

Election and Electioneering Process in Nigeria: The 2015 Presidential Election in Focus.

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Abstract: The Greece city-state of Athens in the Fifteenth Century BC, considered election and electioneering as basic components of democratic incentives where electorate were given the ultimate choice on how to elect worthy men and women into political offices. Gradually other nations, including Nigeria, came to embrace the practice in choosing who should be their leaders. On this background the paper investigated the 2015 Presidential electioneering process in Nigeria. The theory of rational choice was adopted as a guide for the study while the data were sourced through secondary method. The findings revealed the north-south dichotomy played a predominant role in the outcome of the election. The insecurity challenge and the public outcry of alleged corruption in the Jonathan-led administration heightened the public discuss which shaped the outcome of the election. Conclusion was drawn based on the various journals and articles consulted during the research. Accordingly, some recommendations were suggested, and if implemented Nigeria may experience more free, fair and peaceful elections in future.

Key Word: Election, Electioneering, Voter Apathy, Rational Choice, Presidential, Security

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria was one that attracted global attention as a result of the unprecedented victory by the opposition candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari against the incumbent President, Dr Ebele Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) played a prominent role to ensure that the electoral process enjoyed certain level of confidence among Nigerians. The decision taken by Nigerians to make their votes count was the hallmark of the election. That is to say, the election outcome was dependent on the people's ability to ensure that the change they yearned for was effected through the ballot box. To this end, the incumbent was made to surrender to the people's will considering the fragile nature of the state of affairs at the time.

Thurston (2010) opines that the background to the presidential election came as Nigeria was torn between opportunity and crisis of good governance. Moreso, since the inception of independence the political parties and party members have constituted a major challenge to the smooth conduct of election in Nigeria. Bearing in mind, the validity of votes cast and its high stakes for governance was the decisive ending Nigerians were expecting in the wake of anarchy and insecurity the political arena was tensed (Thurston 2010).

The outcome of the election as predicted was to have a serious implication on the entire Africa continent. This is in view of the fact that Nigeria is the most populated Black Country in the world hence, the result would determine the entire African security situation in an already insecure and battered continent, having estimated population figure of 180 million people as documented by the 2005 census. Notably, a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$509 billion in 2013 as such, her influence in Africa cut across conflict resolution and deployment of peacekeeping force to conflict zones. Similarly, Nigeria is also known to be a frontrunner of leadership position in regional crises. For example, her role in the curtailment of the Ebola outbreak in the continent cannot be over emphasized. Thanks to her rich oil reserve; Nigeria is regarded as the largest producer of oil in Africa. She generates as much as 2.5 million barrels per day. In addition, to other activities such as the telecommunications industry, entertainment, real estate, services sectors of the economy and manning.

In addition to her role in international community Nigeria's middle class has equally expanded for as far as 600 percent since 2000 thereby, encouraging her highly skilled citizens in the Diaspora to return home to participate in the democratic process in order to effect positive changes.

This paper intends to take a holistic view of the narrative and the factors that cumulatively made the Nigeria 2015 Presidential election a success upon which the global community lend their voice to describe it as one of the freest and fairest elections in the country. Over the years and in the course of Nigeria democratization

process the country has not had it so easy due to Military intervention in the country political system. However, all that changed in 1999 when democracy returned to the country.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study derives its data mainly from the secondary sources. These include textbooks, journals, articles as well as unpublished master theses. Some of them were sourced directly from libraries in Abuja, Nigeria, while others were obtained online, that is, via the internet. The data were then analyzed qualitatively using the tool of content analysis.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories, in the field of social science, are sets of principles which seek to explain social phenomenon. According to Charles and Shannon (2012:23), a theory is a relation between two or more factors that exist. To this end, they cited Edwards Deming, a statistician who defines theory in a logical sequence thus: "Without theory, experience has no meaning. Without theory, one has no questions to ask. Hence without theory, there is no learning".

Given the definition of theory in the realm of political science as fact with which events in the international political economy are predicted upon, it is therefore, necessary to briefly mention some of these theories before we progress in detail. These include: System theory, Modernization theory, Dependency/underdevelopment theory, Rational-decision theory, Marxist theory, etc. but the appropriate theory adopted in this work is the rational-choice theory. In the words of Roskin, et al (2010:34), the in-depth knowledge of this theory can enable people to predict the behavior of political actors in an election situation. Similarly, rational-decision theory exposes individual to general understanding of how actors in politics minimized and calculate their best payoff. It is on the bases of this theory that the 2015 general election was predicated upon. This theory also is armed at political commentaries to take an informed position on what the outcome of the election was to be, hence, sets the ground rolling for pre-determined conclusions that saw President Muhammadu Buhari emerged the winner. Finally, given the prevailing security challenge and alleged corrupt practice by the government in power, individual electorate became aware where the political pendulum was swigging to, which impacted on the outcome of the election.

