

THE 2011 NIGERIAN ELECTIONS

An Empirical Review

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria held presidential and parliamentary elections in April 2011, the fourth since the return to democracy in 1999. While both domestic and international observers judged the elections to be free, fair and transparent it must be stated that there is more work to be done by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in order to consolidate the gains made in 2011. In other words, if credible elections are to become a fact of Nigeria's political life, as promised by the late President Umaru Yar'Adua and his then vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan, when they ran on the same ticket in 2007 in what many agreed were fraudulent elections, INEC and other stakeholders have their work cut out for them. This article is an attempt to review empirically the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. It highlights the challenges facing INEC and recommends ways of overcoming them.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2011 Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation (the population is currently estimated at 150-million) went to the polls to participate in what was only the seventh democratic election since the country became independent 51 years ago. The elections, for both federal and state democratic structures, were judged by both domestic and international observers to have been transparent, free and fair. This is quite remarkable, especially when viewed against the backdrop of sham elections organised in 2007. However, despite the widespread commendation received by the winner of the poll, President Goodluck Jonathan, and Professor Attahiru Jega,

Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), there are indications that the results did not go down well with all the players.¹

This is particularly true of the presidential election, where an orgy of violence greeted the re-election of Jonathan. Reports indicate that at least 300 people lost their lives in northern Nigeria in the violence that followed the announcement, on 16 April, of the results (Jones 2011). The president called for calm and tolerance, stating, however, that the federal government would not sit idle and watch the destruction of innocent lives (BBC 2011).

Since Nigeria is one of Africa's economic and political power blocs it was of keen interest to Africa and the world that the outcome of the election did not generate further violence and that the polity was maintained. This article argues that INEC needs to do more in future to deliver the much desired credible elections to the country.

It sets the stage with a discussion of Nigeria's journey to democracy, highlighting in the process the role military rule played in this journey. The historical overview is followed by an analysis of the 2011 electoral process, zeroing in on the major political parties and personalities that featured in the elections. The next section is an assessment of the elections and a review of the challenges faced by INEC with recommendations on how these challenges might be overcome. The article concludes with the outcome and future impact of the elections on the country's evolving democratic experience.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: MILITARY RULE AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

In the late 19th and early 20th century the British administered the north and south of Nigeria as two different entities. However, in 1914, Lord Fredrick Lugard, then high commissioner for the Northern Protectorate, was also given the task of administering the Southern Protectorate.² For administrative convenience Lugard amalgamated the two protectorates. That act by the colonial authorities, which brought together people from diverse political, religious, social and cultural backgrounds, is considered by many Nigerians to have been the genesis of the conflict in the country.

On 1 October 1960, after almost six decades of colonial rule, Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom. In the country's 51 years of

1 At the time of writing one of the presidential candidates, Major General Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), was still in court challenging the declaration of President Jonathan as winner of the presidential election.

2 For a good understanding of the political history of Nigeria see Falola & Heaton 2008; Nwabueze 1982; Burns 1955.

independence it has enjoyed democratic rule for about 20 years. For most of the post-independence period Nigeria has been ruled by different military dictators.

The first military coup against a civilian administration, while not technically successful, still led to the overthrow of the civilian government of President Nnamdi Azikiwe (known as Zik) and Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.³ General Aguiyi Ironsi, a Christian Igbo and the highest-ranking military office, inherited power. In the same year a counter coup brought to power Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a northern Christian. It was during Gowon's rule, between 1967 and 1970, that the Biafra/Nigeria civil war took place.

Gowon ruled Nigeria until July 1975 when he was overthrown in a bloodless coup and the mantle of leadership fell on Brigadier General Murtala Ramat Muhammed, a Muslim from Northern Nigeria. Muhammed ruled for a short period, during which he instituted many changes in the polity. He is best remembered for championing the fight against corruption and for making a commitment to return the administration of the country to civilian rule in 1979, a move that had started with Gowon but had been derailed. On Friday 13 February 1976 Murtala Muhammed was assassinated on his way to work. Curiously, he had no escorts with him, as was the custom.

The attempted coup failed, however, and some of the perpetrators were executed by firing squad.⁴ The mantle of leadership fell on Lt General Olusegun Obasanjo, the erstwhile Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters. Obasanjo, a Yoruba from Western Nigeria, continued with the transition programme and, in 1979, made history as the first military head of state to hand over power to a democratically elected government.

