	Total number of replies (R)	Estimated number of replies by youth (70% of R)
1	@ doyinokupe Proverbs 24 21 My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change:	March 28, 2015	18	13
2	APC is a strange party with a strange mission. Its original leaders are mainly thieves while virtually all its new ... fb.me/3F8Aqw2uz	March 11, 2015	60	42
3	At last the strife is over and the battles is won. God has put a new song in our mouth Hallelujah!!!! Victory at last. Glory be to God.	March 24, 2015	101	71
4	It has pleased the Almighty God to give victory to Gen Mohammed Buhari, the Presidential candidate of the APC and ... fb.me/6wjCpUgTM	April 2, 2015	17	12
5	#WeArePDPWeWillBeBack #WeArePDPWeWillBeBack #WeArePDPWeWillBeBack	April 21, 2015	60	42

(Author's survey, 2015)

Doyin Okupe's Twitter account (Table 8) was one of the most controversial during the elections. The youth responses to his tweets attracted the attention of various news headlines during the period of 2015 general elections. I analysed all replies to his five selected tweets and noted that 97% of replies by young people were abusive, thereby dragging the account owner to be equally abusive and defensive. This dynamic had grave implications for the popularity of the PDP presidential candidate. In fact among the 3% replies that were pro-PDP, some blamed the account owner for the defeat of PDP during the elections. The youth used this account during the election to criticise PDP and to fault its media and publicity arm for propagating hate messages, which it was claimed gave the APC candidates victory in the 2015 general election.

Table 9
Selected posts by Rueben Abati

S/N	Abati's Tweets	Date	Total Number of Replies (R)	Estimated number of replies by youth (70% of R)
1	Obasanjo's unwarranted attack on President Jonathan is odious, repugnant and self-serving grt.me/oOZgG	February 14, 2015	91	64
2	'We're fully in support of President Jonathan's reelection' Gani Adams, State House Lagos, Thurs.#OPCfor Jonathan	March 13, 2015	74	52
3	Empty APC podium at NEDG 2015 Presidential Debate, Sun. March 22. #TheirBabaisMissingin Action	March 22, 2015	136	95
4	Jonathan's Next Four Years: My vision for a Nigeria that works for all.#Must read	March 23, 2015	30	21
5	Lee Kuan Yew's glowing example will eternall inspire positive developments in the World – President Jonathan grt.me/A2tud	March 23, 2015	11	8

(Author's survey, 2015)

Equally controversial was Abati's Twitter account (Table 9). The owner of the account is one of the media aides of the PDP presidential candidate. The youth population on this account rely on information from his tweets owing to its official nature. Of the replies I analysed, 97% comments on the five selected tweets were against Abati's stance. The teeming youth replies on the account were not demeaning, unlike those for Okupe, although they made a mockery of the tweets. Some followers bluntly affirmed the elections would be in favour of the opposition and often defended the opposition (APC) in their replies. I observed that the remaining 3% replies to the tweets were carefully made in view of the overwhelming population of youth opposition and the fear that one might be bullied on the platform, which often ended up as major news headlines on other media platforms.

Table 10
Selected posts by Femi Fani-Kayode

S/N	Fani-Kayode's Tweets	Dates	Total number of replies (R)	Estimated number of replies by youth (70% of R)
1	My attention has been drawn to a story that I am renting a crowd to embarrass Gen. Buhari at Chatham House later today. It is a lie.	February 26, 2015	167	117
2	"APC is a formation of hate, anger, frustration, envy and malice. They are the dregs of the PDP" - Gov. Sule Lamido.	March 15, 2015	55	39
3	Amaechi has alleged that Pastors were paid 6 billion to campaign against Buhari. What a dirty lie. He has sold his soul to the devil.	February 4, 2015	185	130
4	If u have run from the debate simply because u can't hold ur own, u committed perjury and u lied about ur certificate just say so.	January 30, 2015	150	105
5	By God's grace we are going to win this election. President Jonathan belongs to the modern age whilst Buhari belongs to the stone-age.	January 19, 2015	185	130

(Author's survey, 2015)

Fani-Kayode's Twitter account (Table 10) was also controversial; this account belongs to the media director for the PDP presidential candidate. The five selected tweets enjoyed scrutiny by the youth. Of the replies I studied from the selected tweets, 98% were abusive, raw and derogatory of the opposition. At one point Fani-Kayode had abusively responded to these replies, which most times ignited rage in the youth – who also attacked him on his Twitter page. In some replies they claimed that Fani-Kayode was unprofessional in his handling of youth and information on Twitter. Only 2% of replies favoured Fani-Kayode's tweets and these were enmeshed in abusive replies. As with the previous two accounts (Tables 8 and 9), it was claimed that this account contributed to the defeat of the PDP presidential candidate.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISCOURSE

In this study, archival posts and tweets from the selected Facebook and Twitter accounts were studied to understand the impact of the youth on the 2015 electoral process vis-à-vis their social media usage. The number of comments and replies that followed the posts and tweets, as shown in the previous section, affirm Ogunlesi's (2013) findings from a youth social media survey, in which he claimed that young people constitute 70% of active social media users in Nigeria.

Although the tables above do not show quotes of comments and replies by young people, my study painstakingly examined how youths responded to issues and situations during the elections. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the social media population that follows the accounts of politicians and political parties does not guarantee victory in an election. Goodluck Jonathan had 1 864 143 Facebook likes (population), while Muhammadu Buhari had 121 949. The idea of likes and followers on Facebook and Twitter is that one must belong to these categories to be able to view and share information, comment and reply to information on any account of choice. My analysis also established that the conventional definition of 'like' – which implies affection and love – is not clearly defined on Facebook. In the same vein, the population of a Twitter account is called followers. In everyday English, 'followers' denotes supporters, fans, factions and admirers. Nigerian youth during the 2015 general elections refuted the common meanings of those words. It was noticeable that both followers and likes of accounts examined in this study comprised youth devotees and oppositions on both sides.

With reference to Tables 3 to 10, the study showed that Facebook and Twitter are sometimes used to spread false and hate messages or to intimidate and bully others. Nnanyelugo and Nwafor (2013) corroborated this in their work. My study also identified that politicians and their political parties do not have well-grounded knowledge of Nigerian youth's social formation, and thus have fallen prey to youth's tactics of dragging politicians into using abusive and offensive language. This accounts for one of the main reasons why the hitherto ruling party (PDP) lost in the 2015 elections. Undoubtedly, Facebook and Twitter engaged the youth during the period of the elections by sharing information on electoral malpractices and insecurity.

From the presentation and analysis in Table 7, we note that the social media platform was used by El-Rufai to make security alerts on election rigging. Some young people responded to this by providing additional information through videos, pictures and audio evidence from various locations. This evidence clearly indicates there has been a shift away from previous patterns in which youths were actors in violence during elections. Social media advocacy and information are largely responsible for this drastic disinclination, thereby reducing the propensity of youths to engage in electoral violence in Nigeria.

Among the comments and replies that followed selected posts and tweets on social media accounts examined in this study, Tables 3 to 10 list the estimated number of replies from the youth. This explains the notion of forming other networks that are different from the ones initiated by Facebook and Twitter accounts. For instance, there may be comments and replies to a post or tweet from the youth; however, once an offensive comment or reply to post or tweet is noticed, rather than following the trend of comments and replies, they form another sub-network on the controversial comments or responses to defend, abuse, bully and campaign to express their fanatical support for the candidate of their choice. This pattern was common on all the accounts selected for this study. Furthermore, the study included other non-political Facebook accounts (Channels TV and Sahara Reporters) to which the youths took their movement as it were.

CONCLUSION

In this study I interrogated the roles played by Nigerian youth during the 2015 general elections. I started by defining Nigerian youth within the context of social media platforms Facebook and Twitter during the period of the elections. I analysed the social media evidence, with an emphasis on how young people in Nigeria utilised social media to redefine and appreciably abate Nigeria's electoral culture of violence, election rigging and disenfranchisement. The findings also showed the increasing political participation and advocacy tendencies of youth in Nigeria on Facebook and Twitter, and how this has helped to reshape their mindset on electoral violence and malpractice during the 2015 elections. This stands in contrast to past experiences, in which young people's numerical strength and access barely influenced the direction of the electoral process in Nigeria.

It would serve no purpose to wish away the significant contribution of social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, to the success of the 2015 general election in Nigeria. The youth and social media platforms were also instrumental in elections conducted recently in the United Kingdom, as in other developed and developing countries. As in these other countries, Nigeria has had its share of youth and social media influence over electoral processes, though it was noticeable during the 2011 general elections but became exceptional in 2015. Above all, I therefore conclude that social media can play a potent role in galvanising the youth for political discourse, conscientisation and education. In turn, these phenomena can facilitate the effective transformation of electoral processes in Nigeria.

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NIGERIA'S 2015 ELECTIONS:
*Permanent voter's cards, smart card readers
and security challenges*

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ABSTRACT

Voting time in any democracy always involves rigorous politicking. The electioneering exercise in developed democracies tends to have less tension in the polity than in many developing democracies which do witness some hitches, mainly in issues of procedure and security. However, these problems reduce with every subsequent election. Nigeria's 2015 general elections were no exception to such improvements as there were innovations in the Anti Electoral Fraud Procedures (AEFP). The research in this work questions the extent to which the AEFP prevented electoral malpractices in Nigeria's 2015 general elections. It also assesses whether, given the security tension in the country, the ratio of actual voter turnout to registered voter speaks of peace in the electoral process. The research methodology adopted is an empirical analysis of data from the Afrobarometer Round 6 survey assessing Nigerians' perceptions of their electoral environment and of the level of preparedness of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC's officially released presidential election result is also critically interrogated. The relative deprivation theory is used to analyse the causes of security challenges. The conclusion is premised on the grounds that there were general improvements in the 2015 general elections and recommendations were posited to the Election Management Body (EMB), the government and the general masses.

Key Words: election, democracy, permanent voter's card (PVC), card reader, urban violence, INEC

INTRODUCTION

Election time in any democracy is always a period of rigorous politicking. All the stakeholders, such as the election management body (EMB), the political parties, the electorate and the government have their hands full ensuring that the exercise is successful. The EMB is responsible for the conduct of a free and fair election, the political parties are responsible for the contest for available political offices, the electorate is responsible for voting their preferred candidates into office, and the government is responsible for maintaining a level playing field for all stakeholders.

Elections are a universally acceptable process of legitimising a government. In developed democracies, there is usually less tension in the polity than in developing democracies. Election periods are seen as a time to reward representatives who have served in function and in office in equal measure to their performances (Abdullahi 2015; Goldsmith 2015; Butts and Metz 2015). This therefore creates an opportunity to check and balance both the political parties and the candidates vying for political offices. This power of the electorate to choose between political parties and candidates in highly competitive campaigns, but in a peaceful and rational manner, speaks of the developed democracies such as Britain, the United State of America, France and Germany.

On the other hand, the electioneering exercise in developing democracies does, in many cases, witness some hitches mainly regarding procedures, technical and security issues. The reason for this is that these nations have recently emerged from either colonial rule, military dictatorship or some other form of autocratic regime, including a one-party state. Those groups that emerge out of the politics of personal aggrandisement, subjugation and manipulation, regardless of whether they are ethnic, religious or other, will be in perpetual conflict with the polity. Therefore they use all possible means including the politics of anger, force and violence, to liberate themselves (Lauren 2015; National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria 2015). However, this political rush and the forceful emancipation of political power abates with every subsequent election. Most countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and a few in Latin America fall into this category.

Nigeria's 2015 general elections also experienced improvements in procedures and fairness when compared with the previous elections. There were innovations in the Anti-Electoral Fraud Procedures (AEFP) such as the smart card reader and the permanent voter's card, which has microchips for a technical analysis of card-holder identity. This helps to reduce electoral malpractices to an acceptable minimum and therefore consolidates and improves the democratic process in the country. It also negates the previous elections conducted in the country which were characterised by multiple voting, underage voters, voter impersonation, ballot stuffing, ballot snatching, irregular accreditations of political

parties, candidates and electorates, and general security imbroglios (Omotola, 2010; National Democratic Institute, 2012).

This research considers the extent of improvements such as the electronic card reader and the permanent voter's card (PVC) introduced by the AEPF into the conduct of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, using the presidential election as a yardstick. It further considers the security threat to and tensions of the electorate by comparing the ratio of registered voters to the accredited voters who actually voted. The research questions thus posited in this work are; to what extent did the AEPF reduce electoral malpractice in Nigeria's 2015 general elections; and, considering the actual voter turnout as a percentage of the registered electorate, whether this indicates a level of insecurity or political tension in Nigeria's electoral space.

The relative deprivation theory is used to analyse the reasons behind political tension and crises in most developing democracies and some developed democracies. In this study it is also used to analyse the causes of security challenges in the polity. The research methodology adopted is an empirical analysis of data from the Afrobarometer Round 6 survey on Nigerians' perceptions of their electoral environment and on the INEC's level of preparedness for the election. INEC's officially released presidential election result is also critically interrogated.

The conclusion is premised on the grounds that, unlike the previous elections in Nigeria in 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, there have been general improvements in the 2015 general elections. Subsequent elections in the country are forecast to have improved election processes. Recommendations were directed to the electoral body, the government and the general masses on the need to engage in politics without tears and to have freer and fairer elections in the country.

DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Since independence in 1960 Nigeria has been a deeply divided multi-ethnic state. The quest for establishing democratic government has swept across the polities of the world checking undemocratic regimes, and in 1999 Nigeria also had its fair share of this democratic wave. The cardinal point in every democracy is the right of the citizens to choose who they want to govern them from many options and alternatives (Gyimah-Boadi, 2015). Since the advent of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, there has been a growing desire for people to exercise their legitimate right to vote and be voted for. This has led to several crises and clashes of interest between different factions in Nigeria such as ethnic and religious sectors.

All elections conducted in Nigeria since independence have generated untold controversies and bitterness on a national scale. This is because of the Siamese

twins of electoral fraud and mass violence that have become central elements in both the history of elections and of the electoral process in the country (Gberie, 2011; National Democratic Institute, 2012). Despite the marked improvement in the conduct of the 2011 elections, the process was not free from malpractices and violence (Omotola, 2010; Gberie, 2011).

Thus over the years the electoral processes in Nigeria's democratic governance have continued to be marred by malpractice, such as extraordinary displays of rigging, ballot snatching at gun point, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulations of the voters list, falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Omotola, 2010; Jega and Hillier 2012; National Democratic Institute, 2012). These did not strengthen the democratic process but instead created a fissure in the polity. The true wishes of the electorate were not respected by these fraudulent acts, thus making the polity a haven for political demagogues instead of being the pride of political statesmen.

The role of security personnel in the assessment of electoral security in Nigeria's democracy, particularly since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, indicates that the public has little trust in them (Chukwuma 2001). Nigeria's security sector consists of the army, police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and State Security Service. Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution lays down the functions of the Nigeria Police to include protection of life and property, the preservation of law and order, and the prevention and detection of crime (Nigeria's Constitution, 1999). The main election role of the police is to protect life and property, to preserve electoral law, to prevent and detect electoral crime, to maintain order and to create, by means of effective policing, a favourable climate in which a democratic election can take place (Electoral Bill 2006; INEC, 2011 and Rosenau et al. 2015).

Security personnel in most cases became despotic, aiding and abetting electoral irregularities in the country (Chukwuma, 2001; National Democratic Institute, 2012). In previous general elections during Nigeria's Fourth Republic – in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 – they have used their authority, power, and access to firearms on many occasions to intimidate the population. In extreme situations, they have reacted violently to opposition parties which are supposed to be conducting lawful political campaigns or rallies, and have run into battle with civil society (Alemika, 2003; INEC, 2011; Jega, 2012; Oni et al 2013).

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria witnessed a dramatic turnaround in terms of its conduct and electronic procedures. The turnaround includes the introduction by the electoral umpire, INEC, of anti-electoral fraud procedures such as the use of the electronic smart card reader (SCR) and the permanent voter's card (PVC). This to a large extent minimised electoral fraud and malpractice in

the electioneering process. This election is also significant because it was keenly contested and featured the strongest opposition to the ruling political party since the transition to civilian rule in 1999.

Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs)

INEC introduced the use of PVCs for use in the 2015 general elections. This replaced the laminated paper temporary voter's card (TVC) which has many shortcomings for conducting a standard, zero malpractice and generally acceptable, free and fair election. Since the 2011 general elections the TVC has had a record of permitting high crime, flexibility, fraud and manipulation.

INEC produced PVCs for the 68 833 476 persons in the biometric register of voters ahead of the 2015 general elections (INEC 2015b; YIAGA 2015). The PVC replaced the TVC issued on the heels of voter registration after 2011. Quality, security, durability and cost effectiveness were underlying factors in the production of the PVCs by INEC. These cards have many components and specialised features such as base substrate, security printing, personalisation, lamination and chip embedding, with an average life span of ten years.

The PVC has an embedded chip that contains all the biometrics of a legitimate holder, including fingerprints and facial image. On election day the card is swiped on a smart card reader at the polling unit for authentication of the card and verification of the voter before voting commences. The PVC has security features that are not easily susceptible to counterfeiting. Only voters with their PVCs were allowed to vote in the 2015 general elections.

A pre-election verification of the PVC was carried out by INEC so that interested persons could do a prior check on their status in the register of voters by composing a short message in the following format: INEC, state of registration, last name, and the last five digits of the Voter Identification Number, and by sending an SMS to short code 20120. The PVCs are also made available for daily collection, including weekends, at distribution points in all 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The introduction of PVCs actually reduced election malpractice in the whole country and created a degree of serenity and relative trust in the electorate.

The Electronic Card Reader

For the first time in Nigeria's electoral history, electronic voter authentication systems, also called smart card readers, were deployed in the 2015 general elections. The card reader uses a highly secure cryptographic technology. This is commonly used in devices that need to perform secure transactions such as pay

terminals. It has an ultra-low power consumption with a single core frequency of 1.2GHz and an Android 4.2.2 operating system. INEC has also introduced a backup system for the card readers – 36 000 spare batteries and 25 000 backup card readers that are positioned locally for quick delivery if needed (INEC 2015c).

The card reader units have been widely subjected to quality assurance, integrity and functionality testing, and found reliable in terms of ease of use, battery life and speed of processing. For instance, it takes an average of 10 seconds to authenticate a voter. The card readers were also subjected to stress testing in the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) ahead of the 2015 elections. INEC made card readers available at every voting point in the States and FCT during the 2015 elections, with a substantial number of spares available to address contingencies (INEC 2015c).

Fraud continues to be a very serious problem in Nigeria's election environment, but it is gradually dwindling. Over 4.8 million voters were removed from the register after 2011 and the 2014 update for multiple registrations, while another 12 million were removed for incomplete information after the 2011 elections. The PVC and card readers are primarily a fraud prevention measure to prevent voters from being impersonated or disenfranchised through large-scale voter inflation. This is why the voter register has shrunk from 73 million registrations in the 2011 general elections down to 58 million before the continuous voter registration (CVR) of new voters, which brought it to 68 million voters ahead of the 2015 general elections.

CHALLENGES OF ANTI ELECTORAL FRAUD PROCEDURES (AEFP) TECHNOLOGY IN NIGERIA

The new technology introduced into the 2015 general elections encountered a number of challenges. These can be summarised as the technical malfunctioning of the machines, and the human errors in handling the machines. Apart from the menace of the Boko Haram insurgency which had led to the potential disenfranchisement of up to 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) for the 2015 general elections, there were concerns about violence around or after the elections based on religious, ethnic or regional divisions. Indeed, there had been a significant number of violent campaign incidents in all parts of the country resulting in at least 82 reported killings. The decision of INEC to postpone the elections by six weeks also gave rise to fears about vote rigging by the authorities (Nart 2015). However, to prosecute a credible election, INEC needed to verify the efficiency of the card reader in advance, and thus they conducted a mock election prior to the election in order to test the proposed system for the election (INEC 2015e; Sweeney 2015a).

The elections were nevertheless bedevilled with problems. There was a poor level of awareness among the electorate about the card reader. A large number of Nigerians, especially those in rural communities, were completely unaware of the device. Many of these people had neither seen nor heard about the card reader until election day. The training given to the ad hoc and permanent INEC staff on the use of the card reader was inadequate. Most of the presiding officers and assistant presiding officers in the polling units were not effectively trained on the proper use and handling of the card reader and on the need to remove the film covering from the screen of the device to facilitate better fingerprint decoding. Of particular note was the failure of the card readers to recognise President Goodluck Jonathan's card and that of his wife Patience Jonathan. After four repeated trials and failures, Jonathan filled the incidence form and resorted to manual accreditation in order to vote.

Other challenges include the rejection of the PVC by the card readers, an inability to capture the biometrics from fingertips, and irregular capturing and fast battery drainage. INEC officials had to abandon the polling units and take the card readers back to their office for proper configuration. In order to salvage the situation INEC ordered the use of a manual process for accreditation. A number of the PVCs issued to voters by INEC could not be authenticated, thereby disenfranchising some eligible voters. In other cases voter cards were authenticated but their biometric data could not be verified after several trials. Even where they were verified, the process was in some cases very slow, especially with regard to fingerprints (Sweeney 2015a). Challenges concerning its use included possible battery failure to power the device and timeliness in verifying PVC holders, both of which reduced the numbers of voters confirmed in the accreditation process. Despite these concerns, Nigerians were generally optimistic that the technology had a positive impact on the voting process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Deprivation theory

The theory of deprivation as applied in this work implies the deprivation due to unequal distribution of political, social and economic wealth. The theory does not claim that in all social groups there will be consensus in values; rather, it considers some of the consequences of situations where there is consensus. Where people do not agree on values, relative deprivation can also be noticed. This theory came out of a need to understand the motivations behind the social activist movements of the 1960s. It seeks to give answers to questions such as what impetus motivates an individual to agitate for change in his life.

The theory posits that (collective) action stems from the individual's psychological reactions to the gap between expected circumstances and actual ones. The gap becomes apparent when they perceive themselves to be in a relatively unjust position vis-à-vis another person or group to which they might reasonably compare themselves (Tougas and Beaton 2002). For instance, an individual might expect to have access to an improved chance of electoral victory for a variety of reasons: he or she is of the right age, is obviously very intelligent, and has prepared by studying and adequate politicking. Other obvious facts that can degenerate into electoral violence and agitation may be the lack of expected access, which might create a perception of relative deprivation in comparison to people of similar age and status.

Alam (2013) also noted that the key to understanding the feeling of deprivation is a matter of which of these characteristics they are comparing themselves with. Why do they think they deserve better than they have? Who is their point of comparison? What choices do they think they should have open to them? Relative deprivation theorists have suggested that perhaps it is not ego relative deprivation (ERD) that motivates individuals, but rather perceptions of group or collective relative deprivation (CRD). CRD occurs when the individual feels that his or her group has been deprived. This is a major reason why the eruption of violence in Africa and in many developing economies is a prominent and regular event. Various groups and interests might suffer neglect and deprivation for a while but after some time their marginal propensity and elastic limit of forbearance is exceeded and therefore agitation, protest and violence inevitably ensues.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted is an empirical analysis of data from the Afrobarometer Round 6 survey. This is to assess the perception of Nigerians on their electoral environment and on INEC's level of preparedness, using a total sample of 2 400 participants. INEC's officially released presidential election result is critically interrogated, validated and interpreted.

The sample selection technique is a simple proportionate purposive random sampling. Simple percentage, ratio and graphical illustrations are used to analyse the result. This research is appropriate because it reflects the true mindset of the populace regarding the apparently unending urban violence in their respective countries. It also reveals the perceptions of the people on the relevance of continuous democracy.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The perception of Nigerians on their electoral environment and on INEC's level of preparedness is analysed according to the following criteria:

- election efficacy
- fear of political intimidation
- trust in INEC
- results of the 2015 presidential election
- voters' evaluation ratio to population evaluation
- voter analysis.

Table 1
Election Efficacy in Nigeria

Rate	Percentage
Not at all well	28%
Not very well	40%
Well	19%
Do not know	4%

Source: Afrobarometer 2014

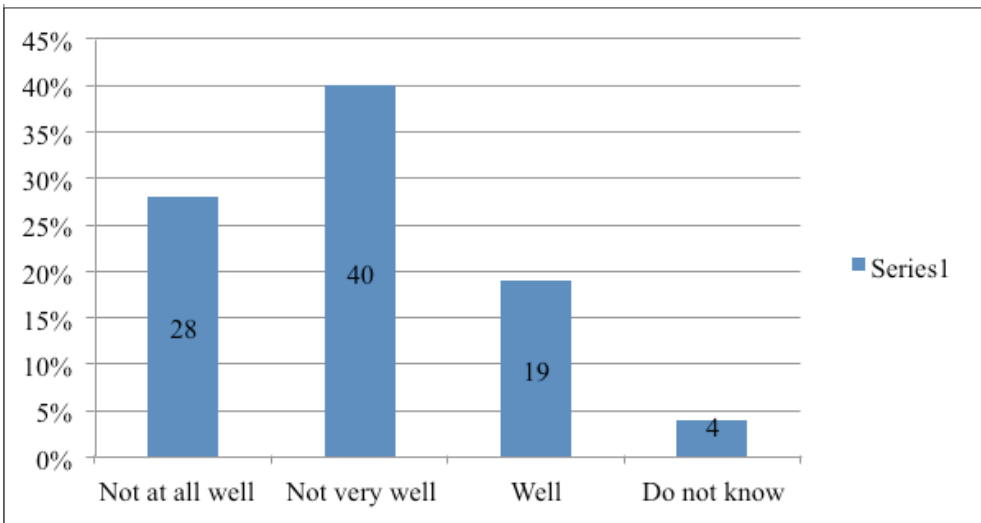


Figure 1: Election Efficacy in Nigeria

From Table 1 above, it is evident that the perceived relevance of elections in Nigeria seems to be in a relative mature stage as 28% of the Nigerian electorates considers the efficacy of election to be not at all well; the highest percentage is in the relatively decisive stage with 40% of Nigerians seeing the efficacy of elections as not very well rooted in the polity. A total of 19% refers to the efficacy of the election as well. This is a relatively strong percentage comparing it with the not at all well perception.

Table 2
Fear of Political Intimidation

Issues	2012	2014
Somewhat/ A lot	34%	50%
A little/Not at all	65%	48%

Source: Afrobarometer 2014

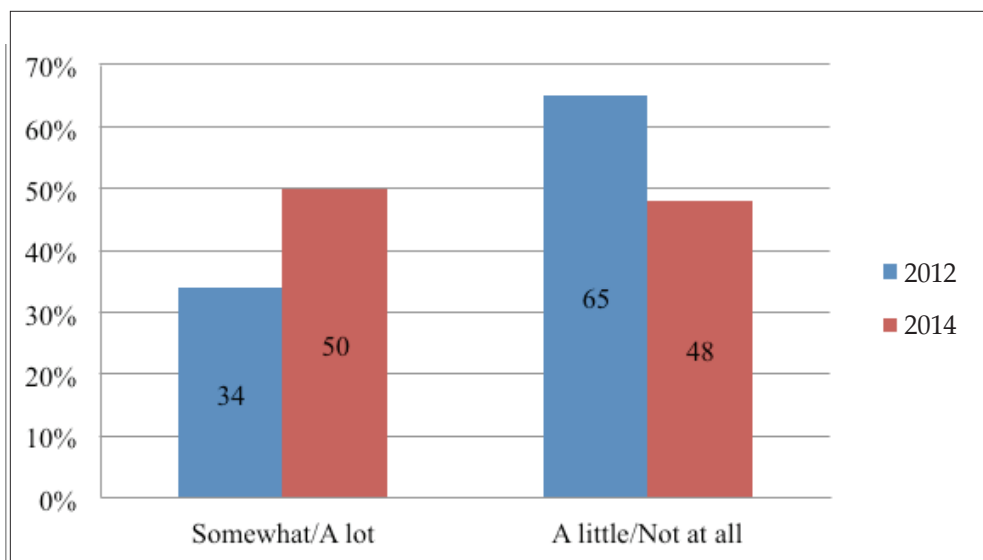


Figure 2 : Fear of Political Intimidation

Table 2 above indicates that the electoral atmosphere in Nigeria seems to be charged with political intimidation. But the intensity of the charge is seen to undulate from high to low at different intervals as the trend of political events changes. This might be a good sign that Nigeria’s democracy is consolidating

from one national electioneering period to the next. The perception of the fear of political intimidation as somewhat/a lot is 34% in 2012, compared to 50% in 2014. However, the perception of the fear of political intimidation as a little/not at all is 65% in 2012, while it is 48% two years later in 2014.