IV. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Election

Election is a process of choosing a leader or a representative into an office in a democratic manner. Election is a vital aspect of global democratic process which involves different stages, either in groups, families, states and inter-state as the case may be. According to Dye (2001) election is an instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; the tool to participation in electoral process or democracy and the key to consent of government by the majority.

Electioneering

Electioneering is an entire process in which certain groups of people try to obtain votes for candidates in a democratic process. To Bruno, et al (2018) "electioneering process represents a formal procedure whereby a person is elected into a political office". Nigeria's journey to democratic dispensation has experienced both negative and positive impacts in the political process. Some of these ugly phenomena include: lack of political interest by voters as a result of massive rigging and votes apathy. However, there is a glimmer of hope in the system. There has been agitation from both local and international bodies for political and electoral reforms in the country's political parties and INEC in order to restored confidence in the system.

V. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

An Overview of Political Scenery in Nigeria

The Nigeria political landscape cuts across six geopolitical zones namely; North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East, and South South. Each zone is made up of five to seven states respectively (Orji, 2015). These zones more or less represent cultural and historical entities of the occupants dating back to the pre-colonial era. Hence, the North West contains a portion of Muslim polity affiliated to the Sokoto Caliphate. The North East comprises some part of another pre-colonial Muslim empire, the Kanem-Bornu. They are the Hausa speaking people who are at present the largest ethnic group in the North West and North East as written by some historical scholars.

The North Central is popularly known as the "Middle Belt", it constitutes one of the most diverse ethnic groups in the country. Similarly, there is the South West area, a home to the Yoruba ethnic group. They are said to be the second-largest ethnic group in Nigeria (CSIS, 2010) besides the Hausa Fulani people of northern Nigeria. More so, we have the South East inhabits the Ibo cultural society. They are regarded as the

third-largest ethnic group in Nigeria and oftentimes, refer to as the center of the defunct Biafra nation. They attempted to break away from the Nigeria nation in the late 1960's which eventually led to the country civil war. Finally, we have the South-South geopolitical zone, a home of the Niger Delta people, a non-Ibo minority ethnic group. Former President Jonathan hails from the South-South. He won the majority of votes in 2011.

According to Adibe (2015) the factors that precede the 2015 presidential election is first and foremost, the emergent of a viable opposition which coincides with a period of great tension between the northern and the southern. Arising from the decision of President Goodluck Jonathan to contest the 2011 elections, for Adibe (2015) the decision made many northerners felt aggrieve and shortchanged, consequently, inducing suspicion and violence in the country. This development pitched President Jonathan, a southern Christian against a viable opposition northern Muslim contestant.

The Build-up to the 2015 Election

Prior to the election, like many other Africa countries, Nigeria was confronted with challenges of her own (Orji, 2015). The evolution of electoral process in Nigeria has been protracted by violence since independence in 1960. So far, the country has organized nine general elections and series of other regional, state and local elections respectively. Among these elections, the 1979, 1993, and 1999 polls were conducted by military government. While the other elections organized from 2003 to date were conducted by civilian governments in order to consolidate democratic rule in the country. Though, historical antecedent of elections conducted by incumbent civilian governments in Nigeria and other Africa countries have been recorded with series of violence in the past (Agbaje and Adejumo cited by Orji, 2015). Besides, the exclusion of the 2011 and 2015 elections, these other elections have been described by many election observers that ruling political parties tried as much as possible to contrive the will of the people in their choice of candidates; thus, manipulating the entire electoral process to their advantages. These chains of events, replicated the massive victories recorded by these ruling political parties in 1964, 1983, 2003, and 2007 general elections respectively. Ibeanu (2007) posits that for example, the 1964 federal election contested by the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), and the coalition of the predominant southern political parties, and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), whose base of support was in northern Nigeria is a good illustration for this argument. Thus:

The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and its allies in the NNA took advantage of their control of the federal government to contrive a controversial victory.... The 1983 general elections were also manipulated by the incumbent National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which won the presidency and gubernatorial elections in seven out of the nineteen states in 1979, and thereafter attempted to extend its political power throughout the federation. The allegations of vote manipulation in the 1983 elections triggered violent protests in some parts of Nigeria (Ibeanu, 2007).

