

The Political Economy of the Postponement of Nigeria's 2015 General Elections: Effects, Implications and Lessons

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Abstract

The credibility of Nigeria's previous elections had been doubted, though the situation has been improving lately. This research article examines the effects and implications of Nigeria's postponement of the 2015 general elections. An attempt is also made to identify and discuss the lessons learned from the shift in elections. The effects of elections postponement identified in the study include: protracted grounding of governance; nosedived economic activities; increased unemployment; negative effects on social and cultural activities; and heightened political tension; although it afforded the INEC a good opportunity to improve upon its preparations. Implications examined include erosion of the integrity of Nigerian Government; perception of the INEC as managing elections' programme poorly; and reduction in future aids. The paper pinpointed some of the lessons learned from the elections' postponement as: the need for timely provision of funds; professional management of elections; use of contingency and change management plans; and proper documentation of lessons learned. Finally, the research recommends the use of lessons learned as springboard for strengthening democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Effects, Implications, Lessons, Elections' Postponement, Political Economy, Nigeria.

Introduction

The credibility of Nigeria's previous elections had been doubted, though the situation has been improving lately. The Nigeria's 2015 General Elections earlier slated for 14th February and 28th February, 2015 for the national elections (National Assembly and Presidential) and the state elections (Governorship and State Assembly) respectively were rescheduled for 28th March and 11th April 2015 respectively. Despite the fact that the rumour of likely postponement had been rife in the public space, its announcement by the chairman of The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on 7th February, 2015 was a rude shock, not only to majority of the internal stakeholders, but also to the international community. While political parties have been recognized as indispensable to any democratic system (Stokes, 2013), it is clear that developing democratic institutions also bring maturity in the political system, making it more transparent, equality based and efficient (Singh, 2014).

Following a letter written by the National Security Adviser (NSA) to the INEC on Wednesday, 4th February, 2015, the NSA and all the Armed Services and Intelligence Chiefs, at the National Council of State meeting - the highest advisory to the President comprising past and present leaders in Nigeria - held on Thursday, 5th February 2015, unanimously reiterated that the safety and security of election operations could not be guaranteed. They also emphasized that the Security Services needed at least six weeks within which to conclude a major military operation against the insurgency in the Northeastern Nigeria; and that during this operation, the military would be concentrating its attention in the theatre of operations such that they might not be able to provide the traditional support they render to the Police and other agencies during elections (Jega, 2015). Consequently, INEC had to reschedule the elections to 28th March, and 11th April, 2015, relying on Section 26(1) of the Electoral 2010, as amended (Electoral Amendment Act No. 6, 2010). According to Jega (2015), the total number of Permanent Voter Cards (PVC's) collected as at 5th February 2015, was 45,829,808, representing 66.58% of the total number of registered voters. Consequently, INEC promised to use the period of the extension to keep on perfecting its systems and processes for conducting the best elections in Nigeria's history. In particular, it was expected to resolve all outstanding issues related to non-collection of PVCs, which agitate the minds of many Nigerians.

Although security challenge had been cited as the main reason, however in the public arena, it is a widely held view that the Nigeria's 2015 general elections were postponed to enable the ruling People's Democratic Party cover lost grounds, adequately showcase the party's achievements and aggressively market its candidates in order to ensure success at the polls. This view was buttressed by the fact that Reuters as quoted by The Punch (2015) disclosed that the NSA had earlier in London, while speaking at the Chatham House (a London Think-Thank), suggested that the elections be postponed in order to increase the collection rate of the permanent voter cards -- a kite that did not fly at that time.

This research article focuses on answering the following questions: what are the effects and implications of the postponement of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, and what are the lessons learned? The rest of the research article is organized as follows: section two covers materials and methods, the next section deals with results and discussion of the effects and implications of, as well as the lessons learned from the postponement of the 2015 elections while section four concludes the article.

Conceptual Discourse

Political economy is the interplay between economics, law and politics, and how institutions develop in different social and economic systems, such as capitalism, socialism and communism. Political economy analyzes how public policy is created and implemented. This centers on the production of material wealth and the mode of production, that is, it studies production and the basis of society from the point of view of the economic relations between people in the production process (Ryndina, 1980).

In the views of Lenin, political economy deals not just with production, but the social relations of men in production and the social system of production. The subject-matter of political economy is therefore, the production (economic) relations between people, the relationship of various social classes to political power and the interplay of politics and economy in the determination of power relations within the comity of nations.