Table 3
Trust in INEC

Issues	2012	2014
Not at all	27%	30%
Just a little	39%	37%
Some What	27%	25%
A lot	7%	7%

Source: Afrobarometer 2014

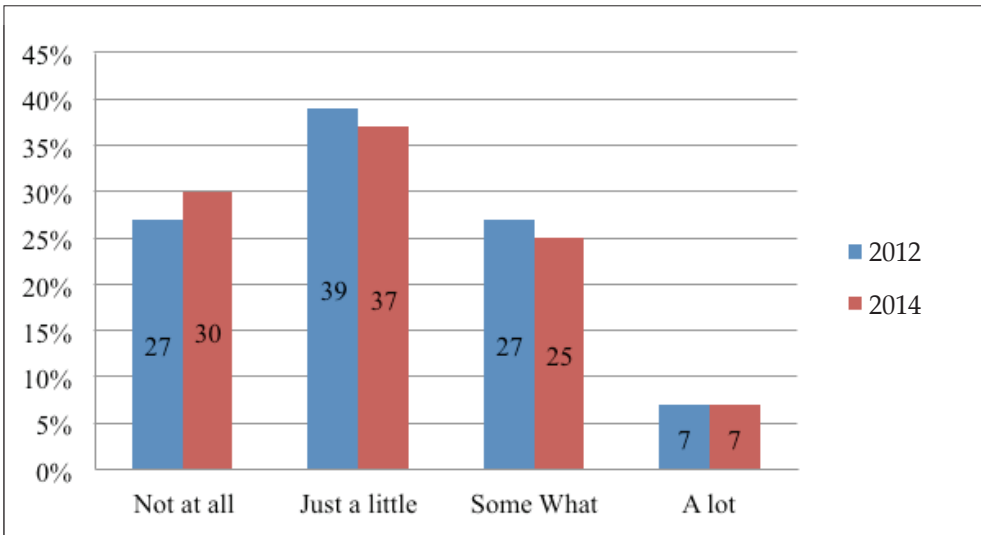


Figure 3: Trust in INEC

Figure 3 represents the relatively constant level of trust by Nigerians in the electoral body INEC. However the pendulum of this trust is swinging towards the low side. It is evident that a total of 73% of Nigerians had an appreciable level of trust for INEC in the year 2012, but this level had dropped to 69% in 2014. A total of 27% of Nigerians had no trust in INEC in 2012. This percentage increased slightly in 2014 to a record of 30%. This data also corroborates the 2015

pre- and post-election survey conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral systems (IFES). Their research revealed that public confidence in INEC is high and it increased dramatically by 16 points from pre-election (2014) to post-election (2015) levels of confidence (IFES 2015).

Table 4
2015 Presidential Election Result

S/N	Political Party	Votes Recieved	Percentage
1	APC	15 424 921	53.96%
2	PDP	1 853 162	44.96%
3	OTHERS	1 154 000	1.08%

Source: INEC 2015d; IFES 2015

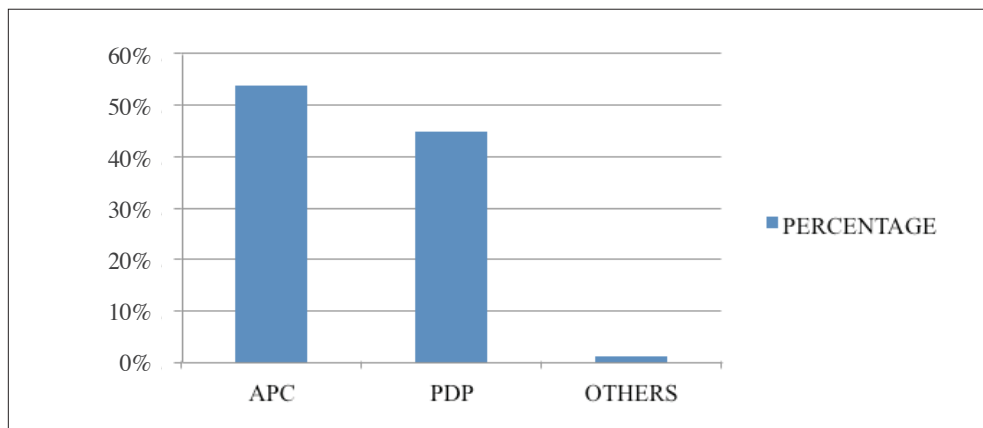


Figure 4: 2015 Presidential Election Result

The official INEC results of the 2015 presidential elections as shown in Table 4 above indicate that two major political parties have the majority of the votes and that neither of the two has an absolute majority. The parties in question are the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP). The APC, with 54%, has the largest percentage of votes, but it is important to note that this is not an absolute majority of votes cast. The PDP also have a large vote of about 45%. The other 12 political parties had a total of about 1% of the total votes. There is no absolute majority winner in the polls but with a simple majority the winner was the candidate from the political party with the highest number of votes.

Table 5
Ratio of Voters to General Population

Total Nigeria Population	Total Electorate	Total Accredited Voters	Total Valid Votes	Total Rejected Votes	Total Votes Cast
183 523 432	68 833 476	31 756 490	28 587 564	844 519	29 432 083

Source: INEC (2015d) and United Nations (2015)

Table 6
Percentage of Voters and Non-voters

Percentage of Electorate in Total Population	Percentage of Population not Voting	Total Electorate Accredited	Total Electorate Accredited but Did Not Vote
37.51%	62.45%	53.86%	7.32%

Source: INEC (2015d)

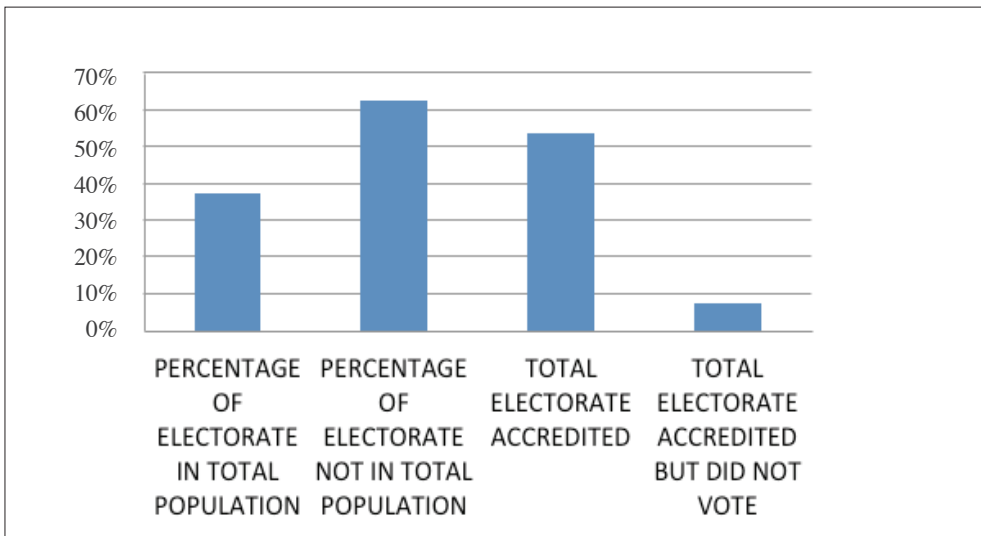


Figure 6: Percentage of Voters and Non-voters

Tables 5 and 6 indicate that the electorate in 2015 consisted of nearly 38% of Nigeria’s population. The remaining 63% consists of the non-voting population. The fact that two-thirds of the country’s population played no active role in determining political leadership is an issue for concern and cannot be considered adequate for democracy and majority rule in any democracy.

It is also evident that nearly 54% of the total electorate were not accredited and just over 7% of accredited voters did not vote. This means that the real number of the electorate reduces by nearly 54%. Of the remaining 46% that were accredited for the elections, about 7% of the total number of accredited voters did not vote.

Table 7
Voter Analysis

Percentage of Total Accredited Voters to Total Electorates	Percentage of Total Vote Cast to Total Accredited Voters
46.14%	92.68%

Source: INEC (2015d)

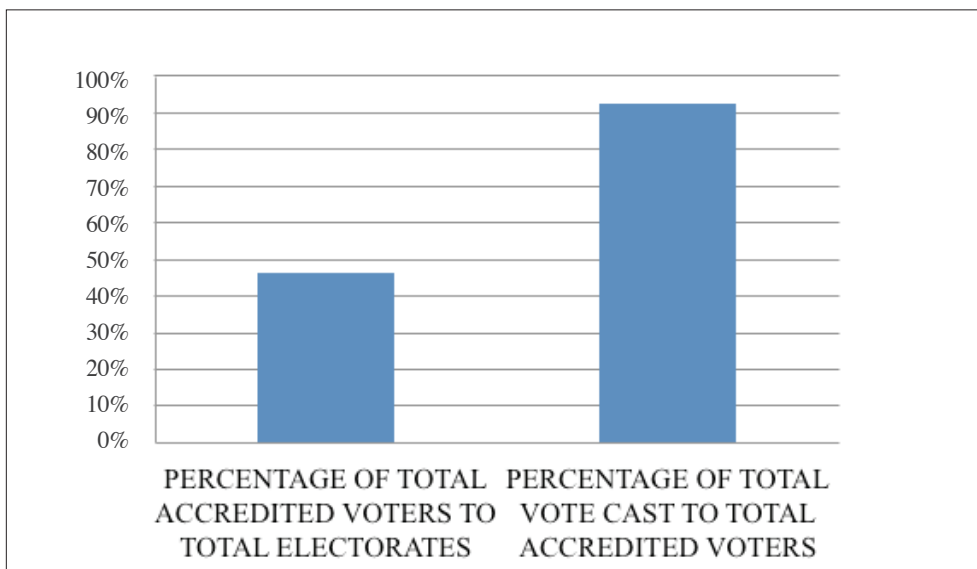


Figure 7: Voter Analysis

From Table 7 above it is evident that the percentage difference of the total accredited voters to the total number of electorate is about 46%. About 7% of the total number of accredited voters did not vote. This means that of the total accredited voters nearly 93% voted. This implies that of the total accredited Nigerian electorate, a few did not vote. This does not speak of a fully informed electorate and a mature democratic set up.

THE BAILOUT STRATEGIES

For future elections to be more free, fair, equitable and widely acceptable, all the stakeholders should consider the following bailout as inevitable. These concerned stakeholders include: INEC, the executive arm of government, the legislative arm of government, the electorate, international organisations and the citizenry.

INEC should also treat logistical problems with the same importance as the announcement of election results. All electoral materials, both sensitive and nonsensitive, should be ready at least two months before election day so as to prevent emergencies and postponements. INEC should also ensure transparency and nonpartisanship in its conduct with both political parties and political zones to prevent the electorate from being biased towards the electoral process. Finally, voter registration should be continuously upgraded, permanent voter cards should be issued and the use of the card reader machine should be maintained in future electoral processes.

The interference of the president in INEC functions should be limited to the appointment of the INEC chairman and commissioners, and this should be done in conjunction with the National Assembly so as to have a majority approval of citizen representatives. The police and other security agents should join hands, under the direction of INEC, in escorting INEC materials to their destinations and securing staff during the elections. This will restrict their duties to security and monitoring instead of harassing the electorate and supporting political parties in campaigning.

The legislature should pass laws to give the INEC full financial autonomy, not linked to the executive or to political parties, so as to have a nonpartisan electioneering process. The disbursement of such finances should be as and when needed. Also, there should be vigilant oversight function of how INEC spends this money. The Electoral Act should not be designed to suit any particular political party but further strengthened to enhance equitability and fairness to all contestants across board.

The electorate on their part should consider their votes as of paramount importance. This will make electioneering, from registration to voting, a process of true value. The electorate should ensure that they are available for electioneering

activities from registration to the declaration of results at each polling unit, so as to ensure a full democratic consolidation with free and fair processes.

International organisations should sustain their monitoring roles in the electioneering process so as to help check undemocratic practices that may interfere in the process. Their financial assistance and support to the government for the election process should also be monitored so as to prevent any diversion of money for personal or political party use. Their technical expertise should be directed towards the area where they are needed and not to issues that had been resolved locally.

The general populace, which comprises both the electorate and those not qualified to vote, should ensure that they act as watchdogs to the daily actions and reactions of the INEC and other stakeholders, so that the much esteemed democratic process will be balanced, free and fair. Both the electorate and nonvoting age groups should be free to participate in terms of positive criticism and constructive opinion on the electioneering processes.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's 2015 general election took a new direction in its patterns, processes and procedures. The introduction of anti-fraud electoral procedures made people think more about the level of trust in the electoral body, INEC, for ensuring a credible election. The level of acceptability of all electoral processes is highly significant both within the country and beyond its shores. The level of violence recorded during the presidential election was minimal, which shows that the political behaviour of the Nigerian electorate is concerned with consolidating a sustainable democracy.

The deprivation theory adapted in this study showed that a significant number of Nigerians were interested in what the politicians would give them as compensation for voting or campaigning during this period. Others accepted financial inducements and opted for political street gang duty for some desperate politicians. However, the level of security for the election was adequate for a peaceful, relatively free and fair poll.

The research question in this study was interrogated by the methodology adopted. This shows that the positive perception of Nigerians about their electoral environment and of INEC's level of preparedness is relatively high. This was seen from the perception of the election environment, fear of political intimidation and the level of trust in INEC. The analysis of the official INEC presidential results, voter turnout and the performance of the political parties, all show a significant improvement in Nigeria's democracy.

The research revealed that the electorate was not afraid of political intimidation, the level of INEC preparedness was high and the level of popular trust in INEC also increased significantly from the pre-election year to the election year. Also the use of technology such as the permanent voter's card and the card reader machine add credibility to the electoral processes. These new technologies, however, had several flaws which can be mitigated in subsequent elections through continuous improvement in the training of ad hoc INEC staff and awareness of its usage by the general populace. These flaws contributed to the decreased output of the total number of registered voters and to the final tally of votes cast at the end of the election.

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SMART CARD READER AND THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

A central issue in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria was the use of the smart card reader, which was a critical component in the election. It was used for the first time in the electoral process of Nigeria and it remains one of the greatest technological innovations of the 2015 general elections. The smart card reader is a technological device set up to authenticate and verify, on election day, a permanent voter card issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission. The fundamental basis for deploying the technological device was to ensure a credible, transparent, free and fair election and thereby to deepen Nigeria's democracy. However, the use of the card reader generated debate among election stakeholders before, during and after the 2015 general elections. One such debate was the legality of the use of the device. In this paper I examine the debate and the role of the card reader in the elections. I also consider the challenges and impact of the card reader on the election. Considering the massive electoral fraud witnessed in general elections since Nigeria's independence, I conclude that the smart card reader should be used for future elections. General elections in Nigeria should continue to be technologically managed.

Keywords: democracy, electoral fraud, permanent voter card, election technology

INTRODUCTION

Nnoli (1990, p. 2) defines election as the manner of choice agreed on by a group of people which enables them to select one person or a few people out of many to occupy one or more positions of authority. Indeed, elections encapsulate the mediating institutional and psychological processes and anchors for adult citizens to express, in an organised and routine manner, their choice among those who

seek public political office (Jinadu 2005, p. 3). Elections help to determine periodic tests of parties' and candidates' acceptance and popularity. They also confer legitimacy on public office-holders, and subject public office-holders and political parties to periodic assessment. By so doing, elections enhance accountability and good governance (Okolie 2005, p. 436).

Elections are a critical component of any democratic society. As such, Nigeria's return to democratic rule and engagement with the democratic process led to the conduct of its general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. General elections are elections conducted in the federation at large for federal and state elective positions (The Electoral Institute 2014).

The 2015 general election appears to have been the most keenly contested in the history of elections in Nigeria. It was the first time about four major opposition parties came together to form a very strong party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) in order to challenge the dominance of the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the polity. According to Omotola (2013, p. 172) the election became the only game in town, shaping and reshaping public discourse and political actions.

Prior to the 2015 general elections, a number of technologically based reforms were embarked upon by the new leadership of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), headed by Prof Attairu Jega. These included the biometric register of voters and an advanced fingerprint identification system. INEC is the election management body empowered by the 1999 Constitution (as amended) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to organise, undertake and supervise all elections in Nigeria.

The use of biometrics in African elections is on the rise. No fewer than 25 sub-Saharan African countries (including Sierra-Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, Somaliland, Mali, Togo and Ghana) have already held elections employing a biometric voter register (Piccolino 2015). In Nigeria, the automated fingerprint identification system was used in the 2011 general elections to eliminate multiple registrations from the voter list, but it was not capable of verifying the identity of voters at the polling stations (Piccolino 2015). In view of this, INEC adopted the use of the permanent voter card (PVC) system and introduced smart card reader technology, a device used to scan PVCs to verify the identity of voters at the polling booth. The smart card reader was one of the greatest innovations of biometric verification technology and a controversial but crucial aspect of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Other African countries, including Ghana, Kenya and Somaliland, had adopted biometric verification technology. The technology is particularly useful in settings where governments have not previously established reliable or complete paper-based identification systems for their populations (Gelb & Decker 2012).

Concerned about the massive electoral fraud witnessed in past general

elections in Nigeria, INEC deployment of the card reader during the 2015 general elections was aimed at ensuring a credible, transparent, free and fair election. This would deepen Nigeria's electoral democracy. However, the use of the electronic device in the 2015 general elections generated debate among election stakeholders at the time of the elections. In this paper I focus mainly on the role of the card reader in the 2015 general elections and the future of the card reader, but I also examine other selected issues related to the elections.

SELECTED ISSUES IN THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

The 2015 general election was the closest electoral contest since the country's post-1999 transition to multi-party democracy (International Republican Institute 2015). The election was the most politically engaged in the history of electoral democracy in Nigeria. Huge resources were used for the elections, including 120 billion naira expended by INEC, with election staff numbering 750 000 ad-hoc members and more than 360 000 security personnel. The presidential election was contested by fourteen candidates from different political parties. The candidates from the PDP, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, and the APC, General Muhammadu Buhari, were the major contenders.

The 2015 general election was the fifth general election since Nigeria resumed democratic rule in 1999. Nigerians went into the general elections with renewed determination to exercise their voting rights and stood stoutly to monitor and protect their votes with anything and everything (Momodu 2015). The election was bedevilled with issues that almost denied Nigerians the opportunity of voting their representatives into government for another four years. These issues almost affected the integrity, quality and management of the election. Indeed, quality election management is crucial to sustaining democracy. If the citizenry does not believe in the fairness, accuracy, openness and basic integrity of an electoral process, the very basis of democratic society can be threatened. This implies that public faith in the integrity of the election system is a cornerstone of democratic government (Alvarez & Hall 2008, p. 134). In view of this principle, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2015) argued that a legitimate electoral process and public confidence in democratic governance depend on both the actual and perceived integrity of an election. Some issues in the 2015 general election were security threats and election postponement, the expiration of tenure of the INEC Chairman, and the introduction of technology.

Security threats and election postponement

The 2015 general election was conducted amidst security threats and challenges, especially the Boko Haram insurgency. The Boko Haram insurgents had engaged

in kidnapping, massive killings and wanton destruction of property. The terrorist group had also captured territories in Nigeria, which was effectively under their control, and the insurgents had threatened to disrupt the 2015 general elections. Against this background, the 2015 election which was scheduled to be held on 14 and 28 February 2015 was postponed by INEC to 28 March and 11 April 2015. The National Security Adviser, Col. (Rtd.) Sambo Dasuki, stated that the general elections scheduled for February 2015 could not be guaranteed in view of the security threats and challenges across the country. According to Dasuki this was because most men in the Nigerian Army were engaged in Nigeria's north-east, confronting Boko Haram insurgents. He contended that six weeks' postponement of the general elections would enable the armed forces to subdue and reclaim the territories that were effectively under the control of Boko Haram.

The postponement was received with mixed feelings. Some individuals, groups and political parties – especially the PDP – supported the decision. Supporters of the postponement were of the view that it would guarantee peace and security across the country. Other individuals, groups and political parties – particularly the APC – outright rejected the rescheduling of the 2015 general election. Some parties, including APC, accused the PDP-led Federal Government of deliberately allowing insurgency in the north-east, an opposition stronghold, to fester so the party could cash in on the crisis and be re-elected. Adichie (2015) has argued that the postponement was a flailing act of desperation by Dr Goodluck Jonathan not to lose the election. Jonathan was the Nigerian President between 2011 and 2015 and he was the PDP's presidential candidate in the 2015 general elections. Similarly, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former Nigerian President (1999–2007), described the date shift as a grand plan by the PDP presidential candidate to win the election at all costs. Nwankwo (cited in Kendhammer 2015) believed that the intention behind the rescheduling was to undermine the democratic process and to stop support growing for APC in the country.

It seems INEC was persuaded by the security apparatus of the Nigerian state to reschedule the 2015 general elections, and this singular act embarrassed Nigeria and Nigerians. Indeed, the postponement of the election appears almost to erode public credibility and confidence in the elections. Billions of naira from public funds had already been expended towards preparing for the election despite Boko Haram's annexation of territories. Considering the security threats and challenges, how could people, materials and logistical arrangements be distributed and managed effectively for a violence-free election during and after the poll with its changed dates?

The contention by some stakeholders in the 2015 elections that territories captured by the terror group could have been excluded from the poll appears to me as irrational. The question would be – are these groups of people not Nigerians?

Had these categories of people been excluded in the 2015 elections, it would have amounted to a breach of their democratic and fundamental human rights. This may have led to legal actions that would have impacted negatively on the general elections. Some stakeholders were quick to mention that countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq have successfully held elections although they were in a state of war. However, this statement does not accurately reflect the true situation in these countries. The security of an election is unique to the circumstances in which it is conducted. The stakes for any given election are different – even if elections are held periodically in the same country – owing to the changing forces that shape the national interest and corresponding political agenda (Dunne 2006). Neither Afghanistan nor Iraq had any of their territories under the effective control of the terrorist groups that operated in these countries when their general elections were conducted in April 2014. The terrorist groups were Taliban in Afghanistan, and Islamic State of Iraq and Levant in Iraq. The terror groups in these countries usually embarked on suicide bombings and attacks. In fact, within 48 hours of their respective general elections, security personnel and civilians' lives and properties were destroyed.

Security is a critical component of electoral democracy. Indeed, good security is one of the requirements to achieve credible and transparent elections. Ensuring a fairly secure environment for voters and sensitive materials on election day in all areas of the country is a necessary condition for holding democratic elections. The absence of basic security measures will jeopardise, if not severely harm, the acceptability of the results (López-Pintor 2010, p. 15).

To ensure the integrity of the electoral process, various security measures need to be instituted during all phases of an election (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2015). Indeed, the assurance of equitable security during an electoral process is essential to retaining the participants' confidence and commitment to an election. Consequently, security is integral to the goal of an electoral process (Dunne 2006). In view of this, INEC could not have continued with the 2015 general elections if the security agencies could not guarantee the safety of lives and properties before, during and after the elections. However, this fact calls into question the primary responsibility of government – which is to provide security and welfare for its citizens as enshrined in section 14 (b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the 2015 general election rescheduling was within the constitutionally stipulated period for the conduct of the elections by INEC. The 1999 Constitution (as amended) stipulates that elections for the offices of president and vice-president, governors and deputy governors, and members of the National Assembly and Houses of Assembly shall be held not earlier than 150 days and not later than 30 days before the expiration of the term of office of the last holder.

In addition, section 25 of the Electoral Act (as amended) empowers INEC to set a date not earlier than 150 days but not later than 30 days before the expiration of the term of office of the last holder.

Section 26 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) empowers INEC to postpone an election where there is reason to believe that a serious breach of the peace would occur if the election was held on a said date. Therefore, the postponement of elections is within the purview of INEC's powers following security concerns raised by the National Security Advisor (Policy & Legal Advocacy Centre 2015a). It is therefore my opinion that the postponement of the 2015 general elections was not in breach of any law in Nigeria. The rescheduling of the election was in order considering that 29 May 2015 (63 days after 28 March 2015) was the handover date.

Another justification was that the Nigerian armed forces were able to reclaim territories during the period of postponement, and subsequently went on to integrally involve the military under a special arrangement in the 2015 general elections. However, the deployment of the military in the 2015 elections generated controversy among stakeholders in the election – to the extent that court judgment was delivered on the issue. The human rights activist Falana (cited in *Premium Times* 2015) argued that military involvement in providing security for the elections was unconstitutional. He maintained that INEC was wrong to insist that only the military could guarantee security during the 2015 general elections. He noted that the obligation to provide security and maintain law and order during elections rests on the police and not the military.

The deployment of the military in the 2015 general elections became an issue in view of the previous massive deployment of the military in the Ekiti and Osun States governorship elections of 2014. In those earlier elections, some political parties accused the military of playing out a script in the elections. However, the military were not directly involved in the 2015 general elections and the role of the military in the election was very limited. No military officer was posted to any polling booth. They were deployed to major roads for security checks to prevent security breaches during and after the elections.

Expiration of tenure

While the issues of security, deployment of the military and postponement of the 2015 general elections were still generating controversy among election stakeholders, the sudden debate about the expiration of tenure of the INEC chairman – and subsequent calls for his removal – further compounded the fear, in some quarters, that the 2015 general elections might not be held if they were rescheduled. There was speculation that the INEC chairman might be asked to proceed on terminal leave in March 2015 before the expiration of his tenure in

June 2015. The PDP-led federal government was accused of plotting this inordinate agenda. Various individuals and groups called for the removal of the INEC head (Ebhomele 2015). They included the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and the Afenifere Renewal Group (ARG), as well as some former militants in Niger Delta and even some state governors – such as Ekiti State Governor, Ayo Fayose (Ebhomele 2015). Other groups and individuals kicked against his removal.

INEC is a body established under law by virtue of section 153 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) of Nigeria. Furthermore, section 157 states that for the removal of an INEC boss, a two-thirds majority of the Senate must support the request by the president. Such removal must, however, be the result of the chairman's inability (whether arising from infirmity of mind or body or any other cause) to discharge the functions of the INEC office, or misconduct. Has the chairman of INEC been declared medically unfit? Has the INEC boss failed to discharge his duties for any reason? Has he engaged in any misconduct while carrying out his responsibilities?

INEC's previous chairman, Prof Maurice Iwu, was removed illegally in a manner that was undemocratic and was not challenged. This fact calls into question the practice of rule of law and constitutionalism in Nigeria's democratic process. The hullabaloo about removing the INEC boss appears to me to have been an attempt to coerce him to rescind some of the reforms he embarked on in Nigeria's electoral democracy in preparation for the 2015 general elections.

Prof Jega is the first Nigerian to have conducted two consecutive general elections (2011 and 2015) in the country. His appointment came at a time when the democratisation process was bedevilled by badly conducted elections that left Nigerians frustrated and questioning the value and validity of electoral democracy (Jega 2014, p. 4). To address this ugly situation, Prof Jega started a series of reforms to deepen Nigeria's electoral democracy. Chief among these was the introduction of the smart card reader for the 2015 general elections.

Smart card reader: The real issue in the 2015 general elections

The smart card reader was the most contentious issue in the 2015 general elections. The smart card reader was a critical component in these elections and it was being used for the first time in Nigeria's electoral process. The card reader remains one of the greatest innovative technologies from the 2015 general elections.

Past elections in Nigeria had witnessed the desperate bid for political power by some stakeholders with vested interests in Nigeria's electoral process. Certain stakeholders engaged in all forms of electoral malpractices – including multiple voting, impersonation, manipulation and falsification of results – which led to

legal action, electoral conflict and violence. Electoral malpractices make citizens lose confidence in the electoral process; and lack of confidence by citizenry in the democratic process is an impediment to deepening electoral democracy. If the citizenry does not believe in the fairness, accuracy, openness and basic integrity of the election process, the very basis of any democratic society might be threatened (Alvarez & Hall 2008, p. 134).

According to López-Pintor (2010, p. 9), electoral fraud has even more serious political implications in that it allows a party or candidate to take over public positions contrary to the popular will. This undermines the democratic process and usually leads to electoral violence, insecurity and political instability. The governments of Cote d'Ivoire, Peru and Serbia all collapsed in 2000 as a result of popular rebellions against fraudulent elections. Similarly, the so-called 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine in 2004 led to presidential elections being completely re-held after extensive fraud was demonstrated (López-Pintor 2010, p. 5).