In a related development Lewis (2003) and Suberu (2007), argued that as a result of the negative impacts of the 2007 elections, Nigeria home and abroad was battered as such, the winner of that election, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua openly acknowledged those deficiencies are inconsistent with the electoral law. Consequently, set up Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) immediately to improve the conduct of future elections in the country by this means, restoring the confidence of local and international community in the Nigerian electoral institution again. Likewise Olowojolu and Ake (2015) declare in their journal article entitled "an Overview of 2015 General Elections in Nigeria" amid 2011 to 2015 Nigeria undergone series of both economic and insecurity challenges. Seemingly, the concern for corruption and bad governance was brought to the public purview amid the escalation of Boko Harm insurgency in the north. Furthermore, President Jonathan was spotted by many as weak leader home and abroad. In addition, to the already over heated polity, the crisis of second tenure put forward by the northern oligarchy worsen the situation that the way forward was a new President otherwise another civil war.

Similarly, emphasis was on the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission to do the needful by ensuring the election is free from all irregularities unlike the 2011 poll to ensure the legitimacy of the outcome. Accordingly, all hands were on duck to see a credible leader emerge through a credible process as opines by Aderemi (2019) "Thus the 2015 election was not only a contest for the popularity of political gladiators but also served perennial purpose, a test for the viability of the electoral commission and probity of its helmsmen". In another analysis by Ikuli, et'al (2018) the expectation of the outcome of the election has never before seen in Nigeria or in any developing economy as it were.

The 2015 election promised to brighten the emerging socio-political landscape, bearing in mind, Nigerians have over the years experienced a rising frustrations borne out of political actors. Being that successive governments have been found to be passive on issues of good governance by focusing political dividend on primordial sentiment of north-south, Christian-Muslim dichotomy. It was against this background that Adamu and Ali(2017) note apart from ethnicity and religion reasons, other issues that were to play a crucial role in the political discuss shall include, rigging of elections results, manipulation and political violence perpetrated by political Godfatherism those political actors, who have constituted themselves in political

decision of the country. However the winner of the election shall be that candidate Nigerians have confidence in due to the polarize nature of the country and the general dissatisfaction of Nigerians in the President Jonathan led administration. Hence, people wanted changes and they were ready to effect the changes through the ballot box.

Electoral Emporia

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is based on the principles of democratic rules, social justice and independence of the Nigerian people, a government of a Constitutional provision which derives all its powers and authority to govern through peaceful means. Hence, the benchmark for every free and fair election in a democratic system implies the right or the opportunity for people to decide who presides over their affairs (Durotoye, 2015). Periodic elections present people the opportunity to either accept or refuse men and women who are to govern over them. This can only be achieved through free and fair elections that prove the legitimacy of any government in power. Perhaps, the credibility and the legitimacy of such government as described above can only be achieved through the electoral body as recognized by the constitutional provision of the federal republic of Nigeria. Over the years, an attempt by INEC to conduct free and credible election has been largely unproductive. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistant (IDEA 2001:217) opines that the process of electioneering in Nigeria has been portrayed by:

Stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers, over bloating of voting registers, special treatment of voters and electoral officers, and the disappearance of/or destruction of ballot boxes as well as the distortion or doctoring of election results. And that electoral malpractice had become an entrenched practice in Nigerian political system. At worse, the ruling elite resorted to using judicial tribunals to unjustifiably uphold their elections.

Under the electoral law INEC is saddled with the responsibility of conducting national and state elections in Nigeria (Thurston, 2015). The electoral commission as stipulated by the constitution is headed by Chairperson/Chief electoral commissioner and 12 other commissioners. Resident electoral officers for each state of the federation including, the FCT. The President is saddled with the responsibility of appointing commissioners, whose selection must be ratified by the Senate. the duties and responsibilities of INEC as posits by Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group (2015) includes, the Registration of political parties; the Regulation and the auditing of political accounts for income and expenditure; Maintaining on a continuous basis of a National Register of Voters and an established rules and regulations for an election campaign and the conduct of voters and civic education, including fixing dates for elections and delimitation constituencies

The "INEC's 12 national commissioners include academics, a medical doctor, and several career public servants. The commission includes two members from each geopolitical zone. Its national Chairman was Attahiru Jega, a university professor and administrator from Kebbi State. Jega was appointed by Jonathan in 2010, who replaced Prof. Maurice Iwu (Thurston, 2015). The conduct of the 2011 general elections earned Prof. Jega an international acclamation due to the successful outcome. Nevertheless, Jega faced several controversies towards the 2015 general election, as it was alleged that his sectional interest was put above national interest. For example, Prof. Jega deliberately refusal to withdraw from his initial plan of creating new additional 30,000 polling booths in order to reduce pressures on the existing 120,000units angered some 14 INEC commissioners who accused him of northerner nepotism as against the interest of the southern when he noted most of these polling booths, were to be put in the north (NigerianTribune, 2014).