Election is an integral part of a democratic process that enables the citizenry determine fairly and freely who should lead them at every level of government periodically and take decisions that shape their socio-economic and political destiny; and in case they falter, still possess the power to recall them or vote them out in the next election. This was why Rose (1978) and Dye (2001) aptly defined election thus: Election is a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; the key to participation in a democracy; and the way of giving consent to government (Dye, 2001); and allowing the governed to choose and pass judgment on office holders who theoretically represent the governed (Rose, 1978). Election is an irreducible feature of democratic governance. Democracy here is defined as a social system of administering a nation-state where political parties and independent candidates compete for elective positions in a free and fair election atmosphere, and in which the citizens are legally empowered to choose those who will run the affairs of the state in a given period.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The theory of reflexivity is best option for the research as it makes proper analysis of the effects of the postponement of election in Nigeria and it also shows the correlation between elections and the market environment. Although reflexivity theory is widely attributed to George Soros, it was originally developed as a sociological construct by William Thomas in the 1920s, known as the Thomas theorem, and built upon by sociologist Robert Merton in the late 1940s. The outcome of their work was to define the idea of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” where in predictions often lead to component actors to behave in ways that make the “prophecy” becomes true. The theory states that investors' and traders' biases can change the fundamentals that assist in determining market prices. If you believe that the elections may not hold or that the signs are unclear to make an informed decision; you will take care by reducing your portfolio or exiting the market. If more than a few believe that too, then a ‘herd effect’ is created. Tracking these changes or “decision influencers” can prove tricky but for a discerning mind, the trends always show up early on. The uncertainty and drama that ensued around and about the Independent National Electoral Commission’s (INEC) postponement of Nigeria’s 2015 general elections to March 28 and April 11, 2015 send out signals to the international community’s that the INEC was not ready probably due to some ‘environmental issues’ that must needed to be resolved, revenue decline, exchange rate volatility, amongst others .

Materials and Methods

This study utilized secondary data obtained from INEC Website. The data set was analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics as well as the discourse approach. The major descriptive statistical techniques utilized include tables, percentages and pie charts.

Results and Discussion

This section addresses the key issues in three subsections as follows:

Effects of the Postponement of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

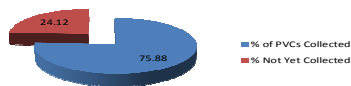
The effects of the postponement of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria include the following:

It Enabled the INEC to Improve upon its Preparations

Although the INEC claimed that it was ready for the general elections as previously scheduled for 14th February, and 28th February, 2015, events after the postponement clearly showed that INEC had not adequately prepared for the polls. It therefore seized the opportunity to perfect its processes and systems. These included the

imperative test-run of the card readers in selected states in each of the six geopolitical zones in the country. Also, the INEC utilized the shift in dates to increase the rate of distribution of the PVC's from the initial 75.88 percent as at 17th February, 2015 to 81.98 percent thereby significantly reducing the number of disenfranchised voters by 4,197,859 voters (Figures 1 & 2. Also see appendices 1 & 2). The postponement facilitated further perfection of INEC's recent significant efforts geared towards unprecedented improvement in the electoral processes, systems and the credibility of elections in Nigeria, which the researchers have coined the "Jegarization" of electoral processes and systems. This is a term derived from Jega, the surname of the INEC Chairman, for his innovativeness and steadfastness, which would go a long way in etching his name in gold in Nigeria's electoral history. While opinion polls in India, as in a number of developing nations such as Nigeria, have repeatedly shown that people generally vote more for the party than for a candidate (Kesalu, 2013), before now, history has repeated itself in many developing countries, including Nigeria, that the ruling party would always win the elections either genuinely or through vote-rigging.. With the "Jegarization" of electoral processes and systems in Nigeria, vote-rigging has been brought to the barest minimum.

Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards as at 17th February, 2015



Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards as at 21st March, 2015



Protracted Grounding of

Governance

During electioneering and political campaigns, leadership activities tend to be more partisan. In a period of extension such as the one in focus, political parties took it as an opportunity to cover lost grounds and intensify electioneering, political campaigns, scheming and related activities aimed at getting a landslide. A lot of resources, including time and money, were involved which led to a protracted virtual grounding of governance and democracy dividends.