Obasanjo was also the first Nigerian to rule as both a military head of state and a civilian president and the first civilian president to hand over to another civilian – Alhaji Shehu Shagari. After the elections of 1983, which were flawed and greeted with widespread violence, some citizens expressed fear and others hope that the army might take over power. On 31 December 1983 the military struck again, fulfilling the wishes of many.

The leader of the coup, Major General Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim, ruled the country with an iron fist, attempting to put it back on a disciplined path. Most political leaders of the Second Republic were detained on

3 Balewa; the Sarduana of Sokoto and premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello; the premier of the Western Region, Chief Samuel Akintola, and a host of others were killed in the coup. Azikiwe, who was out of the country on 15 January 1966 when the coup took place, and Michael Okpara, the premier of the Eastern Region, survived – Okpara was arrested and later released.

4 Among those executed were Major General I D Bissala, Joseph Gomwalk, Col A D S Way, Lt Col T K Adamu, Lt Col A B Umoru, Lt Col B S Dimka and Lt Col Ayuba Tense.

allegations of corruption and indiscipline. The creation of an agency to tackle indiscipline in the Nigerian psyche and his anti-corruption crusade, known as the 'War Against Indiscipline' and during which for the first time in the long history of Nigeria citizens were starting to be orderly in their activities, is considered by many to have been a lost opportunity to straighten out the country.

However, Buhari was also cited for gross human rights violations (Carey, Gibney & Poe 2010, p 153). Interestingly, Buhari was the main challenger to Obasanjo in the 2003 elections and also a major contender in the 2007 and 2011 elections. Many Nigerians believe that if the political playing field had been level in 2007 Buhari might actually have won. They also believe that it would take a person of Buhari's disciplinary stature to set Nigeria on the path of both political and economic probity.⁵

However, with President Jonathan's appearance on the scene, the odds were stacked against Buhari. Between 1985 and 1993, during the military presidency of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (known as IBB), another northern Muslim, who overthrew Buhari in a palace coup, Nigeria experienced one of the worst and most wasteful periods in its political history. His eight years in office were characterised by massive waste and profligacy, after which he stepped aside, handing over power to an interim national government (ING).

It was Babangida who annulled the 1993 elections, judged to have been the freest and fairest ever conducted in Nigeria. Alhaji Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim and a businessman, who happened to be a personal friend and business associate of Babangida, was accepted as the winner, but the military cancelled the results. Before the ING could settle down to governance General Sani Abacha, who had experience of coups, abolished it and assumed power as a dictator.

Many have argued that it was Babangida and Abacha's plan that Abacha should take over power from the ING, citing as evidence the fact that when Babangida stepped aside he retired all his military chiefs but left Abacha as the chief of army staff and defence minister. It is also interesting to note that when Babangida left office he categorically stated that he was 'stepping aside', leaving many with the impression that he would eventually come back.

His attempts to stage a comeback through the political process have been nipped in the bud and he recently announced his retirement from active politics (*Daily Times* 2011). Abacha's dictatorship is remembered best both in Africa and in the rest of the world for the fact that on 10 November 1995 he hanged writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental rights activists

5 An opinion poll was conducted by the authors in March 2007.

who were campaigning against the environmental degradation caused by oil companies (primarily Shell) in the Niger Delta.⁶

Domestically, his reign is also remembered as the most brutal Nigerians had ever experienced – human rights were violated, political assassinations of opponents were rampant and those who got wind of their fate early enough fled the country.⁷ Continuing the political process initiated by Babangida, Abacha strong-armed the five main political parties into adopting him as their presidential candidate.

On 8 June 1998 Abacha was reported to have collapsed and died in a room at the Aso Rock Villa, as the presidential villa is known. His death paved the way for Nigeria to move forward politically and, more especially, for Abiola, the official winner of the 12 June 1993 elections, who, at the time was incarcerated by Abacha for treason, to declare himself the legitimate president of Nigeria. However, on 7 July Abiola dropped dead in the house in Abuja in which he was being kept while awaiting his official release.

Many conspiracy theories have been advanced about Abiola's sudden and convenient death and the involvement in it of both domestic and international spy rings. To avoid a leadership vacuum in the military command General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the chief of defence staff, was appointed as the military head of state to replace Abacha, a position he occupied until 29 May 1999 when he, like Obasanjo 20 years earlier, handed over power to a democratically elected president. The president was Olusegun Obasanjo.