Similarly, there were issues of insufficient permanent voter's card and stolen ones in addition to the moral question of INEC inability to technically embrace the new technology advocated for and introduce the smartcard reader (Durotoye, 2014). For the first time in Nigeria's electoral history, INEC would insist on the use of electronic voter authentication system Smart Card Readers which were deployed for the 2015 general elections. The card reader uses a highly secure and cryptographic technology device. The introduction of the smart card reader was to rid Nigeria off of the electoral fraud which the country is known for. Thus, Jayum and Osinakachukwu (2011) highlight some of these electoral challenges which have hunted the umpire over the years to include:

1. Illegal printing of voters' cards;
2. Illegal possession of ballot boxes;
3. Stuffing of ballot boxes;
4. Falsification of election results;
5. Illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers;
6. under age voting
7. Compilation of fictitious names on voters' lists;
8. Illegal compilation of separate voters' lists;
9. Illegal printing of forms used for collection and declaration of election results;
10. Deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas;

11. Announcing results in places where no elections were held;
12. Unauthorized announcement of election results;
13. Harassment of candidates, agents, and voters;
14. Change of list of electoral officials;
15. Box-switching and inflation of figures.

However, to avoid the above mentioned factors, INEC advocated the use of the smart card reader to minimize the fraudulent incidents that had characterized our elections over the year.

Voters Apathy

For Fagunwa (2015) investigation over the year has shown a continuous decline in political participation in the Third World nations by voters. To many this study is not surprising which has been credited to historical development of electioneering process in these countries especially in Africa due to the wonton level of “electoral irregularities varying from violence, gender discrimination, malpractices, strenuous voting process and non-fulfillment of electoral promises by politicians.” According to Powell (1986) and Wattenburg (2002) low voter turnout diminishes the legality of democratic process in that it denies the bulk of the masses the opportunity to fulfill their electoral obligation largely, due to the disconnection between the masses and the government polices thus, bringing to question the democratic rights and acceptability of the government in power. Thus, decline in voter turnout is nothing but the reflection of the failing legitimacy of democracy especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The rate of voter turnout in elections, whether high or low will forever be a fundamental component of representative democracy.

Ovwasa (2013) adds that “the evidence of liberal democratic perspective portrays democracy as a method of government which allows citizens of a state the freedom to choose their representatives through elections at regular intervals”. Iyayi (2004) on his part, opines that concept of voting and the procedure associated with it often times, lie at the heart of a system of representative democracy. The other elements in the process are the guarantee of civil and political liberties through the existence of an institutional framework on whose function is the maintenance of the aforementioned elements the rule of law. On the contrary, this is not the cause in Nigeria; voter apathy coincide with the culture of politics in which the context or the benchmark indicate the major implications for the economic and social well being of the people. Fayemi, Jaye and Yeebo (2003) and Ake (2001: 1-6) have argued that the failure of development and the passive actions of government in Africa to formulate development policies overtimes, disconnect the electorates from participating in political process thus, its direct implications on the people economic conditions. Perhaps, mark the political culture with violence which makes development impossible.

Having explained the scenario associated with Third World nations, the 2015 Presidential election ushered in a new hope and a new dimension in the political process in which voters realize they can determine who governs their affairs (Bruno, et’al, 2018). Suffice it to say that the 2015 Presidential election, as it were, was a game changer in the political landscape of Nigeria. As it was a time when expectations and apprehension for changes in government institutions were high, a time when an average Nigeria will make an impact that will forever make history in African politics. Bearing in mind, that previous elections and Politicians have betrayed their confidence in the electoral process. It is against this backdrop that the 2015 Presidential election was decided by the people’s votes. Despite this, Mason, Nelson and Sakariyau (2009) are of the opinion that the political ignorance which the country has long experienced likewise signifies itself in the form of political apathy, which evidently manifests in “the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs and the emotional detachment from civic obligations and abstention from political activity”.

