ELECTION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract
The main objective of this paper is to examine Nigeria 2015 elections and its impact on democratic consolidation. Elections and electoral processes are fundamental to the workings of every democratic setting of the modern state. Elections are the major hallmark of a democratic society. The paper adopted secondary method of data collection and informal rules approach as framework of analysis. The paper argue that despite the views of both domestic and international observers that the 2015 elections in Nigeria were credible, the much expected democratic norms and value are still lacking and the requirements for democratic consolidation are yet to be in place. The paper posits that what negates democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the failure of the actors to abide by the norms of democratization. For instance, there was no control of electoral spending, as billions of Naira was rolled out into campaign adverts, luring traditional leaders and political road shows which undermined equal opportunity to candidates whose party may not have such financial muscle. The paper argued that there is still need for large scale electoral reforms. It therefore recommend among others thing that INEC should be unbundled into three such as political parties registration and control commission, electoral offences commission and the election managers, accordingly such separation and independence of office will enable the commission to set up clear standards and enforceable regulations regarding political campaign funding and punishing those who commit breach of the electoral laws. It opines that stakeholders must commit themselves to the task of conducting free and fair elections if the Nigerian fledgling democracy will be consolidated.

Keywords: Evaluation, Effectiveness, Monitoring, Nigeria, Assessment
Introduction

Democracy, today, is unarguably the most preferred form of government the world over. One of its cardinal principles is the participation of the people by making a choice on who governs them (Elaigwu, 2014). Hence, it is germane that a functioning democracy requires an informed and active public that understands how to voice its interests, act collectively, and hold government officials accountable through credible electoral process (National Democratic Institute, 2011).

This can also be achieved through democratic participation, debate, and, most importantly through voting at elections. Elections involve a set of activities leading to the selection of one or more persons out of many to serve in positions of authority in a society. Political scientists and development theorists link free, fair and credible elections to democratic governance, peace and development. In brief, they argue that free, fair and credible elections provide the basis for the emergence of democratic, accountable and legitimate governments with the capacity to initiate and implement clearly articulated development programmes.

It can be argued that credible elections are, therefore, sine qua non for democratic governance, political stability and national development. The first Nigeria’s attempt to practice parliamentary democracy was at independence in 1960 which was interrupted by a military coup in 1966 (Dudley, 1982). In 1979, Nigeria made a transition from military rule to presidential democracy. Again, the democratic government was removed via a military coup in 1983, the third democratic experiment in Nigeria began in 1989 but was aborted in 1993 following the annulment of the presidential election, which would have marked the highpoint of the transition (Joseph, 1991).

Following intense domestic and international pressures on the military government, as well as the sudden demise of the then military Head of State General Sani Abacha, the military government finally relinquished power to an elected civilian government in May 1999 (Osaghae, 1998). Since 1999, elections have become more regular in Nigeria, between 1999 and 2015; the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had conducted five consecutive general elections for the first time in the Nigeria’s political history. The period since 1999 has been marked by an extraordinary progress towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Oyovbaire, 2008). Although elections are now more regular in Nigeria, the quality of these elections is a matter of grave concern to both the actors and observers.

The dissatisfaction that reflected in the barrage of litigations brought before the election tribunals and courts as well as the number of election results that are nullified suggests the need to interrogate the significance of election within the democratic process. This is necessary especially against the backdrop of democratic rule in Africa collapsing through disputes over elections. Against this background, this paper seeks to examine the 2015 election in Nigeria and its impact on democratic consolidation. This paper comprises: Abstract; Introduction; Conceptual Discourse; Theoretical Framework; a critique of 2015 elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria; Conclusion and Recommendations.