In view of the negative effects of electoral malpractice, global attention is now focusing on how to mitigate this undemocratic behaviour and improve the electoral process. One strategy to combat electoral malpractice is the introduction of information and communication technology into the electoral process. The use of technology in elections is not an end in itself but assists with various aspects of electoral administration (ACE Project n.d).

Against this background, an electronic technology-based device, the smart card reader, was introduced into the Nigerian electoral process in 2015 to help improve and deepen electoral democracy. The smart card reader is a technological device to authenticate and verify voters with PVCs. The device uses a cryptographic technology that has ultra-low power consumption, with a single core frequency of 1.2 GHz and an Android 4.2.2. operating system (INEC 2015). The INEC card reader is designed to read information contained in the embedded chip of the permanent voter card issued by INEC to verify the authenticity of the PVC and carry out verification of the intending voter, by matching the biometrics obtained from the voter on the spot with the ones stored on the PVC (Engineering Network Team 2015). The card reader performs these functions while also keeping a tally of the total numbers of voters accredited at the polling unit and forwarding the information to a central database server over a global system for mobile (GSM) network. These features make the card reader most welcome at this point in time in the nation's electoral history (Engineering Network Team 2015).

The fundamental basis for the deployment of the technology-based device in the 2015 general elections by INEC included the following motivations:

- to prevent electoral fraud
- to allow the electorates' votes to count

- to reduce litigation arising from elections
- to authenticate and verify voters
- to protect the integrity and credibility of the election
- to audit results from polling units across the federation
- to ensure transparency and accountability.

Other reasons included the need for statistical analysis of demographic data of voters and voting for the purposes of research and planning, to build public confidence and trust in the election, to reduce electoral conflicts, to ensure a free and fair election, and to further deepen Nigeria's electoral and democratic process.

In spite of the laudable goals and objectives of the smart card reader, it generated debate among the 2015 general election stakeholders before, during and after the polls. On the one hand, supporters of the card reader view the innovation as a deliberate effort to ensure the conduct of a free and fair election; on the other hand, there have been arguments that INEC has neither the legitimate authority nor capacity to use the card reader (Policy & Legal Advocacy Centre 2015b).

The proponents of the device, according to Peters (2015), believe the card reader procedure can prevent or minimise rigging in the sense that there would not be multiple voting. By contrast, opponents believe that in the peculiar circumstances of the Nigerian situation, the card reader is designed to assist a certain political party to win a general election. Peters (2015) maintained that the thrust of the latter argument is that the card reader must have been programmed to assist a pre-determined winner of the election by ensuring that a certain number of votes could not be given to another party. This would ensure victory by an INEC-preferred party. There have also been mutterings about the use of a faith-based bank to transfer money to print the PVCs and the configuration of the card reader.

The allegation that card readers were designed to favour a political party has been shown as baseless, as we saw before and after the elections. None the less, this unsubstantiated sentiment led to the invasion and destruction of the APC Data Center in Lagos and the subsequent arrest of the supplier of the card readers by the Department for State Security. The Department subtly apologised to APC and later released the supplier of the card readers after no evidence was found.

The contention that a faith-based bank, JAIZ Bank, was used to pay for the supply of the card readers appears to me ridiculous. Was the transaction illegal? Was the bank not a licensed financial institution in Nigeria? Investigations showed later that another bank, First City Monument Bank, was used to make electronic payment for the supply of the card readers.

The use of the card reader in the 2015 general election was also criticised on the premise that its timing was too close for over 68 million Nigerian voters.

Considering that the device was a relatively new technology not tested or tried in Nigeria, it was therefore argued that INEC should set aside the card reader in the 2015 general elections. This argument appears to me valid to the extent that INEC would conduct an election of such magnitude and deploy a device that has a far-reaching impact on the electoral process, but did not test the device in previous smaller by-elections to validate its effectiveness and efficiency. Moving from manual process to infusing technology in voting is a milestone that requires high efficiency. Between 2011 and 2015, INEC conducted governorship elections and by-elections in some states of the federation. Why would INEC wait for the 2015 general elections to use the card reader?

To address the issue of the card reader not being tested, INEC hurriedly conducted a pilot run with the device on 7 March 2015, just 21 days before the polls. The pilot run took place in twelve states, consisting of 225 polling units and 358 voting points, of the federation. Some card readers did not function effectively during the test run. However, INEC promised to deal with the issue. The pilot run was carried out after the general election had been rescheduled. In other words, INEC could have conducted the elections without test-running the device. This could have created a disaster for INEC.

The legality of the use of the card reader in the 2015 general elections was a crucial aspect of the debates led by critics of the card readers. To examine this issue, a careful study of Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence is needed to determine whether the use of the smart card reader by INEC falls within the confines of the law. First, as argued earlier, it is clear that INEC is a creation of the law as it is established under section 153 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) as a Federal Executive Body. Under paragraph 15 of Part 1 of the Third Schedule to the 1999 Constitution (as amended), INEC is mandated to organise, undertake and supervise all elections in Nigeria; conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote; and prepare, maintain and revise the registration of voters for the purpose of any election (Policy & Legal Advocacy Centre 2015b). INEC is also empowered to carry out the functions conferred upon it by virtue of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended).

In addition, the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2015b) argued that section 118 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) subjects the registration of voters and the conduct of elections to INEC's discretion. Similarly, section 16 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) gives power to INEC to cause to design, print and control the issuance of a voter's card to voters whose names appear on the register. Therefore, according to the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2015b), INEC has express and implied powers to design means, procedures and processes that enable it to exercise the powers granted under the Constitution – which includes, for example, the use of the PVC in the 2015 general elections.

Hence, without doubt the legal framework at the time of the 2015 general election empowered INEC to be the electoral umpire. However, sections 49 and 52 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) were subjected to legal debate with regard to the use of card readers for the 2015 general elections. To some, the deployment of card readers for the accreditation of voters at the elections tactically meant adoption of electronic voting, which the 2010 Electoral Act outlaws (Oderemi 2015). Section 49 states that –

- 1) Every person intending to vote shall present himself [sic] to a Presiding Officer at the polling unit in the constituency in which his name is registered with his voter's card.
- 2) The Presiding Officer shall, on being satisfied that the name of the person is on the Register of Voters, issue him a ballot paper, and indicate on the Register that the person has voted.

Section 52 stipulates that –

- 1) Voting at an election under this Act shall be by open secret ballot.
- 2) The use of electronic voting machine for the time being is prohibited.
- 3) A voter on receiving a ballot paper shall mark it in the manner prescribed by the Commission.
- 4) All ballots at an election under this Act at any polling station shall be deposited in the ballot box in the open view of the public.

In his contribution, Falana averred that the deployment of the card reader by INEC is not illegal. He submitted that INEC has the constitutional power to set the standards and guidelines for elections. In view of this, he argued that the card reader is part of accreditation rather than voting. He maintained that what the law proscribed is electronic voting and not card readers. Therefore, according to him the use of the card reader in the 2015 general elections is legal and legitimate (cited in Oderemi 2015).

A civil society called the Society for Advancement and Protection of Public Rights (SAPPR) (2015) in its submission argued that the deployment of card readers is illegal because it violates section 52 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended). SAPPR opined that the use of the card reader for screening voter cards, or which has the effect of preventing a registered voter from voting, is beyond the powers of INEC. As such, SAPPR maintained that by virtue of sections 77(2) and 117(2) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended), INEC had no power to deprive eligible Nigerians of the right to vote at the election (cited in Oderemi 2015).

Banire (2015) contended that electronic voting machines and card readers are two different devices that are not necessarily deployed together for all purposes.

He explained that a card reader is not an electronic voting machine but a machine used for accreditation of voters only before the actual voting. According to Banire, electronic voting requires no ballot papers whereas the 2015 general election was ballot-paper-based. He argued that what section 52(2) prohibits (as indicated earlier) is the use of electronic voting machines but not the use of card reader for accreditation of voters. Banire (2015) therefore concluded that the use of card readers is not prohibited. In view of this, he argued, what is not prohibited is permitted in law. He cited the case of *Ojo Bolarinwa Theophilous vs. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012) LPELR-9846 (CA)*, wherein the Court of Appeal declared that 'The basic canon of interpretation or construction of statutory provisions remains that what is not expressly prohibited by a statute is impliedly permitted.'

Thus, since the use of card readers for the purpose of accreditation of voters is not prohibited by the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended), according to Banire (2015) the card readers are definitely permitted. Furthermore, Banire maintained that accreditation of voters is not the same thing as casting of votes, because a person may be accredited without presenting him or herself to vote. The difference between accreditation and voting is underscored, according to Banire, by section 49(1) and (2) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended). In order to separate accreditation from actual voting, he opined that the 2015 INEC *Guidelines and Manual for Election Officials* provides that accreditation shall be conducted between 8:00 a.m. and 13:00 p.m. or such time as the last person in the queue finishes; by contrast, voting commences at 13:30 p.m. or as soon thereafter as accreditation is completed, until the last voter concludes.

Citing section 52 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended), Peters (2015) argued that the use of the card reader is illegal. Section 52 clearly stipulates that the use of electronic voting machines for the time being is prohibited. He maintained that INEC has in respect of the introduction of the card reader gone beyond its limits. Peters submitted that the card reader was only mentioned and introduced in the *Electoral Manual 2015*. In view of this, according to him, its use is illegal and void because the evergreen policy of the law is that where a statute provides a method of doing a particular thing, no other method would be accepted. He cited the case of *Ajuta II v. Ngene (2002) 1 NWLR (Part 748) at page 300 paragraph C*. In this case, C. Muhammad J.C.A. said

It has become trite that where a statute provides for the manner of doing a particular act, only that manner as provided by the enabling legislation would be acceptable. The doing of the act by a vehicle other than that provided by law for its attainment would be declared void.

To that extent, according to Peters (2015) every other requirement including the card reader outside the said section 49(1) and (2) of the Electoral Act that is

contained in the *Electoral Manual 2015* is illegal and void. He accused INEC of developing false confidence that it can do and undo under the cover of 'an umpire' instead of pursuing the amendment of the law to accommodate the new invention (card reader). He advised that the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) should be amended to include the card reader. Until this is done, he posited that the use of the card reader remains illegal.

Peters (2015) also observed a contradiction between the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) and the *Electoral Manual 2015* wherein the card reader was introduced for the accreditation process of the 2015 general elections. According to him, section 49(1) of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) stipulated that an intending voter shall mandatorily present to the Presiding Officer for accreditation processes. Contrarily, the *Electoral Manual 2015* said the intending voter shall present to an Assistant Presiding Officer. Peters (2015) cited the Latin maxim '*expressio unius est exclusio alterius*' – which means the express mention of a name or thing in a statute excludes the applicability of other things or names not specifically mentioned. To that extent the absence of the name of Assistant Presiding Officer in section 49(1) of the Electoral Act underscored the position of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) that an Assistant Presiding Officer has nothing to do with the accreditation process in Nigeria's electoral system.

When the words used in a statute are clear, they must be given their natural and ordinary meaning. It is therefore clear that electronic voting – which the law prohibited in Nigeria – is not the same thing as a card reader. As such, the use of the card reader as part of the accreditation process in the 2015 general elections was in line with legal frameworks for the elections. In spite of the hullabaloo about the card reader, it was eventually used for the 2015 general election. However, the device had some challenges in its operation during the election.

CHALLENGES OF THE SMART CARD READER IN THE 2015 ELECTIONS

In spite of assurances given by INEC to address the issues raised by the pilot run using card readers in twelve states of the federation, the 2015 general elections witnessed an inability of the device to deliver effectively in a large number of polling units. This happened especially in the presidential and National Assembly elections.

What challenges were card readers confronted with in their operation for the purpose of accreditation in the 2015 general elections? First, the level of awareness among voters about the card reader was poor. A large number of Nigerians, especially the electorate in rural communities, were completely unaware of the device. Many of these people had neither seen nor heard about the card reader until election day. These voters had no information about the role of the card

reader in the elections and there was a lot misconception about the device. To some of the electorate, the card reader seemed like a voting device. The inadequate dissemination of information and poor sensitisation of the electorate regarding the card reader led to some strained human relations, with resulting uncooperative attitudes between some illiterate voters and election officials.

Second, the training given to ad hoc and INEC staff on the use of the card reader was inadequate. Most Presiding Officers and Assistant President Officers in the polling units were not effectively trained in the proper use and handling of the card reader. In most cases the venues provided by INEC for training were crowded and not conducive to learning, such that most trainees did not receive proper instruction in the use of the card reader. There were imperfect practical demonstrations of how the card reader would be effective. In some cases, two card readers were provided for a class of a hundred trainees and many trainees did not have the opportunity to operate the device. In some cases, those who received training were replaced by people who had no proper knowledge of how to use the device effectively. All these issues led to poor handling of the card reader during the elections, to the extent that the protective film of some card readers was not removed, which resulted in the device being unable to detect thumbprints.

Card reader breakdown was also witnessed during the elections. Some devices malfunctioned on the day of the elections. Although INEC had provided back-ups in case of card reader breakdown, some of the back-ups also failed to function. For instance, five card readers were deployed for use at the polling unit of the presidential candidate of the PDP in Bayelsa State, yet none of them functioned. Similarly, the card reader at the polling unit of the vice-presidential candidate of APC was non-functional. A few card readers were unable to function owing to blank screens, non-activation of subscriber identification module (SIM) cards in the device, or flat batteries. Some INEC officials, according to Vanguard (2015), attributed the failure of card readers to INEC engineers who could not decode the inbuilt security installation in the devices. The security code in the card reader is reportedly designed to record the time and date of voting. One official claimed that the cards were initially programmed for 14 February and that with the postponement to 28 March, some card readers had not been re-programmed (Vanguard 2015).

When the card readers did function, a few of the devices were confronted with the challenge of PVC authentication and biometric data verification of the voters in the polling units. The authentication and verification of card and voters respectively were components of the accreditation process for the election. A number of PVCs issued to voters by INEC could not be authenticated, thereby disenfranchising some eligible voters in the elections. Where voters' cards were authenticated, often their holders' biometric data could not be verified after several

trials; and where it was verified, the devices worked slowly. For instance, in Borno State, 10% of eligible voters' cards were authenticated and biometric data was verified by card readers at most of the polling units (Odiakose 2015). However, the inability of the device to capture the fingerprints of voters was attributed to greasy or dirty fingers of the voters. Often people had to scrub their hands on the ground to ensure the device could read their fingerprints (Okoro 2015).

Following the widespread failure of the card readers, Prof. Jega changed the guidelines for the conduct of elections on 28 March, and approved the use of manual accreditation in areas that the smart card readers had malfunctioned during the presidential and National Assembly elections in the country (Odiakose 2015). These changes were made while the election was ongoing and after millions of frustrated voters had gone home disenchanting. The announcement by the INEC chairman seemed to have eased accreditation in many places. However, the extent to which this announcement may have inadvertently opened the door for electoral fraud is yet to be fully analysed (Amenaghawon 2015). It is unfortunate that the rules of the game were changed in the middle of the electoral competition. In spite of this, the smart card reader had an impact on the 2015 general elections.

IMPACT OF SMART CARD READERS ON 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Despite the challenges that confronted the operation of some of the smart card readers during the 2015 general election, a significant effect of the device usage was observed after the elections. First, the use of the card reader increased and reinforced public confidence and trust in the electoral process. As already discussed, public confidence in each step of an election process is critical to the integrity of an election. Citizens not only have a right to participate in elections, they have a right to know for themselves whether the electoral process is valid (Open Election Data Initiative n.d.). Sadly, previous elections in Nigeria – particularly the 2007 general election – had made Nigerians completely lose confidence in the electoral process. Indeed, the flaws that characterised the conduct of the 2007 elections severely dented Nigeria's image and electoral integrity (Orji & Uzodi 2012). The election fell short of basic international standards, to the extent that it was considered the worst in the history of electoral democracy in Nigeria.

In short, public confidence depends on the integrity of an election, and the 2015 general election appeared to possess this. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2015) described the 2015 elections as the most successful general elections in recent Nigerian history, and as such the elections renewed citizens' confidence in the electoral process. Indeed, most Nigerians after the elections believed that their votes would count and their will could be respected in future elections; this perception has reinforced the legitimacy of Nigeria's democratic process.

Second, electoral fraud was reduced. Successive elections in Nigeria since the colonial period lacked the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process: transparency, fairness and freeness. Sadly, electoral fraud did not abate after independence. Indeed, since the inception of the Fourth Republic, a series of elections has been conducted with large-scale electoral fraud and malpractice. According to Ijim et al. (2011), the 2003 general elections effectively put Nigeria on the map of countries that do not understand or respect democracy. Ijim et al. argued that the monumental and state-sponsored structural rigging showed a country with no regard for people's votes. The 2011 general election, although described by international observers as free and fair, lacked credibility in its conduct – especially in the rural areas of Nigeria (Ijim et al. 2011).

The smart card reader checked the undemocratic attitude of politicians in polling-booth electoral malpractice. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2015) described the device as a game changer in the 2015 general elections. According to the Situation Room, the politicians and candidates were unfamiliar with and even afraid of the card readers, as they had not learnt how to manipulate them. This fact in itself limited their ability to rig the elections.

Third, election litigation was minimised. The total number of post-election litigation cases related to the general elections of 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2005 were 560, 1290, 731 and 297 respectively. These figures show that the 2015 elections incurred the least litigation during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Indeed, there was a departure from the past where every election outcome was contested at the election tribunal. Most of the candidates that lost in the 2015 general election did not challenge the outcome. In fact, some of the strongest contenders who did not win in the election embraced and congratulated the winners. For instance, the PDP presidential candidate immediately congratulated the APC presidential candidate who had won the presidential election. This attitude was evident across many states of the federation during the governorship, State House of Assembly and National Assembly elections.

In addition, electoral conflict and violence was minimal as the election was seen to be transparent and credible owing to the use of the card reader. Elections in Nigeria since independence have been marred by violence. However, the 2011 post-election violence stands out in terms of its magnitude, severity and consequences (Orji & Uzodi 2012). Indeed, the usually excessive and pointless attacking and degrading between the election winners and losers in past electoral contests were significantly reduced in the 2015 general elections. In view of the minimal level of electoral fraud owing to the use of the card reader, tensions were reduced among the political gladiators, and electoral conflict and violence was grossly diminished after the 2015 elections compared with past elections in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Nigeria's democratic capacity has increased and its democratic institutions have been strengthened. Nigerians and Nigeria's democratic institutions now have the knowledge needed to hold a free and fair election in order to deepen the democratic process.

SMART CARD READER AND FUTURE ELECTIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

The introduction of information and communication technologies into the electoral process is generating both interest and concern among voters as well as practitioners across the globe. Today, most electoral management bodies around the world use new technologies with the aim of improving their electoral processes (ACE Project n.d.). However, the new software and devices, including smart card readers, must be deployed in a manner that leads to their effective use.

Without doubt, the smart card reader played a significant role in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. However, there is a need to ensure that issues and challenges that arose through the use of the device around the time of the elections do not reoccur in future elections. A number of mechanisms need to be put in place by INEC for the deployment of the card reader in future elections so as to strengthen the democratic process. INEC should ensure that its conduct and activities in future elections are transparent, especially with the use of technology like the card reader. Transparency is a key principle in credible elections and this will bring about trust and public confidence in the electoral process. Also, INEC should consult widely and carry out effective campaigns about the card reader and any other technology to be deployed in future elections. Stakeholders – including the media, political parties, civil societies, the National Assembly and the electorate – should be adequately consulted. INEC should partner with them to carry out mass dissemination of information and to sensitise people about the need for technology to improve the electoral process and to deepen democracy. INEC should endeavour to manage information about the technology and changes so that stakeholders do not have unrealistic expectations and do not impose impossible deadlines (ACE Project n.d.).

The need to strengthen electoral laws on conformity for technology used in future elections is germane. The Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) should be further amended to include the use of the card reader for biometric verification of voters, for the purpose of accreditation. The National Assembly should be approached by INEC as soon as possible to amend the electoral legal frameworks regarding the use of card readers, in order to address the issue of legality which the card reader generated in 2015. Furthermore, adequate training of election officials and temporary and permanent staff of INEC should be conducted in a

suitable environment well ahead of future elections, so as to give room for practical demonstrations on how to use the device effectively. Enough card readers should be made available during the training session. Every trainee should undergo a mock test during their training, and strict compliance with all instructions given to trainees should be monitored. The trainees' allowances should be paid in full to motivate them to handle the device properly.

In addition, INEC must regularly update and re-examine the relevance of the card reader to future elections in Nigeria. Technology is not static, and the level of technological change is so rapid that a device used five years ago may not be relevant today. To conduct a credible, transparent, free and fair election in the future, with the use of the card reader, INEC must invest in regular staff training and development to remain up to date with modern technological changes. These developments are fast occupying the democratic landscape and electoral process. Consequently, future general elections in Nigeria should gradually become more technologically driven.

CONCLUSION

The use of card readers generated debate at the time of the 2015 general elections. However, despite the challenges of using the device it also had a significant and positive impact on the election and its outcome. These influences are not easy to quantify. INEC's aim in deploying the card reader was to improve the electoral process and deepen the democratic process. Unfortunately a lack of trust and the occurrence of suspicion and altercations among stakeholders with vested interests in the election created tension within the polity. With the use of the card reader in the 2015 general elections, and the gradual deployment of technology in subsequent elections in Nigeria, the prospect of the country becoming one in which elections are largely managed through technology appears to be achievable.

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ELECTION RIGGING AND THE USE OF
TECHNOLOGY:
*The Smart Card Reader as the Joker in Nigeria's 2015
Presidential Election*

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ABSTRACT

Elections provide the platform for political succession in Nigeria, as elsewhere. They used to provide an opportunity for fraudulent individuals and groups to perpetrate acts of rigging against both other contestants and the electorate. Through no fault of their own stakeholders and the electorate are sidelined through unbridled rigging, thus losing the election or having their votes stolen or cancelled. This was the situation until the arrival of the permanent voter's cards and the smart card reader. This technological input in Nigerian electoral space made it extremely difficult for results to be manipulated, either by anonymous individuals or through arbitrarily and fraudulently manipulating figures. The transparent application of this electronic device and its embodied security features make it extremely difficult to clone or compromise. This paper, therefore, intends to explore the circumstances that warranted the use of the smart card reader, the polemics surrounding its use, its performance during the 2015 presidential elections, as well as its potential for future elections.

INTRODUCTION

What we aim to achieve is that with the 2015 general election, Nigeria will take its rightful place in the global order of nations where electoral democracy has come of age. That is our goal, and we have an unflinching commitment to it.

Jega 2014, p. 16

It is this writer's belief that the Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Attahiru Jega, and his team were able to conduct a credible general election in 2015. Going by his previous experience, Jega and his team displayed a high level of integrity and innovative spirit in the organisation and management of the election. In the aftermath of the elections it is time to reflect on and identify what did and did not work, especially against the backdrop of national and global fear that violence would overtake the election and that the Nigerian state might implode. This doomsday feeling and predictions by many about the election was not borne out by the apparent success of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. This paper discusses whether this success could be attributed to a single factor or a combination of factors, and the extent to which technology, that is the use of the permanent voter's card (PVC) and smart card reader (SCR), made a significant contribution to the election.

From the time of the First Republic, Nigeria's electoral history has been characterised by grave incidences of electoral rigging. Eguavoen (2009, p.27) correctly observes of Nigerian politics that the country has never had crisis-free and fair elections. Elections in Nigeria have never been devoid of malpractice and violence. After attaining political independence in 1960, Nigeria had a parliamentary system of government. During the general elections four years later Nigeria ran into serious problems. Accusations and counter-accusations of fraud and malpractice were widespread, with many lives lost and property destroyed. Political crises eventually led to the first military coup d'état in January 1966. Therefore, the successes achieved in the 2011 and 2015 elections should not simply be glossed over. They were major achievements that need to be dissected and documented in anticipation of future elections. Despite some disagreement with this perspective our hope is that these misgivings may be laid to rest.

Winning elections in Nigeria is a serious business because it is a sure way of accessing state resources. As an aspiring democratic state, periodic free and fair elections are one of the pillars for sustaining democracy. Defined as a procedure that allows members of a state, organisation or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it, and which promotes public accountability, elections are critical in ensuring participatory governance. As we know, the concept of democracy is not necessarily synonymous with elections; however, a free and fair (credible) election is generally accepted to be at the heart of democracy. A free and fair election is a desideratum for the existence of democracy. A democratic government ideally denotes government composed through the freely given consent of the people as expressed in an election. Once the element of free consent is absent in an electoral process, then the outcome is no a longer democracy, but dictatorship (Aborisade 2006, p.115). Any election fraught with fraud and violence is therefore a usurpation of the sovereignty of

the people, the equivalent of an electoral coup. Further, elections are one of the most important means of establishing legitimate government and exercising popular control over leaders. It is also a means of policy selection as set out in party manifestos during elections. An election is a process, and it is free if all stages of the process are devoid of inhibitions and contradictions. It is also fair if the process shows no favour to person, party or side. Fairness means acting in an honest and honourable manner that is in accordance with what is desirable according to rules (Okoh 2005, p.24).

For Adebisi (2005, p.18), as quoted by Sarah Birch, a global authority on the subject of election malpractices, electoral malpractices could occur in three principal ways, namely:

- Manipulating the design of institutions governing elections to the advantage of one or more electoral contestants in violation of the principles of inclusivity, impartiality, openness or transparency, such as through gerrymandering, malapportionment, over-restrictive franchise or candidacy regulations.
- Campaign regulations that lead to inequalities among contestants.
- Lack of observer access to electoral processes.

However, what Birch did not envisage is that electoral malpractices could have a primordialist slant, largely unbridled and unfettered, and perpetuated with violence and impunity. This was particularly true of Nigeria before the general elections in 2011 and 2015. These malpractices were often effected with the active connivance of government authorities, compromised security and INEC officials, and corrupt politicians. This was a manifestation of the character of the Nigerian state.

THE NIGERIAN STATE AND UNBRIDLED ELECTION RIGGING

The penchant for violence and election rigging in Nigeria's electoral democracy needs to be understood in terms of the character of the Nigerian state and its aversion to transparency and accountability in the electoral process. Indeed, there is a running battle between primordialist forces and progressives over the ownership of the state. The character of the Nigerian state and society is fundamentally anarchical, mainly as a result of the multiplicity of ethnic groups and the political economy of the entity. This is largely a mono-product economy superintended by a distorted federal structure (Agbu 2016). Its political structure and governance have been distorted since political independence in 1960: first, by colonialists; second, by the ethnicised political class; and thirdly, by military

politicians. The character of the Nigerian state therefore derives from the various experiences of the past as experienced under colonial rule, the various attempted, aborted and successful coups d'état (eleven as at the last count in 1997), ethnic politics, the civil war (1967–1970) as well as deep-rooted distrust among some of the ethnic nationalities, and settler/indigene crises across the country (Moru 2004). These experiences have continued to shape the structure and dynamics of the Nigerian state. Unfortunately this structure is generally believed to facilitate a rentier and nepotism system which undermines creativity and elevates the mediocrity preferred by primordialist forces. This situation is extrapolated to the electoral process, which unfortunately is a zero-sum game with the prize going to the person or group that can out-rig all the others. To this extent, access to power and its use for primitive accumulation and influence have become an internecine affair. In this struggle for primitive accumulation, the state is not neutral but is an active participant; indeed, it became an instrument of the class that had captured the state. The dominant political class used state power for survival and reproduction. This accounts for the persistent incidence of electoral fraud and violence. The state, its structure, institutions and apparatus were instruments of domination, tenure extension and preservation (Okolie 2005, p.435). This explains why the law enforcement agencies, INEC and some of its officials were used to pervert the rule of law and disenfranchise the electorate in an unbridled manner. For several decades Nigerian politics became a subject that many felt should be discussed rather than practised because of the violence, fraud and risk involved (Opeibi 2009).

The elective principle was first introduced into Nigeria's electoral system in 1923 because of the corruption and money politics that characterised the electoral college system (Babalola 2003, p.8). This reduced corruption and money politics but failed to eliminate them. Although the 1979 constitution was a watershed experience in Nigeria's constitutional development, subsequent party politics were not much different from post-independent Nigeria. Political parties were formed largely along ethnic lines, while the political class politicised the ethnic divides. The Nigerian state was to witness a further crisis relating to revenue allocation, state creation, civil war, power-sharing, sectarian crises, and coups d'état that almost led to its disintegration. Since then, Nigeria has been bedevilled by claims of marginalisation, separatist agitations, and resource control, attesting to the distorted nature of its political structure, and calls for its re-structuring.

