

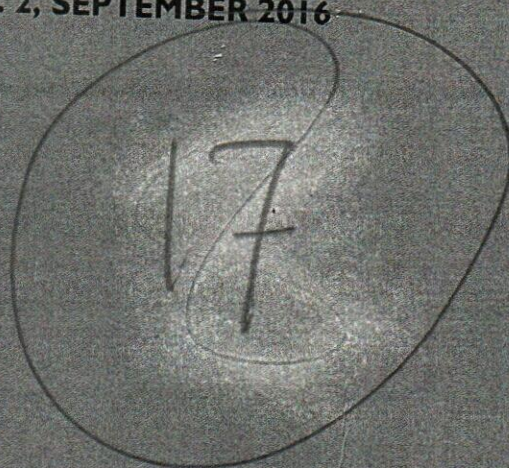


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"KUDOS OR KNOCKS": ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF INEC IN THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

ADEBIYI, OLUWASHINA MORUF

Abstract

This paper examined the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the 2015 general elections, with particular emphasis on the distribution of Permanent Voters Card (PVCs). Considering the significance of voter turnout to democracy, the major objective of this paper is to assess the effects of the distribution of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) on voter turnout and apathy vis-à-vis democratic consolidation. Through personal experience garnered from participant observation of the electioneering process and a qualitative assessment of extant and relevant secondary data, this paper submits that while the overall performance of INEC was commendable, the country's electoral body need to do more in terms of distribution of PVCs in order not to disenfranchise eligible voters and to conduct all-inclusive elections. This paper, however, concludes by proffering some recommendations on how to improve on future elections.

Key Words: Election, Election Management Body, Voter Turnout, Voter Apathy, INEC, PVC, Democratic Consolidation

Introduction

The Nigerian experience as regards the conduct of democratic elections has not been palatable. Elections conducted during the First and Second Republics were accomplished by massive fraud and violence. Some of the elections conducted in the present Fourth Republic also share some of these features. Iyayi (2004) posit that elections in these periods were characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation of political opponents and controversy, increasing materialization of politics, electoral brigandage, thuggery, violence and warfare. He is of the opinion that elections and electoral process in Nigeria have failed to establish a platform for the establishment of democracy. He summed this up in the following words:

The incontrovertible and overall conclusion that can be drawn from the history of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria is that they have failed to promote the emergence of a democratic culture even within the limited application that it has within a bourgeoisie social order. Indeed, each set of elections seems to deepen the culture of violence, authoritarianism, abuse of human rights, corruption and crass materialism in Nigeria. Each succeeding election seems to perfect in an even more perverse sense, the abuses that characterized the earlier elections. Thus with each successive election, the ruling elites are not only more and more isolated from the people, they also come to relate with them increasingly through violence, contempt, repression and authoritarianism (Iyayi, 2004).

The crisis of representative democracy, according to Iyayi (2004) can be exemplified in the failure of the Nigerian electoral system.

The 2015 general elections, however, have been described as depicting a major turning point in Nigeria's political history. The elections attracted audience from most part of the world. Observers both local and international described the election as a success. It is, however, important to note that one of the high points of the 2015 general elections was the controversy that surrounded the distribution of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) by the country's electoral body. Before the elections, the country's electoral umpire made it known to the electorate that the use of Temporary Voters Card (TVC) will not be allowed during the general elections which amount in essence to the fact that people without the PVC will be automatically disqualified from voting. The rigour and the challenges encountered by intending voters to get access to their PVCs generated a lot of controversies not only among the electorate but also among political stakeholders across the country. Up to the election period, many people were unable to get access to their PVCs.

It is on this basis that this paper examines the effects of the Permanent Voters Card on voter turnout and voter apathy during the 2015 general elections vis-à-vis democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This paper is structured into five segments. The first part gives a general introduction. The second part contains the historical evolution of INEC. The third part gives a critical examination of the nexus between EMBs and democratic consolidation and an overview of the 2015 general elections. The fourth part examines the effects of the Permanent Voters Card on political apathy and voter turnout during the 2015 general elections. The fifth part concludes and gives policy recommendations.

Electoral Management Bodies and Democratic Consolidation: The Nexus

Scholars over the years have strived to establish a relationship between administration of elections and the emergence and consolidation of democracy (Elkit and Reynolds, 2000, Lopez-Pintor, 2000, Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002). Elkit and Renolds (2000:5) argued that "elections are complicated processes, most, especially when it comes to administration. Because it is not certain that elections will run smoothly, they argued that the quality of election administration be included among the factors that must be studied and analyzed carefully before any serious explanation of the level of sense of individual efficiency or its relation to the level of legitimacy in a post authoritarian or emerging democratic system can be ventured.

The significance of credible, free and fair elections to democratic consolidation cannot be overemphasized. According to (Animashaun, 2010:3), elections represents the lifeblood of modern democracy and the frequency, fairness and openness of elections are crucial to the political stability of the polity. The extent to which election advances democratic order depends largely on the existing electoral system, its nature and its acceptance by the stakeholders in the electoral process (Animashaun, 2010:3). In the words of Omotola (2009:8), the perceived centrality of elections to the democratization process of any country has been predicated upon a number of reasons, which revolve around the multiple roles credible elections can play to reinforce democracy.