Conceptual Framework

Concepts that are closely knit with this presentation will be clarified in this section of the study. These include Election, Democracy and Democratic Consolidation. Democratic elections are thus the opportunity for the people to express their sovereignty through the ballot to confer legitimacy to
their government, renew its mandate if necessary or withdraw from it the authority to govern which
the basis of accountability government (INEC, 2011). Obiyan & Afolabi (2013) see elections as a
set of activities leading to the selection of person(s) out of many to serve in positions of authority.
They contended that elections are viable instruments for fine-tuning the workings of democracy and
consummating representative government, and being a means of leadership turn-over. As Agbaje &
Adejumobi (2006) have noted, elections are an expression of the people’s sovereign will, helping
to confer legitimacy on political leadership. Akindele (2011), however, notes that elections are not
just what happen on Election Day, but are subsumed in a process which encompasses activities
before, during and after elections. According to him, it includes the legal and constitutional
framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the
electronic and print media in terms of access; campaign financing, the activities of the security
agencies and the government in power.
Similarly, Onyeka (2002) gave a lucid clarification and interpretation of an election as a process by
which the people of a place choose those who will represent them in government, according to
Onyeka, these takes place in order to fill public offices at various level of government be it federal,
state or local. Villalon (1998:16) rightly argued, “Elections themselves may be a strategy for
maintaining power and many African elections have been clearly intended to forestall change, or
even strengthen the status quo.” Elections as political stratagems for pursuing these agendas
produce quasi-democracies in West Africa. In liberal democratic theory, an election is a viable
mechanism for consummating representative government. Apart from facilitating leadership
succession, it promotes political accountability, citizens’ participation and gives voice and power to
the people (Agbaje & Adejumobi 2006). This brings us to the concept of democracy.

Democracy means different things to different people: a platform for power contestation and not the
least a class struggle. Nwoye (2001) notes that democracy is premised on effective representation
and participation, adding that while the specificity of democracy differs cross-culturally, there are
still basic underlying features that are common and genuine to all democratic processes which
include: free elections, majority rule, participation of political parties, unimpeachable judiciary and
parliament. Similarly, the word "democracy" according to Bangura (2013) is used to describe three
different political systems. 'According to him, this system of government has to do with the rule of
many and also a representation of the true interests of the people. These characteristics of
democracy differentiate it from other forms of government that are dictatorial and which does not
take cognizance of the wishes and desires of the people in whatever sphere be it in the choice of
who represents them in government or in overall decision making.

Scholars have used different definitions of democratic consolidation. These definitions are based on
two conceptions of democracy. One is a “minimalist conception”, emphasizing procedural or
formal democracy. The other is a “maximalist conception,” focusing on the outcomes of politics,
such as institutionalization of political institutions, social justice, and economic equality. Based on
the Schumpeterian conception of democracy (that equates democracy, with regularly held electoral
competition), Schmitter (1992) defines the minimalist conception of a consolidated democratic
regime as “the process of transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and
contingent solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of cooperation and
competition that are reliably known, regularly practiced, and voluntarily accepted by those persons
or collectives, that participate in democratic governance.
To Linz (1999), a consolidated democracy is one in which “none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces or institutions consider(s) that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and that no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers. To put it simply, democracy must be seen as “the only game in town.” In comparison with a minimalist conception of democracy, many scholars adopt “out-come-oriented conceptions” of democracy, or a maximalist conception of democratic consolidation. These scholars argue that both political and socioeconomic democracy is needed for a country’s democracy to be consolidated. This conception includes not only procedural or formal democracy but also substantive democratic elements, such as guarantees of basic civil rights, democratic accountability and responsiveness, civilian control over the military, democratic and constitutional checks on executive authority, and punishment of occupational and human rights abuses (Im, 1996).

According to Diamond (2013), democratic consolidation means the quality, depth, and authenticity of democracy in its various dimensions has been improved: “political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent.

**Theoretical Underpinning**

There are many theories of democratic consolidation. These include institutionalization and informal rules. Institutionalization: Some scholars think that the process by which a democracy becomes consolidated involves the creation and improvement of secondary institutions of the democracy. To Linz (1999), democracy is consolidated by the presence of the institutions supporting and surrounding elections but O’Donnell (1988) believes that the institutionalization of electoral rules is not the most interesting feature of democratic consolidation.

O’Donnell’s approach is to compare the formal institutional rules (for example the constitution) with the informal practices of actors (for example the rule of law). Consolidation in this view is when the actors in a system follow (have informally institutionalized) the formal rules of the democratic institution (Kalu, 2011). This study adopts the informal rules approach. This is because, the inability of Nigeria to meet the challenges of rising expectations within the polity as well as lack of accountability and active citizenship have undermined democracy in the country. The operational norm of democracy in Nigeria is less about political competition, but is more about public accountability and active citizenship, and the ability to adhere to the norms of democratic governance.