It is widely accepted that the political centre of the neo-liberal state in Nigeria had been captured by state, corporate interests and ethnic bigots. Thus political parties are bogged down in primitive accumulation or corruption, not the idea of serving the Nigerian people. Inadvertently, political parties promote the neo-liberal culture of celebrating the cult of the individual, selfishness, greed

and the validation of electoral riggers as winners. In such a framework, political gangsterism or 'garrison politics' become the order of the day. The task today is how to understand and eschew the confusion arising from this.

However, in the current age of globalisation, the dictates of global governance and democratisation require that countries comply with certain standards, and these standards are further propelled by technology, especially communication technology. The framework of our discourse is therefore anchored in understanding the character of the Nigerian state, and the imperative of embracing technology as applied to the electoral process. In this case, these are the progressive forces as encapsulated in the general theory of technology (Markus & Robey 1988). For many Nigerians the question is how to make their votes count in this political environment. For many progressives the choice was simple – to embrace the PVC and SCR.

Various frameworks have been used to explain the application of technology in society. Many of these theories could be categorised into descriptive and critical theories, while others are simply new propositions that remain unclaimed. Descriptive theories attempt to interrogate the link between technology and society through the definition and substance of technology, its emergence and changes in relation to the human/social sphere. Critical theories on the other hand use descriptive theories to search for ways to change the relationship between technology and society. Therefore, it becomes imperative for critical theories to be on the front burner, anticipating change. Some of the more common theories include the social construction of technology (Mackenzie & Wajcman 1985), systems theory (De Santis & Poole 1990), and the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel 1986). In more recent times, the following theories have also been used to explain the role of technology in the electoral process: rational theory (Enwere & Laden-Baki 2015), cultural relativism (Idike 2014), cybernetics model of communications theory (Nwangwu 2015), and the linguistic and discursive analytic perspective (Opeibi 2009). Broadly, we here apply Markus & Robey's general technology theory as an analytic tool. It presents the causes, structures of agency (technological, organisational, imperative, and emergent); structure (variances and processes) and the level of analysis (micro, macro). In this case, it is the imperative of devising or embracing technology that can check the endemic problem of election rigging that necessitated the use of electronic accreditation for the presidential election. While the Nigerian state, INEC and the electorate are key stakeholders and provide different levels of analysis, it is ultimately the goal of achieving a credible election and making votes count that provides the motivating force in the relationship between artifact and society.

Furthermore, the Internet and the expansion of communication networks which goes with it, appear to be the most important technology affecting the world

at present. Despite the importance of the Internet today, there is still some cultural lag whereby culture takes time to adjust to the material conditions embodied in technological change (Gyford 2011). We note this against the background of those theories that suggest that technology changes society, rather than vice versa. The general technology theory attempts to address the relationship between technology and society and raises questions of agency, determinism and autonomy. In the Nigerian case, it is the need to devise a reliable way to halt election rigging that led to the use of the PVC and SCR. In other words, societal imperative led to the use of the technology and not vice versa.

Permutations of ICT in electoral processes such as e-voting, its adoption and diffusion, could lead to significant improvement in democratic practices in various democracies around the globe. This phenomenon profoundly influenced Nigerian policy makers to explore the viability of adopting e-voting in their public elections (Ahmada et al. 2015, p. 95). The Chairman of INEC, Attahiru Jega, asserted that ‘... the whole world is moving in the direction of increasing the use of technology in order to have credible elections’ (Jega & Hillier 2012). As observed by Levan and Ukata (2012), there are various factors that are bound to challenge the performance of the traditional paper ballot system of elections in Nigeria. These include the difficult topographical terrain of some communities in Nigeria, the movement of both the electorate and electoral officials as well as election materials to polling units and collation centers, and the tallying and collation of results. Moreover, communicating election results using traditional means of transportation expose the results to numerous risks such as attack by political thugs, aggrieved party members, or manipulation by corrupt officials. These constraining factors question the continued use of the traditional paper ballot system and therefore open up a window for the e-voting option (Jega & Hillier 2012).

INEC was faced with the problem of how to deal with electoral rigging and polling unit politics. After much critical thinking, consultation and research they endorsed aggressive voter education in order to check polling unit politics, and deployed SCR to reduce the growing incidence of election rigging and over-inflated votes. However, before the SCR was introduced, INEC had painstakingly worked out the modalities of this sophisticated device. This included switching to the manual method of accreditation and resetting the SCR in case of any anomaly associated with the device; and they also analysed its merits and demerits (Enwere & Ladan-Baki 2015).

Since political independence, Nigeria’s democratisation has witnessed massive electoral fraud characterised by violence. This has compromised the ethics of democracy despite several electoral reforms that had little impact on the electoral process. Electoral fraud, which can also be referred to as election rigging, is described as electoral malpractice. These are palpable illegalities committed

with corrupt, fraudulent or sinister intention to influence, intimidate and foist other acts of coercion on voters, including the falsification of results and fraudulent announcement of a losing candidate as a winner.

Nigeria has conducted five elections since 1999, comprising the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections respectively. Except for the elections in 2011 and 2015 they were all roundly condemned for not meeting the required global standards and were therefore not considered credible.

For example, rigging in the 2003 general election was simply rampant. Some results were said to have been written in the private homes of individuals, and in some cases, announced even when the elections had not been conducted (Eguavoen 2009, p.28). In other places, fictitious thumb-printed ballot papers were stuffed into ballot boxes and used to compute figures for pre-determined winners. Security agents were used by government to intimidate and harass the electorate in different parts of the country. Money was used to influence the electorate to vote for unpopular candidates. In fact, the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM) Team led by Max van den Berg mentioned 12 States where fraud and irregularities were rampant and concluded that the 'minimum standard for democratic elections were not met' (NDI 2003, p.30).

Furthermore, the general elections of April 2007 were characterised by several challenges and shortcomings. These were as a result of poor preparation and widespread manipulations of the electoral process by the government using law enforcement agencies, especially the police and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The irregularities in this election included the late arrival of materials and officials, stealing of ballot papers, vote buying, harassment, chanting, shooting and taunting of voters, lack of secret voting, police interference, ballot snatching and stuffing, intimidation and political violence, denial of access to polling stations, partiality of electoral officials and the police, improper voting procedures, late commencement of elections, and underage voting (TMG 2007, p. 132). After evaluating the reports of observers deployed throughout the country, the Domestic Election Observation Group noted that numerous lapses, massive irregularities and electoral malpractices had been documented, and came to the conclusion that the whole election was a charade and did not meet the minimum standards required for democratic elections (TMG 200, p.136).

Whilst the 2015 general elections were declared largely free, fair and credible by most local and international observers, there are some who think otherwise, pointing out incidences of what they consider to be electoral fraud. The aim of this paper is to provide convincing evidence endorsing the claim that the PVC and SCR were indeed, the jokers in the pack, used to ensure freer, fairer and more credible 2015 general elections in Nigeria, in comparison to past electoral practice.

THE PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT AND ELECTION RIGGING

Since the institution of an election is a process, it is necessary to examine the environment under which the 2015 presidential election was held. This was an environment that was already charged, and in which the electoral management body, INEC, was constantly under scrutiny. Many – and not just politicians – believed that its leadership was already compromised in favour of the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This belief was not far-fetched, since except for a few instances, experience showed this to be true of the other management bodies and their staff. To many, the result of the election had already been decided. Nevertheless, the emergence of the two key political actors, President Goodluck Jonathan and General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd), both with political pedigree, and with Buhari having immense followership in the northern part of the country, indicated that this election was going to be different in the sense that it would be keenly contested.

In the run-up to the election, there was a reckless use of the police and military in Ekiti and Osun States; also the use of firearms by PDP thugs in Edo State in collusion with the police to vandalise the Edo State House of Assembly residential quarters. There were also constant machinations to humiliate the Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi employed by his political opponents (Odigie-Oyegun 2014). Furthermore, in Edo State the police continued to disobey the orders of both the High Court and the Court of Appeal. In Ekiti State, the police looked the other way when judges were beaten up, and democratically-elected principal officers of the State House of Assembly were sacked by only six of 26 elected members.

As the general elections approached, concerns mounted that the elections would generate violence, chaos and anarchy as many politicians jostled for positions. Nigerians were indeed apprehensive that there might be conflict and violence with serious implications for the stability of the country. Indeed, the suspicion was that fear of political violence and personal harm deterred many voters, especially in the south west and south east of the country, from coming out to cast their votes. This is against the backdrop of the unnecessary deaths of 943 persons, with 838 injured in the aftermath of the 2011 presidential election (Idowu-Fearon 2014, p.17). The primaries conducted by the various political parties did not give much hope that lessons had been learned from the processes of the 2011 general elections. Internal democracy within the parties remained a mirage as parties still engaged in the imposition of candidates and disregarded agreed modalities for contesting political office, while politicians schemed how to remain in power at all cost.

The consequences of the failure of the 2015 general elections were too grim to contemplate. As early as four weeks before the elections, Nigeria was at the forefront of global attention, with personalities like Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Emeka Anyaoku, former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, working to create a less acrimonious atmosphere for the presidential election. This resulted in several prominent Nigerians brokering the peace deal between incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan and the tenacious General Muhammadu Buhari, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC). In addition, prominent ex-presidents from Africa visited Nigeria and added their voices to the need for a peaceful election. These were Thabo Mbeki from South Africa, John Kuffor from Ghana, as well as Abdusalami Abubakar of Nigeria. Even the American Secretary of State, John Kerry, came around soliciting peaceful elections, with subtle threats to recalcitrant politicians who did not keep the peace (Osundare 2015, p.28). British Prime Minister David Cameron registered his own concern and encouragement for the process; the European Union was not silent, while Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary General, cabled the anxiety of the international community. Only a few hours before the election, President Barak Obama of the United States broadcast his own message by video to the Nigerian people and their rulers (Osundare 2015). Indeed, it was clear to all that the success of this election was important to the global community, and for democracy in Africa.

Prior to the elections, INEC had set in motion various reform measures to ensure credible and successful elections. Some of the measures were initially introduced for the 2011 elections with appreciable results and implications for the 2015 elections, and include:

- A new biometric register of voters
- A re-modified open ballot system (REMOBS)
- Improved standards in the production of sensitive electoral materials (serial numbering and colour-coding of ballot papers and results sheets as well as security coding of ballot boxes)
- Revised framework for results collation and returns
- More open and transparent procedures, modalities and processes on election day (posting results at polling units and collation centres)
- Improved voter education and citizen engagement
- Creation of an inter-agency consultative committee on election security (ICCES) to ensure coordinated engagement of all security agencies during election periods

(Jega 2014, p.6).

Since the 2011 elections, INEC had spent adequate time reviewing and preparing a better framework for the conduct of subsequent elections that involved INEC staff, security agencies, development partners, the media and political parties. Lessons from the 2011 elections included:

- Good elections require adequate and timely planning.
- Good elections are about effective partnerships and cooperation.
- Good elections are about openness.
- Finally, elections cannot be perfect.

Based on the experiences of the 2011 elections, INEC began to plan early for the 2015 elections with a view to consolidating the gains from the 2011 elections. Three focal points of structure, policy and plan were articulated; taking a hard look at INEC as an institution in respect of structure and human resources, as well as developing new policies on election management, and strategic planning and election planning. In summary, the commission prepared for the 2015 elections as follows:

- Formulated a strategic plan (2012–2016), and a detailed strategic programme of action.
- Completed a detailed election project plan leading up to the 2015 elections.
- Conducted reorganisation and restructuring of the commission.
- Finalised the de-duplication of the biometric register of voters that included continuous voter registration nationwide.
- Drafted a gender policy intended to make the commission's work more gender sensitive, in line with global best practice.
- Recommended improvements to the legal framework based on experiences from the 2011 elections, for constitutional action and on the Electoral Act.
- Re-organised the Electoral Institute, with the appointment of a new Director-General and reconstitution of its board.
- Established a graphic design centre with support from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), which for the first time gave the commission the capacity to produce election materials internally.
- Embarked on a programme to review electoral constituencies and remap/reorganise polling units

These were some of the reforms taken by INEC in the run-up to the 2015 elections. However, the most novel strategic measure taken was the introduction and use of the permanent voter's cards and smart card reader. This was the 'joker' that made it extremely difficult to rig the elections, despite the efforts made by desperate politicians to scuttle the use of this device. It is evident from the exertions of INEC in preparing for the election that this was the main, but not only reason for the success of the 2015 elections, regardless of opinions to the contrary. Anticipated challenges to the 2015 elections included insecurity, especially in the north east of the country, and its implications for conduct of elections; funding; the attitude of the political class; and citizen apathy. Indeed, INEC's efforts at creating more polling units met with stiff opposition from some of the stakeholders who believed that this was the fore-runner to rigging the election. However, it appears that these challenges were significantly surmounted as the elections proceeded.

PERMANENT VOTER'S CARDS AND SMART CARD READERS: THE TRIUMPH OF TECHNOLOGY

We begin this section by understanding what the permanent voter's cards (PVC) and smart card readers (SCR) are, and what they were expected to do during the elections.

Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs)

The Independent National Electoral Commission produced PVCs for 68 833 476 persons in the biometric register of voters ahead of the March 28th and April 11th, 2015 general elections. The PVC replaced the temporary voter card (TVC) issued on the heels of voter registration in 2011. According to INEC, quality, security, durability and cost effectiveness were underlying factors in the production of the permanent voter's cards by INEC. These cards have many components and specialised features (e.g. base substrate, security printing, personalisation, lamination and chip embedding), and were designed with an average life span of ten years (INEC FACTSHEET on PVCs and Card Readers, 2015). The PVC has an embedded chip that contains all the biometrics of a legitimate holder, including fingerprints and facial image. On election day it would be swiped in a smart card reader at the polling unit to ensure 100 per cent authentication and verification of the voter before he or she would be allowed to vote. The PVC has security features that are not easily susceptible to counterfeiting. Only voters who had their PVCs were allowed to vote in the 2015 general elections. The PVCs were available for collection at distribution points in the 36 States of the country and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) until Sunday, 8th March 2015.

Smart Card Readers (SCRs)

Smart card readers, on the other hand, were used for the first time in Nigeria's electoral history for the 2015 general elections through electronic voter authentication. The card reader uses a highly secure and cryptographic technology that is commonly used in devices that need to perform secure transactions, such as pay terminals. It has ultra-low power consumption with a single core frequency of 1.2GHz and an Android 4.2.2 operating system. The card reader units were supposedly subjected before the elections to quality assurance, integrity and functionality testing, and were found reliable in terms of ease of use, battery life and speed of processing. In theory, voter authentication was to take an average of ten seconds; however, experience varied as the reader failed on several occasions. This was despite the fact that the card readers were subjected to stress testing in some states and the FCT ahead of the elections on 28 March and 11 April 2015 (INEC FACTSHEET on PVCs and Card Reader 2015).

Indeed, on 7 March 2015, INEC went to the field to test run the reliability of the PVCs and the SCRs ahead of the elections. The trial took place in 225 out of the total 120 000 polling units and 358 out of the 155 000 voting points that were to be used for the elections (*Thisday* 2015). While there were some hiccups, the exercise was generally considered a good outing across 12 States in the six geopolitical regions of the country. The field reports largely justified the objective of the exercise: to verify PVCs presented by voters at polling units to ensure that they are genuine; and to biometrically authenticate the person who presents a voting card at the polling unit to ensure that he or she is the legitimate holder of the card. The real objective of the experiment was to ensure that only eligible voters exercised their franchise, and that only such legal votes would be counted and tallied. To this extent the introduction of this technology was justified. However, the technical problems experienced were significant enough for many political stakeholders to express misgivings about its workability, while some canvassed outright for its non-use or postponement. Overall, a verdict on the success or otherwise of this electronic technology depends on its overall contribution to the transparency and credibility of the elections.

According to the Kayode Idowu, chief press secretary to the INEC Chairman, the use of these card readers has enormous advantages. These include the fact that once configured, the card reader can read only PVCs issued by INEC. Any person who shows up at the polling unit without a PVC or with a card not issued by INEC will not be able to vote. Also, the SCR reads the embedded chip on the PVC, not the barcode, and it shares a secret code with the PVC; thus it is impossible to falsify the cards. The card reader authenticates the identity of the

voter by cross-matching his or her fingerprints with that stored on the embedded chip. No person can vote using another person's PVC. The card reader keeps a tally of all cards read, comprising the details of all voters verified as well as those not verified, and transmits the collected information to a central INEC server via GSM data service. Information transmitted to the server will enable INEC to audit results from polling units, as well as do a range of statistical analysis of the demographics of voting. Further, collation officers will also be able to use information transmitted by the card reader to audit polling unit result sheets and determine whether accreditation figures have been altered (Idowu 2015).

The use of the card reader to accredit voters is one of the innovations introduced by the Commission to improve the integrity of the electoral process. It does not violate the Electoral Act 2010, as Amended, or the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as Amended. It adds value to the process in line with the yearnings of Nigerians for credible elections, and accords with international best practice. Whereas the Electoral Act prohibits the use of electronic voting, the SCR is not a voting machine and is not used for voting. The card reader is used only for the accreditation of voters, and only accreditation (and not voting) data is transmitted by it.

To prevent fraudulent use, the card reader was configured to work only on election days. In addition, the device was configured to specific polling units and could not be used elsewhere without requiring reconfiguration by authorised INEC personnel. The commission procured more than 35 000 back-up batteries that could be rapidly deployed in the event of failure during use, as well as 26 000 spares for card readers (Idowu 2015). This was necessary as a result of observations made from the use of SCRs in Ghana's 2012 general elections.

Parties, Polemics and the Smart Card Reader

Polemics over the use of the SCR continued with accusations and counter accusations between the two major parties, the PDP and APC, on the merits and de-merits of its use and possible designs for rigging by either of the parties. The hitches observed during the test-run of the SCR were significant enough to renew the rivalry between both parties in an already highly polarised political climate. While the APC hailed the outcome of the exercise as an impediment in order to 'manipulate the coming elections', the PDP dismissed it and asked that the usage of SCRs in the crucial election be shelved. The National Publicity Secretary of the party, Olisa Metuh, believed the outcome of the test 'vindicates earlier widespread calls by stakeholders that the card readers should be thoroughly tested to ascertain their workability before the general elections' (*Thisday* 2015). The PDP's position was strangely supported by some 15 fringe political parties which signaled their

unpreparedness to go to polls if the electoral body went ahead with the card readers at the polls. Indeed, other interest groups went beyond verbal challenges as they lodged complaints against the use of the card readers in courts of law for appropriate interpretation, claiming its use would contravene the 2010 Electoral Act as amended, as well as the 1999 Constitution.

Further, the INEC exercise of collating PVCs and continuous registration in 12 States did not go that well, and INEC blamed this on computer error. Those who raised their voices against the use of the new technology for voter accreditation argued that the INEC Chairman Attahiru Jega should have used the technology on a smaller scale during the governorship election in the states, before using the technology full scale during the national election. However, in principle Nigerians welcomed the idea of the innovation as they hoped it would help stem the tide of electoral malpractice in the country. What was worrisome for many was the timing which became an issue as Jega waited for almost four years before triggering arrangements for the use of the SCRs. Many believed the INEC Chairman did not do a comprehensive test-run of the SCRs; and that INEC staff and ad-hoc staff were not properly trained in how to handle the card readers (Odiakose 2015).

INEC, which initially insisted that only those cleared by the SCR would be allowed to cast their votes, later came up with the idea of an incident form for those whose fingerprints the card readers could not read. That there were several incidences of SCR hitches was not in doubt. Even then President Goodluck Jonathan, the presidential candidate of the PDP in the polls, and his wife, were not spared. After several failed attempts with five card reader machines that tried to read his thumbprint, Jonathan and the First Lady were eventually issued with incident forms for accreditation. In Enugu, a similar incident played out which compelled the Deputy Senate President, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, to advise the Independent National Electoral Commission to discard the use of SCRs for the polls after he could not secure accreditation with the machine. Ekweremadu was also eventually accredited with the incident form. According to Ekweremadu, the card reader should have been tried in a by-election or supplementary election before the main election. In Ebonyi State, the card readers failed woefully, a development that compelled electoral officials to hand out incident forms to accredit voters. Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, who is an indigene of the state, instructed INEC to correct the lapses in the accreditation process linked to the SCRs in order to give credibility to the polls (Odiakose 2015).

It is important to note that some INEC officials attributed the failure of the card readers to INEC engineers who could not decode the inbuilt security

installation in the card reader. The security code in the card reader is reportedly designed to update the time and date of voting. One official claimed that the cards were initially programmed for February 14, and that with the postponement to March 28, some of the cards had to be re-programmed (Odiakose 2015).

Following the failure of the card reader machines in several places, Attahiru Jega changed the guidelines for the conduct of the election on March 28. He approved the use of manual accreditation in areas where the SCRs malfunctioned during the presidential and National Assembly elections. In a statement issued while the election was under way, and after millions of frustrated voters had gone home disenchanted, INEC admitted that accreditation had been slow in many places and had not commenced at all in some others. INEC said that 'even though the guidelines for the 2015 general elections provide that where card readers fail to work and cannot be replaced, elections in such Polling Units will be postponed to the next day'. The scale of this challenge necessitated a reconsideration of the guidelines. The commission therefore decided that in polling units where card readers failed to work, the presiding officer was to accredit voters manually. In addition the presiding officer was to mark the voter's register upon being satisfied that the person presenting the PVC was the owner.

There was also the troubling issue of underaged voters issued with PVCs in the north of the country during the March 28 polls. Some of the states identified in this malpractice were Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Gombe, Bauchi, Katsina, and Kogi States (Nnaji 2015). A team of European observers led by Dirk Verheyen and Joelle Meganck had decried the spate of underage voting that characterised the election in the north. They reported that minors presented valid PVCs. How did this happen? Perhaps we deserve some answers from INEC. Further, INEC was accused of voter suppression in the south through the instrumentality of the PVCs. For example, while there were about 5 million voters from the south east in the 2011 elections, only 2.6 million votes were recorded in 2015. In contrast, the total votes from Jigawa and Kano States (Jigawa used to be a part of Kano State), was 3.1 million, even double that of Lagos State, which had only 1.4 million (Nnaji 2015). Several months before the election the issue of underage voting was brought to the attention of INEC, and Jega's response was not really convincing as he only stated that any underaged voter to present himself or herself to vote on election day would be arrested. In spite of Jega's assurances, thousands of underaged voters were alleged to have been allowed to vote on March 28. If this is true, it is not a good development for our democracy. And if this act goes unchecked and the culprits remain unpunished, it may encourage other regions in the country to also engage in such malpractice in future elections.

ELECTORAL FRAUD IN THE 2015 ELECTIONS

It is against the backdrop of the polemics generated by the use of the PVCs and SCRs that the presidential and National Assembly elections were held on 28 March and 11 April 2015. While the elections were largely satisfactory, the electoral process and results from the two states of Rivers and Akwa Ibom were fundamentally conflictual and hotly contested. In both states, it appeared that either the PVCs or SCRs were side-lined, or that they were seriously compromised. Following the large number of votes churned out during the elections in these two states, the Nigerian police instigated investigations into allegations of electoral fraud or rigging in both. The Rivers State Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Mrs. Gesila Khan, and her Akwa Ibom counterpart were to be investigated for alleged electoral fraud. The Rivers State APC Chairman, Dr. Davies Ibiamu Ikanga, had repeatedly called for an investigation of the 28 March and 11 April elections in the state. The belief is that the results of the elections were manipulated by the Rivers REC due to 'orders from Abuja' (*Daily Times* 2015, p.8). It is important for Nigeria's democracy to determine whether the malpractices observed in these states were as a result of the non-use of the SCR or whether the device itself was compromised.

From the results presented by the returning officer (RO) Osasere Orumwense, Chief Nyesom Wike of the PDP was awarded 1 029 102 votes, representing 87.8% of 1 228 614 being the conjured number of total accredited voters (*Daily Times* 2015, p. 11). However, according to the 94 page INEC endorsed document, the total number of accredited voters for the 11 April gubernatorial election in Rivers was 292 878. This document was signed by the Acting Director in charge of INEC legal unit, Ibrahim Bawa and Head of Unit, Data Management of the Commission's ICT Department, Abimbola Oladunoye (*Daily Times* 2015, p.11). In the document detailing polling unit analysis of actual voters' accreditation for the election, none of the 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) had as many as 51 000 accredited voters. Rivers State had 319 Registration Areas (wards) and 4 442 polling units. Informed sources believe that the only logical explanation for the increased number of accredited voters exceeding 292 887 is if manual accreditation was used in addition to the use of SCRs. Conversely, INEC did not approve the use of manual accreditation for governorship election in any of the federation states (*Daily Times* 2015).

According to the statement from the INEC Chairman, the purpose of the card reader is to prevent electoral fraud, especially falsification of the number of accredited voters in order to inflate the number of votes cast. Inside information revealed that the number of accredited votes generated by the Commission's central server is the authentic number for the Rivers State Governorship Election;

hence, it will be impossible to justify the excess number of votes allocated to it. This is thus a good case for the Election Petition Tribunal. Indeed, the APC, which lost the election, went to the tribunal for help. Interestingly enough Governor Nyesom Wike of the PDP recently requested that the Rivers State Election Petition Tribunal set aside the order it made for the opposing party (the APC) to inspect election materials used for the 11 April 2015 Governorship polls in the state (Ughegbe 2015, p.15). The petitioners had urged the court to order the inspection of SCRs and records of electoral materials used in all the polling units in the State. This begs the question of why any stakeholder would resist the inspection of materials that could vindicate him or her from accusations of rigging or electoral fraud.

Akwa Ibom State, for example, experienced violence that characterised their gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections. This included several allegations of malpractice against the State's Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC). As a result the governorship candidate of the APC in the State, Umana Umana, called for the cancellation of the elections, accusing the PDP of state terrorism. According to him, electoral materials were unavailable in many polling units in all the three senatorial zones, and both ballot boxes and sensitive election materials were snatched (Azimazi 2015, p.4). In a report by *Premium Times* (2015), INEC officials in some polling units colluded with supporters of a political party to rig the presidential election in favour of their party. The claim is that whereas INEC officials had completed voters' accreditation as early as 1.30 pm, they refused to commence voting until some chieftains of the political party arrived at 4 pm. The party chieftains immediately ordered all voters to move away from the polling centre, which they successfully ensured by firing gunshots. This gave the party chieftains the opportunity to have a field day thumb-printing ballot papers under the supervision of INEC officials. In this case, the rigging appears to have been made possible by political violence, and not necessarily the use of the PVC and SCR.

Indeed, it did appear that there were more incidences of electoral rigging in the south-south zone of the country, namely, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River, than in other parts of the country. This could be due to a deliberate attempt to subvert the process, or a technological failure. However, it is important to note that in spite of all these alleged electoral malpractices, a key actor in the process, the presidential candidate of the APC Muhammadu Buhari, declared that the introduction of the PVC and biometric card reader by INEC ensured free, fair and credible polls in 2015. According to him, the votes would not have been counted but for these initiatives. He noted that in previous riggings, results were written in party offices and sitting rooms and announced on radio stations and television houses, while those who protested were often asked to go to court (Abuh & Azimazi 2015, p.7). Who best to know this but Buhari, as he had contested the presidential elections a record of four times.

LESSONS LEARNED AND POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE

Several lessons could be learned from the use of the PVC and SCR in the 2015 presidential and general elections. The key lessons revolve around the gains made in ensuring increased credibility for the electoral process, but also in respect of the problems encountered in the use of technology. It is equally necessary to note that the use of this technology did not necessarily stop the usual problems encountered during elections in Nigeria. The presidential polls witnessed automatic attacks by Boko Haram in the north east. This led to the death of six persons, breaches of security in Enugu and Awka, shootings in Lagos and Imo States, and an explosion in Jigawa state (Musari 2015). There were riggings in the general elections despite the use of PVR and SCR technology. These include underage voters with PVCs in the north of the country, over-counting, double voting, cancellations, and hijacked ballot papers as experienced in Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. The INEC Chairman's frequent comment was that no election is perfect, and indeed this is true. The important thing is that overall the election satisfied minimum expectations, and the overwhelming wish of the electorate.

Some of the easily observable problems from the 2015 elections include:

- the slow process of accreditation (procedures should be reduced to save time)
- the card reader's inability to capture thumbprints of some eligible voters who had their PVCs
- late arrival of election materials
- breaches of security
- collusion of some INEC staff in undermining the voting process
- the inadequate preparation of some INEC staff and voters for the exercise.