Elections help to institutionalize the process of democratic succession. They do this by creating a legal-administrative framework for handling inter-elite rivalries and providing a modicum for popular backing for the new leaders (Hughes and May in Omotola, 2009:8). Also, elections help in institutionalizing the process of democratic competition and participation. Under an ideal situation, elections afford all eligible adults the right to vote and be voted for. By so doing, elections allow the people to participate in choosing representatives and by extension, in the forming of the government in a competitive fashion (Omotola, 2009:8). That elections will aid the consolidation of democracy in a polity is a function of how efficient the electoral body is in conducting democratic, free and fair elections. It has been argued that EMBs as one species of Independent Administrative Agencies (IAAs) are usually not at the forefront of the discussion on democracy, but has become crucial as an institution when talking about democracy in the sense of free and fair elections (Aaken, 2009:298). She further argued that even though most states conduct elections, the fairness of the election and the free expression of the voters' will are by no means guaranteed. According to her, elections can be unfair, either because they are intentionally rigged, because campaign conditions disproportionately favour the incumbent, or because administrative inefficiencies exist (Aaken, 2009:298).

In addition to these, she opined that since EMBs control the moment of the set-up of government i.e. the election which is a crucial moment as the de facto accountability of governments depends on it, unfair elections or unfair electoral set-ups destroy the roots of accountability (which is one of the major aims of holding elections) and that if the re-election constraint on politicians is the most powerful mechanism for re-alignment of the citizens-principal with the politicians-agents interests, then the moment of re-election is also the most sensitive moment as potential conflicts of interest of the agent is at its peak. On the one hand, she has to stand for re-election in order to achieve legitimacy by holding free and fair elections, on the other, hand there is a strong incentive to rig elections in order to stay in power. She, however, sees one solution for mitigating the problems in the EMB (Aaken, 2009:298).

The nexus between elections and democracy can be located among various electoral variables, particularly that one that has to do with the efficacy of Election Management Boards. Kerevel (2009:2) posit that several studies (Pastor, 1999, Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002, Hartly, McCoy and Mostillo, 2008) see election administration as a major variable in understanding democratic transitions and consolidation. When EMBs conduct elections that are credible, the confidence of the citizens in the electoral process is bolstered. However, the conduct of free, fair elections by the electoral body largely depends on the existence of some variables, some of which include independence from government influence and impartiality of the electoral body itself. According to López-Pintor (2000:65), one of the most important ways in which elections can be regarded as legitimate is through the development of credible election administration institutions. EMBs that are independent from interference by other government institutions and political interests, impartial in their decision-making and professional in their make-up are considered a crucial component for conducting free and fair elections in newly democratic states (Wall et al. 2006:12). On the contrary, EMBs with excessive partisan influence or exclusive commissions that limit political input in the administration of elections may lead to a perceived lack of professionalism and impartiality that lead citizens to question the fairness of the election process (Kerevel, 2009:3).

He further argued that citizens may also question the validity of election results due to a perceived lack of professionalism in the conduct of elections or as a result of perceived bias in electoral administration. He, therefore, concluded that individuals who have little confidence in the EMB may have reduced confidence in the accuracy of how ballots are counted. Such lack of confidence in election results may have additional consequences, such as reduced electoral participation, or an increased propensity to engage in protest activity (Kerevel, 2009:3). These impede the democratization process. For elections to foster democratic consolidation, the expertise and technical know-how necessary for electoral management on the entire matters of the electoral process requires an impartial and autonomous Electoral Management Body. The place of EMB in democracy cannot be underestimated. The growing importance of EMBs to democratization must have accounted for the growing attention given to electoral administration in electoral and democratization studies. Such focus has specifically been directed towards Election Management Boards (Lopez-Pinto, 2000). Omotola (2009:20) emphasized that based on their administration, elections can either be a positive or negative reinforcement of democracy, depending on the quality of the elections. He stressed that quality of elections depends on three important variables, namely: participation, competition and legitimacy. These indicators according to him can only be guaranteed provided the EMBs satisfy some important conditions that strengthen effective electoral administration.

In addition, he considered these conditions to include the autonomy of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), measured basically in terms of their structure, autonomy, motivation, transparency and general capacity. These conditions are important in order for the EMBs to effectively discharge their duties. Other relevant structural agencies like political parties, mass media, civil service, the security agencies, civil society groups (CSOs), also need to effectively play their roles, including the provision of logistic support, which is vital to the operation of the electoral body (Omotola, 2009:20). In a comprehensive piece on EMBs, Wall et al. (2006:7) classified EMBs into three. These include: the independent model, governmental model and the mixed model.

The Independent Model of electoral management is used in countries where elections are organized and managed by an EMB that is institutionally independent and autonomous from the executive branch of government; its members are outside the executive. Under the Independent Model, the EMB has and manages its own budget, and is not accountable to a government ministry or department. It may be accountable to the legislature, the judiciary or the head of state. EMBs under this model may enjoy varying degrees of financial autonomy and accountability, as well as varying levels of performance accountability (Wall et al. 2006:7). In countries with the Governmental Model of electoral management, elections are organized and managed by the executive branch through a ministry (such as the Ministry of the Interior) and/or through local authorities. Where EMBs under this model exist at the national level, they are led by a minister or civil servant and are answerable to a cabinet minister. With very few exceptions, they have no 'members'. Their budget falls within a government ministry and/or under local

authorities (Wall et al. 2006:7). The Mixed Model of electoral management usually involves two component EMBs and a dual structure: a policy, monitoring or supervisory EMB that is independent of the executive branch (like an EMB under the Independent Model) and an implementation EMB located within a department of state and/or local government (like an EMB under the Governmental Model). Under the Mixed Model, elections are organized by the component governmental EMB, with some level of oversight provided by the component independent EMB (Wall et al. 2006:8).