Other factors include the inability of the political leaders to create an environment of shared ownership in the practice of governance and in the generation of ideas needed to govern as well as inability of the state to meet the challenge of rising expectations within the polity. Consequently, the research posits that what negates democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the failure of the actors to abide by the norms of democratic governance. As a corollary to this reality, therefore, the study asserts that the antidote to the prevailing stalemate is strict adherence by all politically relevant strata of the Nigerian state to the universally acclaimed of democratic governance.
A critique of 2015 elections in Nigeria
The 2015 General Elections of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were the fifty elections since the country’s return to democracy in 1999. It was a two-horse race between the ruling PDP and the main opposition party, the All Progressive Congress (APC), the party formed in February 2013 from a merger of three ethnically and regionally based political parties. It was the first time the opposition have a realistic chance of wresting power from the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

As Nigeria was preparing for the 28 March 2015 election, there are already causes for concern over whether the vote will be free, fair and peaceful. For one, the language used at political rallies and events by members of all political parties remains violent and divisive. In the run-up to the election, ethnic and religious chauvinists have reportedly been stoking the fire of violence during electioneering. The northern part of the country insists that power must return to it, as sitting former President Goodluck Jonathan, who originates from Nigeria’s south–south zone, insists on a second term in office.

While the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) seems to have suffered setbacks as a result of unprecedented fractionalisation and defections, a number of leading opposition parties have capitalised on this to merge and form a ‘mega party’ through which to challenge the ruling party as mentioned early. Adding to this was the problems of national security, to such an extent that the situation provided an excuse for the military and other security agencies to ‘force’ the INEC to postpone the Presidential and National Assembly election originally scheduled for 14 February to 28 March while that of the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections were shifted from February 28 to April 11.

INEC introduced various innovations through which it sought to curb irregularity and ensure credibility in the election. Among the novel ideas introduced by INEC was eTRAC, a project that enabled signed polling unit result sheets as pasted at the polling unit to be accessible on the commission’s website. eTRAC aimed at building trust and ensuring transparency in the election process (INEC, 2015). The commission also employed ICT tools to guard against cases of multiple registration that had marred previous elections. Specifically, INEC introduced AFIS Automated Finger Print System, the device helped to identify and eliminate confirmed cases of multiple registration (Nwafor, 2015).

The introduction of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and the electronic smart card reader to check the authenticity of the card and the owner is perhaps, the best ICT innovation used in the conduct of the 2015 elections. For the first time in Nigeria, probably also in Africa, biometric technology was extensively used by the INEC in verifying the eligibility of voters at the election (Agbata Jnr, 2015). The card readers had utility in the sense that only the voter cards of actual registered voters could be used, removing the possibility of wholesale padding of voter figures and number of votes exceeding the number of registered and accredited voters as noticed as witnessed in 2011.

Also, the smart card readers were configured to work in specific areas, thereby reducing the tendency for multiple voting and rigging (Owen & Usman, 2015 quoted by Channels Television, 2015). It was equally possible for registered voters to track their status and PVC information through the INEC website. The use of these ICT devices by INEC was not without challenges.
For instance, the smart card reader malfunctioned in some places by not being able to reliably verify voter fingerprints in a reasonable amount of time (TMG, 2015). The nation was held spellbound watching President Jonathan struggling with his verification for over thirty minutes. The failure of the smart card reader in some places led to INEC reverting to manual authentication and this action seriously questioned the state of preparedness of the commission for the election (Fadoju, 2015). INEC, however, downplayed the significance of such situations, claiming only 300 of 150,000 polling stations, or 0.2 percent, were affected (Wallis, 2015). Apart from the failure of the smart card readers in some areas and lack of electricity to power the smart card readers, another controversy that surrounded the use of the biometric technology was the allegation and counter allegation by political parties that the card readers had been configured to aid the victory of a particular party (Okocha, 2015).

