

# **Election Governance and Consolidation in Nigeria: An Assessment of the 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections**

**NWOZOR, Agaptus (Ph.D.)**

Department of Political Science and International Relations  
Landmark University, Omu Aran, Kwara State, Nigeria

&

**OSHEWOLO, Segun**

Department of Political Science and International Relations  
Landmark University, Omu Aran, Kwara State, Nigeria

## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to examine election governance and democratic consolidation through the instrumentality of the 2011 and 2015 elections in Nigeria. Since 1999, Nigeria has progressively worked towards the entrenchment of the ethos of democracy. The question is whether the Nigerian political system has entrenched the essential elements of democratic practice to signpost growth towards consolidation. Using secondary data and anchoring its theoretical explanations on prebendalism, the paper notes that politics in Nigeria, as demonstrated by the 2011 and 2015 elections, is governed by the overriding principles of power acquisition to satiate narrow interests. The paper contends that a major condition for democratic consolidation is the improvement of election governance system.

**Keywords:** Elections, Election Governance, Democratic Consolidation, Prebendalism, General Elections, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has held nine general elections since its independence in 1960, namely 1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. The fewness of general elections is a product of long years of military rule. However, since 1999 when Nigeria embraced democratic governance, it has held five general elections with four of them organised by democratically elected governments. Election is an important component of democratic governance; in fact, a major determinant of how democratically-compliant a state is. The more a state adheres to, and incorporates the core principles of elections, which are freeness, fairness, and credibility, the more it

is adjudged democratic (Nwankwo, 2006).

When Nigeria organised the 1999 general elections, the general impression was that even though it was characterised by irregularities, they were not substantial enough to invalidate the electoral outcomes. The nationwide optimism was that subsequent elections would correct whatever lapses that manifested in the elections. However, the desperation of re-election in 2003 and the obsession with entrenching the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 2007 led to the conduct of highly flawed elections that raised both domestic and international doubts about the sincerity of entrenching democratic governance in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the 2007 general elections were adjudged to be below average, with the European Union Observers describing the elections as the worst they had witnessed anywhere in the globe (BBC 2010; CNN Wire Staff 2011).

All these elections were conducted under the watch of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Until May 2015, the PDP had controlled the centre and all attempts to oust the party by the opposition elements had failed. The party was eventually voted out of power in 2015 by “a coalition of three major opposition political parties (the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)), as well as a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)” (Olorunmola, 2016, p. 4).

This paper examines the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Nigeria, emphasising that the lessons from the former were foundational or fundamental to the remarkable improvements in the latter. The paper is divided into seven sections. While this section represents the introductory piece, the second section theorises election and its governance in evolving democracies. In section three, the paper attempts a brief overview of elections in Nigeria's fourth republic (1999-2007). The fourth and fifth sections examine the 2011 and 2015 elections respectively, while section six evaluates some emerging issues in election governance and consolidation. Section seven offers some concluding reflections.

### **Theorising Elections and Election Governance in Evolving Democracies**

Elections play a very important and decisive role in the democratic process. Elections constitute the core of democracy. Therefore, the calibration of democracy to ascertain its depth and progression towards consolidation often starts with the examination of the electoral process. Elections neither operate in isolation nor constitute an end to themselves. Rather, they signpost a trajectory towards the perfection of the democratic process. The utilitarian value of elections in democracies is their inclusiveness, which makes everybody in the polity, who has met certain minimum conditions, to be actively involved in the process through participation. This criterion of inclusiveness is what differentiates elections from other forms of selection such as “acclamation, selection by lot, appointment and cooptation” (Nnoli, 2003, p. 223).

Thus, the definitional criteria or the ensembles of elections include participation and contestation, both of which are driven by a unifying process. This process involves rules and regulations designed to ensure that the contest for elective political positions and the participation of the electorates in determining the outcome of the contest are entrenched. Nnoli (2003, p. 220) points out that elections are processes of choice motorized by the selection of one or a few people out of many who are vying for the position. An essential ingredient that is missing in Nnoli's (2003) "processes of choice" is the concept of voting. If selection must be made, it ought to be anchored on voting. In other words, elections create room for larger number of people, categorized as eligible electorates, to select a fewer number of people through voting to occupy and exercise powers inherent in such positions (Nwankwo 2006, p. 182). What this implies in essence is that citizens exercising the power of choice under elections do so in furtherance of their constitutionally imputed sovereignty over those likely to exercise the powers of the state (Alemika, 2011).

The centrality of elections in democratic theory is underlined by several assumptions: one, elections are indispensable in the enthronement of democratic governance as well as other forms of competitive politics; two, elections provide the platform for political participation and competition; three, they provide a formalized setting for electoral choices to be made by the electorates; four, they constitute the route to the institutionalization of orderly and organized political succession in the polity; five, elections concretize the notion of equality of citizens as they are anchored on the electoral principle of one-citizen, one-vote; six, elections as a medium for the expression of the political preferences of electorates possess juridical quality as they facilitate the emphatic conclusion of electioneering campaigns by deciding among political contestants; seven, elections are measured temporally and hold at designated intervals depending on a particular country's constitutional provisions; and lastly, they play legitimizing role in the consolidation of electoral outcomes (Nnoli 2003; Nwankwo 2006; Omotola 2010; Osumah & Aghemelo 2010; Alemika 2011).