In many cases during the election, the verification of PVCs lasted up to 10 minutes, thereby slowing down the process. This was exactly the case during the test-run of the PVC and SCR in Nassarawa, Rivers and Ebonyi, where the SCRs recorded significant failures (*Thisday* 2015). One would have thought that INEC would have taken adequate measures to avoid this occurring again. It could however, be opined that the true winners in the 2015 Presidential election were the electronic biometric device and the Nigerian voter. This technology should be further improved and factored into the 2019 general elections. Electronic voting could also be explored in the future starting with upcoming gubernatorial elections, if approved by the National Assembly and embodied in the Electoral Act.

Again, the use of the PVC and SCR may have revealed certain details of

Nigeria's population and demography long suspected to be false. The 2015 elections recorded 10 million voters less than in the 2011 elections (Nkemdiche 2015, p.17), begging the question of where all the votes came from in the 2011 elections. The presidential election was won by a margin of only 2.5 million votes, the smallest margin in presidential elections since the Fourth Republic. This technology therefore has considerable potential for national planning and the verification of existing national data.

CONCLUSION

The expectation was that the use of the SCR would eliminate malpractices and election rigging and add to the credibility of the elections. To a large extent this expectation was attained, and the votes counted despite some drawbacks; so it could be said that the progressives won. As observed, elections are credible when they are premised on a quantitative and qualitative national register of votes. Elections conducted on the basis of the foregoing become credible if they have popular participation, and citizen and ballot safety and securitisation (Umeagbalasi 2015, p. 39). In other words, election security still remains paramount for the safety of personnel and the election process, and must continue to be taken seriously. In spite of a few cases of malfeasance by the police in some states, it must be noted that for the 2015 elections the Nigerian police were very civil and performed above average, thereby giving the required security cover necessary for transparent and credible elections and for the SCR to be deployed.

The use of the card reader did help reduce the previous penchant to rig elections and thus subvert the electoral system. The expectation is that even in those instances where there were successful breaches of the electoral process, especially through the use of violence, the records in INEC's database, which are ordinarily immune to human manipulation, would be relied on and serve as tenable evidence at the Election Tribunal.

It is important to note that the 2011 Voter Register, the first electronically compiled voting register, served as the basis for the production of the PVCs used in the 2015 general elections. The successful deployment of the SCR during this election could serve as the precursor to making the voting process completely electronic in the 2019 general elections. The transparent application of this device and the security features embodied in it made it extremely difficult to compromise the elections, despite attempts to do so. This time, the Nigerian electorate won due to the measures taken by INEC, particularly by the introduction of the SCR. With technological modifications based on field experience during this election, the future is bright for democracy in Nigeria.

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POLITICS AND THE PULPIT:
*The Rise and Decline of Religion in Nigeria's 2015
Presidential Elections*

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ABSTRACT

Numerous reports show that Nigeria is one of the most religious countries in the world. Thus, it is not surprising that religion features prominently in the country's elections. The 2015 general election marks another signpost in the interconnection between religion and elections in Nigeria, although with a different pattern. Using an analysis of the 2015 presidential elections, this paper argues that, although religion appeared to play a central role in the pre-election period, it was less significant in the actual voting decision of the electorate on election day. Rather, other factors, especially candidates' profiles and performance records, took precedence over religious and ethnic considerations. This essay concludes that the voting pattern possibly reveals an increasingly sophisticated electorate and a consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: religion, Muslims, Christians, Nigeria, 2015 presidential elections

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have proven that Nigerians are amongst the most religious people in the world. A 2015 Global Attitudes Survey by the Pew Research Center revealed that Nigerians are the ninth most religious peoples in the world, with 88% positive responses from them that 'religion plays a very important role in their lives' (Theodorou 2015). Similarly, a 2005 survey conducted by the BBC World Service found that 85% of Nigerians 'trusted religious leaders and a similar proportion were willing to give them more power' (Ferrett 2005). With Christianity and Islam as the most widely recognised religions in Nigeria, mosques and churches are a

common sight on every street throughout the country. The country also has some of the richest and most influential clergies in the world. A *Forbes* report in 2015 concluded that the five richest pastors in Africa are from Nigeria, with their net worth ranging from USD 10 million to 150 million (www.africaranking.com). It is, therefore, not farfetched to claim that religion takes centre stage in the major spheres of social life, including politics, in this country. Given its effectiveness in identity formation, political mobilisation, and regime legitimacy (Fox & Sandler 2003), religion has been highly entrenched in Nigerian politics. This is more visible during election seasons as politicians characteristically, but deceptively, make use of religious rhetoric as a powerful instrument to mobilise voters, which has often led to incidents of religious conflict (see Onapajo 2012).

The 2015 general elections provided another arena for religion to be used for electoral gains. The political elites employed religion proficiently as part of their campaign and mobilisation strategies, which was further encouraged by the coincidental climate of perceived religious terrorism orchestrated by Boko Haram fighters who claim to be on a mission to Islamise Nigeria. This phenomenon gave room for many predictions in the media and in academic circles that the electoral process would be both highly religionised and also very violent, and that could contribute to the disintegration of the Nigerian nation. However, to the surprise of many, including the politicians who had actually orchestrated some corrosive plans, the elections ended with credible and remarkable outcomes (Onapajo 2015). This indicates that religion played a less significant role in politics than anticipated.

In light of the background described above, this paper analyses the role of religion in the 2015 presidential elections, with the aim of demonstrating that surprisingly, religion did not play as influential a role as anticipated in the actual voting decision of the electorate. The paper argues that religion was visible in the pre-election period owing to the politico-religious climate which coincided with the elections; yet it cannot be argued convincingly that religion finally played a significant role in the actual voting decision of the electorate.

It should be noted that this study focuses on the presidential election for its analysis. This is owing to the fact that the presidential election is considered to be the most important of the contested positions in the country's elections because of the influential role the president plays in the institutional arrangement of the Nigerian state.

The paper has five sections, excluding this introduction. The first section presents the theoretical and empirical perspectives that show the intersection between religion and electoral politics. On the one hand, the section demonstrates the significance of religion to politics, and on the other hand, it shows the specific importance of religion to elections. The second section gives a historical overview of the role religion has played in Nigeria's electoral politics before the

2015 elections. The third section analyses the intrigues of the campaign process and the strategic use of religious rhetoric by the contestants and their parties, which is argued as the stage in which religion was actually visible in the electoral process. The fourth section provides an analysis of the results of the election, demonstrating the fact that religion was not very significant in the voting decision of the people. The final section contains the conclusion of this paper, which also analyses the implications of the voting pattern for the electorate and the democratic process in Nigeria.

RELIGION, POLITICS AND ELECTIONS: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES

Two sets of theoretical literature speak to the connection between religion and elections. They are the literatures on the topics of religion and politics, and of electoral behaviour. The literature on religion and politics is grounded in studies proving the failure of the 'demise of religion' perspective which was popular in the 19th and 20th century theories advocating modernisation and secularisation. In a satirical comment on the increasing irrelevance of the modernisation/ secularisation theories on religion, Gill (2001, p. 119) wrote that: 'If there ever were an award for the most durable, yet outdated, theoretical perspective in the social sciences, secularisation theory would be the winner, or at least a close runner-up.' Similarly, Stark and Finke (2000, p. 79) concluded that: 'After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations ... it seems time to carry the secularisation doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper "requiescat in pace".'

Influenced by the rapid trend of religiosity and the increasing influence of religious movements across the world, political scientists who had been influenced by secularisation perspectives began according some importance to religion as a variable in their studies, especially in the post-Cold War era (for example, Marty & Appleby 1991; Juergesmeyer 1996, Huntington 1993; 1996; Gill 2001). One notable study is that of Samuel Huntington (1993) who argued in his seminal article that religion represents a strong component in the formation of civilisations, and a major factor driving international politics after the Cold War.

The attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 further motivated research on the role of religion in politics. This produced works confirming that it was wrong for scholars to have jettisoned the role of religion in politics and society (Fox 2001; Philpott 2002). Rather, they point to the fact that religion has been a major factor in politics because it marks a major source of people's world views and, therefore, influences state decisions and is a source of legitimacy or illegitimacy for the government (Fox 2001; Fox & Sandler 2003). Most importantly,

it is observed that religion can be instrumental in political mobilisation and collective actions. This is because the activities of religious organisations are often reluctantly restricted by the government. Furthermore, religious organisations do have pre-established platforms and instruments for mobilisation including worship centres, schools, and community activities. Religion remains a major uniting force that can bring together peoples of different ideologies, classes, race, ethnicity, and ages (Fox 2003, p. 567).

Clearly, this shows why religion cannot be ignored as a salient factor in the mobilisation for votes and party support during elections, even in those advanced democracies supposedly built on secularism. This underscores the location of religion in the literature on electoral politics. Early research on voting behaviour has identified religion, alongside other factors such as class, race and ethnicity, as the basis for social cleavages that drive voters' decisions. In their seminal study, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argued that European politics in the 19th century was driven by social cleavages in which religion was a major factor. As an effective strategy to build and maintain a strong support base, political parties identified themselves with religious groups and interests – Catholic or Protestant, religious or secular (Dalton 1996, p.325). As further cited by Dalton (1996, p.326), Arend Lijphart (1979) observed in his empirical research, which compared the factors of religion, class and language in four democracies, that 'religion was the strongest on voting choice.'

Furthermore, some more recent studies have emphasised the significant (but ignored) role of religious parties such as the Christian Democratic parties with an age-long existence in Europe (Manza & Wright 2003; Van der Brug, Hobolt, & Vreese 2009; Kalyvas & Kersbergen 2010). In the empirical research by Van der Brug et al. (2009, p.1280), it was discovered that in contemporary Europe religion remains 'an important predictor of the vote' and most especially, 'religion is a particularly strong determinant of support for Christian Democratic parties and that Catholics are generally more likely to vote for the centre-right whereas secular citizens are more likely to vote for the centre-left.' Furthermore, their research demonstrated that migration to Europe has a significant impact on rising religiosity in the continent, which may in turn continue to have stronger influence on voting and politics.

In the American elections, numerous studies have also shown the role of religion (Miller & Wattenburg 1984; Layman 1997; Norris & Inglehart 2004; Green 2007; Browne 2009). In her historical research, Katie Browne (2009) provided interesting revelations about the influential roles of religious groups including the Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals and the Jews, as well as the use of religious strategies by candidates, during presidential elections in America since the 19th century. Similarly, Manza and Wright (2003, p.302) argued that historically 'the

Republicans received very strong support from Episcopalians, Congregationalists, New School Presbyterians, and Methodists; while the Democrats drew support most heavily from Catholics, and less broadly from Lutherans and Unitarians.' Indeed, the increased wave of Christian fundamentalism in the 1960s and 1970s and the rise of groups such as the New Christian Right in the state are significant factors that informed religion-motivated voting in the state.

RELIGION, PARTY POLITICS AND ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

Religion has played a major role right from the early days of elections in Nigeria. This is more apparent in the northern part of the country, given the influential role religion plays in its social system. Religion took a central role in the ideology and membership profile of the first political parties that emerged in the 1950s, following the concession of the colonial government to the nationalists' demands for wider political participation. The three major northern political parties that emerged – the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) – displayed a religious character. This was especially true of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which was the most popular party in the region and was heavily influenced by Islam. According to Dudley (1968, p.143), the party's 'Islamic influence in winning mass support can hardly be underestimated' because the party itself was under the leadership of Muslim leaders including Ahmadu Bello (the Saraduna of Sokoto and founder of Jama'atu Nasril Islam) and Sultan of Sokoto (the de-facto leader of Nigerian Muslims who was the patron of the party). Furthermore, according to Dudley the party was seen as representing a consensus of the Muslim community (*Ijma*), and refusal to accept the consensus of the community is considered heretical according to Islamic principles. Thus it is not surprising that the party enjoyed tremendous support among the Muslim majority, and for this reason consistently won a majority of the parliamentary seats in the pre- and post-independence elections.

The NEPU, although it was the first political party in northern Nigeria, later became the strongest opposition to the NPC in the Muslim-populated areas of the northern region. Its major aim was the creation of a pro-masses social structure that would challenge the reign of the Fulani aristocrats, thus claiming the identity of a party representing the interest of the *Talakawa* (the down-trodden) of society. Given that the NPC was associated with the upper strata of the Muslim-dominated society, the NEPU drew its membership from the lower class, mostly constituting the teachers of the local *Madrassah* and members of the *Tijjaniyyah* brotherhood – facilitated by the historical conflict between the *Qadriyyah* (with historical

connection to the Sultanate of Sokoto under Usman dan Fodio) and *Tijjaniyyah* (led by the Emir of Kano Alhaji Muhammadu Sanusi) Sufi brotherhoods (Loimeier 1997, p.71).¹ Indeed, this generated increased intra-religious conflicts and, most especially, the state persecution of prominent *Tijjaniyyah* members. It was in the midst of this crisis that the Emir of Kano was compelled to resign from office and forced into exile in 1963 (Dudley 1968, p.190; pp.216-217).

Another major party opposed to the dominance of the NPC was the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) whose emergence was conspicuously driven by Christians in the non-Muslim areas, otherwise known as the Middle Belt region. The party was a product of the protest associations and parties created by Christians in the Middle Belt against a perceived Hausa-Fulani Islamic hegemony especially through the instrumentality of the NPC. The UMBC emerged following the merger of the Middle Zone League (MZL) and Middle Belt People's Party (MBPP). These parties derived their sources from the Northern Nigeria Non-Muslim League created with the aid of Christian missions 'to counter Islamic expansionist moves' (Dudley 1968, p. 93). Thus, the UMBC, according to an NPC member, 'is only an ideology infused by the Christian missionaries against the expansion of the Moslems in Northern Nigeria' (cited in Dudley 1968, p. 91). Expectedly, this gave the party some electoral advantage in the Christian-populated parts of the northern region.

Indeed, the influence of religion in the party formation and voting pattern was not restricted to northern Nigeria. Kukah and Falola (1996, p.87) showed that a Muslim party, the United Muslim Party (UMP), was established in Lagos in 1953 with the aim of contesting elections and to wrest power from the ruling Action Group (AG). However, the party was not successful in its ambition as it was unable to attract established Muslim politicians in the AG to its fold. For this reason, the party could not win any seats in the 1954, 1956 and 1959 elections. In 1957 Muslims formed another political party, the National Muslim League (NML), in protest against the perceived anti-Islamic activities of the AG's government in the western region. Given the NML mission and increasing popularity amongst Muslims in the western region, the AG actually felt threatened by its existence, which was considered capable of reducing the electoral support of the ruling party, particularly in the 1959 general elections. The NML, having changed its name to National Emancipation League (NEL) following criticisms of its use of religion for political mobilisation, entered into an alliance with the NPC. According to

1 It is useful to note that the *Qadriyyah* and *Tijjaniyyah* Sufi brotherhoods are the most visible Sufi brotherhoods in Nigeria, whose activities have significant impact on the development of Islam in the country. *Qadriyyah* had been in existence in northern Nigeria many centuries before the *Tijjaniyyah* which only surfaced in the 19th century. The leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate was affiliated with *Qadriyyah*, while the Emirs and scholars opposed to the status quo under the Caliphate joined the *Tijjaniyyah*. For a detailed analysis on the conflict between the two brotherhoods, see Loimeier, R. (1997).

Kukah and Falola (1996, p.90), even though the party was unable to neutralise the dominance of the AG, given its failure in the 1959 elections, it was able to represent a formidable opposition to Awolowo's AG in the western region.

In the Second Republic religion did not disappear from electoral politics. This was despite attempts by the government to discourage religion-driven parties with the constitutional provision that no political party could carry the identity of any ethnic or religious groups. It should be recalled that the Second Republic was preceded by an intense debate over the inclusion of a provision for a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal in the draft constitution at Constitutional Assembly in 1977/78, which culminated in major rivalry between Muslims and Christians. Clearly, this environment created an avenue for the manipulation of religious texts and for the faithful to garner votes. The most popular parties, including the National People's Party (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), People's Redemption Party (PRP), and the Nigeria's People's Party (NPP), were associated with either Christianity or Islam. For example, the NPN, being a duplication of the old NPC, was seen as a product of the aristocratic Fulani Muslims in the north because of the nature of its leadership and popular base. The PRP was associated with the *Tijjaniyyah* brotherhood given its closeness to the old NEPU, while it gained its electoral strength in Kano and Kaduna with a considerably higher presence of the brotherhood. The UPN and NPP were perceived more as Christian parties owing to their leadership and areas of influence (Oloyede 1987). It should be noted, however, that in the western region there were notable Muslims in the UPN and also Christians in the NPN, as the Yoruba are known for a liberal approach towards both Christianity and Islam (see Laitin 1986). Yet it was still a prevalent perception in some sections among the Yoruba that UPN was anti-Islam. For example, Muslim members of the NPN in Oyo State were proficient at using campaign slangs and songs to discourage Muslims from voting for the UPN, following their classification of that party as leading to *Jahannum* (hell-fire) (Oloyede 1987, p.83). In the eastern region, Eze (2009) also argued that the church campaigned vigorously for NPP which greatly contributed to the party's success in the region.

In the Third Republic, research indicates that there was some religious dimension to the political process. This was despite the popular belief that religion had been insignificant in the 1993 presidential elections following the Muslim-Muslim ticket (Muslim presidential and vice-presidential candidates) advanced by the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which was massively supported at the ballot box across the country. It was reported that Christians under the banner of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the north actually threatened to boycott the elections if the candidates presented by the SDP and National Republican Convention (NRC) were Muslims (Osaghae 1998 p.237). For this reason, some

Christian presidential aspirants (including S.L Slifu, a former Secretary-General of the northern branch of CAN, and Jerry Gana) were encouraged to join the race chiefly to challenge the Muslim aspirants. However, they were unable to succeed at the primaries (Rufai 2011, p.176). Furthermore, after the military regime annulled the presidential election won by Moshood Abiola, it was reported that Yoruba Muslims actually lobbied the Hausa-Fulani Muslims requesting the Sultan of Sokoto to use the influence of his office to condemn the annulment (Suberu 1997, p.420). Rather than condemn the act, the Sultan, Ibrahim Dasuki, only urged Abiola to 'accept the annulment as "an act of God"' (Rufai 2011, p.176).

The transition programme initiated by General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998 kick-started a journey into the Fourth Republic. The new republic, just like the previous ones, has not been devoid of religion during elections. Clearly, this can be meaningfully connected to the politics around the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo as President in 1999. The emergence of Obasanjo, a southern Christian, was the outcome of an agreement amongst the political elite, spearheaded by the northern military leaders and influential political elite. This was to pacify the Yoruba after the injustice done to Abiola over the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections and his subsequent incarceration, which led to his death in prison in 1998. Shortly after Obasanjo assumed power, the northern Muslim elite suspected attempts to Christianise the presidency by his Christian aides and certain groups close to him. This group of people, dubbed the 'Theocratic Class' by Ebenezer Obadare (2006), was driven by the increasingly influential Pentecostal Church. They gave President Obasanjo the image of a 'born-again' president and defined him as 'a personal embodiment of divine response to their prayers and prophecies for the nation' (Obadare 2006, p. 670). According to some, the fear nurtured by the northern Muslims over this development was partly responsible for the introduction of the *Sharia* system in twelve states of the Muslim-majority areas in the north with the aim of countering the apparent moves of an emergent Christian power bloc (Akinyele 2001).

The northern elites further advanced vehement moves to wrest power from the southern Christians. This move reached a crescendo after the sudden death of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2010 who was unable to complete his term as the president. His death necessitated the succession of his southern Christian vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan, as the president in 2010, in accordance with the Nigerian constitution. Jonathan later ran for presidential office and won in 2011. It is instructive that Jonathan's decision to stand for the office of president was met with total resistance from the northern politicians who saw the move as a violation of an existing zoning formula in the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which was supposed to favour a northern candidate. It was also more upsetting for the northern politicians that Jonathan was strongly supported by former President

Obasanjo, who had gathered enough power to exert tremendous influence in the PDP and in the country. Therefore, this situation was used as a reason to mobilise Muslims in the north against Jonathan's candidature in the 2011 elections after he defeated Atiku Abubakar, who was seemingly the 'Northern Consensus Candidate' at the PDP primaries (Onapajo 2012).

The religionisation of the 2011 electoral process was further strengthened by the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as the presidential candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). Buhari, who had been labelled a Muslim fundamentalist by his opponents because of his positive remarks on the *Sharia* legal system and his Islamic devotion, enjoyed obsessive following by Muslim youth and clerics, not only in the north but also in the southern region. Therefore, ensuring the success of his presidential ambition was considered a religious duty. To that extent, any act of opposition to Buhari's candidature by a Muslim was even considered heretical by some Muslim leaders and groups (Onapajo 2012).

Goodluck Jonathan also created for himself the image of an oppressed Christian who needed the support of his brethren to win the presidential election. He regularly attended church programmes in order to identify himself with the large Christian population and mobilise votes to realise his ambition. The most notable was his visit in December 2010 to an annual event of the Redeemed Christian (Pentecostal) Church, 'The Holy Ghost Night', which provides an avenue for one of the largest Christian gatherings in Nigeria. He knelt before the church's highly influential pastor, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, ostensibly to pray for the nation, but in fact to advance his political ambition. Some other church pastors also conspicuously campaigned for him in their churches. For example, it was reported that a Lagos-based Pentecostal pastor, Paul Adefarasin, of the House on the Rock Church, urged his followers to unanimously support a Christian presidential candidate in the 2011 elections (see Onapajo 2012).

Therefore, the 2011 presidential election seemed to be a major contest between a Christian and Muslim candidate. The pattern of voting clearly confirmed this assertion as it was apparently characterised by the Christian-Muslim divide in the country. In the Christian-dominated areas of the south and the Middle Belt, Jonathan had a landslide victory over Buhari. On the other hand, Buhari was overwhelmingly voted for in the Muslim-dominated areas consisting of twelve states: Sokoto, Zamfara, Niger, Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Bauchi, Kaduna, Jigawa, Borno, Gombe and Yobe. Though the result was controversial, Jonathan garnered a total 22 495 187 (58.89%) votes in 23 states of the federation over Buhari's 12 214 853 (31.98%) which earned him victory (<http://www.inecnigeria.org>). Violent protests against this election outcome by youths in the north resulted in the deaths of about 800 people as well as arson attacks on worship centres (International Crisis Group, 2011).

RELIGION IN THE 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Electoral politics of 2015 were clearly an extension of the politics of the 2011 elections. The loss of that contest to Goodluck Jonathan reinforced the determination of the northern Muslims to ensure the emergence of someone from their community as the president in the 2015 elections. This agenda was easily adopted by other Muslims across the country as Jonathan's government was increasingly seen as biased towards his Christian brethren. This is judged by his closeness to notable Christian leaders, especially Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor (the President of the CAN), who were regularly visible at the presidential villa and also wielded much political influence. Muslims also felt aggrieved by some policies of the government which were seen to be marginalising them. A notable example was their disenchantment with the composition of the National Political Reform Conference held in 2014, which had an unbalanced number of Muslim representatives in comparison with their Christian counterparts. This triggered a protest visit by the Muslim community, led by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar, to President Jonathan in March 2014 to lodge a formal complaint about the situation (*Premium Times*, 26 March 2014). Although Jonathan assuaged their feelings, denying any deliberate attempt to marginalise the community and promising that the imbalance would be corrected, the Muslim community felt deceived and aggrieved that no substantial effort was made by the government to address their concerns. This is clear in the following statement by Ishaq Oloyede, the Secretary-General of the National Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), that:

The Muslim community met with the then president [Jonathan]. He saw that the composition was flawed. He admitted that it was an error and promised heaven and earth. He never did anything to rectify the error.

(Akinoyemi 2015)

Boko Haram violence is another prominent issue that has contributed to the religionisation of the 2015 electoral politics. This is because violence takes the form of religious terrorism when the Boko Haram group claims to be on a mission to Islamise Nigeria, based on its own interpretation of Islam. A major consequence of the Boko Haram attacks, therefore, is the deterioration of an already bitter Christian-Muslim relationship in the country. On the one hand, Christians perceive the Boko Haram insurgents as a sort of 'Muslim army' that aims to actualise a long-term Muslim agenda to Islamise Nigeria. In addition, some Christian leaders alleged that the entire incidence of Boko Haram was actually orchestrated by northern Muslims in order to force a Christian president out of

power against the backdrop of the 2011 elections. Thus, they consistently claim that Christians and churches are the main targets of the deadly group (Onapajo & Usman 2015).

On the other hand, a popular view within the Muslim community was that Boko Haram was a plot by Christians to tarnish the image of Islam and of the Muslim elites who were opposed to Jonathan's presidency. They claimed that many incidents of Boko Haram attacks had been discovered to be connected to Christians and their leadership. Furthermore, some Muslims claimed that there was a 'Federal Government Boko Haram', suggesting that Jonathan's presidency was behind some Boko Haram-related attacks aimed at preventing voting in the largely Muslim-dominated North East, in order to decimate the electoral chances of the Muslim candidate. Indeed, this altercation nearly pushed the country to the brink of a religious war as the leadership of both religious groups threatened reprisal attacks against each other (see Onapajo & Usman, 2015).

Clearly, this political climate created a major religious division which was useful to the political elite in preparation for the elections. This made religion a very useful tool in the hands of the political elites in the electoral process. The following sub-sections provide an analysis of how the political elite went about using religion as an instrument for voter mobilisation in the pre-election period.

CLAIMS OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES

The Nigerian constitution (1999) categorically disallows religion-based or ethnic-based parties, in order to promote national unity. While there is no evidence to show that any of the major political parties involved in the presidential contest – the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives' Congress (APC) – are affiliated to any religion, politicians used the strategy of associating their opponent's party with a particular religious group with the aim of making it unpopular and thereby attracting sympathy votes from targeted religious groups and even secular voters. This was adeptly used by the PDP against the APC in the campaign process. On several occasions the PDP alleged that the APC was an Islamist party founded in the same fashion as the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, with links to other international Islamist groups, with the ultimate intention of Islamising Nigeria. For example, Olisa Metuh, the National Publicity Secretary of the PDP, stated that:

... it is shocking that the APC would attempt to hoodwink Nigerians even in the face of incontrovertible facts exposing its religious inclinations and plots to divide the nation along religious lines... the revelations by an Islamic cleric, Ambassador Yusuf Garba and

the Religious Equity Promotion Council, REPC, that APC seeks to impose an agenda like the Egypt Muslim Brotherhood remains a fact that cannot be brushed aside.

(Umoru & Akinrefon 2014)

Furthermore, the APC was accused of having connections with the Boko Haram group in order to destabilise Jonathan's administration. This claim was made by Femi Fani-Kayode who was the Director of Media and Publicity in Goodluck Jonathan's re-election campaign team, and who wrote acerbically on his Facebook page that: 'The APC is the political wing of Boko Haram and Boko Haram is the military wing of the APC, Say NO to the Haramite murderers and barbarians' (*Vanguard* 6 August 2014).

In the northern region it was easy to discredit the PDP as a Christian party, given the accumulated grievances of the people against Jonathan. Thus, the APC members in the region exploited the situation to project the PDP as a party promoting the interest of a Christian candidate. Sule Lamido, a PDP governor in Jigawa State, alluded to this while alleging that the presidential candidate of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari, usually identified himself with the Muslim community at campaigns in northern Nigeria, but he preached the message of a united Nigeria in the south. He therefore lamented: 'Why then are our people [PDP members] vilified and maligned because they refuse to vote for a Muslim as their president and have opted for a Christian?' (*Top News* 2014). Interestingly, the vice-president and the running mate of President Jonathan under the PDP, in a bid to mobilise votes for his party in the north, claimed that the APC should rather be viewed as a Christian party because 'their chairman is a Christian, their Campaign Director General is a Christian and the Vice President (candidate) is a pastor' while in his party, 'Our chairman is a Muslim, the Director General of our campaign is a Muslim likewise. I, Namadina Sambo, am Muslim. It is only our presidential candidate that is a Christian' (Iyatse 2015).

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The politics around the religious profile of the major candidates were also central to the politics around the elections. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan is an Anglican Christian from the Ijaw ethnic group of the Niger Delta, a region which had the earliest contact with Christianity in Nigeria, and a reason why this religion is most popular among its peoples. The translation of Jonathan's traditional name 'Ebele' means 'God's wish' (BBC, 2015). Jonathan, since his assumption of the presidential office in 2010, increasingly projected himself as a good Christian, a regular church-goer, and for which he was immediately accepted as a pious

brother by the large Christian community. Shortly after his emergence as the president in 2010, Reverend Father Matthew Kukah, the Bishop of the Sokoto Catholic Diocese, was one of the first Christian leaders to give a spiritual definition to the process leading to his presidency. He ascribed it to a 'monumental act of divine epiphany' and that his 'rise has defied any logic and anyone who attempts to explain it is tempting the gods' (Kukah 2010).