The failure of the smart card reader in some places led to INEC reverting to manual authentication and this action seriously questioned the state of preparedness of the commission for the election (Fadoju, 2015). This, to some extent, detracted from the success that INEC recorded in the use of ICTs platforms for the conduct of the 2015 elections. However, political analyst applauded the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for insisting on the use of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and the Smart Card Reader, designed to facilitate the authentication of voters’ eligibility and consequently reduce election malpractices. Its shortcomings, notwithstanding, the use of ICT tools by INEC significantly contributed to the integrity of the 2015 elections. Issue

Another challenge in the past was people not finding their names on the biometric register of voters on Election Day. During the election process in 2015, INEC displayed register before the commencement of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) nationwide, there were additional means being put in place by the Commission to facilitate voter enquiry about the register. The Commission provided a service in this regard by introducing the use of SMS platform. This facility was launch nationwide before the 2015 elections but was actually put into full use in 2015 elections. The deployment of the use of SMS was to enable the voter to interrogate the register. You could send an SMS to a particular number to know whether you are on the register, and in which polling unit you have registered. This is to have the register accessible on INEC website so that people can ascertain their status.

Again, the introduction of the customization of result sheets was another landmark in the 2015 elections, after the challenge of 2011 election and that of November 2013 Anambra State governorship election. INEC started customizing result sheets to specific wards and polling units. This was to avoid a situation where there will be a mix-up in the distribution of result sheets among polling units. The Automated Finger Print System technology was also used by INEC to clean up the voters’ list through the identification and removal of multiple registrations; this reduced registered voters from 73.5 million in 2011 to 67.4 million by January 2015 (Owen & Usman, 2015).

The 2015 election was a departure from the past when citizens cast their ballot but could not, at their own convenience, monitor and report election proceedings. Centre for Democracy and Development also had a website http://ngmanifesto.org/ which displayed a lot of resources in relation to the elections, including the manifestoes of all the participating political parties. The traditional media, as represented by radio, television and print media, also caught in the ICT frenzy. Different online platforms were created for news and programmes relating to the elections. For instance, Punch, Vanguard and a host of other newspapers created electronic versions that
readers could access online (Elegbede, 2015). Television stations active on YouTube such as Channels uploaded a lot of election related content for viewing, in addition to live streaming of election updates on YouTube, websites and mobile applications. These aided global information sharing and dissemination about the elections. Punch Newspapers created an election monitoring site, http://elections2015.punchng.com, dedicated primarily to posting real time election updates and reports. Google hosted a dedicated weblink, http://www.google.ng/elections/, which served as a database of election-related information (Agbata Jnr, 2015).

Online polls conducted by media houses were another highpoints of the 2015 elections. The polls were specifically for the presidential election and the most popular were conducted by Sahara Reporters, Reno Omokri (Senior Special Assistant to President Jonathan on Social Media), Africa Independent Television (AIT), Premium Times and Daily Post. Perhaps, the results of the online polls were a good way to gauge the electoral outcome and result as the candidate of the APC dominated (Ugbodaga, 2015).

The TMG which had consistently observed elections in Nigeria since the era of military rule, deployed 4000 trained and accredited citizen observers in teams of two to 1,507 representative random sampled polling units across the country for the elections (Ajanaku, 2015). The group used Quick Count, or Parallel Vote Tabulations, a methodology that “uses well established statistical principles and utilizes sophisticated information technology’ with the aim of independently verifying the accuracy of INEC’s official results (Zikirullahi, 2015).

This enabled TMG observers to send reports in real time via coded text messages using mobile phones to the National Information Centre, Abuja. The text messages provided data on the quality of the election process and the official results of polling units as announced by the poll official. TMG’s report released following INEC’s official results of the presidential elections showed that the results had significantly reflected the ballots cast at polling units, falling within TMG’s technology-driven estimated range (Zikirullahi, 2015).

Apart from the security situation in the North East part of the country, the others reason that advance the postponement was the allegations, counter-allegations on PVCs distributed, it was reported that PVCs had been distributed 80 per cent and above in some Northern states’ cities, including those of Boko Haram insurgency torn Northeast, despite huge numbers of displaced persons, while allocation and collection in Southern states’ cities, including high-density commercial nerve-centre of Lagos, ranked mostly between 35 and 50 per cent (Olaniyan & Asuelime, 2015).