The worth of elections is embedded in the fulfilment of four core conditions, namely openness in terms of free entry and free exit of contestants: that is, the freedom of every qualified and eligible person to present themselves for election; freeness: the electoral process must be free and devoid of any encumbrances and both the contestants and the electorate must be unrestrained to make their choices; fairness: the conditions set by the supervising electoral institution must be applicable to all contestants irrespective of their party affiliations. In other words, there must not be real or imagined display of favouritism by the supervising electoral institution; and, lastly, credibility: both the electoral managers and the processes must be credible enough to make the contestants have conviction of the fairness and representativeness of electoral outcomes (Nnoli 2003; Nwankwo 2006; Alemika 2011; Orji & Uzodi 2012). The general perception of non-adherence to the electoral guidelines is what often gives rise to violence both during the actual voting or

afterwards. This is so because non-adherence could distort the electoral outcome and therefore thwart the wishes of the people.

A cardinal beauty of elections is the conferment of decisional power on the electorates to determine those to occupy executive and legislative offices. The one-man-one-vote principle that underlines elections empowers ordinary people to choose from the coterie of contestants that present themselves for elections. The power of the electorates to determine the occupants of executive and legislative offices motorizes electioneering campaigns. As part of political salesmanship, contestants reach out to the people on campaign trails where the monotony of village, and even urban life, is broken with highfalutin oratory that unveils their programmes for the people (Nnoli, 2003). Although elections are important empirical referents in determining the degree of compliance to democratic tenets by states, there have been institutional distortions that render them hollow. As Omotola (2010, p. 537) opines, “elections are not in themselves a guarantee for sustainable democratic transition and consolidation. Elections can also be used to disguise authoritarian rule... Under such circumstances, elections are only held as a transitional ritual where the people have little or no choice...” The distortion of the electoral process which ultimately terminates in compromised elections is a major trigger of electoral violence.

Elections occupy the middle position in the matrix of electoral process. Electoral process incorporates the whole gamut of processes that govern mass-based selection of candidates. These processes are anchored on tripodal stages and comprise: pre-election; election and post-election stages. At the pre-election stages, the issues that are addressed include: the setting up of legal framework for elections which may incorporate the delimitation of constituencies; type of voting method; voter registration; period for party primaries and nominations; time frame for campaigns and rallies and timeline for the display and correction of voters' register. The election stage covers the actual polling; counting and recording of votes; and declaration of results. The post-election stage consists of election petitions; verdicts at the tribunals and power transfer (Omolayo 2010; Alemika 2011; Obiyan & Olutola, 2013).

The measure of democratic consolidation is determined by the quality of elections conducted by the election management bodies (EMBs). Thus, a good evaluative yardstick for elections in emerging democracies is the extent of adherence to, and observance of, the basic tenets of good elections. Larry Diamond (2008, p. 25) has outlined these tenets to include the neutrality of the election managers; the competence and resourcefulness of election managers to evolve strategies to checkmate electoral frauds; the neutrality of the law enforcement agents, especially the police, military and courts to treat competing candidates and parties impartially; framework for equal access to all the contenders to the public media; impartial rules and regulations with provisions that do not grossly handicap the opposition; unfettered voting rights to all adults; openness in conducting the elections including

the procedure for counting the votes and declaring the results; and availability of impartial procedures for resolving election complaints and disputes.

The major problem with elections in Nigeria is non-adherence to, or deviation from, the standard set for the conduct of elections. The direct effect of this is the limitation of the power of the electorates to exercise their voting power through the foreclosure of robust choices. The various manifestations of violence at the later stages of the electoral process are traceable to deviation from the ideals of the electoral process (Alemika 2011; Orji & Uzodi, 2012).

Within the context of evolving democracies, prebendalism plays an important distortionary role. Prebendal politics is driven by political godfathers who deploy a combination of resources to control the electoral process. Political violence is a product of desperation arising from lack of compromise among contending political forces in the process of election governance. There is often undue elite dominance of elections in evolving democracies. This is necessary fallout of the influence of godfatherism in the political system.

Godfatherism connotes the dominance of the political system by powerful and influential members of the elite class who control the polity for what it can offer them. Not only are godfathers self-seeking members of the elite with the prime motive of converting the institutions and resources of the state to advancing their overall politico-economic interests but deploys every tool to achieve this control (Nnamani 2004; Oluwatusin 2007; Olarinmoye 2008). Ayoade (2008, p. 90) paints the picture of how godfathers drive electoral violence thus:

They are merchants of fear. They dispense violence freely and fully on those who stand in their way. In this they play the additional role of Warlord. They establish, train and maintain a standing personal 'army' which they ostensibly supplement with a sprinkling of the official police detachment. In order to effect electoral change, they bribe election officials to deliver the winning election figures. They also bribe the police and other security agents to look the other way when they traffic in ballot boxes and sack opponent strongholds.

The desperation which is often associated with elections in evolving democracies accords with the continued relevance of state power in the accumulation process. Instead of the electorates being allowed to make choices, the elite undermine and hijack the process of election in two important ways: by controlling the processes that underpin the emergence of candidates at the party level; and by deploying all manner of incentives to achieve a predetermined end which is consistent with their overall acquisitive objectives. It is the conflict among the elite in the face of conflicting goals under the ambit zero-sum scenario that engender political violence.

### **Brief Overview of Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 1999-2007**

Nigeria's electoral machinery was rusty at the time the transition programme that ushered in the Fourth Republic kicked off. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Nigeria's third republic was unceremoniously halted when the ill-fated transition programme of General Ibrahim Babangida hit political icebergs and ended up in still-birth that resulted in, first the interim national government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan, and later, the Abacha regime. Thus, the first election held in the Fourth Republic in 1999 was under the auspices of a new election management body, known as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Made up of a Chairman and 12 National Commissioners, INEC was established in accordance with section 153(f) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria through the Independent National Electoral Commission (Establishment etc) Act No. 17 of 1998 (The Carter Centre & NDI, 1999).