Suspension of Investment and Business Decisions

The postponement of the general elections triggered increased uncertainty. This forced foreign (and local) investors to delay investment decisions pending the outcome of the elections to enable them know the strategic/investment direction of the in-coming administration. Owing to increased uncertainty, existing businesses delayed business decisions such as new product decisions, innovation decisions, and business expansion/market development decisions until the coast was clear. Thus, the postponement of the general elections' was a bottleneck for not only the Domestic Investments but also Foreign Direct Investments.

Nosedived Economic activities

Delayed investment and business decisions, and the grounding of governance, among others mean that potential value addition to the economy would always be truncated during the period of extension of election dates. The only sector that got the bulk of the spending was the media; through advertisements, jingles, documentaries, and advertorials, etc. In view of the above factors, productive economic activities in the country became dampened and this would eventually hurt the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the end of 2015 as it has been shown that the asymmetric effects of government spending adversely affects economic growth (Mehdi and Avati 2012). Furthermore, individuals and firms would have limited choice in terms of consumption, and production decisions thereby restricting their functionalities. Functioning has been defined as what a person does or can do with the commodities of given characteristics that they come to possess or control (Sen, 1999). . The postponement of the 2015 general elections for six weeks by the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, had an adverse impact on the Nigerian economy to the tune of \$2bn (over N400bn) loss. It was discovered that the devaluation of the naira against the United States dollars affected the domestic airline operators as they tried to procure their spare parts abroad (Daniel, 2015).

According to him, the 2015 elections postponement also led to Foreign Direct Investment to find their ways to

other countries and loss of confidence in Nigerian economy, adding that it will also lead to huge business challenges in the country.

In respect to the elections, many European countries have placed travel ban on some of their citizens, adding that this will negatively impact the aviation sector in the country. Elections postponement impact on the economy is analyzed to be worth over \$2bn as cost and investor loss of confidence for existing and new Foreign Direct Investment that may have found its destination to other countries. Nigeria's foreign reserves was constantly depleted while the national account is currently in deficit, pointing out that the crash in oil price and consequent impact on the nation's revenue earnings had led to an exchange rate from N155 a dollar to N205 to dollar within a six-month period at the interbank and Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN.

Beyond the logistic and financial implications of the postponement of the general elections, two major international research firms, Renaissance Capital and Standard Chartered Research, believe the Nigerian financial authorities may have to take some pre-emptive measures in order to tame the effects of the dwindling oil price on the economy before the new election dates.

Social and Cultural/Traditional Activities were adversely Affected

Before the recent shift in the general elections, individuals, groups, and communities that had slated weddings, social engagements and cultural/ traditional festivals had taken into consideration the previous timetable. Some of them were forced to postpone their events because of coincidence with the newly announced dates of the elections.

Heightened Political Tension

The sudden postponement of the elections barely a week before the due date generated some avoidable agitations and also heated up the polity. Majority of the general public was disturbed and this sparked some doubts as to the real intentions behind the postponement. A subsequent special presidential media chat contributed in no small measure in dousing the tension later. However, the abated tension was renewed with greater vigour and got exacerbated as the new dates of elections drew nearer.

Increased Unemployment and Underemployment

Increased uncertainty, delayed business decisions, and the eventual decline in productive economic activities kept many human resources in the unemployment market while some hitherto employed people might have slipped into becoming underemployed during the period. Specifically, the results of a study carried using 1950 - 1983 U.S. data suggest that 1% higher unemployment reduces output growth by 2.1%, which translated in 1987 to over \$1,000 per household per year (Hibbs, 1987). However, the reports of the same study estimates that no more than 25% of this value returns to households as extra leisure. According to Brenner (1973, 1976), unemployment has also been linked to multifarious psychological, social, and medical problems that include family tensions, stress, mental health, suicide, homicide and other crime, and cardiovascular and renal diseases.

Implications of the Postponement of the 2015 General Elections' for Nigerian Economy

The implications of the elections' postponement are as follows:

Erosion of the Integrity of Nigerian Government

Nigeria may be inadvertently perceived as a country that may not be trusted with elections' timetable in future. This arises from the fact that general elections constitute a big programme that should not be handled with levity. This would negatively affect Nigeria's elections-scheduling rating in the eyes of the international community as future elections timetable might be taken with a pinch of salt.