While INEC officials claim to have distributed PVCs 80 per cent and above nationwide, PDP’s supporters staged protest march in Abuja and some cities to demonstrate their rejection of the use of Card Readers that was introduces by INEC for the first time for election in Nigeria. Supporters of the two parties staged million-man march, multi-million-man march and so forth. Allegations, counter-allegations, and muck, counter-muck have been used to block healthy debate of issues, policies, and strategies. Electioneering propaganda has never been this vile, especially with the entry of the social media. And so, only days were left to separate the electorate from voting, the streets were suffused with rumour that the election could again be postponed (Elegbede, 2015).
Already once the presidential election was rescheduled for Saturday March 28, perhaps, the biggest allegation was that the Jonathan administration had hatched a plot to institute an Interim or Unity Government in place of the election. Together, these developments would have reduced the level of public trust in Nigeria’s electoral process and negatively affect the level and quality of citizens’ participation in the process if not for the timely public broadcast by the INEC chairman assurance the nation and reiterated the commitment of the commission toward fair and credible election. He explained that the rescheduled was still perfectly conforms to legal provisions requiring that elections should be conducted not earlier than 150 days and not later than 30 days before the expiration of relevant tenures(Jega, 2015).

However, Elections took place in the following order: on March 28 for the presidential and National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives), and April 11 for governorships and State Houses of Assembly. Available records indicate that in spite of the initial controversies generated by the rescheduling of the elections, the polls elicited large voter turnouts across the country, specifically, the Presidential and National Assembly elections. The election was conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner with enthusiastic voters, committed to patiently attend accreditation and voting from early in the morning till the end of the exercise. The INEC Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega, who was the Chief Returning Officer for the presidential election, declared retired Maj.-Gen. Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) the winner after polling 15,424,921 votes to defeat all other candidates. In the election, President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP garnered 12,853,162 votes to place second (INEC, 2015).

After the result was announced, former President Jonathan, the new hero in Nigeria’s democracy, concede defeat, prior to the official release of the results by INEC against the predictions and skeptic believes that the elections and its outcome will break up the country, insisting that his action was purely in obedience to the laws of the country.

“I am a Nigerian and I am Goodluck Jonathan. I feel that as a nation we are all bound to respect our laws; I am quite pleased to respect the laws of the land. “As a nation, we are quite happy we are consolidating our democratic efforts; the key thing is that citizens must be ready to change government properly. “We must hold elections every four years,” Jonathan said, while fielding questions from newsmen at Otuoke, shortly after casting his vote in the state assembly polls (Thisday, April 11, 2015 p 20).

This singular action of the former president (Goodluck Jonathan) was applauded by local and international observers. It can be recalled that prior to the elections, there were predictions and skeptic who believes that the elections will be characterized by crises and violence and Nigeria will break up as a result of the outcome of the 2015 election (Adidi, 2013). This led to the formation of the National Peace Committee headed by former Head of State Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, Acknowledging that some die-hard cynics never expected the elections to be peaceful, Mr. Santiago Fisas, the EU Chief Observer stressed that the government and the people of Nigeria had proved such skeptics wrong."You know many people didn’t expect this kind of elections; they expected a lot of problems after the elections, which did not happen," he said (EU, 2015).

Sharing similar sentiments, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, former Head of State and Chairman of the National Peace Committee, commended Jonathan for his “statesmanship” in conceding defeat, and congratulated Buhari for his victory in the presidential election. Describing the election as “very
peaceful’, Abubakar thanked Nigerians and the international community for their support during the election. “The election has been very peaceful despite the hitches there.” At the end of the election, at the counting (stage), a lot of upheavals cropped up but thankfully, they were contained. “We were in the middle of a meeting with the international observers to try to see how we can water the tension down when I called Gen. Buhari to tell him that we were going to see him. “He (Buhari) told me Mr. President had called him at about 5.15 p.m., congratulated him and conceded defeat. We were spellbound.” And the reason we have come here is to thank President Jonathan for this statesmanship. “In the political history of Nigeria, I think this is the first time where a contestant has called his rival to congratulate him. “And through this point, President Jonathan has always maintained a point that the blood of a Nigerian is not worth his presidency and by his action, he has demonstrated that. “He has proved that he is a man of his words because during our interaction on this peace committee, he has always maintained that he is going to accept the result of the election whichever way it has gone;and he has proved it.” “He has proved that he is a statesman and that he has the love of this country in his heart, ‘he said (Abdulsalami, 2015).