To further show his commitment to the Christian faith, Jonathan took upon himself the duty of embarking on a regular pilgrimage to Jerusalem, usually with a large entourage. He did not only choose notable Christian leaders as close friends, he was also very generous to the community. Pastor Tunde Bakare, the founder and presiding pastor of the Latter Rain Ministries and a social critic, revealed in an interview that 'Christian leaders benefitted tremendously from his (Jonathan's) administration in terms of licenses and waivers' (Jaafar 2015). His generosity to the community was not restricted to granting waivers and licenses, as he also used his office to facilitate huge cash donations for church projects. A typical example was the fundraising organised for the St. Stephen's Anglican Deanery and Youth Development Centre of his hometown church in Otuoke, Bayelsa State. At the programme launch attended by Jonathan and his friends – including incumbent governors of his party, government contractors and bank executives – the sum of 6 billion Naira was raised for the project (Ehikioya 2013). Clearly, these credentials are enough for him to win the Christian vote as he did in 2011. However, this calculation was thwarted by the emergence of a seemingly stronger Christian, Yemi Osinbajo, a pastor at the enormously influential Redeemed Church, who was the vice-presidential running mate of the opposition candidate. I shall return to this shortly.

While the Christian votes seemed guaranteed, the major challenge for Jonathan and the PDP was the selection of a running mate who would be acceptable to the largely Muslim population in the north. Apparently, Namadi Sambo, a non-Fulani northern Muslim from Zaria, incumbent vice-president and former governor of Kaduna State, did not possess that quality in the face of a strong Fulani Muslim opposition candidate – Muhammadu Buhari. This, especially, is against the backdrop of his outright loss to the same candidate (Buhari) in his own voting constituency in 2011. His property was also the target of destruction by protesting youth in Kaduna after Buhari lost the election to Jonathan in 2011. It is for this reason that some PDP chiefs initially planned to drop Sambo as the vice-presidential candidate for the 2015 elections. Some other relatively acceptable candidates were considered as his replacement, including Sule Lamido (then governor of Jigawa State) and Ibrahim Shema (then governor of Katsina State) (Ahaoma & Ibraheem 2014). Perhaps because he feared the

presidential ambition of the aforementioned candidates, Jonathan retained Sambo as his running mate, despite his lack of popularity in the northern region and among the Muslim community.

APC presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari's devoted Islamic life and his seemingly favourable disposition towards the Sharia system was seen by his opponents as a political flaw that could weaken his chances. Buhari's opponents in the PDP accused him of being the brain behind the Boko Haram violence given the statement he made in 2012 that: 'God willing, by 2015, something will happen...if what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood' (*Vanguard* 15 May 2012). This claim is further substantiated after some self-acclaimed Boko Haram leaders in 2012 named Buhari as one of the individuals they respect and who could mediate on their behalf with the government. Although he rejected the offer and proved he had no connection with the group, the PDP ensured that this was used to exploit against Buhari's candidacy. For example, Fani-Kayode of the PDP wrote that:

... some people still say they want Buhari as President? A man who said, only last year, that 'an attack on Boko Haram is an attack on the north'? A man who said, in 2001, that he wants to 'spread sharia throughout the federation'? A man who said, in 2001, that 'Muslims should only vote for Muslims'? A man who said, in 2001, that 'why should Christians be concerned when Muslims cut off their limbs under sharia'? A man who said, in 2001, that 'after all the limbs that are being cut off are Muslim ones and not Christians, so why should the Christians bother about it'? ...This is the man that some Nigerians are clamouring for to be their President? May God open their eyes and protect them from themselves

(Godwin 2014).

Having realised the potential of the strategy consistently used against Buhari, his party members considered it more strategic to select a strong Christian personality as his running mate for the elections. Buhari also did this in 2011 when he campaigned for the presidency with Pastor Bakare as his running mate on the CPC platform, which was unsuccessful given the weak structure of the party in the southern region. This strategy was adopted as a good option for the 2015 elections, judging by the rising tension generated in the country following speculations that the APC was ready to stage a Muslim-only ticket for the presidential and

vice-presidential positions. Yemi Osinbajo, a pastor in a popular Lagos branch of the Redeemed Church and an associate of Bola Tinubu (the National Leader of the APC), was therefore appointed as a suitable vice-presidential candidate.

The emergence of Osinbajo immediately disrupted the plans of Jonathan and his party. This is because, besides being a prominent member of the Redeemed Church, Osinbajo was also very close to the founder and general pastor of the church, Pastor Adeboye. This in turn suggests that the large number of votes from the Redeemed Church, which has an estimated five million members and about 14,000 branches across the world (Miller 2010), would most likely go to the APC because of Osinbajo. Furthermore, the fact that Pastor Osinbajo appears more devoted and disciplined as a Christian would attract him more Christian voters than Jonathan. A report confirmed that, after the nomination of Osinbajo, Jonathan complained to some Pentecostal pastors that 'everything was okay until APC picked Osinbajo' (*Sahara Reporters* 19 January 2015).

MOBILISATION AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

The electoral process was characterised by the contestants and their parties meeting with religious leaders, ostensibly in order to use these leaders to favourably influence their followers' votes. For example, following several overt and covert meetings Jonathan had with the Christian leadership, Rotimi Amaechi, then governor of Rivers State and also director general of the APC presidential campaign, alleged that Jonathan gave Christian leaders, through the CAN, the sum of 6 billion Naira to use for their churches to gather votes and also discredit the APC as pursuing an Islamisation agenda. In another allegation, which further substantiated Amaechi's claim, the Director of the Voice of Northern Christian Movement, Pastor Kallamu Musa Ali Dikwa, alleged that:

Actually President Jonathan is using CAN president, Pastor Ayo Oristejafor, and it was the CAN president that collected the monies and shared N3 million to CAN executives in each state. And some Pentecostal Bishop including Bishop Oyedepo also collected his share. Actually, the money is not N6b, it is N7b.

(Joseph & Benjamin, 2015)

Therefore, it was not surprising when Jonathan announced some months before the elections that 'we have decided that from now onward, until I leave the State House, every last Sunday of the month, I will go to different churches,' which was later termed the 'presidential church tour' in the media (Nzemeke 2014). Obviously, this was a tactic of using the pulpit to campaign and persuade the

Christian voters to vote for him. This motive saw him visit notable churches across the country, especially in Lagos and Abuja, before the commencement of elections on 28 March 2015.

Similar attempts were made to mobilise the leadership of the Muslim community to support his re-election. This was not totally successful as there were strong indications that the community was determined not to support his re-election given the perceived mistreatment of Muslims under his administration. Thus, all entreaties to the Muslim community in different guises by Jonathan and his party in order to secure its cooperation were rejected. For instance, Ishaq Akintola, the director of Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC), while querying the motive behind any meeting with Jonathan at the auspicious time of the elections, remarked that:

President Jonathan neglected and marginalised us in the past. Why is it now that he wants to meet us? If he wants to meet us, he should wait till after the election, not now. We don't want his dollars.

(The News 2015)

However, some selected Muslim leaders in the South West, including Edo and Delta States, held a meeting on 17 March 2015 with the vice-president, Namadi Sambo, and a number of PDP members in Akure, Ondo State, where they endorsed Jonathan's candidacy. However, this meeting and endorsement were swiftly disowned by the larger Muslim community in the South West under the umbrella of the Muslim Ummah of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN), which declared that: 'There is no prominent Imam from the Southwest at the meeting because we all agreed not to be part of such a clandestine move' (Adebanjo & Akeredolu 2015).

On the part of the APC, the candidate and his campaign team held some consultations with notable pastors, excluding the CAN whose leadership had already pitched its tent with the PDP's candidate. Buhari's strategists saw the meetings as important in order to repudiate the perception created by his opponents against him as a Muslim fanatic. In January 2015, the pictures of Buhari attending a Christian event where Pastor Adeboye was the presiding pastor, occupied the social media, ostensibly to indicate his religious liberalism. On 10 February 2015, Buhari also had a meeting with Catholic bishops where he emphasised that he 'will not condone any initiative that seeks to promote one religion over the other' (*Premium Times* 11 February 2015). About the same time some Christian leaders met under the banner of Northern Christian Leaders' Eagle-Eyes Forum in Abujato declare their support for the Buhari-Osinbajo ticket.

In a discussion with the General-Secretary of the National Council of Muslim Youths Organisations (NACOMYO) Lagos State branch, it was understood that

Buhari had decided not to follow the approach of Jonathan concerning the Muslim community. Therefore, Buhari significantly reduced his meetings with the community at the close of the elections in order to weaken the negative image of 'Muslim fanatic' already given to him by his opponents, and also to prevent the perception that he would be biased towards his religion when elected into office. However, according to my interviewee, many Muslim organisations committed themselves to the success of Buhari at the presidential elections not only because he is a Muslim, but also because of Jonathan's outright display of 'hatred' towards Muslims in his administration (personal communication, 2015).

VOTING AND THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

Despite the pervasiveness of religion in this pre-election period, one cannot successfully argue that religion was a major factor in the voting pattern. The Muslim-dominated northern areas in the North East and North West did vote massively for Buhari, while the largely Christian areas in the South East and South South voted predominantly for Jonathan, and this has something of an ethnic dimension (see Table 2). The pattern of voting in two major geo-political zones with a large Christian population, North Central and South West, is instructive for analysis here. In the North Central, which is mostly composed of the northern Christian-populated states – Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Kogi States – the APC candidate beat the PDP candidate by over 25%. This is unexpected in those areas especially when considering the votes Jonathan (as a Christian candidate) recorded there in the 2011 elections (see Table 1). In addition, when considering the results at state levels it is striking that in Benue and Kogi States, Buhari earned more votes than Jonathan by 18.8% and 43.3% respectively. In some other predominantly Christian-populated states, including Plateau and Taraba where Jonathan recorded more votes, the margin was surprisingly narrow (22% and 16% respectively). Also in the South West, with a seemingly mixed population of Muslims and Christians, there was a margin of 25.1% in favour of the APC candidate. With this result, there is reason to suggest that factors other than religion played significant roles in the voting choice of the people.

Table 1
Result of the 2015 Presidential Election According to Geo-Political Zones

Zone	PDP (Jonathan)	CPC (Buhari)
North Central	3 123 126	1 612 999
North East	1 832 622	3 624 919

North West	3 395 724	6 453 437
South East	6 118 608	49 978
South South	4 985 246	20 335
South West	2 786 417	321 609
Total	22 495 187	12 214 853

Source: *Nigeria Muse* 19 April 2011

Table 2
Result of the 2015 Presidential Election According to Geo-Political Zones

Zone	APC (Buhari)	PDP (Jonathan)
North Central	2 411 013	1 874 638
North East	2 848 678	796 588
North West	7 115 199	1 339 709
South East	198 778	2 464 906
South South	418 590	4 714 725
South West	2 433 193	1 821 399
Total	15 425 451	13 011 965

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission Website (accessed 22 October 2015)

Two reasons may account for this pattern of voting which saw a reduced role of religion:

Firstly, pre-election surveys conducted in some states that produced surprising outcomes, as indicated above, clearly show that despite attempts at politicising their worship centres, voters' decisions were based on the performance records of the presidential candidates, especially on issues concerning security, corruption, and employment. For example, a number of Christians in Plateau State interviewed in a BBC report suggested that the religious affiliation of the candidate would not be primary in their voting decisions; rather their credibility would be a major determinant. According to a Christian voter, 'If the Christian leader does not have what it takes to provide good leadership, I will not vote for him merely because he is a Christian' (Ross 2015). Another respondent stated that '... the way things are going people are beginning to downplay the role of religion in deciding who you vote. I hear people talking a lot about credibility' (Ross 2015).

It should be noted that the Jonathan administration in particular lost its

popularity following its poor management of Boko Haram violence and other related ethno-religious violence in the northern region, which significantly affected his fellow Christians. On the other hand, there were increased expectations that Buhari, as a retired general in the Nigerian Army with a record of dealing with similar terrorist groups in the 1980s as a military head-of-state,² would handle the situation better. Furthermore, Jonathan lost credibility in the face of a deluge of corruption allegations against his cabinet members, about which he was passive. A good example is the allegation made by the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, that a sum of USD 20 billion from the oil revenue account went missing on the watch of the Minister of Petroleum, Diezani Alison-Madueke. Rather than institute a convincing investigation into the allegation, President Jonathan suspended the whistle-blower (Sanusi Lamido) on some fabricated charges. On the other hand, Buhari was seen not only as being personally free of corruption but also as an anti-corruption crusader because of his record as the military head of state between 1983 and 1985, when he significantly addressed the problem of corruption and all forms of indiscipline in the country through the policy of 'War Against Indiscipline' (WAI).

Secondly, the campaign strategy of the PDP against the APC candidate based on his personality and religion was apparently counter-productive, as it ended up pitting one religion against the other. This strategy was considered inflammatory as it could have pushed the country to the point of a religious war. This position is also admitted by the leadership of the PDP after it was accused by the campaign team of causing Jonathan's failure at the elections. The Publicity Secretary of the party responded that:

We (National Working Committee) did not lead the party to failure. We were not involved in the campaigns and our advice was ignored ... in 2003, President Obasanjo ran an election against Odumegwu-Ojukwu in the South-East. In 2007, Yar'Adua ran election against Ojukwu. I can tell you, if PDP had engaged in name calling or abused Ojukwu in any way, PDP would have lost the elections in the South-East.

(Umoru 2015)

This shows that Nigerian voters are gradually becoming more sophisticated. With the outcome of the 2015 presidential elections, one can argue that the inclination

2 Muhammadu Buhari was Nigeria's Military Head-of-State from December 31 1983 to August 27 1985. His administration confronted the Maitatsine sect which engaged in religious insurgency in some cities of northern Nigeria. In addition, he was also one of the major military officers who fought in the Biafran civil war between 1967-1970.

to vote for visceral reasons may be on the decline. More voters displayed their preference for the performance capacity of the presidential candidates, rather than their religious or ethnic backgrounds. In a liberal democracy, a quality and rational voter is certainly a useful criterion for the development of democracy. This observation reflects a research finding based on the case study of Ghana indicating the emergence of a 'rational voter in Africa' who 'are consciously or unconsciously placing a significant premium on their sense of the economy and of whether the government's policies have helped or hurt most people' (Lindberg 2012, p.10). Although this does not necessarily indicate the death of identity factors in elections, it suggests that incumbents and parties will pay more attention to delivering on their mandate in order to be re-elected, rather than having an easy path into office courtesy of their religion or ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's status as one of the most religious countries in the world ensures that the connection between its religion and politics is relevant to the literature on this subject. The involvement of religion in Nigerian politics relates to its use as an instrument for mobilising votes in elections. As shown in this paper, the history of Nigeria is replete with the invocation of religious sentiments for electoral gains. Clearly, the 2015 presidential elections provide another significant example of how the political elite attempt to manipulate religion and influence the faithful to gather votes and win elections. As such, this study of the politics around the elections is about how the faithful were mobilised at their places of worship in order to win the elections. This was clearly manifested in the campaign strategies of the major contestants for presidential office. Furthermore, by analysing the voting patterns, this paper demonstrates that despite this strategy, religious sentiments had minimal effect on the voting choice of the electorate. The voters instead made their choice based on the performance records of the presidential candidates. This has positive implications for democratic development in Nigeria. It shows that the voters are indeed becoming more rational and less sentimental at the polling station, despite the manipulations of political elites.

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DEMOCRACY DEFERRED: THE EFFECTS OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE ON NIGERIA'S PATH TO DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

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ABSTRACT

The conduct of free and fair elections provides a yardstick to measure the quality of democracy in a country. Credible elections are the platform on which the populace partakes in democracy by electing representatives of their choice as public office holders. This process enhances the confidence of voters in democratisation, and rekindles the prospect of consolidating democratic institutions, particularly in democratising states. The conduct of elections in Nigeria since 1999 has been inundated with spiralling malpractices in the electioneering process. The trend has worsened with each round of elections, as typified by the 1999, 2003 and 2007 polls. During these three elections, rigging, violence and intimidation flourished. How do such malpractices affect the quality of Nigeria's democracy? How do electoral malpractices affect the outcome of elections in Nigeria? Can democracy be consolidated in Nigeria in the face of elections that do not reflect the will of the voters? How can Nigeria chart a credible path towards stabilising the country's democracy? This paper presents qualitative data and an analysis of the above questions. I argue that it is not the regularity of elections that can strengthen democratic heritage in Nigeria, but how transparent the country's electoral process is.

Keywords: vote rigging, transparency, electoral offences, pseudo-democracy

INTRODUCTION

The 'third wave' of democracy globally in the late 20th century guaranteed its proliferation. By the twilight of that century, democracy had been engraved in many countries of the world. Today, the measurement of a country's political credentials is based on how democratic the country is, which makes democracy the 'only game in town' (Linz & Stephen 1997, p. 15).

What is responsible for democracy's resilience and overshadowing impact over other forms of government? Democracy, compared with other variants of government, has become popular globally because of the opportunity it provides people to determine who their leaders should be. Since its original experiment in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens about 250 years ago, democracy has endured across many regions of the world and varied cultures. This survival ability of democracy stems from its philosophy, which offers the *demos* in a political community the privilege to exercise their will and freedom to choose (Dunn cited in Jega 2007, p. 3). The abiding faith of people in the process of democracy hinges on its core principles of participation and accountability. Through the machinery of elections, democracy ensures that voters control decisions about who should represent them and where and when policies that affect their lives are made. What distinguishes democratic rule from its authoritarian counterpart is democracy's emphasis on mass participation – made possible by the conduct of elections.

Under a democratic regime, the accountability of leaders to the people who elected them becomes an inescapable norm. The survival of public office holders in their positions depends on how well they perform in office. It also depends on how the leaders justify, through performance, the mandate given to them by the people during election, knowing full well that they risk losing their appointments if they fail to perform. Non-performance and non-accountability of political office holders is anathema under democracy; pedagogically, democracy stipulates that the acts of elected public officials must conform to the will of the electorate. Therefore, the conduct of free and fair elections is the beacon upon which a healthy democracy thrives. During democratic elections, three things should happen. One, citizens have the freedom to select their representatives. Two, citizens have the option of choosing from an array of candidates soliciting their support. Three, public office holders can be re-elected at the expiration of a specified period of time (Bunce 2010).

In Nigeria elections have become, to use Schedler's (2002) phraseology, the 'menu of manipulation'. Since 1999 the outcomes of elections in the country have scarcely reflected the will of the voters owing to an avalanche of electoral malpractices (Aluaigba 2009a; Bratton 2008; Ezeani 2005; Oddih 2007; Ojo 2008; Suberu 2007). This nagging political phenomenon cast doubts on the evolution

of a viable democracy in Nigeria. Indeed, the vast cache of misdemeanours in governance in Nigeria is a mockery of democracy and a parody of what democracy represents (Aluaigba 2002). This arises from the precipitating consequences of electoral fraud on the quality of democracy in the country.

In what ways do these malpractices affect the quality of the Nigerian democracy? How do electoral malpractices affect the outcome of elections in Nigeria? Can democracy be consolidated in Nigeria, in the face of elections that do not reflect the will of the voters? How can Nigeria chart a credible path towards stabilising the country's democracy? The qualitative analysis presented in this paper attempts to provide answers to these questions, using theory and secondary data. The paper has six sections: an introduction, an overview of conceptual issues and elections in Nigeria since 1999, a summary of electoral malpractices at the Nigerian polls, a description of the consequences of these malpractices, and a conclusion with recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Democracy

Democracy is a concept that receives tremendous attention from political scientists and other scholars. Numerous attempts have been made to define the concept, with a resulting plethora of definitions of democracy. What is evident in most of the definitions is an apparent shift away from the classic popularised definition of the concept by Abraham Lincoln (16th American President, 1861–1865), who stated that democracy is 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. More modern definitions conceive of democracy being based on specific variables or factors. Some scholars view democracy as political competition through periodic elections, others see it as citizen participation, and still others link democracy to civil and political liberties. Addi (1997, p. 107) perceives democracy as 'the process by which power changes hands without violence or force'. The focus of Addi's definition is the peaceful transfer of political power in a society. Similarly, according to Morlino (2004, p. 5) the concept of democracy implies 'a regime has at least universal adult suffrage; recurring, free, competitive and fair elections; more than one political party; and more than one source of information'. Morlino stipulates the existence of democratic institutions and rights in a polity to attenuate its being qualified as a democracy.

Aristotle's view on democracy was that

... the most pure democracy is that which is so called principally from that equality which prevails in it; for this is what the state directs; that the poor shall not be in greater subjection than the rich; nor that

the supreme power shall be lodged in either of these, but that both shall share it.

cited in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1768, p. 216

Aristotle's emphasis on the meaning of democracy as equality of all individuals in a society is corroborated by the work of Kapstein and Converse (2008), in which they attribute the causes of breakdown of democracy in a country. According to these authors, democracy as a mode of government has thrived in some countries but failed in other countries because of the prevalence of poverty and inequality that instil segregation in society.

Arising from these varied conceptions of democracy, when it is practised in consonance with its precepts, democracy provides a political platform through elections for the engagement of all members of a community in the process that determines who governs them. Thus, political power belongs to the people and not to the elected leaders. People may easily 'dethrone' a leader if he or she does not perform.

Democratic consolidation

Democratic consolidation is construed as a stage in a country's democratic process where democracy acquires some characteristics of stability. Consolidation cannot take place unless certain political features are present in a country operating a democratic regime. Some of these features have been identified as 'routinized, recurrent and predictable patterns of political behaviour...; defining clear workable rules of the game, establishing more authoritative, proficient, and dependable structures for mediating political conflicts ...' (Diamond 1999, p. 75). In addition, for a democracy to consolidate, the predisposition to authoritarian reversal should be remote. The military – as an alternate domain of the exercise of political power – should exhibit total loyalty to democratic institutions, thus forestalling the possibility or threat of overthrowing an elected government. Most importantly, democratic consolidation becomes overt in a society when the rights of citizens are guaranteed, and the ruling elite is accountable and responsive to the populace. A further hallmark of democratic consolidation is that the masses are well acquainted with political procedures and norms – that is, the masses 'routinize, internalize, habituate, and legitimate' (Im 2000, p. 23) these norms and procedures.

Democratic consolidation thus incorporates vast criss-crossing or variegated governance issues that border on people-centred government, and responsive political leadership that is absolutely accountable to the electorate. It also implies permanence of the regime. This is not to say that consolidated democracies are immune against political squabbles. Even in old and stable democracies, instability

resulting from political upheavals – which in turn result from dwindling economic fortunes – can culminate in social distortions. This pattern can be seen in recent anti-austerity demonstrations in Europe in 2011 and 2012 which were the result of the global economic recession that began in 2008.

Linz and Stephen (1997, p. 23) outline two impediments to democratic consolidation. These are the threat of ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic states, and the disenchantment by citizenry which arises from the inability of democratic regimes to deliver democratic dividends to improve the living conditions of the masses. This is precisely the case in the ‘third wave’ democracies, especially those that evolved in the 1990s in Africa – including Nigeria. In these countries, there has been growing disenchantment of the citizenry because of worsening social conditions of the people after more than a decade of the start of democracy. Democratic consolidation therefore means much more than mere existence of institutions and periodic elections.

Electoral malpractice

Electoral malpractice generally refers to an instance where acceptable norms and principles that confer credibility on elections are desecrated; and in their place duplicity, falsehood, manipulation and cheating by any means are deployed to sway the outcome of elections. Ezeani (2005) defines electoral malpractice as ‘illegalities committed by government, officials responsible for the conduct of elections, political parties, groups or individuals with sinister intention to influence an election in favour of a candidate(s)’ (Ezeani 2005, p. 415). Birch (2011) divides electoral malpractices – which she calls ‘electoral corruption’ – into three categories. They are malpractices that relate to the legal framework, malpractice related to preference formation, and malpractices centred on electoral administration. Electoral malpractice in any form is anathema to democracy because of its retrogressive effect on the quality of democracy in a country. As a corollary, electoral malpractices are not condoned anywhere in the world but rather censured. Abhorrence of electoral malpractice is necessary. If malpractices such as winning elections through rigging, massive use of money, use of violence against political adversaries and so on are unbridled, the tendency is for a negative culture of ‘political larceny’ to be inculcated by politicians. This ultimately dilutes the potency of elections as a means of peaceful transfer of political power and as a tool to legitimise political power.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Elections are an important aspect of liberal democracy. As stated above, the integrity and credibility of elections are strong measures of a deepened democracy

in a country. In every country where democracy thrives, stringent laws exist to guide the conduct of polls. However, because it is through elections that people decide who occupies particular elective public offices, politicians and groups sometimes resort to the use of vile unscrupulous methods to win elections. Therefore, it behoves any political entity to put in place rules and regulations that all stakeholders in the electoral process must obey. These regulations also spell out the punishment to be meted out to any ailing individual and group that engages in electoral malpractice. In Nigeria, the legal framework that defines how elections in the country are conducted, what constitutes electoral offences, and how offenders are punished is found in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and the Electoral Act 2010, as amended.

The 1999 Constitution deals mainly with the structures necessary for the conduct of elections for the various political offices in Nigeria and the constitution of the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as well as Election Tribunals. By contrast, the Electoral Act 2010 contains detailed definitions of electoral malpractices and the punishment accrued to them. For example, the 1999 Constitution in sections 76, 77 and 78 provides the modalities for electing members of the National Assembly and the qualifications of Nigerians who can vote during National Assembly elections. Similarly, sections 116, 117 and 118 of the Constitution contain information on how and when elections for State Houses of Assembly are to be conducted. Furthermore, as it affects the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, sections 131, 132, 133 and 134 of the 1999 Constitution specify the qualities of any Nigerian who wishes to contest in a presidential election, and how he or she will emerge as a president-elect in a national poll. Specifications are also stipulated for candidates seeking elections to office as State Governor in sections 177, 178 and 179. In order to resolve disputes arising from elections for the above offices, section 285 of the 1999 Constitution makes provision for the establishment of Election Tribunals at the state and federal levels to handle such disputes. In the Third Schedule, Part I, sections 14 and 15 of the Constitution provide for the establishment of INEC, the qualities of its chairman, and its functions and powers.

With regard to electoral offences, the Electoral Act 2010 clearly states offences and punishments for buying or selling voters' cards, as well as crimes committed during registration of voters. For instance, section 23(c) of the Act states that anyone who 'buys or offers to buy voters' card on his own behalf or on behalf of any other person, commits an offence and should be liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding ₦500,000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding two years or both'. As it affects registration of voters, section 24(2b) provides that anyone who 'in any way hinders another person from registering as a voter commits an offence and is liable on conviction, to a fine not exceeding ₦500,000.00 or imprisonment

not exceeding 5 years'. Other electoral offences covered by the Electoral Act 2010 include impersonation and voting when not qualified to do so (section 122), bribery and conspiracy (section 124), non-secrecy in voting (section 125), voting by unregistered persons (section 127), disorderly conduct at elections (section 128), offences on election day (section 129), undue influence (section 130), threatening other voters (section 131) and so on. All these legal provisions are meant to forestall incidents of electoral malpractice in order to enhance the credibility and integrity of elections in Nigeria. However, as discussed next, such fraudulent acts are still prevalent in Nigeria's electoral process.

OVERVIEW OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

Since the re-emergence of democracy in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic, the country has conducted five nationwide elections (in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015). These elections have shared many common features and few things differentiate them. For instance, the elections were all conducted periodically as expected, they were closely monitored by domestic and international observers, they arouse varied contestations from Nigerian politicians and voters, and they were all marred by varying degrees and calibres of malpractice. Apart from the 2011 and 2015 polls, the credibility and acceptability of the elections waned further with each subsequent election. The inference from the conduct and outcome of these elections is that Nigeria is yet to demonstrate the attributes of a growing democracy (Yagbojaju 2011, p. 93). This section summarises the elections in Nigeria by highlighting their general characteristics, the nature of malpractices, and an assessment of how each election differed from the others in terms of acceptability and credibility.