Since its establishment, INEC has successfully conducted five general elections, namely 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. As at 2011, INEC has had five chairmen, that is, Justice Ephraim Akpata (1998-2000); Dr Abel Guobadia (2000-2005); Professor Maurice Iwu (2005-2010), Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega (2010-2015), and Professor Mahmood Yakubu (2015 to date). The Fourth Republic's pioneering election in 1999 was not perfect but its imperfection was condoned as part of the learning process. The general elections started with December 5, 1998 with Local Government elections in which out of 26 political associations that sought for registration only nine of them were registered as political parties. These nine political parties contested for the Local Government elections, and based on their performance, only three were duly recognized and thus cleared to contest for the gubernatorial and presidential elections held in 1999 (The Carter Centre & NDI, 1999).

Despite the criticisms of electoral irregularities levelled against the 1999 general elections, an atmosphere of peace prevailed throughout the election period. The irregularities associated with the elections were not orchestrated by any specific political party (Obiyan & Olutola, 2013). The irregularities were, more or less, manifestations of an imperfect electoral management system and were exploited by politicians to advance their victory. As a result of the first set of elections at the local government level, which showed the relative strength and spread of political parties, the presidential election saw the realignment of political forces, which contracted the political space and paved the way for a two-party contest.

There were three major interesting features of the 1999 election, especially the presidential election: one, there was political bridge-building and marriage of convenience between the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Peoples Party (APP) (later known as All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP) that led to both parties producing one presidential candidate; two, the political space was contracted as two parties contested the presidential election; and lastly, the two presidential candidates that

contested the election, namely Olu Falae of AD/APP alliance and Olusegun Obasanjo of Peoples Democratic party (PDP) are from the Yoruba ethnic stock. The PDP won the presidential election in addition to the governorship election in 21 states. The AD clinched the governorship election of all the six south-west states. And the APP triumphed in the governorship election in nine states.

The victory of Obasanjo and the PDP did not go unchallenged as Falae petitioned against it on the ground of massive electoral irregularities (Ihonvbere, 1999; Kew 1999). The general opinion about the 1999 election was that even though there were traces of irregularities, these were not large-scale or sufficiently distortional to invalidate the outcome of the election. The Supreme Court judgement also towed this line (Obiyan & Olutola, 2013). Despite the feeling that certain irregularities marred the elections, the political atmosphere was devoid of tension. The peaceful conduct of the 1999 general elections was a product of three interrelated factors: one there was a massive desire for political change; two, the military regime of General Abdulsalam Abubakar displayed genuine desire to hand over to a democratically elected government and the political class did not want to provide any excuse for the military to renege on the proposed handover date; and lastly, the irregularities were not orchestrated by any particular party and, therefore, were not interpreted as emanating from deliberate attempt to distort the electoral outcome in the presidential election.

If the 1999 general elections were seen as part of the learning process, the 2003 elections were expected to demonstrate what the politicians and the election management body, the INEC had learnt. The expectations were high. One, it was the first election to be conducted by a democratic regime; two, a new helmsman, Dr Abel Guobadia, was appointed in INEC and his admission that “...all Nigerians expect that, under my leadership, the regime of free and fair elections that started in 1999 and returned the country peacefully to democracy will be sustained” heightened expectations (Baxter, 2000, p. 8); and lastly, Nigerians looked forward to breaking the national jinx of peaceful and successful elections supervised by a democratic regime.

The 2003 general elections were adjudged as not meeting the watermark of electoral credibility. As Obiyan & Olutola (2013, p. 165) opine,

The 2003 general elections no doubt suffered greatly from the contagious effect of the previous elections in Nigeria. Notwithstanding the enthusiasm and apparent commitment of many Nigerians towards the survival of the nascent democracy in Nigeria, especially during the 2003 elections, the deficiencies and flaws associated with the organization as well as the conduct of the elections were certainly on the increase.

The 2003 election results showed serious distortions and electoral reversals that were difficult to rationalize. The PDP extended its lead across the polity. From 21

governorship positions it won in 1999, it added seven more to bring the tally to 28. The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) lost two states to end with seven gubernatorial positions and the AD managed to retain only one state as it lost five governorship positions to the PDP (Akinyele, 2004). In addition, Obasanjo and PDP won the presidential election polling 24,456,140 votes or 61.94% of total votes cast. The ANPP and Muhammadu Buhari, the closest rival in the presidential election, polled 12,710,022 votes or 32.19%. The same streak of landslide victory was recorded in the National Assembly election as the PDP won a comfortable majority (Akinyele, 2004; Osumah & Aghemelo 2010; Obiyan & Olutola, 2013).

There were widespread allegations that PDP used its power of incumbency to manipulate both the INEC and the security agencies to perpetrate electoral malpractices in its favour. As a result of widespread disappointment with the elections, Nigeria's House of Representatives passed a motion calling for fresh election in the North on account of massive irregularities as well as the dismissal of both the then Inspector General of the Police, Tafa Balogun and INEC chairman, Abel Guobadia (Obiyan & Olutola, 2013). Similarly, "opposition parties severally and collectively under the aegis of the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties rejected the election result, and called on the international community not to recognize any government constituted on the basis of the 2003 election" (Osumah & Aghemelo 2010, p. 20). The judicial challenge which Buhari instituted was unable to overturn the declaration of Obasanjo as the winner of the election.