Expressing a similar viewpoint, the U.S. Government said that the peaceful conduct of the election had demonstrated to the world the strength of Nigeria’s commitment to democratic principles. “By turning out in large numbers, and sometimes waiting all day to cast their votes, Nigerians have come together to decide the future of their country peacefully. “I commend President Goodluck Jonathan and President-elect Muhammadu Buhari for their public commitments to non-violence throughout the campaign. “President Jonathan has placed his country’s interests first by conceding defeat in the election and congratulating President-elect Buhari on his victory,’’ U.S. President Barack Obama said in his message to Nigerians. Obama particularly praised INEC and Jega for what independent international observers deemed largely peaceful and orderly elections.

Echoing similar sentiments, the European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission to Nigeria described Jonathan’s concession of defeat, prior to the announcement of the election’s result, as an extraordinary step for the democratic consolidation in Nigeria example to the world. Mr. Richard Young, the Deputy Head of Delegation of the EU observers, said that the degree of patience which Nigerian voters exhibited during voter accreditation and voting was quite exemplary. “I must congratulate the commitment and patience of all Nigerians, who have come out in very large numbers to vote, and they did it with so much patience. Young commended the efforts of INEC, security personnel and members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) who served as INEC’s ad-hoc staff, saying that everyone contributed to the success of the polls (EU, 2015).

Acknowledging the success of the election, election observation missions of the Commonwealth, the AU and ECOWAS unanimously agreed that the elections were peaceful, transparent and credible. The election observers particularly applauded Nigerian voters for their maturity, orderliness and commitment towards the success of the polls. Speaking on behalf of the election observers after a visit to President Goodluck Jonathan, former Ghanaian President and Head, ECOWAS Election Observer Mission, John Kufuor, said that Nigeria’s feat with regard to the elections was a pride to Africa. “The Nigerian elections are a pride, not only to Nigerians, but also to West Africa and the whole of the African continent; we are all proud of the success of the Nigerian elections,” he said. The ex-Ghanaian president particularly lauded Jonathan for creating an appropriate environment for peaceful polls (Ecowas, 2015).

Similarly, former Head of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, said that, the conduct of the March 28 presidential election had put the “prophets of doom”, who had predicted Nigeria’s downfall, to shame. Gowon told Newsmen in Jos that “no one will ever repeat that wild and arrogant prediction that Nigeria will go under; those doomsayers have been shamed and Nigeria will grow from
“Nigeria has always had the mechanism to tackle its concerns; this election and its peaceful outcome have proved that a united and focused nation would always survive and move toward greatness” (Yakubu, 2015:12).

Here are the Candidates, political parties and final official INEC results of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential election:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates and political parties</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Alliance (AA)</td>
<td>22,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN)</td>
<td>40,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafiu Salau (AP)</td>
<td>30,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mani Ibrahim Ahmad (ADC)</td>
<td>29,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayeni Musa Adebayo (APA)</td>
<td>53,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammadu Buhari (APC)</td>
<td>15,424,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Eke (CPP)</td>
<td>36,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambrose N. A. Owuru (HOPE)</td>
<td>7,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort O. Sonaiya (KOWA)</td>
<td>13,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Onovo (NCP)</td>
<td>24,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodluck E. Jonathan (PDP)</td>
<td>12,853,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allagoa K. Chinedu (PPN)</td>
<td>24,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godson M. O. Okoye (UDP)</td>
<td>9,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chekwas Okorie (UPP)</td>
<td>18,220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Nigeria Tribune, 13 April 2015).