After a long period of over three decades of military rule, elections that ushered in Nigeria's Fourth Republic were organised in a staggered manner. The Governorship and state Houses of Assembly elections were held on 9 January 1999. The National Assembly elections followed on 20 February, and the Presidential election was conducted on 27 February 1999. This marked the end of the transition programme of the military regime led by General Abdusalami Abubakar. The 1999 elections were won by Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and he was subsequently (on 29 May 1999) sworn in as Nigeria's first president in the Fourth Republic.

As noted by Okolie (2005, p. 439), 'transition elections' are usually relatively peaceful because a country is transitioning from an authoritarian to a civil regime. This was true of the 1999 elections, which 'took place without systematic rigging' (Omotosho 2008, p. 3). Nigerians were generally fed up with military dictatorship and ready to embrace a democratic order, and the 1999 polls gave

them the opportunity to attain this aspiration. This is not to say that the 1999 general elections were devoid of electoral corruption or malpractices or that malpractice was confined to known past electoral irregularities. Such fraudulent electoral practices included the late commencement of polling, late arrival of electoral materials, missing names of eligible voters on the register, early closure of voting at some polling stations and voting during legally unstipulated hours. The most noticeable were cases of bribing of voters and vote buying, as reported by election observers. For instance,

in Oshimili North LGA in Delta State, a party gave out the money that facilitated the sharing of ballot papers among the parties, and as a result, that party had 75% to thumb print, while the other two parties shared the remaining ballot papers.

cited in Sha 2008, p. 127

In another instance of vote buying,

In Kano, malpractices were on all sides. While in Gaya Local Government Area (LGA) some voters were offering their votes for sale for as little as N10.00, in other areas, such as Madobi, the INEC officials and party agents connived in bribery and rigging. The fallout of bribery at Sabon Gari ward, Magami polling station in Zamfara State.... Attempts at underage voting were also a feature in this state, for example, at Dambawa 5B polling stations in Tsafe Ward, ten underage boys were brought for voting, but were detected.

cited in Sha 2008, p. 127

What set the 1999 elections apart from subsequent elections was the subtleness of the nature, magnitude and sophistication in the mode of electoral malpractices. For instance, deadly malpractice such as physical violence during and after an election (resulting in high casualty levels) was less noticeable.

The next election in Nigeria after 1999 was held on 12 and 19 April and 3 May 2003 for the National Assembly, Presidency and governorship State Assemblies respectively. The 2003 elections were the litmus test for Nigeria's democracy. The 1999 elections had been conducted by the military, whereas the 2003 election was the first to be held by a civilian government. The 2003 polls led to the first successful inter-civilian transfer of power in Nigeria since a botched attempt at civilian-civilian power transition in 1983 amidst a military coup. However, the 2003 election, like its predecessors, was bedevilled by similar electoral ills to those that had previously occurred in Nigeria. The visible malpractices during the 2003

elections included massive use of money for vote buying, stuffing of ballot boxes, ballot-box snatching, falsifying election results to favour or disfavour particular candidates, and fraudulently announcing that candidates who had in fact lost, had won (Ojo 2008, p. 116). European Union (EU) observers of the elections noted that

though the ballot box was full by around midday, only 85 names on the list of 743 registered voters were ticked [on the register]. At a third polling station, 50 cast ballots were suspiciously folded in the same way, and the first 50 names on the voter list were ticked [on the register] in alphabetical order.

cited in Calingaert 2006, p. 144

The degree of electoral corruption displayed in the 2003 polls gave the impression that there was a deliberate attempt by the ruling PDP to retain power at all costs and by any means. Indeed, according to Elaigwu (2006),

the 2003 elections were very fraudulent and were so acknowledged by both domestic as well as foreign observers and monitors. It is therefore not surprising that three years after, some petitions are just being sorted out by the electoral tribunals and Appeal Courts. ... All political parties in power at the state level put their rigging machines on overdrive and ended up with overkill. The [elections] were disastrous – they were demonstrable evidences of democratic deficit, which has the potential for endangering the democratic process.

Elaigwu 2006, p. 10

The clamour by opposition parties for the cancellation of the elections had little effect, and President Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in on 29 May 2003 for a second term.

On 14 and 21 April 2007, Nigerians went to the poll to elect another set of leaders. However, the 2007 general elections turned out to be the most disparaged and discredited of the lot. They were dubbed the worst ever held in any part of the world and in Nigeria's electoral history, in terms of the high level of fraudulent practices (Jega 2009, p. 20). This debasement has led scholars to describe the 2007 elections as a 'fitful path' to democracy (Ibrahim 2007), 'muddled' elections (Suberu 2007), elections conducted when democracy was in 'retreat' (Rawlence & Albin-Lackey 2007), 'failed elections' (International Crisis Group 2007) and as a 'troubled transition' from civilian-to-civilian regime (*Africa Confidential* 11 May 2007). The core reason for these negative portrayals is the elections were marred by all imaginable kinds of malfeasance.

In the build-up to the 2007 elections, political pundits were of the opinion that the polls were programmed to fail. The numeracy of politically motivated assassinations, inter- and intra-party feuds, interpersonal wrangling among politicians, the rickety preparations by INEC, and the undemocratic primaries conducted by virtually all 50 political parties that contested the elections all culminated in the 2007 electoral debacle. The utterances of ex-president Obasanjo flared political tension when he pronounced the elections as a do-or-die affair for the ruling PDP. The immediate interpretation of Obasanjo's statement by opposition political parties and observers of Nigeria's political transition at the time was that the April 2007 elections were damned to be non-transparent. This was because the then president and his ruling PDP had on their side control of all the state apparatuses of coercion and manipulation, such as the police, armed forces, security services, the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and INEC (Suberu 2007, p. 97). This apprehension was validated when the elections were indeed conducted in a most fraudulent manner.

Prior to the 2007 elections, the huge sums of money raised by some political parties prepared the ground for a monetised electoral process. For instance, the ruling PDP raised a colossal amount of money from unverified sources, was unequalled by the money raised by all other parties combined. These funds were a cog in the wheels of the elections. For instance,

a veteran politician in Abuja says political funding explains some of the fraud [committed in the 2007 elections]. He explained that the PDP is effectively 37 different parties – one for each state and one at the centre, each party raises its money, usually through corrupt deals between contractors and the state government.

Africa Confidential 11 May 2007, p. 2

Even after the PDP's 'victory' in the 2007 polls, the party raised whopping sums of money unparalleled by any other party in Nigeria. On 15 November 2008 at a ceremony to raise funds for a new PDP secretariat project in Abuja, business tycoons such as Femi Otedola and Aliko Dangote reportedly contributed ₦1 billion and ₦3 billion respectively, and Strabag (a construction company in Nigeria) donated ₦100 million. An anonymous donor contributed ₦100 million (Okocha & Taiwo 2008). This manner of aggressive fundraising by political parties was the backbone of electoral malpractice in the 2007 polls, because donors could be sure to recoup their money through the award of contracts if the party they supported won the election (Aluaigba 2009b, p. 110). Moreover, in electioneering in Nigeria since 1999, 'money is used to influence everyone involved in the election process, from INEC officials to party agents, security agents and the electorate' (Bryan & Baer 2005, p. 101). Such practices were in vogue during the 2007 general elections.

A study on the conduct of the 2007 general elections (Aluaigba 2009a) indicates that electoral malpractices most prevalent during the elections were, in order of frequency, as follows: deliberate changing of election results, stuffing of ballot boxes, use of violence, misdeeds by security agents, connivance by polling officials and party agents to rig elections, intimidation of voters and vote buying. Other malpractices are shown in Figure 1 below. These included lack of secrecy in voting, false declaration of election results, snatching of ballot boxes, underage voting and so on. The occurrence of these corrupt practices was confirmed by both domestic and international observers who monitored the polls.

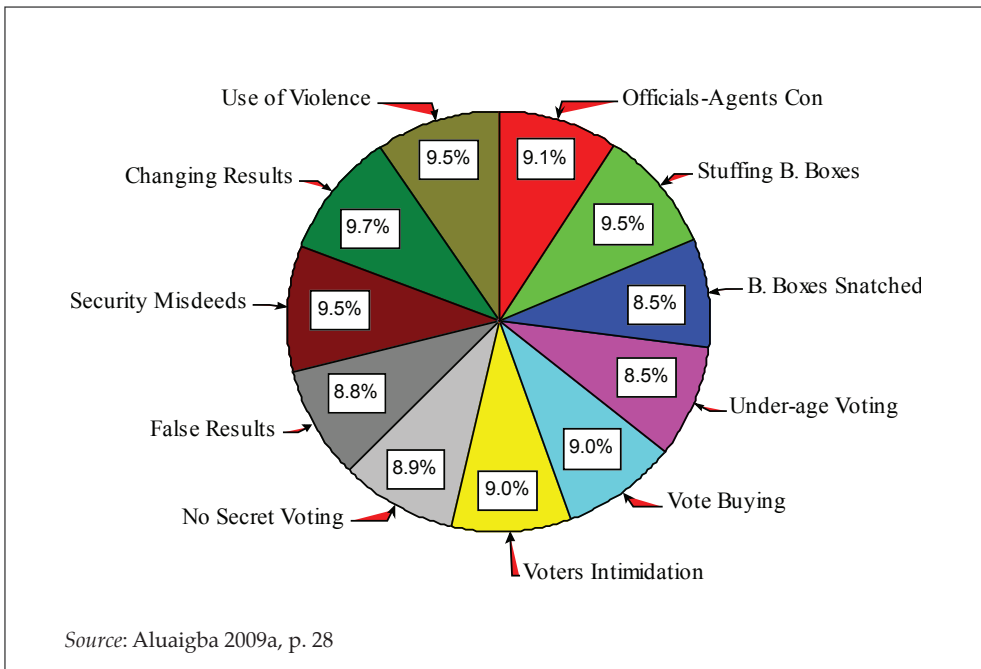


Figure 1
Electoral malpractices witnessed during Nigeria’s 2007 general elections

On the incidence of vote buying during the 2007 elections, another survey confirmed the sordid act when it reported that:

In vote-buying transactions in Nigeria, voters are usually offered money (68 percent of all reported attempts in 2007), commodities (such as food or clothing, 26 percent) or jobs (6 percent). In the latest and previous Nigerian elections, the modal (i.e., most common) inducement

was 500 naira, or about US\$4. But the median price of a vote payment rose between 2003 and 2007, from 1,750 naira to 2,250 naira, largely because the proportion of large payments (10,000 naira or more per vote) increased over time.

Bratton 2008, p. 4

There was also tremendous use of violence during the elections, such that

across the federation (and notably in Anambra, Delta, Jigawa, Katsina, Nasarawa, Ondo, and Osun States), violence surrounding the voting's conduct or outcome took an estimated two-hundred lives, including those of 39 police officers. Arsonists struck the INEC offices, police stations, and the houses of local PDP leaders.

Suberu 2007, p. 100

To ensure victory for the ruling party at all costs, there was premeditated effort to create an artificial shortage of voting materials in opposition areas, and the use of incumbency in the PDP-controlled states (*Africa Research Bulletin* 2007), to reduce the final number of votes for opposing political parties. As a corollary there were agitations by opposing political parties for a re-run of the elections after the PDP was declared the winner of the polls by INEC. The inference from these events was a general consensus by analysts and assessors of the conduct of the 2007 elections that democracy had been raped and the will of Nigerian voters subverted. This was done through the blatant obliteration of the trust Nigerians had bestowed on the security agents and the electoral umpire, INEC, despite the repeated assurances given to Nigerians by INEC chairman Professor Maurice Iwu that the electoral process would be free and fair to all.

The 2011 general elections were held on three different dates (9, 16 and 26) of April that year to elect members of the National Assembly, president, and governors or State Assembly members respectively. The first round of elections scheduled to take place on 2 April was postponed to 9 April. The reasons for the delay were described by INEC Chairman, Professor Attahiru M. Jega, as logistical problems (Akazeze 2011, p. 18) and an inevitable measure to forestall a shortage of election materials on election day. Prior to the election, predictions were rife among Nigerians with regard to the credibility of the 2011 polls, owing to the orgy of electoral fraud in past elections. However, the Jega-led INEC assuaged the fears of Nigerians, and by the end of the 2011 elections the general assessment of the polls, by both domestic and international observers, was that they had been relatively free and fair, and the results were more credible than those of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 polls.

The improvement in the credibility profile of the 2011 elections may be attributed to the new leadership of INEC, which was determined to reform the electoral body to enhance better administration of elections in Nigeria. Indeed, INEC was commended for the improvements recorded in logistics and the relatively smooth voting process during the polls, despite the initial disappointment occasioned by the postponement. The result of the elections ended the total dominance of the PDP, which had overwhelmingly held power since 1999. The party lost its two-thirds majority control of the Senate and won the governorship election in only 23 states out of 36, compared with the 2007 elections in which it had captured 27 states. Unlike in the previous elections, in which members of the National Assembly had substantially retained their seats, in the 2011 polls a good number of members lost their seats. For instance, 72 of the 109 senators lost their seats, and 260 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives also did not return to the house. These trends were indications of the piecemeal but holistic progress made by Nigeria in its march towards democratic consolidation.

Notwithstanding the successes achieved by INEC in the 2011 elections, on closer assessment the polls have been viewed as being far from free, fair and transparent according to international standards, because of the preponderance of electoral malpractice. The malpractices that reared their ugly heads during the 2011 ballot in Nigeria included late arrival of voting materials in many polling units, and incidents of ballot-box snatching and stuffing. Others were intimidation, arrest and detention of election observers, underage voting in some parts of the country and vote buying (Ibrahim 2011, p. 2; Jimoh & Olaniyi 2011, p. 4; Yusuf 2011, p. 31). Another serious shortfall during the elections was the inability of INEC to control the collation process. Most of the rigging took place at this stage of polling; hence, despite INEC's innovative initiative that encouraged communities to monitor the collation of results, this could not materialise. This failure culminated in a declaration of false results in some places. For example, 'there were a number of places where no voting took place but where results appear to have been compiled, including large parts of Idoma land in Benue South and also Isoko land and Warri in Delta State' (Sahara Reporters 2011, p. 1). There was insufficient security at some polling stations, which led to the tragic death of nine National Youth Service Corps members who were serving as the INEC's ad hoc staff in Bauchi State. The heavy security that was provided in some other violence-prone areas worked against the elections as voters were intimidated by the heavy presence of soldiers and stayed away from the polling stations.

Similar to this problem of insecurity, and more detrimental to Nigeria's democratisation process, was the post-election violence in Northern Nigeria that claimed over 1000 lives. This further marked the elections as the bloodiest

in Nigeria's electoral history. On 18 April 2011, following the announcement of the presidential election results in favour of the ruling PDP candidate President Goodluck Jonathan, there were reported cases of rioting in some cities in Northern Nigeria – including Kano, Katsina and Yola. The riot spread to 14 states in the region but was most severe in Adamawa, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Nasarawa and some parts of Niger. The protesters attacked residences of PDP stalwarts as well as businesses, churches, and in some cases mosques in reprisal attacks. As observed by Aniekwe and Kushie (2011, p. 6), electoral violence can be prompted by voters' frustration arising from the fear of unwarranted defeat because of a corrupt electioneering process or injustice in electoral dispute adjudication by the judiciary. These factors fuelled the post-2011 election violence in Northern Nigeria.

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria, conducted on 28 March and 11 April 2015, have been described as the best in Nigeria's electoral history (Gabriel 2015). This election was rated highly by both domestic and international observers because of the comprehensive preparations made and the relatively peaceful and proper conduct of the polls by INEC. Indeed, the characterisation of the 2015 polls as credible was the result of innovations and the introduction of technology in the electoral process by INEC. For instance, prior to the election itself there was the use of biometric voters' registration. During the actual polls, INEC introduced the Smart Card Reader. Also, sensitive electoral materials such as the result sheets and ballot papers were customised and possessed high security features and codes. However, despite these great improvements in the electoral process, evidence indicates that the 2015 elections were not totally flawless. Some of the shortcomings related to operational deficiencies on the part of INEC were 'late arrival of election materials, overcrowding, failure of the card reader, result manipulation and voting of under-aged in some units in the Northern part of the country' (Udu 2015, p. 102). Other electoral malpractices evident during the 2015 polls were snatching of electoral materials and ballot boxes by thugs, and inflation of election figures. For example, in Akwa Ibom State 'approximately 430,000 voters were accredited to vote in that state for Governor and State House of Assembly. BUT THE GOVERNOR-ELECT WON WITH ALMOST 900,000 VOTES!!!' (Sobowale 2015). The cancellation and order to conduct new gubernatorial elections in states such as Akwa Ibom and Rivers in December 2015, issued by the Appeal Court and Election Tribunal respectively, suggests that these electoral vices did occur during the March and April polls. However, Nigeria's Supreme Court eventually upheld the Akwa Ibom and Rivers governorship elections. This final decision corroborates the general assessment of the 2015 polls in Nigeria as one of the most credible in the country's electoral history.

What is obvious from the above review of elections in Nigeria since 1999 is that none of them can be absolved from venality, falsehood and duplicity

occasioned by flagrant usurpation of electoral laws and abuse of the will of Nigerian electorate. As discussed in the next section, these electoral malpractices have grave consequences for the nature of governance Nigerians have experienced since 1999. These negative effects in turn affect the quality of democracy being moulded in the country since the military vacated power years ago. Apart from desecrating the values of democracy that are built on transparency, accountability and good governance, electoral malpractices have dispelled the hopes of Nigerian citizens. At the resurgence of democracy in 1999, Nigerians' optimism hinged on reaping the dividends of democracy that would manifest in improving the living conditions of the people.

EFFECTS OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE ON NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATISATION

Electoral malpractices are undoubtedly an impediment to the democratisation process. This is especially true in countries that have scaled the hurdle of transitioning from authoritarian to democratic regimes and are navigating the political contour of transitioning to a consolidated democracy. Having gone through the bitter experience of electoral corruption since 1999, there are a number of ways Nigeria has been affected or will be affected by the problems created by the conduct of elections devoid of transparency. First, electoral malpractices tend to accelerate the level of voter apathy in a population. People refrain from voting in subsequent elections if previous or current polls are 'won' through vile means like rigging, false declaration of losers as winners, and bribing of electoral officials. In the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, the 26 April 2011 Gubernatorial / State Houses of Assembly polls had a very low voter turnout because of the real or perceived duplicity that had taken place in the 9 and 16 April National Assembly and Presidential elections respectively. The general feeling among Nigerian voters was that their votes were not going to count. Whether they voted or failed to vote, 'winners' must emerge through 'politricks Nigeria style' (Lustig 2007, p. 8). This trend is dangerous for the maturity of Nigeria's democracy.

Second, in a country like Nigeria that is democratising, frequent recourse by politicians to fraud to win elections defeats the *raison d'être* of elections as the basis for legitimising the occupation of political office, and the exercise of political power and authority that accompanies it. Elected political office-holders who won elections through rigging will, for instance, be lethargic about accountability to the electorate or voters. This apathy results from the notion that they bought their way through money and were not voted into office. This tendency illustrates why 'the much anticipated "democracy dividend", whether construed as improvements in governance, stability, or economic welfare, has not materialized' since 1999 (Lewis

2003, p. 131). No doubt, there has been concerted grumbling among Nigerians voicing their dissatisfaction with the performance of their elected public office-holders, as evident in the 9 January 2012 mass agitation to protest the hike in fuel prices by the administration led by President Jonathan.

Third, the Nigerian experience has shown that when the contest for elective positions by politicians is perceived as an investment – the returns of which must be recouped once they win elections and enter office (Ilo 2004, p. 25), there is a tendency for heightened larceny from the public treasury. It follows that democracy dividends can never be delivered to the electorate, because money meant for public projects is diverted into private pockets as rents, pre-bends and rewards to ‘godfathers’ who sponsored the public office-holders. This pattern indubitably will jeopardise Nigeria’s quest for a consolidated democratic heritage.

Table 1 below illustrates the rising level of corruption exemplified by looting of the public treasury in Nigeria since 1999. The rating of Nigeria by Transparency International (TI) between 1999 and 2012 shows that the country has declined in its position on the TI ratings (Table 1). Nigeria was rated better in 1999 than in 2012; after 1999, the country took several steps backwards in TI rankings because of the increased level of corruption in the public domain. However, since 2015, Nigeria’s rating by TI has improved remarkably, ostensibly because of the anti-corruption crusade under the new administration led by President Muhammadu Buhari.

Table 1
5-year perception index and ranking of Nigeria
by Transparency International

Year	Position Occupied by Nigeria	No. of Countries Surveyed	Score
1999	98	99	1.6
2003	132	133	1.4
2007	147	179	2.2
2011	143	183	2.4
2012	139	176	27

Sources: Compiled from the following Transparency International websites:

<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2011/results>

<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>

<http://www.transparency.org/research/>

Fourth, continual reliance on corrupt practices such as rigging, intimidation and violence to obtain victory in elections can ignite political protests. Such protests can – either rapidly or slowly – degenerate and metamorphose into full-fledged

anarchy. The heightened level of violence and terrorism that exacerbated insecurity in 2012 in Nigeria, especially through the activity of the Boko Haram sect (Walker 2012), gathered momentum after the post-election violent protests in the North, following the election on 18 April 2011. The general view in the North was that the protests were the result of perceived cheating in the 2011 elections, which had produced former President Jonathan of the PDP as the winner, while the favourite candidate in the North – retired General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.) of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) – had lost. Similarly, in 1993 the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by the military junta of General Ibrahim Babangida, presumed to have been won by Chief MKO Abiola (a Yorubaman), was interpreted mostly by the Yoruba in Nigeria's South-West Zone to have been rigged out of the country's political process. This led to a momentous political crisis that threatened the unity of Nigeria. Studies have shown that violence, vote buying, negative use of money and so on are impediments to transitioning to a viable democracy, and are anathema in a country that is serious about consolidating its democracy (Aluaigba 2010; Bratton 2008; Obadare 1999).

Fifth, in a pseudo-democracy like the Nigeria variant, where elections are fraught with malpractices, the value of political parties as a vehicle for peaceful transfer of power is also defaced. This is always the case where there exists a strong ruling party whose control of power weakens other opposition parties because of its political might. At a point, members of these opposition parties cross the carpet to join the ruling party. This trend makes politicians evermore less principled in their political conduct because the obsession to acquire political power in order to amass illegal wealth outweighs all other considerations, including integrity and reputation. In the build-up to the 2007 elections, while many members of other opposition parties defected to the ruling PDP, key members of the PDP – including the Vice President under former President Obasanjo, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar – defected to the Action Congress (AC) party, now called All Progressives Congress. This paved the way for Atiku to run as the party's presidential bearer in the 2007 election. Surprisingly, in 2009 Atiku re-defected back to the PDP. This attitude among Nigerian politicians is demeaning to the country's effort at stabilising its democracy.

How do all the above factors affect Nigeria's quest for a consolidated democratic heritage? Aluaigba (2009c) has elaborated on the impediments to achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria, including the use of violence during elections, the influence of money on election outcomes, godfathers and so on. It suffices to reiterate that electoral malpractices are antithetical to democratic ethics; they emasculate the very foundation on which democracy is established and diminish the prospects of moulding the framework for its workability. Certainly, as Huntington (1991–92, p. 580) has averred, 'in all democratic regimes

the principal officers of government are chosen through competitive elections in which the bulk of the population can participate.' Short of this quality of election, it will be virtually impossible for democracy to reside in the country. This is the case in Nigeria where eligible voters are denied the right to choose their leaders, through intimidation and other numerous acts of electoral fraud.

CONCLUSION

There is no refutation of the fact that the conduct of free and fair elections marks a watershed in a country's march to democratic consolidation, despite the concomitant socio-political hiccups that often characterise the process of democratisation. Elections in Nigeria since 1999 have continually been a charade, given the avalanche of fraudulent electoral practices discussed above. However, the minimal improvements observed in the 2011 and 2015 elections are indications that the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria is possible if the required reforms are made, especially with regard to INEC and the reorientation of the mind-set of Nigerians towards elections. We must be reminded of Schumpeter's allusion (cited in Adejumbi 2000) that democracy is meaningful only when a society is able to accept or reject the people who want to govern it. That acceptance or rejection can become realistic only through elections. That is why the holding of elections is inescapable in liberal democracies. To overcome the encumbrances impinging on the conduct of free and fair elections in Nigeria through the monster of electoral malpractice, the country must take resolute steps to overhaul the entire electoral process. Nigerians' attitudes towards elections must be repositioned to attenuate for past failures that have left them in a state of political angst.

First, it is clear from the various reports on elections in Nigeria that elections are usually rigged during the collation of election results. To curtail the manipulation of results at collation centres, INEC should seek collaboration with established and reputable civil society organisations in Nigeria – such as the Transition Monitoring Group, Electoral Reform Network, Alliance for Credible Elections and Transparency International in Nigeria – to prop up the observation and monitoring of polling on election days. This will help to dispel aspirant rigging agents, whether officials of the INEC or party agents. Second, to overcome institutional deficiencies, INEC should through the National Assembly seek more institutional powers and financial independence from the executive, so the Commission's Chairman can gain the powers to appoint Resident Electoral Commissioners with the approval of the National Assembly. This would ensure the INEC is truly independent.

Third, the penalties for electoral misconduct and malpractices, as contained in the 1999 Constitution and the Amended Electoral Act 2011, should be strictly

applied by both INEC and the judiciary. Culprits of electoral fraud must be punished in line with the provisions of the laws. Fourth, the extensive negative use of money in elections should be curtailed by strictly regulating the finances of political parties and politicians.

Finally, it is important to check violence during elections by addressing its root causes. For instance, macro measures – such as tackling unemployment by creating job opportunities through reformation of the agricultural sector and improving electricity supply – would help to reduce youth involvement in election-related violence. If the magnitude of electoral malpractice that has occurred during polls in Nigeria does not decline in subsequent elections, democratic consolidation in the country might as well have been deferred to a later epoch in political history. The determination of the era when elections will reflect the wishes of Nigerians depends absolutely on the hindsight of major stakeholders in Nigeria's electoral process. The government, INEC, political parties and the Nigerian electorate must recognise the exigency to fortify democracy in the country and assiduously work towards it.

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ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL TRANSITION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA, 1960-1999

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ABSTRACT

In Africa, ethnicity has become a versatile tool often used by elites and ethnic organisations to actualise their set goals. The phenomenon of ethnicity is also central to the analysis of Nigerian politics, given its plural nature. Since the commencement of the transition from colonialism to independence and from the guided transitions from military to democratic rule in 1999, ethnic identity and mobilisation have been prominent features of the political arrangement, with serious attendant consequences for political stability. The paper therefore examines some of the impacts of ethnicity on political transition in Nigeria particularly from 1960 to 1999. The methodology is both descriptive and analytical with data drawn extensively from documented sources and subjected to critical analysis.

Keywords: ethnicity, political transition, democracy, political acrimony

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a conglomerate society characterised by diverse types of socio-ethnic communities. These range from tribe to multinational groups with distinct cultural nuances that are expressed in varying institutional systems. The diversity and

complexity of the various groups and the manner in which they influence political processes and decision making in the country have often been cited as the main obstacle against national integration in Nigeria.

As Joseph (1991, p. 48) points out, ethnicity remains a vital social force for several reasons: it is an emotionally satisfying mode of self- and group-assertion; and its salience increases rather than being 'voer-ridden' by division according to social class during the struggle for survival and material advantage in the modern sectors of society and the economy. It follows also that ethnicity is socially relevant when people unite and condition their actions on ethnic distinctions in everyday life. It is politicised when political coalitions are organised along ethnic lines, or when access to political or economic benefits depends on ethnicity (Fearon 2008). The point is that the ethnic factor and the centrifugal forces around it are perceived to be largely responsible for the death of genuine democracy. Suberu (1997, p. 341) captures it thus: Nigeria's deep ethnic, regional and religious cleavages and divisions have made the goal of institutionalising an enduring system of democratic governance paradoxically both structurally compelling and profoundly problematic.

Besides, the character of Nigerian politics has been informed by the global discourse on democratic transition. There are several strands to this discourse with particular reference to Nigerian experience. These include transferring power from colonial rule to indigenous or self-rule; from the military to civilian, that is demilitarisation; and from civilian to civilian (Anugwom 2001; International IDEA 2000, p. 5). Importantly, Nigeria has experienced challenges in trying to attain an uninterrupted transition to democratic rule from the time of its creation as a nation-state by the British in 1914, until 1999. This is perhaps why it is argued that Nigeria's experience of the political transition to democracy has received more attention than any other country in the continent of Africa (Shettima 1995, p. 61; Agbese 1990, p. 23-24).

