

2015 Electioneering Process and the Widening of Voters' Political Consciousness

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Abstract

Electioneering process represents a formal procedure whereby a person is elected into a political office. Previous elections, in the political history of Nigeria, have recorded a high level of political apathy. Lack of interest, with reference to voters' participation, has been a common political culture of the country. The massive rigging, recorded in previous elections, has led to the characterization of electioneering process by many Nigerians as "selection" instead of "election." This ugly phenomenon has informed the growing voters' political apathy recorded in the previous elections. This paper, therefore, raises some fundamental questions such as: when will an average Nigerian voter engage actively and consciously in the electioneering process and in the question of who becomes the leader in the country? How will the political confidence of an average Nigerian voter be restored? These passionate and mind-bugling questions have, however, been put to rest, following the just concluded 2015 electioneering process. Unlike the previous elections, which were marred generally by high level of voters' apathy, the just concluded election marks a sharp deviation from the past, by ushering in an era of active political participants and a high level of political consciousness on the side of the electorate. Based on this, this paper, by means of historical hermeneutics/interpretation and philosophical analysis, argues that the just concluded 2015 electioneering process is a political eye-opener, in that it marked the beginning of a new era of active voters' participation and in widening their political consciousness.

Keywords: electioneering process, political apathy, political culture, political consciousness, political re-engineering

1. Introduction

The 2015 general election, from all indication, is one that elicited the greatest attention. Starting from 1999 to the 2011 general elections, there has never been such great expectations from Nigerians as in the one being expressed during the just concluded 2015 general elections. These great expectations and concern from Nigerians on the 2015 general elections are understandable. This is, because, "Nigeria's democracy is gradually being deepened, while the electoral process by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is also enjoying some confidence from the electorate" (Egbala, 2014, p. 2).

Successive elections in Nigeria since the colonial period lacked the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process, which include transparency, fairness and freeness. This failure is due to several factors, which include manipulation of the decisions and activities at the various stages of electoral process by the governments and politicians; corruption of officials and electorate; violence, during campaigns, polling and collation; rigging, through the stuffing, snatching and destruction of ballot boxes. The first military intervention, in January 1966, "was considered in some quarters as the outcome of the protracted and grievous violence that characterized the elections in the Western Region from 1964 to 1965" (Alemika & Omotosho, 2008, p. 1). This means that past efforts to institutionalize and conduct free and fair elections in Nigeria have been largely unsuccessful.

The 2015 general election promised to brighten the emerging socio-political skyline of Nigeria. This promise, no doubt, "goes with so much expectations and trepidation, bearing in mind the fact that Nigerians, have over the years, witnessed a crescendo of rising frustrations" (Tador, 2014, p. 3). Such frustrations are predominantly borne out of the fact that the political process, often times, takes the electorate (citizenry) away from the driver's seat. Unfortunately, successive governments have been found to be passive while many politicians are yet to deliver on electoral promises. Democratic ideals posit a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them under a free electoral government. Unfortunately, "the Nigerian political landscape is enmeshed in in-animation, irredentism and parochialism, as typified by aphorisms like 'nascent democracy' and 'budding democracy'" (Tador, 2014, p. 3). This is why Osuji (2014) opines that "most politicians have not only lost their bearings, many now engage in all forms of political prostitution and engineering to remain visible" (as cited in Tador, 2014, p. 3). This ugly phenomenon is further compounded by the fact that the country's polity is devoid of any enduring ideologies. However, the citizens, in every election, must not only decide on the party or candidate they wish to vote for or support, but they must also decide whether they will vote at all, considering the fact that previous elections have betrayed their political confidence in the electoral system. It is against this backdrop that the following questions readily emerge: when will an average Nigerian voter engage actively and consciously in the electioneering process in the country, given the fact that previous elections have betrayed their political optimism? How will the political

confidence of an average Nigerian voter be restored? This is the pivot on which this paper rotates. It argues that, despite previous elections, which have failed in the past, the just concluded 2015 general election ushered in an era of active political participation and restored the political confidence of the average Nigerian voter in the electoral system, as well as widened his/her political consciousness. But before we delve deeply into this, a brief conceptual clarification will be apposite.