To achieve the conduct of free, fair, democratic and impartial elections which will secure the confidence of the electorate, the independent model is recommended. International IDEA (2012:5) suggests that Independent Model of electoral management may be the most suitable for most transitional contexts. While EMBs based on other models (Governmental and Mixed) may find it more difficult to build a public perception of themselves as the impartial arbiters of electoral contests. It, however, warned that the independent model itself is not a guarantee of actual independence but that the guarantee of independence in principle. The actual independence should be demonstrated in action (International IDEA 2012:5). This is a pointer to the fact that the functioning of EMBs should not be subject to the control of any other person, authority or political party. It must function without political favouritism or bias. The EMB must be able to operate free of interference, simply because any allegation of manipulation, perception of bias or alleged interference will have a direct impact not only on the credibility of the body in charge but on the entire election process (Lopez-Pintor, 2000:42).

For an EMB to achieve this, it must operate independently both in principle and in practice. One of the ways to ensure this is through the composition and structure of the electoral body. The composition and structure of electoral bodies have great effect on the elections it conducts. Therefore, for an EMB to be independent and free from control, its members or commissioners must not include government officials or members of political parties. Its commissioners should be chosen on the basis of their skills and expertise, by way of an open and transparent nomination and selection procedure. A fixed period of tenure for commissioners is advisable. To be fully independent, an EMB needs to have and maintain appropriate, secure and transparent sources of funding and should develop its own budget. External auditing of EMB funds and accounts can verify an EMB's continuing independence. Equal distance must be maintained from political parties, the government and the security forces. Transparency in all actions is, of course, imperative. It is also important that the electoral commission be granted full power under the law to execute its duties without interference (International IDEA 2012:5).

INEC and the 2015 General Elections: An overview

The 2015 general elections which was the fourth in the series of elections in the Fourth Republic was unique in that it was the first democratic election held that will unseat an incumbent president. The elections were conducted under the auspices of Professor Attahiru Jega who also conducted the 2011 general elections. One of the key points in the preparation for the elections was the distribution of permanent voters' card (PVC) and continuous voters Registration (CVR). Another important area of preparation was the use of card Reader which was used to authenticate the validity of PVC and to make sure that a prospective voter is originally registered and has his or her name in the INEC voters' database. In preparation for the general elections, the electoral body had to contend with security challenges. The elections took place in a period when the country was waging war against general insecurity majorly occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency. All the aforementioned issues posed serious challenges to the conduct of the 2015 general elections.

In surmounting these challenges, the Independent National Electoral Commission declared that as at 27th of February, 2015, it has distributed 54,377,747 (Fifty-four Million, Three Hundred and Seventy-Seven Thousand, Seven Hundred and Forty-Seven) PVCs to persons registered for the general elections. This represented 78.93 percent of the total number of voters registered by INEC (Hassan, 2015). The figure indicated three percent increase from the last collection rate which was recorded two weeks earlier. Also, in order to ensure the effective usage of the electronic card reader, the electoral body carried-out a test-run of the card readers in 225 polling units and 358 voting centres across 12 states drawn from the 6

geo-political zones on Saturday, 7th March, 2015 (CLEEN, 2015:2). The test was, however, declared as a success even though hitches were recorded (CLEEN, 2015:2). To allay the fears of violence, INEC ensured an enhanced stakeholder participation that guaranteed an enduring platform for inter-party collaboration and which contributed to the signing of a peace pact among leading political parties in the run-up to the 2015 polls (Omotola and Nyuykonge, 2015:5). Also, in order to ensure that capable hands are employed as ad-hoc staff to take charge of the general elections, INEC employed about 750,000 ad hoc staff (Idowu, 2015).

The voting process

The 2015 general elections were initially scheduled for the 14th and 28th February, 2015 for the Presidential and National Assembly elections and the Gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections respectively. But coupled with the challenge of insecurity and renewed offensive against Boko Haram (CLEEN, 2015:2) as well as fresh allegation of non-collection of PVCs, the Independent National Electoral Commission rescheduled the polls for 28th March 2015 and 11th April 2015 for the presidential and National Assembly elections and the Gubernatorial and State Assembly elections respectively. The Presidential elections were contested by 14 political parties among these were two major parties, the Peoples Democratic Party and the All Progressive Congress (APC). The Peoples Democratic Party nominated the then incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan to fly the party's flag in the presidential elections. He had the then incumbent Vice President Namadi Sambo as his running mate. On the other hand, the All Progressive Congress, had the former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari as its candidate and Yemi Osibanjo, a lawyer and Professor who severed as Lagos State Attorney General and Commissioner for justice from 1999-2007 (Thurston, 2015:7). Presidential, National Assembly and State House of Assembly elections were held in all the 36 states, while gubernatorial elections were held in 29 states.

Like that of the 2011 general elections, accreditation started by 8am and ended by 1pm or until the last person on the queue before 1p.m is accredited. The voting process commenced by 1p.m or whenever the process of accreditation ends. The presiding officer of each polling unit after arranging the unit in the approved lay out started the voting process by announcing to prospective voters that voting proper was about to begin. In order to be accredited, an intending voter was expected to go to the polling unit where he or she registered with his or her permanent voters' card. The voter, however, presents the card to the polling officials for verification. The presiding officer tests the PVC, using the card reader to authenticate its originality. Once the voter's information appeared on the screen, the voter will be duly accredited but if it does not, this signifies that the card is not from INEC; it may have either been cloned or it belongs to another person. The prospective voter will consequently be disqualified from voting.