The 2007 elections were significant in a number of ways. One, it was the first regime-to-regime change in the history of Nigeria; two, it came after the fruitless attempt of Obasanjo to amend the Nigerian constitution for the purpose of elongating his tenure to a third term; three, the power tussle in the presidency between Obasanjo and his deputy, Atiku Abubakar polarized their party, the PDP. Atiku later decamped from PDP and pitched his tent with the Action Congress (AC) to pursue his presidential ambition; and lastly, the opposition political parties believed that the polarization in the PDP would have enough weakening effect to ensure victory for them (Herskovits, 2007). The high hopes which Nigerians had about the 2007 elections were, however, dashed as they did not fare any better than the two previous elections.

Prior to the 2007 general elections, the polity was heated up by politicians, especially by PDP and Obasanjo. The PDP, through Obasanjo's influence, circumscribed the internal democratic culture as all the PDP presidential candidates were forced to step down for the emergence of Umaru Yar'Adua as the party's flag bearer (Rotberg, 2007). Obasanjo declared the elections as do-or-die affair and followed it up with the use of the anti-corruption agencies to intimidate the opposition. The federal government also failed to release money promptly to enable INEC to plan for logistics to cover about 119,973 verified polling units across the country (Osumah & Aghemelo 2010; INEC, nd; Obiyan & Olutola, 2013). The result



of the 2007 election showed that Umaru Yar'Adua of the PDP won with 70%. His closest rival, Muhammadu Buhari of ANPP polled 18% of the votes and Atiku Abubakar, the former Vice President to Obasanjo, who vied on the platform of AC came third with 7% of the total votes cast. The same trend of electoral success for the PDP was replicated in all the elective posts across the country.

The 2007 elections represented retrogression on the measurement scale of electoral credibility. National and international observers of the 2007 elections roundly condemned the elections as marred by irregularities of the highest order (International Crisis Group, 2007). Even Yar'Adua agreed that the election was not the best the country could afford and promised to set up the necessary machinery to overhaul the country's electoral system. He actually fulfilled this promise when he inaugurated a 22-member Electoral Reform Committee headed by a former Chief justice of Nigeria, Muhammed Uwais, in August 2007 with the primary responsibility of recommending ways to reform the country's electoral system (Obiyan & Olutola, 2013).

Since 1999, the bouquet of flaws that characterised elections in Nigeria has been consistent. Nigeria's election arena is littered with such mines as political assassinations, poor security for election officials; manipulation of voter registration exercise; shortage of election materials; collaboration between politicians and election officials resulting in rigging; logistical problems manifesting in late arrival of election materials and late opening of polling and various manifestations of political violence (Osumah & Aghemelo 2010; Obiyan & Olutola 2013). What this implies is that either no lessons have been learnt about how to improve election governance or the Nigerian elite have deliberately refused to infuse changes that would better the country's electoral lot. Whichever it is, election governance is still to be reinvented to enable the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy.

### **The 2011 Elections**

***Political Build-Up:*** Several events heralded the 2011 general elections. As should be expected, all eyes were focused on PDP because it had, and still has, higher stakes in national politics. The death of President Umaru Yar'Adua in 2010 disorganized the inchoate zoning arrangement that was hurriedly put together by the political elite as part of national efforts to maintain the corporate sanctity of the country at the inception of the fourth republic. The long absence of Yar'Adua on medical treatment and the uncertainty surrounding his state of health led to the emergence of the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as acting president. Jonathan's emergence was not as simple as is provided in sections 145 and 146 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Many politicians from the north calculated, and rightly too, that Jonathan's emergence as acting president, would put a stop to their political ambition. It took concerted pressure from the people of all walks of life for the Nigerian senate to hide behind the nebulous concept of doctrine of necessity to

discharge its constitutional responsibility of approving Jonathan as acting president (VOA, 2010).

There was serious tension in the polity in respect of the 2011 general elections, especially at the federal level. The tension was generated by the issue of power rotation and zoning. The crux of the argument was whose turn it was, among the six geopolitical zones, to produce the president. At the centre of the entire brouhaha was Goodluck Jonathan who was operating from a position of strength as the incumbent president. A number of points are worth noting: one, there was no formal document containing any agreement on zoning or power rotation. It was an informal and unwritten agreement among the political elite to douse the tension generated in the polity by the ill-advised annulment of the June 12 presidential election presumed to have been won by the late M.K.O Abiola.

Thus, the notion of zoning or power rotation had no binding authority; two, the Nigerian constitution recognises the freedom of every eligible Nigerian to contest any position so desired without any form of discrimination originating from gender, ethnicity or religion; three, flowing from the foregoing, Jonathan believed that as the incumbent president, it was a historic opportunity for him and the minorities to contest for the apex position and he enthusiastically enlisted in the presidential race; four, the north believed that it was its turn to continue with the presidency as Yar'Adua had barely completed his first tenure before his death; and lastly, the north believed that Jonathan was a usurper and must be stopped at all costs.

The dominance of PDP in the polity made it a major theatre of political intrigues. The bickering and fragmentation in the party created added interest. The presidential candidates from the north calculated that if they went to the presidential primaries without a consensus candidate, Jonathan would defeat them easily. Thus, the northern presidential candidates, namely Ibrahim Babangida, Atiku Abubakar, Abubakar Bukola Saraki, and Aliyu Gusau cooperated for the emergence of a consensus candidate from amongst them. In a joint statement, these candidates affirmed, “our commitment to a consensus presidential candidate is total and irrevocable” (Okocha, 2010, np).

Eventually, the Adamu Ciroma –led Northern Political Leadership Forum which was saddled with the responsibility of choosing a consensus candidate from among the northern presidential candidates settled for Atiku Abubakar (*Vanguard*, 2010). Following the adoption of Atiku Abubakar as the consensus candidate, the others suspended their presidential aspiration. Notwithstanding the candidature of Sarah Jubril, the withdrawal of other aspirants from the north made the PDP primaries a straight political contest between Atiku Abubakar and Goodluck Jonathan. Out of a total of 3,542 votes, Jonathan polled 2,736 to defeat Atiku Abubakar who won 805 votes and Sarah Jubril who recorded one vote, probably her own (Ajani et al, 2010).