2. Conceptualizing Election, Voting and Political Consciousness

Election represents a formal procedure whereby a person is elected, especially into a political office – a periodic selection of government representatives of the people at various levels of governance by the electorate themselves. Thus, it is the action of electing or the fact of being elected. On the other hand, the understanding of voting is necessary, if we wish to fully appreciate the concept of election. Voting, within the purview of this paper, is understood from the perspective of a formal indication of a choice between two or more candidates expressed typically through a ballot. Thus, it is the right to indicate a choice in an election.

The understanding of political consciousness is also important, if we desire to appreciate the full import of this paper. A philosophical view of consciousness describes it “as the gamut of man’s subjective experience and, indeed, the subjective experience of all beings capable of similar experiences” (Agbakoba, 2001, p. 9). On the other hand, Igwe (2005) defines it “as the purposeful awareness of objective reality, including the logic of its existence” (p. 5). Similarly, Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (6th ed.) views it “as the state of being conscious – the fact of awareness by the mind of itself and the world.” It then means that consciousness is the state of awareness or perception of something. Based on the above explanation, political consciousness, therefore, means the political awareness, as well as participation in the public affairs of one’s country. This means that it is the awareness and involvement of oneself in the activities associated with the governance of one’s country or area.

Over the years, many Nigerians have expressed growing concerns about the level of political ignorance, which the country has long experienced. This often embodies itself in the form of political apathy, which, for Mason, Nelson and Szlarski (1991), manifests itself in “the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and abstention from political activity” (as cited in Independent National Electoral Commission & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2011, p. 15). Voter apathy, a subset of political apathy, has, thus, emerged as a major problem in mature and emerging democracies, settled and volatile societies, large and thriving economies, as well as small and troubled ones, among youth, women and other marginalized groups, as much as among mainstream dominant interests (INEC & FES, 2011).

Voter apathy – the opposite of voters’ political consciousness and active political participation – negatively impacts on the electoral process and its outcome. Any serious effort at electoral reforms, to bring about free, fair and credible elections, must take into account the challenges of voter apathy. In a country trying to deepen democracy, after a long history of authoritarian military rule, strategies for mobilizing people for popular participation and effective engagement in the electoral process have to be well conceptualized and carefully designed. To fully appreciate the import of this, a brief historical review of previous elections in Nigeria and voter’s political apathy in such elections are apposite.

3. Historicizing Previous Elections in Nigeria and Voters’ Political Apathy

Political apathy, according to Mason et al. (1991), is “the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and abstention from political activity” (as cited in INEC & FES, 2011, p. 15). It is evidenced in mass, collective behaviour, but has its origin at the level of the individual psyche. In the aggregate, it is revealed by attitudes and in absence of expected activity. For Mason et al. (1991), “when people cease to care about political life, withdraw from obligations to civil society, and perform entirely nominal acts – or none at all – in political institutions or organizations, apathy is indicated” (as cited in INEC and FES 2011, p. 15).

The 1979 elections witnessed high level of voters’ political apathy due to matters arising from multiple registrations, registrations of fictitious individuals and other forms of malpractices. Ethnicity, caliber of candidate, electoral integrity and party ideologies further contributed to the low level of voters’ turnout both in the 1959 and 1979 elections. Although these elections recorded low turnout of voters, some of the factors that contributed to this ugly development include the absence of partisan politics for more than 13 years, the turbulent politics of the pre-military era, which discouraged, in particular, the older generation of voters, the failure of party leaders to reach large sections of the population during the campaigns and the integrity of the electoral process.

The 2003 elections further identify “forms of electoral chicanery that has been recorded in Nigeria’s political history, including the corruption and maladministration of elections by electoral and judicial bodies, election violence and ideological confusion and/or sterility among the political parties” (INEC&FES, 2011, p. 23). This further contributed in exacerbating the low turnout of voters during these elections.