Note: Accredited voters 31,756,490
Total valid votes 28,587,564
Rejected votes 844,519
Total 29,432,083

The Nigeria’s 2015 election and democratic consolidation
Democratic consolidation simply means the institutionalization of democratic norm and value of political institution of which the electoral process is a critical part of. Indeed, there is an inextricable link between elections and the enthronement of a democratic order. Elections are no doubt a "critical part of the democratic process" (Wail, 1978), and all other variables of democracy do not just "revolve around elections' (Strom & Dalton, 2004), but on the quality of the electoral process. An examination of some major democratic theories reveals the high premium attached to the quality of the electoral process for the qualification of a regime as democratic.

According to Buhari (2015), Nigeria’s 2015 election has important democratic, development and peace and security implications at national, regional and international levels. Muhammadu Buhari, presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) party in Nigeria. He explained
during a Chatham House lectures that; ‘Nigerians and the whole world are intensely focused on this year’s elections’ for a number of reasons, ‘chief of which is that the elections are holding in the shadow of huge security, economic and social uncertainties in Africa’s most populous country and largest economy’ (Buhari, 2015 :31). According to him, if the election is well administered in terms of fulfilling the most basic democratic requirements of elections which are competition, participation and legitimacy, the poll will strengthen Nigeria’s prospects for democratic rule and national development. That the success of the election largely depends on how effectively state security takes measures to minimise reoccurrences of post-election violence, as observed during 2011 (Buhari, 2015: 31).

The whole idea of democracy among many Nigerians seems to have been equated with the holding of election at regular intervals, irrespective of how these are organized and their outcome. As Schedler (1999) points out, elections have historically been an instrument of authoritarian control as well as a means of democratic governance. Most post-1990 elections in Nigeria appear to have been organized to merely give some semblance of democratic legitimacy. While elections are linked to democracy, and are in fact an important conditions for it, elections on their own do not qualify a country to be classified as a democracy. Put simply, democracy can hardly be expected to take hold where elections are reduced to a process of participation with predictable results rather than a process of competition with uncertain results.

The key challenge was that the election was held on the backdrop of the violent insurgency by Boko Haram, a militant group which is particularly affecting the north-eastern part of the country (Olaniyan & Asuelime, 2015). Given the politicisation and manipulation of the upheaval to assume an ethno-regional and religious character, as well as the unprecedented fractionalisation of some elites along these fault lines of identity, the election was seen as the referendum on the survival of the country. That Boko Haram’s activities have featured prominently in the campaign messages of the two leading political parties, the PDP and the main opposition APC, lends some credence to this rationalization.

Former Foreign Affairs Minister Professor Bolaji Akinyemi implied this in an open letter to the two leading presidential candidates, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, in which he maintained that ‘the certainty of violence after the 2015 elections is higher than it was in 2011 (Bolaji, 2014). He concerned was that if President Jonathan wins; the North would erupt into violence as it did in 2011, if Buhari wins, the Niger Delta will erupt into violence.

At that time, we did not need rocket science to have believed this prediction. The signs that this extrapolation may be proved were already visible, with threats and counter-threats emerging from both sides; most notably by ex-Niger Delta militants, particularly Asari Dokubo. Nigeria’s dominance in West Africa, in spite of a number of challenges, chief among them the global downturn in crude oil prices and rising insecurity remains largely uncompromised. With an estimated 170 million plus inhabitants, Nigeria’s population is the largest in Africa. Moreover, the recent rebasing of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) saw the country, with a GDP pegged at US$510 billion per annum, emerge as the largest economy in Africa (Okolo, 2014).

Nigeria also has a robust military capability that puts it in first position in West Africa and is comparable only to that of South Africa in Africa. Nigeria has always demonstrated its willingness
and ability to project power (show activism in the field of peace and security) regionally and internationally, and has an impressive record of participation in international peacekeeping operations at the levels of the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Again, despite its own faltering democratic credentials, the country has been a leading promoter of democratic values in Africa (Omotola, 2013). With this background, it was highly unlikely that challenges to its governance architecture and election processes will only be felt internally, thus raising the stakes of the 2015 elections. Nigeria’s large population and new status as Africa’s biggest economy present investment opportunities and the potential for exponential private sector development, in the same way that its military capability and willingness to project power can enhance prospects for peace and stability internally, and externally. However, if the election was not well managed and conflict occurs, these opportunities could have been easily jeopardised, with negative outcomes for sustainable democracy, development and security in Nigeria, and in West Africa.