The 1999 elections and the emergence of Obasanjo as president were seen by many as a kind of political settlement of the Yorubas and more especially of the Egba clan, to which Abiola and Obasanjo belong. Others view the emergence of Obasanjo as a consensus decision between the military high command and the northern Muslim political elite.⁸ In 2003 Obasanjo, under the banner of his ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) won a second term in office, which ended on 29 May 2007. A move by Obasanjo to secure a third term as president by amending the constitutional provision of two, four-year terms, was scuttled by the Senate in 2006, a move which endeared the senators to many Nigerians.

The elections of 2007, which saw Umaru Musa Yar'Adua emerge as the winner, was described by both domestic and international observers as a farce and a fraud (Obi 2008, p 71). However, despite attempts by Yar'Adua's main

6 The other activists were Barinem Kiobel, Saturday Dorbee, Paul Levura, Nordu Eawo, Felix Nuate, Daniel Gboko, John Kpuine, Baribor Bera.

7 Abacha was implicated in the deaths of Pa Alfred Rewane, Mrs Kudirat Abiola and Alhaja Sulilat Adedeji. Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka was forced to flee the country through a land border on receiving information that he was on the hit list of Abacha's goons.

8 A cross section of people interviewed expressed this opinion.

challenger, General Buhari, to overturn the win in an election tribunal, Yar'Adua stayed in office as president of the country until his death on 5 May 2010, when his vice-president, Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan, was sworn in to serve out Yar'Adua's term.

On 9 April 2011 INEC conducted an election for the National Assembly (which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives). While many declared the election to have been transparent, free and fair there were still allegations of vote rigging, ballot stuffing and ballot box snatching. However, these allegations pale in comparison to those made in 2007. The presidential election of 16 April 2011 has been described as the best-organised in Nigeria's political history. Voters trooped out massively to vote in what was always considered to be a straight contest between the PDP candidate, President Goodluck Jonathan, and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) candidate, Buhari.

Despite that perception, in reality the CPC's poor showing at the polls made the elections no contest. The PDP had won a clear majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, defeating their opponents in states considered to be core CPC states. The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) presidential candidate, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) candidate, Mallam Ibrahim Shekaru, were never considered strong contenders. However, the ACN's stranglehold on the southwest motivated the attempt by the CPC to merge with it in order to present a common candidate in the person of Buhari. This proposed 'coalition' never saw the light of the day, as talks between the two parties reportedly broke down because of their refusal to compromise. The failure of the merger talks left the south-west open for contest, giving the PDP the advantage.

President Jonathan, having secured 22 495187 of 38 209 978 valid votes and having also won 25 per cent of the total votes cast in 31 states, was declared the winner by the Chairman of the INEC and Chief Returning Officer, Professor Attahiru Jega, on Monday 18 April 2011. Hours before the declaration of the final result violence erupted in some of the northern states, notably Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Plateau, Jigawa, Taraba, Kano, Nassarawa and Niger.

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

INEC was created by Decree No 17 of 1998 to conduct free and fair elections in the wake of the transition to democracy initiated by the Abubakar regime. The use of the word 'independent' in the electoral commission's title was a signal to the nation that there might be hope for the electoral process, as was the choice of its first chairman, Justice Ephraim Akpata, who successfully presided over the

elections that heralded the transition to democracy. However, when Akpata died Sir Abel Ibude Guobadia was appointed in his stead and was responsible for the conduct of the 2003 poll, in which Obasanjo's ruling PDP secured a landslide victory in an election that was also marred by allegations of vote rigging and election fraud. When Guobadia's appointment expired in 2005 Professor Maurice Iwu, an internationally acclaimed pharmacist, was appointed to replace him.

Many expected Professor Iwu to bring a new spirit to the decaying INEC. Many actually hoped that he would be able to repeat the feat of Professor Humphrey Nwosu, who is credited with conducting the freest and fairest elections ever in post-independence Nigeria.⁹ However, many observers believe Iwu's chairmanship of the INEC was the worst in Nigeria's electoral history. The alarm that the INEC might not be ready for the free and fair conduct of the 2007 elections was sounded early in the process, when it was observed that voter registration was shoddily handled. There was also a sense that the INEC, and particularly its chairman, was partisan. The most controversial period in Iwu's chairmanship was the role he played in 'disqualifying' some politicians who were perceived to be opposed to Obasanjo. Chief among these was the then vice-president, Abubakar Atiku (Omotola 2010, p 541).