The disastrous 2007 elections witnessed high level of voter enthusiasm and persisting optimism in its countdown. According to Adejumobi (2010), “74.6% of the (voters) showed very keen interest in voting at the elections (2007), not necessarily because of confidence in INEC, but because of their determination to use their vote to make a difference” (as cited in INEC & FES, 2011, p. 24). Thus, for him, “while there was public enthusiasm and optimism toward the elections, the conduct and outcome of these elections confounded such hope” (INEC & FES, 2011, p. 24). The above analysis indicates the socio-cultural contexts, as well as structural, processional and institutional challenges that have bedeviled Nigeria’s search for an open, democratic and sustainable electoral order.

With the generally acknowledged exception of the 2011 elections, which recorded a high turnout of voters, and whose conduct appear generally to have rekindled hope in regard to this search for the consensus, and towards ending the long perceived voters’ apathy in the history of elections in Nigeria to an extent, other civil governance, starting from 1999 have produced increasingly costly and astronomically prohibitive elections and have produced increasingly cruel travesties, leading to democratic regressions, rather than the consolidation of the democratic process (INEC & FES, 2011). Civil rule in Nigeria has produced electoral results, which cannot stand scrutiny or the elementary tests of integrity. The paradox is that the more costly and prohibitive the elections, the less satisfactory have been the outcome (Williams, 2011).

Some of the challenges plaguing the electoral system, including discrepancies in results, lack of preparedness or last-minute actions, date back to the 1950s (INEC & FES, 2011). Their persistence, interacting with equally intractable legacies of military rule, problems of corruption, triumph of culture of impurity, erosion of culture of restraint, low-quality political leadership, institutional weaknesses and structural inadequacies, have served as constraints to voter turnout and catalyst to voter apathy. From one election to the other, Election Observer Missions have highlighted the challenges of elections, as well as voter apathy towards these elections and have made suggestions on how to contain it. However, before we proceed, a retrospective insight into electoral malpractices in the Nigerian political scene will be apposite. This forms the basis of the following section.

4. A Retrospective Insight into Electoral Malpractices in the Nigerian Political Scene

The Nigerian political environment, in previous elections, in the political history of Nigeria, has been characterized with many electoral irregularities. There have been reported cases of political assassinations, thuggery, election rigging, post election violence and even the attitude of the electoral bodies in conniving with political parties to perpetrate rigging. To have a brief insight into electoral malpractices in the country, a retrospective analysis of the previous elections with reference to understanding electoral malpractices, which have characterized the Nigerian political scene, in the Nigerian body politic, will be appropriate.

From the 1959 elections, to those elections after political independence, in 1960, the level of election rigging in Nigerian politics has astronomically increased. Edo (2003) observed that “even under the supervisory eyes of the British, during the 1959 elections, incidents of violence, stuffing of ballot boxes, as well as obstructions and intimidations of opponents were reported here and there” (p. 70). He noted, in addition, that “rigging became properly integrated into Nigeria’s political and electoral lives during the regional elections of 1961” (Edo, 2003, p. 71). Since then, this has become a permanent feature of Nigerian politics.

In the 1964 general elections in Nigeria, “four major political parties – the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the Action Group (AG), the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) – formed political alliance in order to perpetrate their strategies of election rigging” (Awopeju, 2011, p.7). Similarly, elections into the Western House of Assembly on October 11, 1965, ended in disorder, violence and arson of the “Operation Wetie” fame, as a result of widespread rigging (Awopeju, 2011). Due to the widespread of election rigging and violence, the first military coup took place in Nigeria in January 15, 1966, and this brought to an end the Nigerian First Republic.