The main opposition party, the ANPP also organised its own presidential

primaries which provided delegates from all the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital territory, the opportunity to vote. At the end of the exercise, the former Kano state governor, Ibrahim Shekarau won with an overwhelming majority. Out of 5,315 delegates that voted in the presidential primaries, Shekarau polled a total of 4,178 to emerge victorious. His closest rival, Harry Akande secured a paltry 708 votes. Dauda Birmah and Ibrahim Uthman Tofa polled 148 and 139 votes to place third and fourth respectively (Ezigbo, 2011).

Apart from the PDP and ANPP, other political parties merely held congresses and chose their flag-bearers without the actual input of the membership of the parties. Thus, instead of deepening the internal political culture of their political parties, most of the parties that fielded presidential candidates actually detracted from it. The process employed by such frontline political parties like the ACN, and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) (both of which are now part of APC) as well as other fringe political parties was elite-driven rather than mass-driven. The masses were only tools for rubberstamping the flag-bearers already selected by the parties' stalwarts and stakeholders in their various special congresses.

***The Conduct of Elections:*** The 2011 Presidential and legislative elections were held in April. The National Assembly election was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April after a false start. The election was originally scheduled to be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April but had to be called off when the result sheets and other sensitive electoral documents needed for the election were not delivered until the morning of the election. On 9<sup>th</sup> April, the election did not hold uniformly. Due to logistical problems, elections into 15 senatorial districts and 48 federal constituencies spread across the six geopolitical zones were postponed to 26<sup>th</sup> April (NDI, 2012; House of Commons Library, 2015). The last minute postponement of the National Assembly elections from 2<sup>nd</sup> April to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2011 did not have any serious negative effect on the electoral process except the elongation of the election period. The presidential election was held on 16 April 2011 as scheduled. Out of 73,528,040 registered voters, 39,469,484 voters turned out to vote. This figure represented 53.7% of eligible voters. Despite the relatively average turnout of voters for the presidential election, 1,259,506 votes were invalidated for non-adherence to voting parameters (NDI, 2012).

The conduct of the 2011 general elections was different from previous elections in a number of ways. One, Nigeria's election management body (EMB), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had a new chairman, Attahiru Jega, who was generally believed to be a man of integrity; two, the federal government promptly released funds to INEC to enable it start election preparations early; the Commission relied on and recruited its ad hoc polling and presiding officers from the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) members and returning officers from the staff of tertiary institutions and federal agencies; and lastly, the Commission generated its own voters' registers instead of relying on the ones made by, and handed over to Jega by his predecessor, Maurice Iwu (INEC, nd; NDI, 2012).

The 2011 general elections involved 1,486 different electoral contests made up of the presidential election, 469 federal legislative elections, 990 state legislative elections and 26 gubernatorial elections (NDI, 2012). Logistically, INEC registered 73,528,040 Nigerians as voters using 132,000 Direct Data Capturing (DDC) machines deployed to 119,973 verified polling units across the country. In addition to regular INEC staff, over 240,000 ad hoc registration officials were engaged to facilitate the voter registration exercise in the 8,809 registration areas (NDI, 2012). This thoroughness also characterised the conduct of the general elections.

An interesting development in the presidential election was the various concessions made by some presidential candidates. According to NDI (2012, p. 32),

In the week ahead of the election, 6 of the 20 presidential candidates withdrew from the race and encouraged their supporters to vote for President Jonathan. A seventh left the race in favour of Governor Shekarau. Since the official deadline for candidate withdrawal had passed in February, all 20 parties remained on the ballot.

The implication of this was that 13 candidates actually contested the 2011 presidential election. An important thing to note is that these candidates who withdrew from the race on account of Jonathan and Shekarau were flag bearers of the fringe parties. Thus, their withdrawal did not have any significant effect on the outcome of the election. In accordance with the constitutional requirements specifying that elections should be held not earlier than 150 days and not later than 30 days to the expiration of the tenure of offices for which the elections are to be organised (see sections 76, 116, 132 and 178 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended), INEC released the timetable for the 2011 general elections on 23 November 2010. The timetable fixed the date of elections to commence from 2<sup>nd</sup> April but certain "terrible unfortunate emergency" frustrated adherence to this date (CNN Wire Staff, 2011).

**Outcome of Elections:** The PDP candidate, Goodluck Jonathan won the election having won the majority of popular votes and 25% of votes cast in two-thirds of the country as constitutionally required. According to the official result released by INEC, Jonathan polled 22,495,187 or 58.89% of the votes to emerge the winner. His closest rival, Muhammadu Buhari of ANPP and Nuhu Ribadu of ACN polled 12,214,853 or 31.98% and 2,079,151 or 5.41% to emerge second and third respectively. The percentage of win by Jonathan contrasted with the percentage by which Yar'Adua won in 2007: while Yar'Adua won by 70% in 2007, Jonathan won by a modest 58.89% (House of Commons Library, 2015, p. 5). A major effect of the 2011 National Assembly election was the reconfiguration of its membership as majority of them lost their constituencies. For instance, only 39 of the 109 senators won their re-election bid. In the same vein, only 100 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives were able to return after the election (NDI, 2012). PDP still dominated the election as topped with 71 senatorial seats and 199 seats in the Federal

House of Representatives.