The late President Yar 'Adua acknowledged very early in his presidency the flawed nature of the election that brought him to power (Rawlence & Albin-Lackey 2007, p 501). He promised Nigerians that subsequent elections would be credible and, in attempting to fulfil his promise, set up a committee to reform the electoral laws of the country. The committee, tagged 'the Uwais Committee' after its chairman, Justice Mohammed Uwais, produced an electoral reform report. The result of these moves was Nigeria's current electoral law (the Electoral Act 2010 [as amended]).

The appointment of Jega gave Nigerians hope that the Jonathan-led government was ready to deliver a credible election. This hope and belief in Jega's ability to deliver is not unconnected with his antecedents as a university professor and an erstwhile president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Many perceive Jega as a 'no nonsense' and very principled man. His appointment, therefore, could be seen as one of the reasons why Nigerians, who had hitherto lost hope in the electoral process, revived that hope.

Jega immediately swung into action with a massive media campaign, promising Nigerians credible elections if he and his INEC were well funded. His first and immediate task was to call for a total jettisoning of the voters' register, which, he pointed out, was not credible enough, featuring, as it did, names such as Michael Jackson, Mike Tyson, and Dolly Parton, among others.

9 It was Humphrey Nwosu's Option A4 in 1993 that led to Abiola's win.

Jega's action resonated well with the people. However, Nigerians were shocked when he demanded a whopping N89-billion for the INEC to deliver a credible election. He was, of course, given what he asked. His inadequacies, or INEC's inadequacies, were, however revealed when, during the initial registration period, INEC faltered. Many Nigerians immediately started questioning Jega's capacity to deliver on his promises. His subsequent request for an additional N6-billion raised eyebrows among many INEC watchers.

After the initial tottering INEC was able to conclude the registration process, capturing about 73-million voters on its database; 3-million more than it had estimated. There are doubts, however, about the authenticity of the register the commission released.

It will be recalled that in the year 2011 a new state – the Republic of South Sudan – was born in Africa through a peaceful referendum. In the same year civilian populations in North Africa and the Middle East rose up against their countries' dictators and, in what has come to be explained as popular protest, 'chased' them away. The events in Tunisia and Egypt; the enraged protests in Yemen, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the civil war in Libya all demonstrated to Nigerians that they should no longer be indolent about electing those who govern them. It is within this broader context that phrases like 'protect my vote' and 'my vote will count' began to emerge.

PARTIES AND PERSONALITIES

It should be stated that the majority of Nigerian political parties as they are presently constituted are, irrespective of their claims, devoid of ideology, a factor that accounts for the way in which politicians switch parties once they are no longer favoured by their present party. For instance, Buhari, and a host of others, were members of the ANPP until about 10 months before the 2011 elections, when they parted ways and Buhari formed the CPC. Tracing the history of political parties and politicians in Nigeria one can count very few political leaders who were ideologically grounded. The likes of Mallam Aminu Kano come to mind.¹⁰ The section below takes a closer look at the main political parties.

¹⁰ Mallam Aminu Kano was an astute Islamic scholar, an exceptional patriot and a political role model in Nigeria. Born in the northern state of Kano, he studied the Koran under his uncle and due to his mastery of the Koran was at one time the personal imam to the Emir of Kano. He led the funeral process of the assassinated Murtala Muhammed.

People's Democratic Party

The PDP claims that it is the largest political party in Africa. The basis upon which this claim is made is, however, not clear. What is known though is that the party's members include some of the richest businessmen and most astute politicians in Nigeria and that it is the country's ruling party. Presently it has control of about 20 of 36 states and it maintains a comfortable lead in the House of Representatives and Senate, while controlling the presidency.

The PDP, which emerged out of a coalition between the G34 members who were in opposition to Abacha's plan to hijack the political process in 1998 and the People's Democratic Movement headed by Alhaji Mohammed Atiku, is essentially devoid of mainstream ideology – it builds its support base not on issues but on cult figures and the rotation of power between the north and the south. For instance, during the party's presidential primaries in 1999 and 2003 the general understanding was that the candidate should come from the south. In the 2007 primaries it was generally accepted that the power base should shift to the north, hence the decision to nominate Yar'Adua.