Although it was reported that several polling units across the country opened later than scheduled (www.premiumtimesng.com), the voting process was generally peaceful except for some isolated cases of violent incidents. The delay, however, in opening of some polling units across the country was attributed largely to logistics challenges occasioned by the late arrival of election officials and materials (www.premiumtimesng.com). The polling environment was relatively peaceful. Members of the Nigerian Police and other security agencies as well as paramilitary officers were present in each polling unit. The general view of the security presence at polling units was positive. Notwithstanding, there were cases of intimidation and harassment of voters by overzealous security agents and party thugs and supporters (www.premiumtimesng.com).

The general conduct of voters at polling units was satisfactory. Voters turned out en masse and even got to the polling units as early as 7 a.m., before the arrival of election officials and materials. This showed the enthusiasm to exercise their civic rights. This turn out has been attributed to the success of the civic education and determination of people to exercise their franchise. Voters were well behaved even in the situation of challenges encountered during accreditation and voting. In many polling units in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara state, voters remained calm when accreditation and voting did not start as scheduled due to logistics challenges.

Results

A total number of 31, 746, 490 Million registered voters were accredited out of the 67,422,005 registered voters in Nigeria (CPDA, 2015:1). As earlier mentioned, 14 political parties contested the elections. INEC released the results as shown in Table 1

Table 1: 2015 Presidential Elections Result

Party	Votes received	% of votes received
APC	15,424,921	53.96
PDP	12,853,162	44.96
APA	53,537	0.19
ACPN	40,311	0.14
CPP	36,300	0.13
AD	30,673	0.11
ADC	29,666	0.10
PPN	24,475	0.09
NCP	24,455	0.09
AA	22,125	0.08
UPP	18,220	0.06
KOWA	13,076	0.05
UDP	9,208	0.03
HOPE	7,435	0.03

Source: www.inecnigeria.org

According to CCPA (2015:1), the 2015 presidential elections and the result were in many ways different from other elections, most especially the 2011 edition. It noted among others that the incumbent lost by a relatively wide margin of the total votes cast to the opposition, about 20% (2,574,781). Also, the opposition won more states (21) and had at least 25% of votes on more states. Furthermore, the PDP lost approximately 43% of the votes it controlled (22,495,187 in 2011 to 12,853,162 in 2015). In contrast the APC gained approximately 26% more votes between 2011 and 2015 (12,214,853 to 15,424,921). In addition, the PDP won 31 states in 2011, but could only win 16 states in 2015. The PDP did not only lose 15 of the 31 states, it also lost same percentage of votes in the states it retained (CCPA: 2015:1). However, Mohammedu Buhari of APC having satisfied the requirement of the law, and scored the highest number of votes was declared the winner and returned elected.

In the National Assembly elections, the PDP won 48 Senatorial seats while APC won 61 seats. Out of the 352 House of Assembly seats, the PDP won 126 while the APC won 226. In the gubernatorial elections, the PDP won 8 out of the 29 states where elections were held. The APC, however, won 21 states. It was observed that since the return to democracy in 1999, the PDP has held power making it 16 years at the helms of affairs. The party has also been dominant in the legislative arm, winning outright majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representative and producing the legislature's principal officers since the return to democratic rule. The 2015 general elections, however, turned around the fortunes of the party by losing power in the executive arm and losing control of the two legislative houses (Egbulefu, 2015).

Reaction

Prior to the announcement of the presidential election results, there were insinuations from all quarters that there will be a likely occurrence of post-election violence. People stayed back at home and preferred to watch and listen to the proceedings on air. A Kaduna resident expressed his fears when he said "everybody is afraid of the announcement of result. That's why everybody hid at home, but we pray so nothing will happen, that, God willing there will be no violence" (Clotey, 2015). However, unlike in 2011 when violent reactions followed the announcement of the presidential election results, there was

wild jubilation across Nigeria when the APC presidential flag bearer, Mohammedu Buhari, was declared winner.

Assessment

In preparation for the 2015 general elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission said that it "accredited 107 observer groups to monitor the elections". Notable among these were the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM), and the National Democratic Institute. These were led by Mr. Santiago Fisas and Mr. Johnnie Carson respectively. Election Observer Missions were also sent from the African Union and headed by Amos Sawyer, Commonwealth of Nations and Economic Community of West African States led by Bakili Muluzi and John Kuffour respectively. The various election observer missions observed the elections and unanimously described the elections as peaceful and credible (Adamu, 2015). In giving the general impression of its Election Observer Mission, the head of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Dr. Bakili Muluzi, commented that "the 28th March 2015 elections marked an important step forward for democracy in Africa's most populous country and a key member of the Commonwealth". He said "despite the technical deficiencies, the conduct of the Presidential and National Assembly elections were generally peaceful and transparent" (Muluzi, 2015). He further emphasized that though there were technical hitches, he was optimistic that there is room for improvement. He, however, gave credence to the peaceful conduct of the polls and to all the people of Nigeria for demonstrating patience and maturity (Muluzi, 2015).

In his commendation, the head of the ECOWAS Election Observer Mission and former Ghanaian President, John Kuffuor said "the Nigerian elections are a pride, not only to Nigerians, but also to West Africa and the whole of the African continent". He particularly praised Goodluck Jonathan for creating an appropriate environment for peaceful polls (Adamu, 2015). The UN Secretary General, Ban Kimoon, in his appreciation of the peaceful and credible conduct of the polls congratulated the entire citizenry and the government for conducting a peaceful and orderly election. In addition, the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM) commended the Nigerian people, the political parties and other stakeholders for the successful conduct of the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections (Udoh, 2015). The Head of the mission, Mr. Santiago Fisas, commended all the stakeholders involved in the elections. He was quoted as follows:

The EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) commends the Nigeria people, political parties and candidates, INEC, and all stakeholders for the continued commitment to the electoral process. Overall the 11 April election process appeared to be more efficient, with staff working diligently and improvements evident in the timeline opening of polling sites (Fisas, in Udo, 2015).