Perception of INEC as Managing Election Programme Poorly

As at February 5, 2015, only 66.58 percent of the PVC's had been collected which implies that about 33.42 percent of the registered voters were yet to receive theirs; thus a significant number of eligible voters would have been disenfranchised. However, the postponement increased the rate of PVC's collection from 66.58 percent¹⁴ to 81.98 percent thereby minimizing the number of disenfranchised voters (Appendix 2). Hence, a large proportion of the public might have perceived the INEC as being initially slack in the distribution of PVC's and the test-run of card readers. These two issues were, however resolved during the period of postponement.

Reduction in Future Aids

The sudden postponement of elections could inform some cynicism on the part of the international community, especially international donors, who would wish to scrutinize Nigeria's future elections' timetable before giving aids. It is also likely to negatively influence the availability of aids during election years thereby drastically

reducing welfare benefits that ought to be gained by Nigerians in particular and other African Nations in general.

Wrong Signals to Other African Nations

Although Nigeria was not the first country in Africa where elections had been postponed, but being the most populous and the largest economy on the continent, it might send wrong signals and be perceived as a stronger precedence that other African countries might emulate in future. This is not good enough for democracy in Africa.

Lessons Learned from the Postponement of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

Perhaps, the most important factor emanating from the postponement of the elections is the recognition of lessons that must be learned from it. These lessons include the following:

Timely Provision of Funds

In future elections, adequate funds must be provided at the right time to facilitate timely execution of projects/programmes. The INEC must supply a well-prepared budget and same must be made to speedily pass through the approval process. For instance, if the funds for the production of PVC's had been made available and the contracts awarded at least three months earlier than it was done, the about one million outstanding PVC's with the contractors (Jega, 2015b) would have been produced and the level of distribution would have been significantly higher than the figure recorded before the elections were postponed.

Professional Management of Elections

A major lesson is that future elections must be treated as projects/programmes that should be professionally managed. For each project, a good Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) must be designed, and flow chart properly mapped out. Also the critical path must be identified while stakeholders must be effectively managed. Major stakeholders in these elections include: political parties and their flag bearers, security agencies, voters, civil society organizations, election monitors/observers, traditional rulers, the legislature, the judiciary, and the media. Risks that may emanate before, during and after the elections must be properly analyzed and factored in the projects. The implementation of every project must be clinically managed while there is need to strengthen monitoring and control against an established and excellent dashboard.

Contingency and Change Management Plan is Key

As an extension of risk analysis, a good contingency and change management plan must be put in place to prevent or forestall any event that could disrupt holding free, fair, credible and peaceful elections at scheduled times.

INEC Must Work Closely with Security Agencies

The various security agencies must be carried along and made to sign an agreement with INEC, ab initio, with respect to every activity proposed in the timetable. This agreement would go a long way in allowing the security agencies to integrate election security into their plans with a view to making personnel available when and where desired.

Proper Documentation of Lessons Learned from Elections

As earlier suggested, each election must be treated as a project. When this is done, then proper records of lessons learned from each election must be well documented. This would allow strategies and tactics that had previously succeeded to be replicated in future elections surrounded by similar circumstances, while those that failed would pinpoint what could be done differently, and how they could be made more effective in the future.

Conclusion

Elections are a means to an end; they constitute a veritable vehicle for democracy. A proper management of elections builds the credibility of the process and enhances electorate confidence in the Elections' Management Body. In view of these, professionals must be engaged in elections' management, adequate planning must be put in place while adverse effects and implications that would erode the democratic structures and processes must be prevented, henceforth. Other developing nations must take a cue from Nigeria with respect to the improved processes and systems, while the mistakes from the Nigerian experience must be avoided. Finally, Nigeria, and indeed other developing nations, must take the lessons learned as springboard for strengthening democracy.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards as at 17th February, 2015

Independent National Electoral Commission				
Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards as at 17 th February, 2015				
S/N	States	Number of Registered Voters	Number of Cards	Remarks
			Collected by Voters	%
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
1	ABIA	1,396,162	1,115,634	79.91
2	ADAMAWA	1,559,012	1,328,136	85.19
3	AKWA-IBOM	1,680,759	1,468,708	87.38
4	ANAMBRA	1,963,173	1,499,317	76.37
5	BAUCHI	2,054,125	1,745,441	84.97
6	BAYELSA	610,373	404,119	66.21
7	BENUE	2,015,452	1,548,074	76.81
8	BORNO	1,934,079	1,320,667	68.28
9	CROSS RIVER	1,175,623	879,249	74.79
10	DELTA	2,275,264	1,728,524	75.97
11	EBONYI	1,074,273	714,351	66.50
12	EDO	1,779,738	1,145,782	64.38