However, the myth of zoning was shattered by President Jonathan's insistence on running for the presidency and he was eventually nominated. Generally speaking, the PDP has the most national spread of all the parties. Its attraction is due more to its assemblage of 'successful' politicians and party members than its programme of action, though voting patterns reflect that this attraction is waning, especially in the south-west.

Among the notable members of the party are Olusegun Obasanjo, Ibrahim Babangida, Alhaji Atiku, and Goodluck Jonathan, of whom not much was known until he was chosen by Yar'Adua as his running mate in the 2007 election. The extent to which the party is a party of businessmen is exemplified by the type of donations it receives. For instance, Aliko Dangote and Emeka Offor donated N1-billion to the Obasanjo-Atiku re-election bid in 2003; Dasab Airlines donated a 150-seater Boeing 727 and some companies contributed N400-million.¹¹ An anonymous individual donated €1-million to the campaign (*The Guardian Nigeria*, 25 February 2003).

The PDP's stated vision is to make Nigeria one of the 20 most-developed economies in the world by 2020.¹² This, of course, is a tall order, given the continued decay of the country's infrastructure. However, the Obasanjo administration launched economic reforms that were followed up by Yar'Adua. It is expected that the Jonathan presidency will continue with this agenda, which, if it is given a chance to succeed, could place Nigeria among the top 20 world economies in

11 At the time of writing the exchange rate of the Naira to the dollar was US\$1 = N155.

12 Article 3(iv) of the PDP Manifesto.

the not too distant future. For instance, the power and energy sector is receiving a big boost and Jonathan has committed to following up on and intensifying power generation and distribution. It is whispered that he is interested in making his time in office memorable by delivering on the power sector.

Allied to the issue of economic reform is the security sector. In its manifesto the PDP promises to treat security as a major 'infrastructure' to be developed in order to attract much needed foreign direct investment.¹³

Before Jonathan stepped into the political limelight he was a university lecturer with a doctorate in zoology. Through providence he was selected as the running mate of Alamieseghia in the gubernatorial race in Bayelsa state and, through providence again, became governor when Alamieseghia was removed following his criminal trial in London for money laundering (Oji 2005). Providence was to play a part again in Jonathan's political career when, following the death of Yar'Adua on 5 May 2010, he became acting president, a position he occupied until he won the April 2011 presidential election.

Jonathan is one of very few politicians who do not have scandals trailing their political steps. However, many fear that he is weak and very quiet, though, given the fact that he was elected by popular vote it is hoped that he will become firmer and more confident in his governance style.

Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)

The ACN emerged onto the political scene in September 2006 out of the merger of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the Justice Party, the Advanced Congress of Democrats and several minor political parties. The AD was regarded as a Yoruba party during the 1999 elections, when it won a majority of the Yoruba states, including Obasanjo's Ogun state. However, during the 2003 elections the PDP was able to wrest control of these states from the AD and it won only Lagos state. The party, therefore, merged with others to form the Action Congress, which later transformed into the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), perhaps to give it a more national outlook than the south-west regional cloak in which it was dressed. In the 2011 state gubernatorial elections the ACN was able to re-capture Lagos state, Oyo and Ogun, thereby maintaining a stranglehold on the politics of the south-west as they also control Ekiti and Osun states in that region and Edo in the south-south.

The ACN is also making inroads into other parts of the country. However, the appeal of the ANC in non-south-west states has more to do with the individuals that associate with the party in such places than with the party itself. For instance,

13 Article 3(iv) of the PDP manifesto.

in Anambra Central Senatorial Zone the people voted in Chris Ngige, not because he was an ACN member but because of who he was as an individual.

The most prominent member of the party is its national leader, Bola Tinubu, the erstwhile governor of Lagos state. There have been allegations that Tinubu sees the party as his personal fiefdom and does not believe in internal democracy; his wife and other close relations were selected to represent the ACN in senatorial and other elections during the 2011 poll (Olanrewaju 2011). The party's presidential candidate was Malam Nuhu Ribadu, once a leading anti-graft policeman and chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Other notable members are Adams Oshimole, the governor of Edo state and a former labour leader, and Rauf Aregbesola, the governor of Osun state. As stated above the political programme is targeted at the basic problems of economic growth, infrastructural development and security. The ACN put up a good showing in the 2011 federal legislative elections, thereby positioning itself as the official opposition at the national level.

Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)

This party, which set up shop about 10 months before the 2011 elections, succeeded in showing that it is a party of intrigues. In the federal legislative elections it struggled to secure some seats, which led to the party being dismissed as a non-starter. However, in the presidential elections the party rebounded. The CPC's strongest asset, which might eventually be its undoing, is its presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a member of the military team that truncated the democratic journey of Nigeria in 1983. Analysts considered his cult-like status in the north of the country and the CPC's regional outlook as insufficient to give him the presidency.

His failure to be elected in 2011 has been indicated as the main reason why violence erupted in some northern states. Buhari and his CPC alleged that the votes in about 24 states had been tinkered with to favour the incumbent, President Jonathan (Ogundele 2011). The party has, therefore, resolved to challenge the outcome of the presidential election in court.

The CPC is, however, radically different from the other parties in that it claims not to brook corruption and indiscipline. Buhari is generally perceived by Nigerians as a disciplined and incorruptible man and his record in various positions attests to this fact. However, his human rights record as the military head of state in 1984-1985 does not reflect well on him (Oko 1997, p 315). He nonetheless claims to have reinvented himself as a civilian and a democrat. Notwithstanding this claim, the CPC, like the other parties, seems to lack clear internal party democracy. Pundits believe that while Buhari might be incorruptible the same cannot be said

about his co-travellers on the CPC train. The party's very poor showing in the 2011 governorship election, after its good showing in the presidential election, even though this was only in the north, suggests that it may not last.

All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)

The party, the second largest prior to the 2011 elections, appears to be in a shambles. Its performance in the elections suggests that its strongest support base is in the north of the country. Despite the strong appeal of the party's presidential candidate, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, especially after a creditable showing in a televised national debate, the party still does not have national support. After the state gubernatorial elections it controls three of 22 states and all of those are located in the north, which confirms the impression that it is a regional, if not an ethnic party. Other notable members of the party are Chief Ogbonnaya Onu, Alhaji Kashim Shettima and Alhaji Modu Sherif.

The ANPP's objectives are not radically different from those of other parties, especially since the problems of the scarcity of basic amenities are common to most Nigerians. The party plans to transform Nigeria's economy into one of the world's leading economies.

ASSESSMENT OF THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS

As indicated above the 2011 general elections were generally considered to be transparent, free and fair. This assessment, however, needs to be put in context. As a result of the sham elections organised in the past and, more particularly, those of 2007, Nigeria's elections seem to be measured against the 'standard' already set, therefore people conclude that the 2011 elections were well organised. However, when measured against existing international standards the 2011 elections will be found wanting. We examine some of the areas that pose a challenge to the conduct of transparent, free and fair credible elections in order to assist the INEC to improve on its performance.

Voter registration

There has been much criticism of the voter registration exercise conducted by INEC in February 2011. First, there are doubts about whether the number of registered voters was correct. Analysts believe the numbers were inflated, especially in the north, as was borne out by the incidence of under-age voting (Ogbulafor 2011). If the voters' register is to be credible Nigeria should intensify its efforts at demographic mapping in order to record the correct population figures. This can

be done by intensifying the registration of births and deaths and by the Ministry of Internal Affairs issuing national identification cards.

Secondly, while INEC should be commended for its attempt to use direct data capturing (DDC) machines during the registration process the data that currently exist within the commission's database need to be updated constantly. INEC will eventually have to collaborate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to compare notes on the number of registered voters and the existing population data. By linking INEC's computer database and that of the Ministry of Internal Affairs a more credible voters' register will begin to emerge. There should be an opportunity for those who have never registered to do so at INEC offices.

Political parties, independent candidates and internal party democracy

About 63 political parties are currently registered with INEC. While it can be argued that this makes for a more vibrant polity, it also leads to sectionalism or personality-cult oriented parties, as most such parties are built around an ethnic group or an individual, without the necessary political structures in all the geopolitical zones in the country.

The proliferation of parties also makes it difficult for illiterate voters, and sometimes even literate ones, to identify the party of their choice, as most abbreviations of party names sound and seem alike; for instance, PDP and PDC; CDC and CPC; UDP and UNPD. This also accounts for the lack of a viable and credible opposition, which is a very important aspect for the growth of democratic values in any country, as the opposition should act as a check on the excesses of the ruling party. INEC should consider limiting the number of registered political parties and should vigorously pursue legislation to that effect.

Some people have also pressed for independent candidacy. The workability of this within the political geography of Nigeria will be difficult since hundreds of thousands of persons will want to vie for positions. Secondly, it would run counter to the argument for the reduction of political parties and, thirdly, the cost to INEC of managing the logistics that would involve printing candidates' pictures on the ballot papers would be prohibitive.