PDP dominated the gubernatorial results as it won in 18 out of the 26 states. The geopolitical distribution of these states showed that PDP's victory cut across five of the six geopolitical zones. This was not the case with other political parties. For instance, the ACN won its three states from the south west; ANPP from two geopolitical zones, that is two from the north east and one from the north west; APGA from the south east; CPC from the north central; and, PDP won four states from the north central, three from the north east, five from the north west, three from the south east and three from the south-south. It was only in the south west that PDP failed to record victory. An interesting development in the governorship election was that four sitting governors, namely Oyo, Nasarawa, Imo and Kano lost their seats. The governorship election in Imo state was inconclusive after the April 26<sup>th</sup> election but was concluded in a rerun election on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2011.

As should be expected, there were petitions alleging electoral malpractices. A total of 731 petitions were sent to the various Elections Tribunals by different candidates challenging the results declared by INEC and either pleading the cancellation or the conferment of victory on the petitioners. Compared to previous elections, especially the 2007 elections where the number of petitions was 1290, the number of petitions in 2011 was within reasonable limits. The 2011 presidential election held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April was the basis for the post-election violence that engulfed the country. It was estimated that between 800 and 1000 people perished in the riots (HRW 2011; International Crisis Group, 2011). This presented a paradox: the election was acclaimed by both local and international observers as the best in the country's fourth republic elections and yet it recorded the bloodiest post-election riots (Bekoe, 2011).

### **The 2015 Elections**

***Political Build-Up:*** Following the victory of Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 Presidential election, the political question was whether Jonathan would run again in 2015 (Paden, 2013). In order to ensure that constitutional term limits and party zoning principle were adhered to, certain forces within the political system challenged the eligibility of Jonathan to participate in the 2015 electoral process. They argued that if Jonathan was allowed to participate, he would end up serving more than two terms considering his acting Presidency in 2010 in violation of the constitution. But the Court ruled that the “circumstances in which he became president could not be counted towards a term in office”, thus making Jonathan eligible to contest the 2015 presidential election (House of Commons Library, 2015, p. 7).

As the election year approached, opposition to Jonathan's presidential ambition became stronger by virtue of unfolding events: one, intensification of Boko Haram's terrorist activities; two, formation of a coalition political party, the All

Progressives Congress (APC); three, defection of six PDP governors to the new party; defection of about one-third of the PDP's members at both houses of the National Assembly; and the leakage of a letter from Olusegun Obasanjo to Jonathan challenging his candidacy and warning of disintegration should Jonathan contest (House of Commons Library, 2015, p. 7).

Despite the opposition against the candidacy of Jonathan, he won the party's presidential primary at the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014 PDP National Convention with Namadi Sambo emerging again as his running mate. In the same vein, the APC National Convention produced Muhammadu Buhari as its presidential candidate and Professor Yemi Osinbajo as his running mate (Carbone and Cassani, 2016; House of Commons Library, 2015). The period leading to the 2015 general elections was defined by a number of issues: first, the emergence of a strong opposition party with the potential to oust the party in power; second, large-scale Boko Haram violence in the North-East that could potentially disenfranchise the voters in the region; third, public perception of poor preparation by INEC; fourth, heated polity as a result of electioneering campaigns that tended to divide the country along ethnic and religious lines; and fifth, the seeming partisanship of security agencies in favour of the ruling PDP (Onapajo, 2015).

Building on the 2011 biometric voters' register, INEC carried out a continuous voters registration exercise (CVR) to capture newly qualified voters or those who were previously unable to register. This exercise opened in 2014 and took place across the country. The issuance of PVCs – which replaced the temporary voters' cards – followed immediately. However, “the controversies that surrounded the process of PVC distribution revealed major gaps in INEC's operational and logistical arrangements” (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015, p. 26). By the February date originally scheduled for the elections, only 76% of the electorate had collected their PVCs. The postponement of the elections, though condemned, afforded more voters the opportunity to obtain their PVCs (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015).

***The Conduct of Elections:*** In terms of operational standards, “the commission provided 152,031 polling units and voting points to ensure ease of voting. It also deployed 608,124 polling staff, an average of four staff per polling unit” (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015, p. 39). This was a significant improvement on the 2011 elections. By the time the collection of PVCs ended in March, about 56,431,255 registered voters (representing 81.98%) had received their PVCs (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015). Despite “widely held concerns about the likelihood of a destabilising outcome, Nigeria successfully conducted its general elections on 28 March and 11 April 2015” (Orji, 2015, p. 74). However, logistical difficulties led to the late arrival of officials and materials and delays in the opening of polls. Only 43% of election officials arrived on time in 90 per cent of the polling stations (Orji, 2015, p. 79)

Although incumbent President Jonathan and his governing PDP went into the March 28 2015 presidential and National Assembly Elections as favourites due to the so-called “power of incumbency”, many observers still expected a close contest between the two frontline parties. Preparatory to the elections, the PDP massively outspent the opposition APC through media advertisement and huge allocation of funds to groups and individuals in the hope of securing or “buying” electoral success. The electoral process was therefore heavily monetised. Funds were raised by the PDP in manners that violated the country's regulations on political financing. The opposition APC also came under immense pressure from the Nigerian security services, particularly the military, with key opposition figures claiming harassment. The fear in opposition circles about military meddling in the political process was confirmed when it withdrew its support for the original February 14 election date, thereby compelling the INEC to postpone the election by six weeks. This postponement enabled the parties, especially the PDP, to embark on a more aggressive and expensive electioneering campaign (Schneider, 2015; Carbone and Cassani, 2016; Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015).