The United States government in a press statement released through the Secretary of State, John Kerry, congratulated Nigerians and the Nigerian government on the historic and largely peaceful elections. It applauded all voters who showed patience and demonstrated commitment to participate in the democratic process. It commended Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission and its Chairman, Attahiru Jega, on the generally orderly vote, on the use of technology such as card readers to increase the credibility and transparency of the electoral process and on prompt communication of the results. The statement noted that while there were reports of logistical problems, such incidents did not undermine the overall outcome of the election (Kerry, 2015). The government of the United States lauded both the former President Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammedu Buhari for their public commitments to the Abuja Accord signed in January and reaffirmed on March 26, respecting the official results and encouraging their supporters to do same (Kerry, 2015).

Also, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd.), former Head of State and Chairman of the National Peace Committee described the elections as peaceful. He lauded former president Jonathan for his statesmanship in conceding defeat and in congratulating Mohammedu Buhari on his victory in the presidential election (Adamu, 2015). It is important to note that the 2015 general elections drew the

attention of the international community than ever before. Only a few were optimistic that the anticipated occurrence of violence will not tear the nation apart. This cannot but be unconnected with the fact that the build up to the elections was characterized by hostile relationship between the two major political parties, hate campaigns, ethno-religious conflict, unending communal clashes in several Northern states and parts of the North Central and above all, the unpleasant and radical Boko Haram insurgency. However, the international community may have been taken by a big surprise when the country concluded the conduct of the general elections peacefully with minimal incidence of violence.

Assessing the Performance of INEC: The Distribution of Permanent Voters' Cards

The Electoral Act 2010 sections 16 and 49(1) (as amended) requires that INEC issues voter's cards (PVC) to voters which they have to present to the presiding officer at the polling unit on election day. As a result of this, INEC endeavoured to produce PVCs for all voters on the Register (Jega, 2015). INEC commenced the distribution of PVC and the continuous registration exercise in three phases as follows:

- Phase 1: Friday 23rd May – Sunday 25th May, 2014.
- Phase 2: Friday 18th July – Sunday 20th, July 2014
- Phase 3: Friday 22nd August – Sunday 24th, August 2014

Phase one states included: Taraba, Gombe, Zamfara, Kebbi, Benue, Kogi, Abia, Enugu, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa. Phase two states were: Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Sokoto, FCT, Kwara, Anambra, Ebonyi, Ondo, Oyo, Delta and Cross River. Phase three states were: Adamawa, Borno, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, Nassarawa, Niger, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Edo and Rivers state. The collection centre was the designated continuous voter registration Area (Ward) of Every Local Government Area (www.inecnigeria.org). The PVCs contains voters' biometric information in an embedded microchip and replaces the temporary voter's card that was used in the 2011 general elections (Hedlund, 2015). However, as at 7th of January 2015, the statistics on the distribution of PVCs shows the total number of the PVC received to be 54,341,610, while the total number of PVC distribution was 38,774,391. This implied that the percentage of PVC distribution was 71.35%. A total of 15,567,219 PVC were yet to be distributed as at then (www.inecnigeria.org).

However, after the three phases of the distribution of PVCs and Continuous Voter Registration (CVR), many registered voters found out that their PVCs were not available for collection at their respective places of registration. This led to public outcry. Consequently, the Independent National Electoral Commission had to extend the date for the collection of the PVCs. This extension was occasioned by the postponement of the polls to a new date of March 28, 2015. This gave room for more PVCs to be distributed. Therefore, as at the middle of March, INEC had reportedly distributed 67,206,600 PVCs across the nation (Osun Defender, 2015).

The distribution of the Permanent Voters Cards was one of the controversy generating aspects of the preparation for the 2015 general elections. There were claims and counter claims as well as accusations from the two political parties, the PDP and the APC. For instance, the PDP accused the country's electoral body of favouring the opposition party during the distribution exercise. It was reported that the distribution and collection of PVCs were skewed in favour of the APC strongholds (Odebode, Aleehenu, et al. in Omotola and Nyuykange, 2015:5). In another accusation, INEC was accused of removing the records of 1.4 million persons from the register of voters compiled in 2011 in Lagos state (Ezugwu, 2015). However, in a press statement released by the Commission's Chief Press Secretary Mr. Kayode Idowu, INEC refuted the allegation, though it acknowledged the fact that the Commission announced a figure of 6.1 million registrants in the state. But it claimed that when the data was subjected to the Automated Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) software, 82,892 multiple registrations were eliminated. In addition, the Commission claimed that there was loss of data and incomplete data affecting

about one million records, said to have mostly occurred in 1,792 polling units that were identified and made public before the exercise. Thus, INEC maintained that was the reason why the figure came down to about 4.6 million registrants (Idowu, 2015).