INEC should also, as a matter of urgency, ensure that party primaries become transparent, free and fair. Despite the appearance of transparency in the primaries of most parties, there were still allegations of imposition of candidates. While it is in the nature of politicking that camps should be formed in any political forum, flag-bearers for each political office should emerge through the free will of the party members. This will curb the habit of political prostitution: a practice where candidates decamp from their political parties when they feel cheated out of a position, to pitch their tent with another party, with the intention of standing for

same office as he/she has been denied. It will also reduce the incessant court cases associated with such primaries.

Campaigns

The level of campaigning in which the different parties engaged in 2011 was more advanced than that in the past. No longer did candidates rely only on traditional political rallies held in state capitals and at local government headquarters, they made extensive use of the media and the various electronic and digital communication methods available. For instance, it was not unusual for potential voters to receive a series of text messages from different parties during the course of the day, all wooing their support or casting aspersions on opposition candidates.

Furthermore, social networking sites, especially Facebook, were used by many of the parties and those purporting to support them. Another phenomenon, akin to the Facebook factor, is the diaspora element, with numerous diaspora organisations weighing in for the campaign. Another trend seen in the campaign was the extensive use of young people. Unlike in the past, when youths were engaged as thugs, on this occasion candidates, especially the presidential candidates, engaged young people constructively. However, as the post-presidential-election violence in the northern states indicates, young people can also be very destructive as a result of negative orientation.

A major constraining factor for most parties, however, was the issue of funding. The ruling party, both centrally and in most states, seemed to have inexhaustible resources, leading analysts to wonder whether the candidates were using state funds for their campaigns. INEC needs to weigh in on the issue of campaign funds and to place a ceiling on the amount that may be spent by parties and candidates. It might, however, not be feasible to implement such a policy in the immediate future.

Voter education/awareness

There was a high level of voter awareness of the 2011 elections. This is not unconnected with the high level of campaigning and the awareness campaigns mounted by the government and civil society organisations (CSOs). The National Orientation Agency (NOA) and some of the CSOs working on the issue of democratic governance in the country were able to sensitise people about the need to be aware of and involved in the political process. The tempo had to be sustained despite the hiccups experienced.

Similarly, some international organisations provided strategic support for

the voter awareness campaign. Among these organisations were the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the European Union (EU), the Department for International Development (DFID), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The church, too, involved itself in the awareness campaign and there is evidence that some Christian denominations ordered their congregations to register and vote. In fact, some bishops threatened that congregants who failed to do so would not be allowed to receive Holy Communion (Oseloka, 8 April 2011).

Despite widespread voter awareness, however, it appears that there was no corresponding voter education, an impression borne out by the number of invalid votes cast in the presidential election. Of a total of 39 469 484 votes cast 1 259 506 were declared invalid for one reason or another (www.inecnigeria.org/results/presidential). The government, INEC, political parties and CSOs should use the time between 2011 and the next elections to educate voters about the correct method of voting.

Security/conduct

As a result of the violence that dogged campaigns in previous elections many eligible voters shied away from participating in the electoral process. In the 2011 election, however, thanks to the greater level of sophistication and the reduction in violence, eligible voters came out in their numbers to register and vote.

The extent of the security provided by both military and paramilitary forces, however, created the impression that Nigeria was under siege. Restrictions of movement and closure of businesses on election days, while imposed with the aim of providing an enabling and secure environment, should not become the norm. Instead, sustained voter education and campaigns about civic responsibility and awareness should be used to educate citizens about the importance of participating in elections. Through such voter education the billions of naira lost as a result of the closure of businesses for the duration of the elections will be saved.

It is also suggested that INEC consider compressing all the elections into a single day, as the current practice of stretching the process over three weekends takes a toll on both the country and the people. This voter fatigue was obvious in the last of the series of elections in 2011 when voters complained of the stress involved in devoting a whole month to voting. The logistical nightmare associated with this proposal will be reduced if the number of registered political parties is reduced dramatically.

Voting/collation and announcement of results

The introduction by INEC of a modified open ballot system (MOBS) is a welcome initiative. The system is, by its nature, structured to eliminate rigging. However, it also has drawbacks. One of these is situations in which parties are unable to field sufficient agents to cover all the polling units within a particular constituency. There is a tendency in such situations for a party, in collaboration with INEC staff on duty, to rig an election in its favour.