The Second Republic also witnessed increased election rigging. According to Olaoye (2007), there was rigging of unimaginable proportions during actual voting, vote-counting and declaration of results (as cited in Awopeju, 2011). In 1983 general elections, “the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), which was to serve as an umpire in the electoral process, connived with the ruling party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), to perpetrate election rigging techniques” (Awopeju, 2011, p.7). The FEDECO staff were variously accused of aiding and abetting the perpetration of electoral fraud. Five political parties contested the 1979 presidential elections, which include the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), United Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Peoples’ Redemption Party (PRP) and Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP). Among the five political parties, which contested the August 11, 1979 presidential elections, three rejected the results on the ground that it was full of flaws. “Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the UPN challenged the verdict of the FEDECO through the electoral tribunal up to the Supreme Court, when the case was finally rested in favour of Alhaji Shagari’s NPN on September 26, 1979” (Awopeju, 2011, p. 8). Similarly, the 1983 general elections witnessed electoral fraud and massive rigging. Cases of violence were reported, despite the caution sounded by the

transiting military regime. This ugly phenomenon was vividly captured by Abe (2008), as he noted that “during the federal elections of 1983, violence was promoted to an unimaginable level, where states sponsored thugs, arsonists and assassins, unrestrainedly unleashed terror and fear on both opponents and voters alike”(p.170).

The Third Republic “witnessed series of political contraptions under the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Abacha. There were cases of massive rigging, followed by the annulment of the results of the June 12, 1993 presidential election” (Awopeju, 2011, p. 8). According to Olaoye (2004), “the election was believed and adjudged by the 3000 accredited local and international observers to be the fairest and the best in Nigeria’s political history” (p. 8). The results showed that “Social Democratic Party (SDP), under the flag bearer of Chief M. K. O. Abiola, had won 14 states out of the states released by the National Electoral Commission (NEC), headed by Prof. Humphrey Nwosu” (Awopeju, 2011, p. 8). According to Oshun (1999), “report from the thirty (30) states had already indicated victory for the SDP” (as cited in Awopeju, 2011, p. 8). However, in spite of the fairness of the 1993 election, the presidential election was annulled on June 23, 1993, by the Federal Military Government, which was headed by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida.

Election in the Fourth Republic was not a deviation from the previous massive rigging and electoral frauds. Those, who observed the elections, discovered that they were marred by widespread fraud. Even the observers from the US-based Carter Center, concluded that it was not possible for them to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election. In the same vein, the 2003 elections bear the same resemblance with the previous elections. It had been tagged by the Human Right Watch as an “abject failure” (as cited in Awopeju, 2011, p.9). Similarly, April 2007 elections were the worst elections Nigeria has had. Elected officials, alongside with the very government agencies, charged with ensuring the credibility of polls, reduced the elections to a violent and fraud-riddled farce. In spite of the strategies designed to ensure credible polls by consensus of all the monitors on general elections, both local and international, those elections recorded massive failures. European Union monitors described it as “falling short of basic regulation and international standards for democratic elections” (as cited in Awopeju, 2011, p.9). Thus, historically speaking, the Nigerian political and/or electoral system has been characterized with rigging, arson, irregularities, intimidation, assassination and most disturbingly, political thuggery.

Political thuggery is another factor bedeviling the Nigerian political scene. It represents “any act of intimidation, violence, hooliganism, brutality or *gangsterism*, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scale political opponent or perceived political opponents before, during or after elections, and aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage” (Shankyula, 2010, p.33). In the past, series of elections, held in Nigeria, between 1999, 2003 and 2007, activities of thugs have taken a centre stage, thereby, breeding a feeling of resentment among members of the public. The activities of thugs are not noticeable in only one party; all political parties are guilty of this. Each political party, in trying to wrestle power from the other or remain in power ahead of the other, engages in this condemnable act. Thuggery is not known or experienced in only one part of the country, it is everywhere in the country. Within the nation, different groups exist, formed and maintained by politicians before, during and after elections, with the aim to intimidate, harass, distort and to perpetrate whatever activities that would give political advantage to party candidate over their opponents (Shankyula, 2010).

In the Northern part of Nigeria, *Kaurayeis* a brand of Hausa word referring to a group of people, mostly youth, between the ages of 8 – 35 years, some of whom are in secondary schools or school drop-outs. These youths are used by politicians during campaigns and elections in some sections of Northern Nigeria to intimidate voters and political opponents into accepting the position of their sponsors. They are violent, unemployed and mostly drug addicts. Similar group exists in Kano known as *yandaba*. In Kaduna, they are called *Kawaye* or *yan mage*, while in Borno, they are known as *ecomog*. In Bauchi, you call them *sara suka* and in Lagos, they are called *area boys* (Shankyula, 2010).