Permanent Voters' Cards, Voter Apathy and Turnout and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

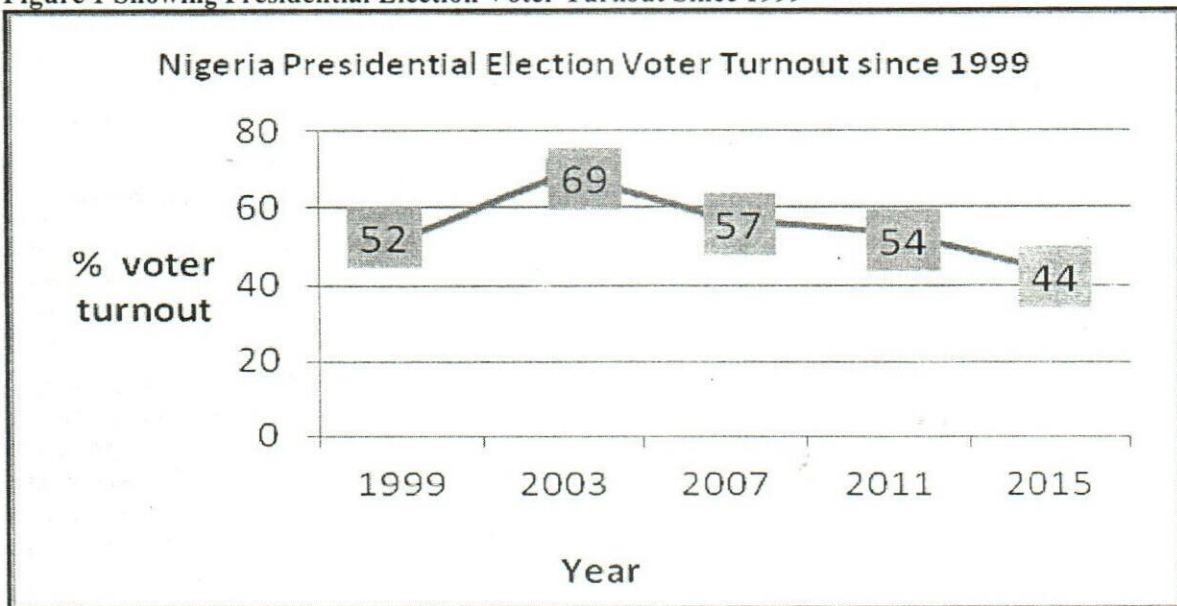
The 2015 general elections in Nigeria were unique for some reasons. First, it was the first election held in the country's political history where an incumbent president contested and lost the presidential election. The elections marked two significant changes to the electoral process. These changes are: the introduction of the Electronic Card Reader (ECR) and the Permanent Voters' Card (PVCs). The PVCs have many components and specialized features. These include: base substrate, security printing, personalization, lamination and chip embedding. The PVC has an embedded chip that contains all the biometrics of a legitimate holder, including fingerprints and facial image. The PVC has security features that are not easily susceptible to counterfeiting (Olaniyi, 2015). Unlike the 2011 general elections where the Temporary Voters' Card (TVC) was used to vote, the PVC replaced the TVC during the 2015 general elections. Only those with PVCs were allowed to vote. This Means that those without PVCs were automatically disqualified from voting. Prior to the 2015 general elections, the total number of eligible voters stood at 87,784,373 (International Republican Institute, 2015:12). The table below, however, shows the distribution of PVCs based on Geo-political zones.

Table 2: Distribution of PVCs Based on Geo-Political Zones

Region	Total No. Of registered Voters	Total No. of Voters with PVC	% of Total No. of Voters with PVC
South-South	7,665,859	6,624,301	86.4
South East	10,059,347	8,434,099	83.8
South West	13,731,090	9,250,041	67.4
North Central	9,767,411	7,661,576	78.4
North West	17,620,436	15,999,398	90.8
North East	9,107,861	7,922,444	87.0
FCT	881,472	569,109	64.6
Total	68,833,476	56,460,968	82.03

Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2015)

It can be observed from the table that out of the total number of 87,784,373 eligible voters, 68,833,476 were registered as potential voters in the general elections. This implied that 18, 950, 897 eligible voters were not registered for the elections. Also, the total number of PVCs distributed according to the table is 56,460,968. This also implied that 12,372,508 registered voters were unable to secure their permanent voters cards. It can again be deduced that the North West geo-political zone had the highest collection rate of PVCs with 9,250,041, while the South West had the lowest percentage of the registered voters that had collected their PVCs for the elections. While it can be observed that 56,460,968 which accounts for 82% of the registered voters were able to secure their PVCs before the election, it is equally important to note that 12,372,508 registered voters who were not able to secure their PVCs cannot be ignored. This in essence is dangerous to the democratization process as it can lead to voter apathy and consequently can contribute to the declining nature of voter turnout in Nigeria since return to democracy in 1999. Since the return to democracy in 1999, there has been a constant decline in voter turnout in the country. According to the Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (2015:2), voter turnout in the 2015 general elections was 43.65% which signified the lowest in Nigeria's democratic history since 1999.

Figure 1 Showing Presidential Election Voter Turnout Since 1999

Source: Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (2015:2)

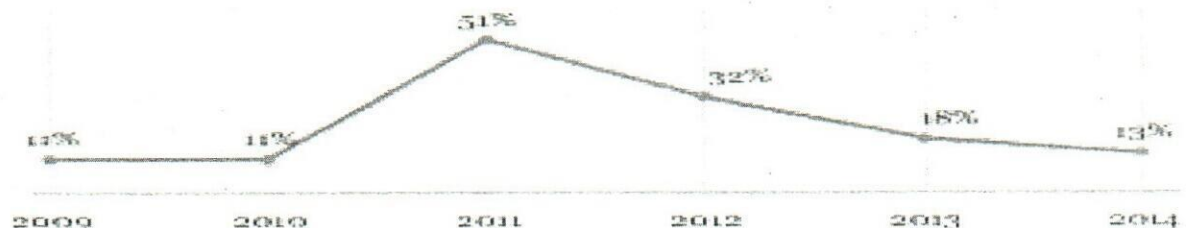
From the figure above, it can be seen that voter turnout was 52% in 1999, 69% in 2003, 57% in 2007 and 54% in 2011 and 44% in 2015. The voter apathy and decline in voter turnout in Nigeria's Fourth Republic may not be a shocking revelation. According to Fagunwa (2015:23), the survey conducted in 2014 by the democratic institution, Gallup, to determine the confidence of Nigerians in the honesty of elections revealed that only 13% Nigerians expressed confidence in the honesty of the then forthcoming elections (Fagunwa, 2015:23).