13	EKITI	732,021	503,431	68.77
14	ENUGU	1,429,221	1,065,210	74.53
15	FCT	881,472	541,359	61.42
16	GOMBE	1,120,023	1,064,577	95.05
17	IMO	1,803,030	1,252,030	69.44
18	JIGAWA	1,831,276	1,706,814	93.20
19	KADUNA	3,407,222	3,133,813	91.98
20	KANO	4,975,701	3,487,155	70.08
21	KATSINA	2,827,943	2,620,829	92.68
22	KEBBI	1,470,648	1,316,656	89.53
23	KOGI	1,350,883	914,164	67.67
24	KWARA	1,142,267	843,792	73.87
25	LAGOS	5,905,852	3,685,322	62.40
26	NASARAWA	1,242,667	1,196,583	96.29
27	NIGER	2,014,317	1,413,015	70.15
28	OGUN	1,829,534	747,556	40.86
29	ONDO	1,524,655	1,071,010	70.25
30	OSUN	1,407,107	1,012,678	71.97
31	OYO	2,415,566	1,569,390	64.97
32	PLATEAU	2,001,825	1,406,528	70.26
33	RIVERS	2,537,590	1,923,139	75.79
34	SOKOTO	1,611,929	1,380,840	85.66
35	TARABA	1,340,652	1,196,583	89.25
36	YOBE	1,099,970	824,401	74.95
37	ZAMFARA	1,495,717	1,458,519	97.51
	Total	68,833,476	52,233,396	75.88

Source: INEC Website; www.inecnigeria.org (Retrieved on 23rd March, 2015).

Appendix 2: Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards as at 21st March, 2015

Independent National Electoral Commission				
Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards as at 21st March, 2015				
S/N	State	Number of Registered Voters	Number of Cards	Remarks
			Collected by Voters	%
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
1	ABIA	1,396,162	1,183,127	84.74
2	ADAMAWA	1,559,012	1,381,571	88.62
3	AKWA-IBOM	1,680,759	1,587,566	94.46
4	ANAMBRA	1,963,173	1,658,967	84.50
5	BAUCHI	2,054,125	1,967,081	95.76
6	BAYELSA	610,373	548,585	89.88
7	BENUE	2,015,452	1,607,800	79.77
8	BORNO	1,934,079	1,407,777	72.79
9	CROSS RIVER	1,175,623	983,968	83.70
10	DELTA	2,275,264	1,939,952	85.26
11	EBONYI	1,074,273	848,392	78.97
12	EDO	1,779,738	1,230,566	68.81
13	EKITI	732,021	522,107	71.32
14	ENUGU	1,429,221	1,223,606	85.61
15	FCT	881,472	569,109	64.56
16	GOMBE	1,120,023	1,070,725	95.60
17	IMO	1,803,030	1,707,449	94.70
18	JIGAWA	1,831,276	1,757,658	95.98
19	KADUNA	3,407,222	3,174,519	93.17
20	KANO	4,975,701	4,112,039	82.64
21	KATSINA	2,827,943	2,620,096	92.65
22	KEBBI	1,470,648	1,372,630	93.34
23	KOGI	1,350,883	926,013	68.55
24	KWARA	1,142,267	889,067	77.83
25	LAGOS	5,822,207	3,799,274	65.25
26	NASARAWA	1,242,667	1,048,053	84.34
27	NIGER	2,014,317	1,682,058	83.51
28	OGUN	1,829,534	1,125,657	61.53
29	ONDO	1,524,655	1,118,479	73.36
30	OSUN	1,407,107	1,033,229	73.43
31	OYO	2,415,566	1,639,967	67.89
32	PLATEAU	2,001,825	1,508,585	75.36

33	RIVERS	2,537,590	2,127,837	83.85
34	SOKOTO	1,611,929	1,527,004	94.73
35	TARABA	1,340,652	1,270,889	94.80
36	YOBE	1,099,970	824,401	74.95
37	ZAMFARA	1,495,717	1,435,452	95.97
	Total	68,833,476	56,431,255	81.98

Source: INEC Website; www.inecnigeria.org (Retrieved on 23rd March, 2015).

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