During the elections, the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) and Card Readers became the technology for voting, principally to address the problem of electoral fraud. While there were technical problems about the functionality of biometric Card Readers in some areas, the flaws were thought not to be sufficient to discredit the outcome of the elections (Carbone and Cassani, 2016). As reported by INEC, “only 0.3% of card readers across the country failed to perform... Only 4% of polling units across the country had to allow voters with Temporary Voter Cards to vote. Distribution of these malfunctions was even across the country” (Schneider, 2015, np). Where there were technical glitches, INEC ordered manual accreditation of voters, but the voter must satisfy officials that he/she is the legitimate holder of PVC (The Commonwealth, 2015, p. 37). While the voters' turnout figure for the presidential election was 54% in 2011, it reduced to 44% in 2015. Again, while the turnout was 67% in President Jonathan's strongholds – the South-South and South-East, the turnout dropped to 56% and 37% respectively in 2015. It is generally believed that the reduction in voters' turnout was not a manifestation of political apathy, but rather a true representation of voters' strength without the usual artificial inflation of voters, particularly in some areas (Schneider, 2015).

**Table 1** below shows that 80% of voters were accredited with smart card reader accreditation backend transmission system.

**Table 1: Smart Card Reader Accreditation Data for the 2015 Presidential Election**

<b>Election Date</b>	<b>March 28, 2015</b>
Total Polling Units Received	98,489
Total Accreditations	23,643,479
Full-Biometric Authentication	10,266,139
Card-Only Authentication	13,377,340
% Success – Full Biometric	43
% Failed – Card Only Biometric	57
Total Votes Cast (Declared Result)	29,432,083
% Voters that were accrd with SCRs	80

(Source: INEC, <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Presidential-Election-Analysis-2015.pdf>)

**Outcome of Elections:** At the end of the election, the candidate of the opposition APC, Muhammadu Buhari, emerged the winner. On April 1 2015, Professor Attahiru Jega announced Buhari as the winner of the presidential election (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015). While “Buhari's APC polled 53.96% of total votes cast, Jonathan's PDP polled 44.96%” (Owen and Usman, 2015, p. 467). A major significance of the outcome of the electoral process is that APC's 2015 victory represented the first time in Nigeria's electoral history that power would alternate between political parties at the national level. The ruling PDP did not only lose the election, its candidate – the incumbent President – admitted defeat and congratulated the winner. With this development, Nigeria “joined the limited number of sub-Saharan states whose voters had been able to oust a sitting president and hand power to the opposition” (Carbone and Cassani, 2016, p. 34). Buhari's victory was summarised by Schneider (2015, np) thus:

In order to win the presidential election, APC required a 9% average swing (PDP vote down 9% and APC up 9%) across the country from the 2011 elections, all things being equal. In particular, Buhari needed to perform well in the swing regions of the South West and North Central while advancing further in his core North West and North East regions. In the South West, Buhari won 54% to 40%, which represents a swing of 18.5%... Buhari was expected to take the South West, although perhaps not by as large a margin, but his performance in the ethnically and religiously mixed North Central more than exceeded expectations. In the zone, the former military ruler won 57% to 39%, which represents a swing of 20.5%. This included victories in two states thought to be PDP-leaning – Kogi and Benue - and a predicted, but still dramatic for its scale, win in Kwara on a 38% swing.

A number of other factors accounted for Buhari's electoral victory, after suffering defeats in three presidential elections. First, technology and civic activism



played a role. The new technology did not only reduce the incentive for electoral fraud, it also enhanced the vigilance of the ordinary voters. Second, unlike in the previous elections, Buhari had an enlarged national structure to support his electioneering campaigns through coalition of opposition parties (Schneider, 2015). Third, PDP's internal crisis – over the purported agreement between the PDP Governors and Jonathan that the latter would not run in 2015 – severely weakened the party and its electoral chances, by pushing some leading figures of the party to the opposition. These figures eventually championed the election of Buhari (Paden, 2013; Orji, 2014; Cohen, 2016).

Between 2013 and 2014, “five state Governors, 11 Senators, 37 members of the House of Representatives, and several other notable politicians” defected to the opposition APC (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015, p. 15). Fourth, the perceived failure of governance under the PDP convinced the electorate of the need for a change of political leadership (Orji, 2015). From the foregoing therefore, “a constellation of contingent circumstances that weakened the incumbent played a role, as did conditions created by Nigeria's 15-year experience with multiparty politics that related not only to the opposition and ruling elite's strategic moves but also to essential improvements in electoral administration” (Carbone and Cassani, 2016, p. 42).

Apart from the presidential election won by the APC, the party also won majority of seats in both houses of the National assembly, ending the historical dominance of the PDP over the national legislature. In the Senate, the APC won 60 seats to PDP's 49. In the House of Representatives, the APC won 197 seats compared to the PDP's 132. The APC equally won majority of governorship elections, including the hugely populated states of Lagos and Kano. Therefore, for the first time in Nigeria's democratic history, the opposition dislodged the ruling party and controlled the presidency, federal legislature, and majority of states (Schneider, 2015).

While the outcome of the 2011 elections was greeted with massive violence, particularly in the North, the 2015 elections were not as violent due to the 'professional' conduct of the Nigerian security agencies. However, there were still cases of election-related violence during the 2015 polls. The Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (2015, p. 45) observes that “at least 20 incidents of violence, which resulted in 19 deaths, were reported during the presidential and National Assembly elections, while at least 30 people were killed in 28 incidents of electoral violence during the gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections”. The relatively peaceful outcome of the election came as a surprise to many principally because of “the difficult political and security environment in which the elections were conducted” (Orji, 2015, p. 74). As explained by Owen and Usman (2015, p. 455), “the general elections were fiercer than most, with expectations that they would end in a contentious stalemate at best, and engulf the country in violent political crisis at

worst”.