In the event that the election was a source of conflict, it is highly unlikely that any country in West Africa, or ECOWAS, could have been able to adequately address the ensuing humanitarian emergencies, including the internal displacement of persons and the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries, let alone stabilise the nation and sub-region by the same logic. Democratic failure in Nigeria would have been a letdown for the continent, particularly on the part of the AU, which has devoted substantial resources for initiatives aimed at promoting democracy in Africa. Democratic challenges in Nigeria would have thus resulted in a major setback to the continental body’s efforts (Egwu, 2015).

**Conclusion and recommendations**

There is no gainsaying that electoral processes offer a safe, predictable, rule-bound method for arbitrating political and social conflicts through the selection of representatives. When elections are credibly conducted, they imbue the government with legitimacy garnered by the consent of the people, improving the capacity of the state to ensure community security through legitimate authority under the rule of law, and to improve the levels of human development through effective governance. Credible elections create legitimate governments that enjoy popular support for programmes and policies.

On the other hand, precisely because election processes are contests through which political power is retained or pursued, and social differences are highlighted by candidates and parties campaign for popular support, they can often generate vulnerabilities for the escalation of conflict into violence. This can mean “development in reverse” as incidences of violence undermine government legitimacy, scare away domestic foreign investors, and result in low levels of social trust (Hoefffler & Reynal-Querol, 2003).

The 2015 general elections have come and gone and even though the election is said to be free and peaceful, a number of implications can be identified that could strengthen our democracy. The first is, there was no control of electoral spending, as billions of Naira was rolled out into campaign adverts, luring traditional leaders and political road shows. Nigeria’s economy was bled dry, it was alleged that over 4 trillion naira was spent in the 2015 electoral process. PDP alone was said to have
disbursed unaccounted 2 trillion naira, and the opposition APC was not left out in huge political financing. The electoral law stipulates limits to campaign donations but there is simply no political will of the regulators to monitor political financing. This shows that there is still need for large scale electoral reforms. There is need to set up clear standards and enforceable regulations regarding political campaign funding. The Electoral Act by section 93 sets the limit of campaign expenses of political candidates, and maximum individual contributions to campaign funds. The Political Parties are to keep strict record of money received and their sources, and of its campaign expenses. This provision has been obeyed in the breach since 1999. INEC lacks the technical capacity to monitor political financing and it is not expected to be saddled with such responsibility in a fragile electoral situation it usually finds itself in every election semester.

For Nigeria to achieve credible electoral process, so as to allow citizen who can serve the nation but have no huge financial war chest to compete in elections, it is important to set up an independent political financing monitoring body under a proposed Electoral Offences Commission. This was the thrust of the recommendations of the former Chief Justice Uwais Commission on Electoral Reform, whose report have not been implemented by succeeding regimes, since it is widely understood that the ultimate guarantor of social peace is robust democratic institutions such as elections, in order to accelerate democratic consolidation drive in Nigeria, incumbent government must provide an unbiased political climate for all political parties and contestants. We also recommended the unbundling of INEC, clearly there is no way we can develop our electoral process until the INEC is unbundled into three: Political Parties Registration and Control Commission, Electoral Offences Commission and the Election managers. Such separation and independence of office will also serve to put electoral officers on check. At the moment, no INEC official can be effectively prosecuted because the same agency and officials are saddled with the responsibility of conducting elections and punishing those who commit breach of the electoral laws. The so-called “consensus” candidates imposed on parties during façade primary elections should be discountenanced. Zero-sum game which makes politics to assume a war-fare dimension should be de-emphasized. Adequate security mechanisms should be put in place to mitigate violence before, during and after elections. Candidates and political parties who feel aggrieved with the outcome of the election should be encouraged to seek constitutional means of redressing their disenchantment. Above all, the national government, the political parties and other election stakeholders must display unequivocal commitment towards free, fair as well as credible elections for democratic consolidation to be achieved.
References


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