Figure 2: Survey conducted to determine the confidence of Nigerians in the honesty of elections

Nigerian Confidence in Elections Erodes Since 2011 Election

Asked among Nigerian adults

■ % Confident in elections



In this country, do you have confidence in the honesty of elections?

GALLUP

Source: Gallup (2014) adapted from (Fagunwa, 2015:23)

Generally, what spurs people to vote can be theoretically explained from the perspectives of three schools of thought (Bartle, 2002). These perspectives include: rational choice, sociological and the political efficacy perspectives. The proponents of the rational choice argue that "voters weigh up the costs and benefits of their actions. Thus, they will turn up to vote when they consider that the benefits of such an action outweigh the costs" (Kolovos and Harris, 2005:3). It was further argued that "every individual voter's benefits from voting are infinitesimal compared to the cost, which may not be great but

it is not trivial: 'time, energy and the chance to indulge in other activities' (Kolovos and Harris, 2005:3). This position has not, however, gone unchallenged, Crewe et al (1992) argue that "voting is a very 'easy' form of political participation, requiring minimal effort and initiative and not demanding the voter's engagement in conflictual or co-operational behaviours with other people. At the same time, this 'easy' act has a high value attached to it'.

The proponents of the sociological school of thought argue that "socio-economic characteristics affect political behaviour, identification with a party's values and people's propensity to vote" (Kolovos and Harris, 2005:3). They are of the opinion that voter turnout is high among white-collar workers, men, middle-aged and older voters, those with closer community ties, those married and members of organisations. They further argued that societal factors may influence turnout by limiting the access of voters to political information and may affect their party identification. Political efficacy theories argue that people alienated from the political process are less likely to vote. Alienated voters feel that their vote will not make any difference, that politics has little influence in their lives and that the main parties do not address their concerns (Kolovos and Harris, 2005:3).

In the context of the Nigerian 2015 general elections, the country's electoral body through the performance of some of its functions particularly that relating to distribution of Permanent Voters Cards may have contributed its quota to political apathy and the consequent low voter turnout witnessed during the general elections. As earlier mentioned Election Management Bodies in any democratization process play pivotal role in the larger democratic process. While the entire political system has the responsibility of advancing democracy, a large part of the burden of democratic consolidation resides with democratic institutions, most importantly the Election Management Bodies which are the general overseers of the entire democratic project of a country. It is, however, disheartening that the country's electoral umpire has not been living up to expectation (even though may have improved recently) in the performance of its core duties as an important democratic institution. Fagunwa (2015:25) lamented that: "there is no gainsaying the fact that generally, electoral bodies have the most imperative roles to play in mitigating voter apathy. While several electoral bodies globally have taken the initiative in their respective countries, surprisingly, the Nigerian electoral body, INEC, has refused to rise to the occasion". He further argued that "the inability (not unwillingness) of the electoral body to manage and administer elections credibly has affected the confidence of the masses in the electoral processes" (Fagunwa, 2015:25).

The pre-election stage of voter registration was characterized by numerous challenges particularly in terms of logistics. These challenges, according to Fagunwa (2015:25), were responsible for the disenfranchisement of many eligible voters. It was further observed that the complicated process of voter registration as laid down by INEC was majorly responsible for voter apathy at the earliest stage into the election, as evident in the low turnout. The most disheartening factor was that even when people defied the harsh weather conditions to get registered as a potential voter, they were unable to get their Permanent Voters Cards which is the whole essence of the registration process and a visa to vote on the Election Day. The inability of these people to get their voters cards was attributed to incapability of INEC to issue the cards due to lack of adequate statistics, error, omission of names, technical failures, etc. Based on these many prospective voters were automatically disenfranchised as their cards could not be traced by the electoral officials (Ibrahim, 2015).

Similarly, the distribution of the Permanent Voters Cards generated heated controversies, particularly during the phase of the distribution process. According to Gabriel (2015), the failure of the exercise in Lagos state led to the residents taking to the street in peaceful demonstration against what they perceived as unlawful disenfranchisement. The protesters stormed the Lagos state Headquarters of INEC to lodge their complaints. It was reported that the declaring of a public holiday in Lagos state for voters to get their PVCs did not help matters as many voters were still unable to get their cards. A sixty-year-old Lagos state civil servant whose name is Lamidi Idowu lamented his inability to get his PVC. He was quoted as follows:

I checked everywhere. I didn't see INEC officials at any centre. I was not the only one. I live at Ejigbo and I went to the centre where I registered but nothing like that was in place. I trekked to polling centres I knew existed around Ejigbo and beyond and even up to Idimu but nobody was giving PVC. The PVC can be required for other things even in the hospital or any place that will require your biometrics. It is terrible (Vanguard Newspaper, 15th November 2014).