Similarly, Adamu and Abubakar (2015) in their submission posit that the 2015 presidential election voting pattern in Bauchi State was not based on the competence of the contestants’ non-party affiliation rather on ethnicity and kinship which is the general norm in the northern Nigeria bloc. Though, this is not to say that the voting pattern was similar in other parts of the country, which apparently reflect the attitude of the Nigeria voters in the electoral process. For instance, Temitope (2015) argues that Lagos state, which is the second largest populated state in the country, recorded the lowest voters’ turnout in the 2015 general elections, with 29% voter turnout, compared to Rivers state which recorded the highest voter turnout with 71%. With a total number of 5,827,846 registered potential voters, as against the 1,495,975 people actually voted in Lagos. Notwithstanding, the 2015 Presidential election according to popular opinion was one election that Nigerians took their destinies in their hands risking it all to ensure their votes prevail.

Security Challenge

According to Commonwealth Observer Group (2015), between 2011 and 2015 Nigeria underwent series of insecurity challenges. For example, the Boko Haram insurgency which has been in operation since 2009 launched its worse operation in the fall of January, 2014 and by July same year, the situation had deteriorated which prompted the Human Rights Watch to release a report stating that over 100 attacks, had

claimed 2,053 civilian lives in the first half of the year. It was said that, Borno state, bore the brunt of the violence, with over 1,446 deaths recorded. Similarly, some parts of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja were affected by the terror attacks.

In addition to this situation, the abduction of the 200 Chibok school girls did not help matter. It attracted local and international condemnations, which led to the conference of the International Summit on security situation in Nigeria hosted by President Francois Hollande of France. As a result, major world leaders declared their support for Nigeria to combat terrorism.

Consequently, at the regional level, countries such as Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin republic agreed to war against terrorism, and similarly shared intelligence on security matters. While at the international level, France, US and Britain affirmed their supports in the fight against terrorism and agreed to provide technical assistance on security issues. The “#BringBackOurGirls” global campaign, which was launched to secure the release of the school girls, received overwhelming local, regional and international supports (Abdulraham A and Danladi, 2016). The insurgency in the North automatically influences economic and political decision which resulted in “high rate of unemployment, widespread corruption, fragmentation within the major parties and the misconduct of frontline politicians through hate campaigns which put the most populous black nation on the spot light both locally and internationally” (Temitope, 2015).

So there was a serious apprehension over the conduct and possible outcome of the elections locally and internationally. Thus, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi appealed to the two major contestants of the presidential election to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would commit them to control their supporters against violence during and after the 2015 general elections (Punch, 5, 2015). Similarly, the National Peace Committee for the 2015 General Elections led by former military ruler, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd) which facilitated the peace agreement between General Buhari (rtd) and President Jonathan (Daily Independent, March 26, 2014). Even at that, there was a concern that Nigeria could burst into flames, as observe by America’s Secretary of State, John Kerry who was in Nigeria prior to the election (New York Times, January 25, 2015). All these helped in the outcome of the election

VI. CONCLUSION

The 2015 Presidential election has come and gone however, the outcome of the election is not one that Nigerians will forget in a hurry. The timing of the election coincided with a most challenging period in the political annals of Nigeria. It was a period when security was exposed to terror activities, mismanagement of economic resources to cap it all blatant corruption that has battered the country’s image home and abroad. The religious dichotomy played a role that cannot be overlooked. Thus, Nigerians from all walks of life were determined to see their votes counted which showed that voter apathy can be overcome in Nigeria electoral process toward the consolidation of Nigeria democratic process. The Result was that the then opposition party, the All Progressive Congress (APC)’s candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) won the incumbent President Jonathan Goodluck Ebele despite the state resources available to the power of incumbent in an election which was observed to be one of the most credible elections in the history of the country.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The continuous reform of Electoral Act through legislative process should be encouraged to reduce the amount of irregularities associated with elections in Nigeria.
2. Definite punitive measures should be adopted to deal with erring members of INEC or any individual found to be involved in the violation of electoral process in the country
3. The 2015 election revealed that vote counted therefore, Nigerians can decide to vote stay back around the pooling booth until their votes are counted and result announced to the hearing of all.
4. The choice of leaders via election should be based on merit rather than ethnic or religious affiliation in order to promote unity and ensure good governance.
5. Candidates and political parties should learn to accept defeat when necessary as President Goodluck did to forestall post election conflict that can claim the lives of innocent citizens

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