Security agents, especially uniformed agents, aid in such vote rigging. Consider the scenario where security agents 'storm' a particular polling station when voting has ended but before the counting and announcement of results. Using their authority the security agents commandeer the ballot boxes and results sheets, using the excuse that they are providing security and protection for the electoral officers, while in fact they are helping a particular party to stuff ballot boxes and fill in results sheets.

The fact that many party agents are illiterate leaves room for vote manipulation. Party agents need adequate training in what to look out for right up to the announcement of results. The era of appointing party agents because of their ability to induce fear is gone. INEC, security agents, election observers and CSOs should collaborate to ensure that polling stations, particularly those in rural areas, are run according to the rules.

Collation officers and returning officers must be non-partisan and adequately trained. INEC's ad hoc staff, largely comprising National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, was not adequately trained and had different approaches to the same issues, thereby lacking uniformity of approach.

Voting

While many hailed INEC's introduction of direct data capturing machines for voter registration the system had its critics, particularly in relation to the cost and the perception that the machines were substandard. It was also expected that the same machines would be used during the voting process, but this was not the case.

We would recommend that before the next elections INEC make it possible for its database to be accessed by its staff anywhere in the country. However, control should be exercised over the uploading of information in order to avoid manipulation of data. INEC should also ensure that there are sufficient DDC machines for each polling unit to have one.

The advantage of using the machines during the election is not merely that this will increase the efficiency of staff at polling units but also that it is not

necessary for voters to travel to their place of registration. Once a voter is registered within a particular constituency and is within that constituency on election day he/she should be able to vote at any polling station because, using the code number on the voter registration card, INEC staff can pick up and verify information about the voter. This, it is argued, will enfranchise more registered voters. The drawback is that there might be more voters voting at a particular polling station than the number registered at that station. INEC should work out the logistics of re-supplying polling stations where such need arises. The commission should also consider the use of electronic voting, as this would reduce the incidence of multiple voting, which is still the bane of Nigeria's electoral democracy.

Post-election violence

The security provided by the government for the conduct of the 2011 elections was near perfect. There was, however, a problem – security experts did not envisage the post-election violence, especially the manner in which it erupted. While Nigerians and the international community were concerned about President Jonathan's response if he lost the election attention was not focused on what his political rivals would do if they lost.

The orgy of violence that erupted in some states in the northern part of the country on Monday 18 April when it became clear that Jonathan was winning was never anticipated. The government, INEC, political parties, religious leaders and CSOs, therefore, need to educate the people about tolerance and the real meaning of democracy. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) has a major role to play in this regard.

CONCLUSION

Domestic and international observers have given INEC and the Jonathan administration a pass mark for conducting a successful election in 2011. Notwithstanding this, the violence that greeted the results, especially in the case of the presidential election, is not encouraging. Although there was less violence than there was in 2007 the election did generate a new type of violence – bomb attacks. The bombing of INEC's Suleja office on 8 April added a new dimension to politicking in the country.

If the type of violence that erupted in April 2011, leading to the imposition of curfews and declarations of states of emergency – actions reminiscent of the era of military dictatorship – is not prevented in the future it will erode the gains made in the elections. Does this, therefore, portend that Nigeria will return to military dictatorship? Not at all, according to some analysts interviewed (Anadu 2011).

Questions arise, however, about the continued level of violence and more particularly the threat posed by the militant Islamists group, the Boko Haram. For instance, how will the instability affect Nigeria's plan to attract foreign direct investment? Were Nigeria to remain a democracy, but one wracked by civil unrest, are businesses secure enough to operate in the country? The president must be firmer on the issue of security, to demonstrate that he is, indeed, in control of the situation.

Nothing much is expected to change with respect to the president's style of governance. However, he might become firmer in his decision-making. With regard to the 'continued' fight against corruption it is expected that he will make a few spirited attempts to control it but will eventually allow the status quo to continue. However, he will, within the new Cabinet, issue warnings against corrupt practices.

It is expected that he will not interfere with the work of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. Nonetheless, he will not overtly encourage it. Notwithstanding the challenges and loopholes identified above, the 2011 elections in Nigeria were a great improvement on earlier ones, more particularly, the 2007 election, and this is, indeed, a sign of the gradual maturation of the country's attempt to build a culture of democratic governance.

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