This was the case in many centres in Lagos. The non-availability of INEC officials to distribute the PVC led to a protest in Lagos. During the protest, the major road linking the INEC state Headquarters was blocked by angry protesters. The interpretation given to the scenario by the protesters was that the country's electoral body was out to rig the elections for a particular party (Vanguard Newspaper, 15th November 2014). The story was not different in other parts of the country. In Edo state, the Resident Electoral Commissioner lamented that 4,658 PVCs were stolen across 9 local government areas of the state. In Ogun state, voters who turned up to collect their PVCs went home disappointed as there was no electoral official to distribute the PVCs and even when there are electoral officials on ground, there were no PVCs to distribute (Vanguard Newspaper, 15th November 2014). It was reported in Nasarawa state that out of the 1.2 million registered voters, only 360,000 PVCs were received. Fall-outs of the circumstances which surrounded the distribution of PVCs across several states of the federation were allegations and counter allegations from the political stakeholders particularly those in the then opposition party. It was alleged that the controversy which trailed the distribution of the PVCs was a calculated attempt by INEC to rig the election in favour of the then ruling party. Given the shoddy manner in which the distribution of PVCs were distributed, the opposition party queried the eligibility of INEC to conduct a free, fair and credible election.

Effects on Democratic Consolidation

The voter apathy and the consequent low voter turnout orchestrated by the inability of INEC to ensure that all registered voters secured their PVCs have grave consequences for democratic consolidation. Elections "gives citizens influence over policymakers" (Powell, 2000:3). In this regard elections are valued as a means to establish particular mass-elite linkages (Rosema, 2013:613). The most essential principle underlying the practice of democracy is the 'active participation' of people. Unfortunately, when people do not participate in the electoral process, it weakens the foundation of the democratic process. The effects of low turnout on the decisions made by elections are crucial to consolidating democracy. The lower the voter turnout, the higher the probability that election outcome is not a true reflection of the choice of potential voters. In essence, Low turnout makes it possible for minorities to defeat majorities. The most significant effect of low voter turnout however, is that decisions are made by a minority of the population (Tucker, 2004:1). Democracy encourages the making of policy decisions by a vast majority of the entire citizenry. In a situation where a small minority determines who governs a country, then such a country is *de facto*, that is, being governed by a small minority. According to Hardison (2012), low voter turnout in a representative democracy may be a pointer to a party process which leads to the only candidates on offer not being ones supported by the majority of the voters. Given a choice between a limited numbers of candidates who do not represent the will of the majority is not really functional democracy.

The fact that elections perform the important role of electing a legitimate government which will exercise power for a stipulated period of time points to the fact that high voter turnout during elections is one of the requirements for a functional electoral democracy. The participatory theory of democracy assumes that a democracy functions at its optimum when it is accompanied by a high degree of civic involvement in the democratic process. Lipset (1960:216) opined that "democratic state, unlike traditionalists oligarchy, must depend on the consent of its citizenry and that a state in which a large part of the population is apathetic, uninterested, and unaware is one in which consent cannot be taken for granted and in which consensus may actually be weak" (Lipset, 1960: 216). He further claimed that "when voter turnout is low, this almost always means that the socially and economically disadvantaged groups are underrepresented in government. The combination of a low vote and a relative lack of

organization among the lower-status groups mean that they will suffer from neglect by the politicians who will be receptive to the wishes of the more privileged, participating, and organized strata. Lack of participation and representation also reflect lack of effective citizenship and consequent lack of loyalty to the system as a whole" (Lipset, 1960: 216). Low voter turnout, therefore, erodes legitimacy of a regime which emerges out of an election graced by a very low section of the electorate. In this case, dissatisfied citizens abstain in order to de-legitimize the regime, while those satisfied vote in order to legitimize it.

Improving on Future Elections: Concluding Remarks

Though the much anticipated 2015 general elections had come and gone, the travails and apprehension which characterized the electioneering period cannot be easily forgotten. While it can be asserted that Nigerian elections are fiercely contested, the risk of violence in 2015 general elections was particularly high. Apart from the fact that the elections took place amidst tensions occasioned by several debilitating factors such as the threat to national security brought about by the radical Boko Haram activities, dwindling economic fortunes, ethno-religions politics, etc., the build up to the general elections generated more anxiety than ever before. The build-up was characterized by campaign of calumny, hate speech and acts of violence. However, the anticipated tendency to expect the worst election was cleared by Nigerians through their peaceful conduct despite the logistics challenges faced in the conduct of the elections. Even though the elections were not devoid of hitches, the general conduct have been described as been free, fair and credible, therefore, satisfying. The nation's electoral body received encomiums for conducting credible polls when majority of Nigerians were pessimistic about the credibility of the general elections.

However, the nation's electoral body, however, should not continue to bask in the euphoria of conducting polls that were described as credible. The level of voter turnout in the 2015 general election confirmed the fact that there is voter apathy and consequent low voter turnout among the electorates. This paper attributed these to the inability of INEC to perform its functions properly and adequately, particularly as it relates to the distribution of Permanent Voters Cards. However, in order to improve on future elections there is much to be done in order to improve INEC's performance so as to ensure increased voter turnout. Firstly, INEC should engage in prompt distribution of PVCs. The continuous voters' registration should commence early enough so as to ensure that the PVCs are produced and distributed before the commencement of elections. Also, INEC should embark on regular mop-up of the voter's register. Secondly, for future elections, INEC should properly screen ad hoc staff, particularly members of the NYSC. This is to ensure that the competent ones among them are selected. Those that are selected, however, should be given comprehensive training in terms of hands-on and otherwise. Thirdly, INEC should formulate implementable policies which will ensure improved ability of delivery of election materials and election personnel. Also, improved communication procedure should be put in place. This will enable the Local Government Headquarter staff communicate with polling units. Lastly, INEC should embark on early amendment of the Electoral Act. This is to give more time for the implementation of the new amendments which will improve the performance of its duties.

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