From the foregoing, the paper attempts to examine how ethnicity or ethnic politics has influenced political transition programmes in Nigeria, particularly from 1960 to 1999. The paper explores the impacts of the military, civilian elites and ethnic organisations on political transitions in Nigeria. In view of this, the paper is sub-divided into four sections: section one introduces the nature and objective of the paper; section two conceptualises ethnicity and political transition; section three identifies and analyses the phases of political transition in Nigeria and the impact of ethnicity on each of the phases; and section four concludes the study.

CONCEPTUALISING ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL TRANSITION

Depending on the analytical inclination of particular authors, and on the specifications and dynamics of particular situations, ethnicity has been attributed

variously to the emotional power of 'primordial given' or cultural ties, the struggle for relative group with mass-based resource competition, elite manipulation, defective political institutions and inequitable state policies (Suberu 1996, p. 4). Amoo (1997) contends that several factors have combined to continue giving critical salience to ethnicity in the African polity. These include the artificiality of the African state, the absence of historical continuity in the political area that constitutes the modern state, the relative brevity and the superficiality of the colonial interregnum and the precipitate process of colonisation, the misgovernment and abuse inflicted upon the citizenry of many states, and the predatory nature of some of these states.

Ethnicity is partly perceived as the subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture by a group to differentiate itself from other groups. It is also viewed largely as an ideology of competition for increasingly scarce resources, which is a feature of colonial, post-colonial and strangeness of the state (Burgess 1978, p. 265-268; Mortimer 1999, p. 4; Hameso 1997, p. 5; Cohen 1969, p. 5). For instance, Nnoli (1978) argues that during the colonial period in Africa, competition for employment led to the phenomenon of urban ethnicity in which groups of migrant workers competed for jobs with better rewards on the basis of arbitrary connections made between tribes and occupation. The point Nnoli is stressing is that ethnicity is produced for its strategic utility in achieving material or political goods formally in the name of a group. But from an instrumentalist approach the concept can be viewed as a consciously crafted ideological creation, not a natural cultural residue. Ethnicity is perceived to be the central unifying concept of African life, and it has been internalised to such an extent that Africans now think of the dynamics of their societies as being dominated by ethnicity. Osaghae (1991, p. 48-49) observes that resources that are usually used to pursue this goal include religious and ethnic groups, which form the gist of the conception of ethnicity as an ideology of inter-elite competition. He points out that elites are facilitated in this process by the marked inequalities which often exist among ethnic groups in terms of development.

In modern Africa, the need to compete for jobs and leadership positions compels individuals and groups to organise and mobilise themselves around ethnic organisations or movements in order to minimise their transition costs and maximise benefits accruing to them. In other words, competition for scarce resources induces individuals to form groups, develop political and ideological platforms, and to engage in conflict behaviour either through peaceful constitutionally prescribed methods, or through violence, in an effort to maximise benefits from such competition (Maku 2001; Nagel 1995). This, however, led to the emergence of many ethnic socio-cultural and political organisations and militias in the post-civil war Nigeria.

To be specific, the Afenifere, Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Niger-Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Ohanaeze Ndigbo all champion the cause of their own ethnic interests through various means and approaches. The ACF, a group of highly visible northern emirs, former leaders, politicians and businessmen, emerged in 2000 in response to the loss of political power by the north. The main objective of the ACF is to foster and strengthen the foundation of northern unity in the context of one Nigeria. The Egbe Afenifere is a dominant ethnic organisation in the south west and is being controlled by eminent and affluent personalities. Its goal has remained the protection of the political, economic and social interests of the Yoruba. The Ohanaeze Ndigbo emerged in 1976 to protect and promote the collective interest of the Igbo and basically to serve as a social pressure group that seeks to influence the power structure in the country.

Indeed, the ethnic claims on the state in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, are tied to an ethno-structural imbalance among ethnic groups competing for the benefits of modernisation. This is typically for just and equitable political and bureaucratic representation, access to and allocation of scarce resources. Rothschild and Olorunsola (1983, p. 10) note that these claims and demands are reasonable to the extent that they do not threaten the legitimacy and existence of the state. But the characterisation of the Nigerian state as soft, weak, fragile, oppressive or failed, points to the inability of the state to satisfy the demands and expectations of citizens. This of course leads to ethnic rivalries and challenges, many of which ironically exploit state resources to sustain patronage networks. With fragile political institutions and weak national political cultures, the state has been transformed into an instrument for pursuing personal, ethnic and other sectional interests at the expense of other individuals and groups.

Increasingly, ethnicity has remained an important variable, as the ruling elite, whether constituted in the military or civil society, has consistently used it to feather their own nest – that is, elite domination. The colonial epoch not only magnified and concretised ethnicity (and presumed ethnic differences) in order to ensure dominance and control over the population, it also resulted in the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates into a single geographical entity. From then on, ethnic groupings or nationalities have been jostling for increasingly shrinking economic, political and social advantages. Owing to this reality, it is argued that ethnicity negatively impinges on newly democratising societies such as Nigeria which have routinely vacillated between military and civilian rule.

Nnoli (1994, p. 27) posits that access to state power is important for the various ethnic groups because of the extensive intervention of the African state in various spheres of the life of the African society, going beyond what is warranted by the character of the evolving welfare state. The common understanding is that access to state power enables influence to be wielded in virtually every facet of African life. For instance, state power could be used as an instrument to dominate, repress or physically eliminate individuals or groups from a juicy position. The same resources can be employed to assist mainly ethnic group members, which often results in an unequal distribution of public goods (Eriksen 1993, p. 4; Esman 1994, p. 26). Relatedly, Eyoh (2002) stresses that nationalist elites or leaders capitalise on the privilege of succeeding the colonial masters in politicising ethnicity. Nationalist coalitions (typically with core regional support bases) disintegrated as the elite appealed to ethno-regional and kinship ties in the struggle for power and modern resources.

This brings into focus the concept of political transition. Political transition denotes a process of change from one form of government to another. It is a change from a military, dictatorial regime to either a civilian or a democratic government. According to Olagunju, Jinadu and Oyovbaire (1993), transition assumes a double meaning, namely transition from and transition to democracy. Transition from democracy simply implies the military take-over of government from the civilian, while transition to democracy implies the hand-over of government to civilian authorities.

Osaghae (2004) holds that political transition is a complex process. First, as reality – with changing processes, it introduces new beginnings and differentiates the past from the present and future in definitive ways. This is often demonstrated with new ground rules such as constitutions, pacts, negotiated settlements, agreements, regimes and the emergence of new actors and coalitions. Second, transitions are periods of turbulence and crisis. These generate tensions and uncertainties through the opening up of new opportunities for political access and competition, and also for ventilating frustrations, grievances and seeking redress, all of which encourage more intense and desperate political actions. Perhaps it is in this connection that O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 9-11) argue that the outcomes of transitions are extremely uncertain especially if they have to do with the transition to democracy.

In most African states, the transition from military to civilian rule is usually programmed in terms of its content, quality, duration and the level of participation by the state and civil society. This process is also almost always supervised by the military government in power. Even in retreat, the military may attempt to influence the composition and behaviour of the in-coming government, and are formidably equipped to destabilise or re-intervene against the new government

especially if their (military) interests are threatened. The implication of this is that a failed political transition can lead to an unstable polity which in turn precipitates a coup d'état, thus introducing another round of military regime with its own new political transition programme; hence, the phrase 'transition without end' (Luckham 1998, p. 25-30).

Hermet (1991, p. 255) opines that the process of transition to democracy only comes to an end when that democracy has endeared itself with legitimate institutions and constitution, most particularly when the democratic leaders have their supremacy recognised by the army. Richard Joseph (1991) and Guy Martin (1993) assert that the transition to democracy in Africa is taking different forms and procedures at various speeds with different outcomes, depending on the nature of external inducements and on the configuration of domestic socio-political forces. Thus, they identify the following models of transition in Africa: national conference; government change via democratic elections; co-opted transitions; guided democratisation; recalcitrance and piecemeal reforms; and armed insurrection culminating in election and conditional transitions.

The national conference model expresses a situation where a broad coalition of civil society that invests itself with sovereign and supreme constitutional powers appoints a transitional government which organises and formulates guidelines for democratic elections. Such a process took place in the Republic of Benin where Mattieu Kerekou was removed from effective control of public policy to give way to multi-party elections in 1990. Government change through democratic elections describes a situation where a change of government is carried out through the normal process of electioneering, while a co-opted transition relates to a negotiated transition in which the opposition is co-opted into the ruling regime. Government via multiparty elections took place in Senegal in February 1988 and in Zambia in October 1991, while a co-opted transition took place in Gabon in September-October, 1990 and in Cameroon in October 1992. In guided democratisation, a military regime takes almost total control of the transition process which is usually perceived to be deliberate, complex and prolonged. This was the case in Nigeria during the military regimes of Ibrahim Babangida (1989-1993) and Sani Abacha (1994-1998).

It is instructive to note that there is often a synergistic interplay between ethnicity and political transition to the extent that the former influences and stimulates the latter. As Osaghae (2004) points out, one area in African politics where a complexity of transitions has had its full impact is that of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. This is so, considering the salience of ethnicity as an instrument of political competition and state organisation in several African countries. He also notes that political transition in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, has often elicited ethnic sentiments and triggered ethnic conflicts leading to the formation

of mainstream and break-away or separatist ethnic political parties, associations, formal and informal ethnic pacts and settlements, and threats to national cohesion and stability. Corroborating this, Laakso and Olukoshi (1996, p. 15) submit that it is evident that ethnicity remains a significant legitimising political resource by civilian authoritarian and military regimes in Africa. They describe the situation thus: many African one-party and military regimes, despite their supposed aversion to ethnicity and despite their apparently secular character, rested on distinctly ethnic political foundations and reproduced themselves on the basis of definable, and in most cases narrow, ethnic alliance. At any rate, the role of ethnicity varies with different phases of the transition process. It is regarded as an appropriate instrument in the process of political succession or power contention. It has functioned primarily to consolidate the hegemony of the political class (Otite 1990 and Horowitz 1987).

Suffice it to say that transitions from military to civilian and from civilian to civilian find explanation in the participation of the electorate. The electorate who belong to various registered political parties is made to vote in order to give salience to democratic transition. In Africa, ethnicity affects voting behaviour. The phenomenon of ethnic voting occurs whenever members of a cultural sub-group show a disproportionate affinity at the polls for a particular political party. The logic of ethnic voting is that, by expressing group solidarity, sub-national groups seek to elevate leaders from their own cultural background into positions of power, especially the top executive spot, thereby gaining collective political representation (Horowitz 1985; Bratton and Bhavnani 2009). Importantly, voting behaviour in Africa has a predominantly ethnic explanation. Other factors include personal linkages and clientelism (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997). As a social cleavage, ethnicity has gained a prominent place in the understanding of politics in Africa. It is a powerful tool for voter alignment and even more so for party affiliation.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN NIGERIA (1960-1999)

The general tendency in most of the transitional periods, especially in the colonial era, is to view political parties with an ethnic microscope and to infer their respective ethnic power bases from the ethnic affiliation of their leaders. When Nigeria's foremost nationalist leaders realised that there was a need to struggle for autonomy or self-rule, they had to come together to fight colonialism through their ethnically-based political parties. The key political parties then were the National Council of Nigerians and the Cameroons (NCNC) formed in 1944, The Action Group (AG) formed in 1951, and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) formed in 1949.

The balkanisation of colonial Nigeria into three regions along ethnic, cultural and linguistic lines, under the Richards Constitution of 1946, laid the foundation of tribalism or ethnicity in Nigerian politics, leading to the emergence of regional and tribal politics. For instance, the NCNC outwardly wore a pan-Nigerian toga as a broad-based national party, even when its foothold or stronghold in a technical sense derived from the eastern region. The NPC, which was formerly a cultural organisation called *Jami'yyar Mutanen Arewa*, represented the collective interest of the north, while the AG which emerged in the west as an offshoot of a Yoruba cultural group, *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, was also pro-Yoruba (Dudley 1982, p. 46-50).

It was within this same period of ethnic attachment to political parties that the concept of floor crossing was introduced into Nigerian political discourse. In 1951 some prominent Yoruba political elites exerted pressure on a number of Yorubas elected on the NCNC platform to decamp to the AG. This was in order to frustrate Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's chances of winning and becoming the premier of the Western Region, instead of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Consequently Azikiwe was compelled to go back to the Eastern Region to forcefully remove Eyo Ita from his position as the leader of government. Eyo Ita was from a minority ethnic group in the then Eastern Region. Thus, 1951 marked the beginning of ethnic politics in Nigeria. This perhaps explains the coalition of the Eastern NCNC and the Northern NPC against the Western AG to form a central government when none of the parties produced a majority after the 1959 general elections. It may therefore not be out of place to reason that the political transition from colonial rule to independent Nigeria was on the basis of ethnic permutation and combination, a factor which eventually led to the demise of the First Republic.

The Murtala Muhammed/Olusegun Obasanjo transition (1975-1979) after the colonial era, was an opportunity for the civilian class to resolve its differences democratically and to compete for public office without threatening the stability of the political system (Oyediran 1997, p. 177). This regime was the only genuine effort after the collapse of the First Republic in 1966 to implement transition programmes that would culminate in the transfer of political power from the military to a civilian government. Murtala Muhammed ousted Yakubu Gowon on the grounds that Gowon had reneged on the promise of a transition to democracy. Having seized power in July 1975, Murtala Muhammed announced a five-stage, four-year transition programme to hand over power to a democratically elected government by October 1979. But on February 13 1976, Murtala was assassinated. The scepticism surrounding his death related to the ethnic factor.

The assumption was that the officers who prosecuted the killing were natives of Plateau states, a core sector of the Middle Belt where Gowon came from. The killers harboured a grudge against those in the military elite who were instrumental in the overthrow of Gowon. Following the demise of Murtala

Mohammed, Obasanjo became the next head of state. In the process, he created 7 states in 1976 in addition to the 12 states created earlier by Gowon in 1972, which made the north/south balance tilt in favour of the north in a ratio of 10:9. Perhaps it was for this reason that Omoruyi (cited in Ayoade 1998, p. 105) argued that the 19 states system constituted the greatest threat to a meaningful dialogue among Nigerians on the basis of equality of states, where states were supposed to be taken as units of representation. The 19 state structure overturned the previous equality between the North and the South.

On 21 September 1978, the ban on party politics was lifted, and this was followed by the registration of five political parties by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). The parties were the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). In view of this, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, a socio-cultural organisation that binds the Igbo together, became involved in partisan politics. While some members of the organisation were wooed by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), others identified with the NPP and a different group aligned with the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). For instance, Alex Ekwueme identified with NPN on the basis of a realignment of political forces between the north and the east. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his group identified with the NPP on the grounds that they would utilise the opportunity to consummate the general amnesty and achieve reintegration into the Nigerian body politic on an equal basis with the other Nigerian communities (Joseph 1991, p. 99).

Jim Nwobodo and Sam Mbakwe, two staunch advocates of the NPP and former governors of Anambra and Imo states respectively, believed in the cause of realigning political forces in the country. It was their belief that through this realignment the Igbo would be fully reintegrated into the political mainstream of Nigeria. It was to this extent that the two governors wanted to link the progressive elements in Igboland with the progressive elements in Yorubaland on the one hand and with the progressive elements in the Fourth Dimension on the other, in an attempt to promote an alternative political party to the NPN after the 1979 election.

In the 1979 presidential election, statistics show that the NPN had 47.21% in the North, UPN had 5.02% and NPP had 3.20%. In the West, UPN had 85.03%, NPN had 11.32% and NPP had 2.19%. In the East, NPP had 84.73%, NPN had 11.20% and UPN had 0.69% (Okpu 1989, p. 347-383). The results indicated or reflected the potency of ethnic identity and consideration and the nature and character of voting behaviour in contemporary Nigeria. Thus, political transitions in 1979 further accentuated the tripartite ethnic configurations exemplified by the three hegemonic ethnic groups and their political party support base, upon which the independent Nigerian state was created.

During the Ibrahim Babangida transition (1985-1993), the ban on political activities was lifted in 1989, a situation whereby the political class was allowed to form political associations and to seek registration as political parties. In the process over 30 political associations were formed. The significant aspect of this was the extent to which ethnic and regional interest tended to determine or inform the nature of political alliances for most of the political associations. For instance, the People's Front of Nigeria was led by Retired General Yar'Adua, a key Northern politician and financier of the association. The People's Party was shaped by Igbo business magnate Dillibe Onyeama, and the National Union Party was organised around Fola Akinsola, a Yoruba (Egwu 1998, p. 20-24).

Egwu (1998, p. 18) argues that the salience of ethnicity in this phase of the transition programme could be expressed in two ways: first, there was a remarkable absence of class-based or ideological politics which would have had the effect of providing alternatives to ethnic mobilisation. Babangida defined ideological debates as a no-go area, and consistently waged war against radicals, extremists and all those who articulated leftist political views. Second, was the visible role played by some individuals who could hardly be separated from their ethnic origins, and their role in the construction of ethnic-based patron-client networks. In fact, amid scrambling for one political association or the other by politicians, Babangida dissolved all political associations on the grounds that old cleavages – ethnic, geopolitical, religious and class – emerged in the new political associations essentially to suppress and prevent them from promoting issue-based politics (Egwu 1998, p. 27).

Arising from this, Babangida announced two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), demarcated along the ideological lines of a 'little to the left' and a 'little to the right'. The recognition of only two political parties was said to be tied to the ethnic factor. This was to minimise the political effects of ethno-regional particularism, religious sectarianism and ideological extremism, and also to balance the ethno-religious equation in Nigeria (Sklar 1997, p. 35; Ihonvbere and Vaughan 1995, p. 77).

Meanwhile, the role played by Chief Arthur Nzeribe through his Association for Better Nigeria (ABN), preparatory to the presidential election in June 1993, was not only political but also largely ethnic. On June 10 1993, a case was brought before Justice Bassey Ikpeme at the Abuja High Court by ABN, restraining the National Electoral Commission (NEC) from holding the presidential election. Though the NEC did not take the court injunction seriously as it went ahead with plans to conduct the election on June 12 1993, the cancellation of the election by Babangida indeed generated heat and incited bitter ethnic, regional and populist sentiments. Studies show that Nzeribe decided to frustrate Abiola's ambition because he claimed that he could do without the Igbo and he (Nzeribe) wanted

to prove that Abiola would not succeed without the Igbo (Elesho and Ogunnaike 2000, p. 18).

In the same vein, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was conscripted by the Babangida administration to canvass Igbo support for the annulment of the June 12 election on the grounds that the Yorubas did not support the Igbos during the Nigerian civil war. According to Lewis (1994, p.327), 'the president's repudiation of the election was especially provocative in view of the political volatility of the Yoruba region'. It reminded the nation of the electoral fraud and political exclusion that led to the breakdown of the first and second republics. The violence prompted a mounting exodus from the major cities, as southern ethnic groups, fearing a recurrent of the communal purges which preceded the 1967 civil war, fled to their home regions.

Shortly after the announcement that election results had been suspended, some western (Yoruba) leaders issued a statement urging that the results should be released. This calls into question whether Abiola, who was the presidential candidate of SDP, was representing only Yoruba interests or was the candidate of a national political party. The Kano people, for instance, voted massively for Abiola in opposition to Tofa, their own son in the eyes of ethnic chauvinists. As Toyo (1994, p. 63) remarks, what message about voting or political behaviour or about Nigeria were the chauvinistic Yoruba leaders sending to the Kano people or to other parts of Nigeria that voted for Abiola?

Toyo (1994, p. 64) further pointed out that earlier in the transition crisis, when Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was disqualified by the National Electoral Commission from becoming a presidential candidate, he claimed that he was discriminated against because he was Igbo. It did not occur to him that Igbos other than himself were found qualified enough to be allowed to contest, or that there other non-Igbos who were also denied the opportunity of contesting. It also did not matter to him that the chairman of the NEC then was Igbo. One may also add that Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on the NPN platform lost to Dr. Edwin Onwudiwe of NPP in Ojukwu's home town, Nnewi, in the 1983 senatorial election, indicating that Onwudiwe was more acceptable than Ojukwu in Nnewi.

Amid increasing tension and agitation against the annulment of the June 12 1993 election, Babangida appointed Chief Ernest Shonekan as the head of the interim government. This man, who had neither a political base nor control of the military, was perceived as a way of appeasing the south-west. Kukah (2000, p. 108) captures the scenario thus:

General Babangida had chosen him ostensibly to pacify the Yorubas and by extension neutralize whatever residual sentiments remained

for Abiola. He hailed from Yoruba ethnic group like Abiola and both are of the same stock ... there is really no cause for worry because the Yoruba could not turn around and say that they had been denied the presidency on ethnic grounds.

Omo Omoruyi in his book, 'The Tales of June 12 – the Betrayal of the Democratic Rights of Nigerians' (cited in Irukwu 2007, p. 264-265), accused Professor Ben Nwabueze of being one of the lawyers who had encouraged Babangida to annul the June 12 election. They assured him that they would provide strong legal evidence to assist him find a reasonable and authoritative legal basis for nullifying the election. Omoruyi maintained that this legal opinion was a betrayal of the transitional project and democratic rights of Abiola and the Yoruba race, and one capable of increasing the dislike of the Igbo by the Yorubas (cited in Irukwu 2007, p. 264-265). In view of this, Irukwu reacted that the democratisation process did not derail because of any intervention by some Igbos. Instead, it failed because those in power wanted it to fail and they gave their reasons for that. He puts it succinctly thus:

Nigerians know all those responsible for the annulment of the June 12 elections and the responsibility should be placed squarely where it rightly belongs, instead of attempting to find some scapegoats amongst the Igbos thereby attributing their action to some kind of organized Igbo action resulting in the so-called Yoruba-Igbo feud. Though some Igbos may have played some negative and popularly unacceptable roles in the transition process they seem to have acted on their own probably as friends of General Babangida, but certainly not on account of any organized Igbo action designed to support the annulment of the June 12 election. This is simply because millions of Igbos voted for Abiola and supported him to the end in order to demonstrate their commitment to the democratic process'

Irukwu 2007, p. 264.

One element to be deduced from the foregoing is that Babangida's political programmes and particularly the June 12 1993 presidential election, arguably the freest and fairest in Nigeria's political history, were sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity. After this, the Sanni Abacha regime (1994-1998) also witnessed ethnic colouration. To consolidate his power, and realising that the greatest opposition to his regime would come from the western part of the country, Abacha picked his number two man or deputy from the west – Lieutenant General Oladipo Diya. Later, he appointed a cabinet that cut across ethnic groups. For instance,

he appointed Ambassador Kingibe (North) as Minister of Foreign Affairs, a prominent pro-democracy lawyer, Olu Onagoruwa (West) as Minister of Justice, and Kalu I. Kalu (East) as Finance Minister (Lewis 1994, p. 329). After a while, the first set of ministers was dropped and replaced with hardliners. It is argued that in those new appointments, ethnic sentiments were applied to dilute ideology as long as they ensured the survival and legitimacy of the government.

It is pertinent to note that it was in Abacha's regime that the idea of dividing the country into six geo-political zones was actualised. Though the issue generated much tension and pressure between the geographical south and north of the country, particularly as regards a rotational presidency and power sharing at the federal level, the Abacha administration endorsed the recommendation. As Agbu (1998, p. 252) notes, the recommendation was predicated on the fact that the annulment of Abiola's victory had sharply questioned the overwhelming domination of political power at the federal centre by military officers and civilian politicians from the geographical north of the country, including the northern minorities.

Realising that Abacha was planning to become a civilian president, many individuals and ethnic groups rallied around the administration championing the Abacha-for-Presidency campaign. Some of these groups and individuals include the Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha, (YEAA) led by Daniel Kanu, the Northern Radicals, New Dimension of Yoruba extraction led by Bamidele Olumilua – former governor of the old Ondo state, Chief Arthur Eze and Arthur Nzeribe. The Northern Radicals were of the view that Abacha's self-succession was in the interests of national survival and unity. The New Dimension, on the other hand, was out to render its unalloyed support to the Abacha government and also to ensure that the anti-Abacha forces in Yorubaland were utterly frustrated. The group put its argument thus:

The west has wanted to give leadership, but it has not had the opportunity. So, must we be a member of this Nigerian community only if we can lead them? If we cannot lead them can we not be a part of them and be a good part of them? We no longer want to play the politics of exclusion

cited in TELL 13 January 1997

By the same token, the duo of Arthur Eze and Arthur Nzeribe sponsored about 50 Igbo persons to Aso Rock in order to support Abacha's ambition. Nzeribe argued thus: 'The delegation has come to inform you that the entire Igbo race is strongly behind you in your presidential ambition' (Bakoji and Nzenwa 1997). Corroborating this, Eze remarked: 'I do not want another civil war again. Any

mistake now can lead to an unpalatable scenario like the Congo Brazzaville ... General Abacha had direction. He has already won peace for Nigeria' (Bakoji and Nzenwa 1997). As a result of this, some Ohanaeze Ndigbo chieftains, such as retired Justice Eze Ozobu and Professor Ben Nwabueze, came out to condemn the positions of Nzeribe and Eze and held that the Igbo were never in support of Abacha's presidential ambition. Nwabueze summarised the position of the Igbo thus:

We made it very clear to Abacha that we are not supporting his self-succession plan at all and so Ohanaeze was not in his good book because of the position we have taken. No doubt, some members of Ohanaeze leadership are sycophants. They are people who want to use that medium to project themselves to one political position or the other. The common Igbo man knows what Abacha is doing. If you go to the common Igbo, they do not need these people to tell them what to do. They are not even close to the grassroots and they have never spoken for the Igbo people before, rather they have been speaking for themselves

(cited in Ojukwu 2012)

The sudden and mysterious death of General Sani Abacha triggered the last political transition programmes that eventually ushered in the much anticipated Fourth Republic. At that point, General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over the reins of power on June 8, 1998. He constituted a new electoral body to be known as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This commission eventually registered three political parties – the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Peoples Party (APP) which later changed to All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). As Ojo (2004, p. 76) observed, the PDP is without doubt the new hegemonic party. The AD is little more than the old Action Group which metamorphosed into the UPN during the Second Republic. The PDP is a resurrection of the old NPC/NCNC alliance, which reincarnated as the NRC during the aborted Babangida regime. The implication of this rebirth is that instead of abolishing ethnicity in the Nigerian polity, military intervention has actually reinforced and consolidated the ethnic divide. During the political campaign that led to the 1999 presidential election, PDP brought in Obasanjo, a Yoruba, to be its presidential candidate. He defeated Alex Ekwueme in the nomination exercise while AD and APP nominated Olu Falae, meaning that the two presidential candidates were both Yoruba, an interesting political scenario. The two presidential candidates emerged from the south west as consensus

candidates of their respective political parties to placate the south westerners for the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by their kinsmen.

Obasanjo was also considered to have sold out to northerners; hence he received little or no support in the south west. In Lagos, for instance, Obasanjo only had 12 percent of the vote (Irukwu 2005, p. 157; Wright 2006, p. 676; Ojo 2004, p. 76). Some members of the Ohanaeze leadership advised the Igbo people not to vote for Obasanjo and his party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The reason for this was that Olusegun Obasanjo never liked the Igbo. But the advice was apparently turned down as at the end of the day the south-east geopolitical zone voted massively for Obasanjo and his party. In sum, Abdul Salami Abubakar's political administration was largely informed by the need to ensure ethnic compensation and the balance of power, especially at the centre.

CONCLUSION

The paper set out to examine the salience of ethnicity in political transitions in Nigeria. It argued that in states where certain ethnic groupings are powerful, even dominant, national stability has been extremely precarious, as demonstrated in the various political transitions in Nigeria. It suffices to say that on one hand, ethnicity has played a destructive role in Nigeria's political transitions as it has contributed to the derailment of institutionalising and/or consolidating democratic governance in Nigeria. On the other hand, it catalysed (positively) the agitation for the restructuring of the Nigerian political system as crystallised in the creation of the six geopolitical zones: South-East, South-West, South-South, North-East, North-West and North Central.

The study revealed that through ethnicity, political associations and alliances display extensive traits of division between ethnic groups of the authoritarian regime. These comprise those ethnic groups that are perceived to be the principal beneficiaries of the policies of the regime, and those of the opposition, as played out by the Yorubas in the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election. More than any other group, the Yoruba did not take the situation lightly as they mounted pressure on the administration to reclaim its mandate. The Yoruba ethnic group, using Kuka's expression (2000, p.119), appropriated June 12 as its own property. Following this, the Abacha administration was conspicuously opposed in every possible way.

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