Following the announcement of election results by INEC, candidates who were not satisfied with the results submitted petitions before the various election petition tribunals set up after the 2015 elections. However, the number of petitions in the aftermath of the 2015 general elections was dramatically low compared to those after the 2011 elections. While the total number of petitions in 2011 was 732, the number reduced to 611 in 2015 (Scan News, October 21, 2015). In addition, three issues became noticeable immediately after the elections. First, as well planned as the election might be, INEC experienced a number of logistical and operational challenges. These problems indicated the need for continuous reforms to enhance the professional capacity of the Commission and reposition it for future elections. The second post-election issue has to do with concerns about the role of the PDP as an opposition party. Before its electoral defeat in 2015, the PDP had governed for 16 years, and so may find it difficult to adapt to its new democratic tasks as an opposition party. Third, just like what happened during the 2011 elections, the 2015 elections also revived ethno-religious tensions in Nigeria (Orji, 2015).

### **Emerging Issues in Election Governance and Consolidation**

Without doubt, the conduct of the 2011 elections laid the foundation for the remarkable improvements witnessed during the 2015 elections. The 2011 elections had been acclaimed by both domestic and international observers as “generally free, fair and credible” (Akhaine, 2011, p. 649). In August 2011, INEC constituted the Registration and Election Review Committee (RERC) “to evaluate the 2011 voter registration and general elections in order to recommend ways of strengthening the Commission's operations” (Orji, 2015, p. 76). One factor that appeared to favour these improvements was that both elections were organised and supervised by the reform-minded INEC chairman – Professor Attahiru Jega. The successes and failures of the 2011 elections produced tremendous lessons which helped to reposition INEC for what appeared to be a daunting 2015 electoral exercise. A critical step taken by INEC was the reduction of the dependence of the Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) on state governors by building their own accommodation and improving the facilities available to the branches of the Commission in all the states of the federation (Onapajo, 2015).

A number of new policies were introduced by INEC. Onapajo (2015, p. 580) succinctly captures an aspect of these policies thus:

The most prominent is the introduction of the permanent voter cards (PVCs) and electronic card-reading system. The main reason behind the introduction of this technological system is to reduce significantly electoral malpractices and fraud including vote buying, impersonation, multiple/fake registration and voting, and inflated figures. The PVC and card reader were designed to check through a biometric system that a voter is at the

correct polling unit where they registered and that their fingerprints match with those on record on their card.

The introduction of technology in election management contributed immensely to the success of the 2015 presidential election. Not only did it provide the basis for the collation of plausibly authentic voters' registers, it also facilitated the conduct of credible general elections. **Table 2** below provides a comparative platform for the evaluation of voting trends in both 2011 and 2015. With regard to the total number of registered voters, 2011 had more registered voters than 2015. While there were 73,528,040 registered voters in 2011, the figure for the 2015 general elections stood at 67,422,005 registered voters. However, only 53.7% and 43.7% of registered voters turned out to vote in 2011 and 2015 presidential elections respectively. Although a comparison of the 2011 and 2015 figures might suggest voter apathy or falling rates of voter turnout, alternative interpretation is that the figures for previous years could have been inflated and therefore unreliable, quite unlike the 2015 figure which was probably devoid of artificial inflation (Schneider, 2015; Onapajo, 2015).

**Table 2: Comparison of Voting Statistics**

<b>Description</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2015</b>
Total Number of Registered Voters	73,528,040	67,422,005
Total Number of Valid Votes	39,469,481	28,587,564
Total Number of Rejected Votes	1,259,506	844,519
Total Number of Votes Cast	40,728,987	29,432,083

*Source: Authors Fieldwork 2017*

In the run-up to the 2015 elections, the National Assembly adopted a number of election-related amendments to the constitution. These included: participation of independent candidates in State and National Assembly elections; prohibition of previously convicted individuals for electoral offences from being elected into State and the Federal Legislatures; extension of time for INEC to conduct run-off presidential and governorship elections from 7 to 21 days; empowerment of INEC to deregister political parties, particularly those that breach registration requirements and fail to win a seat in the State and Federal Legislatures; expansion of the scope of election tribunals to cover pre-election-related matters (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015).

The 2011 and 2015 elections, without doubt, represented democratic milestones in the history of Nigeria. These milestones notwithstanding, several aspects of the electoral process would need to be improved upon. It is important to enact new laws to give constitutional and legal backing to the new mechanism of biometric card readers.

Again, the intrigues that led to the postponement of the 2015 elections revealed military hyper-activity in election-related matters. As an apparatus of the state whose loyalty is to the governing power, their participation has always been politically destabilising. There is therefore the need to demilitarise the Nigerian electoral process. Other issues that require attention include the logistical capacity of INEC, divisive and inciting statements by political gladiators, as well as the ethno-religious tensions that characterised both the 2011 and 2015 elections.

### **Conclusion**

From 1999 when Nigeria reintroduced democracy, elections have been characterized by all manner of intrigues, including violence. After every general election, the battleground often shifted to the election tribunals. It even got to a point where the tribunals did not appear to have usurped the powers of the electorates as people who campaigned nor actually contested elections were declared winners based on legal technicalities. The reform of the election management system which could be periodized to 2007 paved the way for the reengineering of Nigeria's election governance.

Although the 2011 presidential election was considered credible, free and fair, the announcement of the results led to the eruption of violence in Northern Nigeria. However, the lessons of the 2011 general elections prepared INEC for the conduct of a better election in 2015. One of the major driving force in the credibility of the 2015 presidential elections was the deployment of technology. Although the 2015 general election was adjudged good, a major condition for democratic consolidation is the continued improvement of election governance system.

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