Lawal (2010) has it that “immediately after independence, the politicians, in attempt to capture and retain power, recruited, trained and empowered thugs to harass, intimidate and victimize perceived political opponents and opposing views against their political ambition” (as cited in Shankyula, 2010, p. 33). He went ahead to maintain that this culture of thuggery has not only been imbibed and sustained as part of the country’s political behaviour since independence to the present moment, but it has also been one of the potent causes of the low participation of women in politics. The 2007 general elections indicate the prevalence of the activities of thugs and how, in some cases, either clearly over-powered the security operatives, who were on duty on election days, or simply got the cooperation of these same security operatives to perpetrate their activities. The Human Right Watch has it that “in the North-Central zone, comprising Plateau, Benue and Niger, it was observed that there was disruption of voting by militant armed youths, for instance, at Unity Gate polling station, Gindiri V ward, in Plateau State. In Benue State, thugs overpowered security agents and electoral officials at the Government House polling station and snatched away ballot boxes. Violence resulted, and a free-for-all fight ensued, which made voters run away” (as cited in Shankyula, 2010, pp. 33-34). The Report also went ahead to indicate that in North West Zone, covering Kano, Katsina and Sokoto, cases of ballot box snatching amongst other offences were

noticed, whereas, South-South Zone, including Edo, Bayelsa and Rivers States, witnessed snatching of ballot boxes and thumb printing of ballot papers by electoral officers and party thugs, as well as intimidation of voters by stern looking party thugs. Similarly, in “Oyo States, men and women of the Nigeria Police Force were reported to collude with party agents and electoral officers to rig election and intimidate voters” (Shankyula, 2010, p. 33), whereas, in Anambra, Enugu and Abia, it was observed that “cases of snatching of ballot boxes and alteration of election results abound” (Human Right Watch Commission, 2007, p.4). It was also reported that “in one of the polling stations in Anambra State, one Festus Eze of the Nigerian Police Force was seen thumb printing ballot papers in favour of one of the political parties” (Shankyula, 2010, p. 33). This ugly phenomenon leaves one with no choice than to conclude that the security forces were drafted in, not to provide security, but to coordinate and perfect the rigging process.

The 2003 and 2007 elections were continuations of the culture of thuggery as they turned out to be worse. This is an indication that electoral malpractices – rigging, thuggery, manipulation of election results – have thrived in the Nigerian body politic. But the question still remains: what is to be expected in the subsequent elections in the country? Considering what has happened in the past, one is left with no choice than to conclude that only time will tell. But the just concluded 2015 general elections have, to an extent, put to an end to this mind-bugling question. This is, because, it was a sharp deviation from the past as it ushered in an era of active political participation and widened the political consciousness of the average Nigerian voter, who is now more enlightened and politically wiser to be robbed of his vote. This forms the basis of the discussion to which we now turn.

5. The 2015 General Elections and the Widening of Voters’ Political Consciousness

It will not be an overstatement to say that the just concluded 2015 general elections represent a hope for the average Nigerian voter. This is an indication that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. In fact, one would describe that as a restoration of the political confidence of an average Nigerian voter. This is, because, the ideal concept of “one man, one vote” was, to a greater extent, largely enforced. This represents a step in the right direction. Unlike the previous elections, which were marred generally by high level of voters’ apathy, the “sit-tight syndrome,” on the side of the incumbent president, and a high level of rigging, the just concluded 2015 general elections mark a sharp deviation from the past, by ushering in an era of active political participants, a high level of political consciousness on the side of the electorate and a leadership standard on the side of the politicians, who cling tenaciously to power and who will do anything, no matter how malicious, to remain in power. This means that just like the philosophical Socrates, who instilled democratic consciousness in the Athenian citizens, and the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose concept of the superman represents the essence of humanity and the highest level of development of consciousness, the 2015 general election represents a political eye-opener to the average Nigerian voter, in that it marked the beginning of a new era of active voters’ participation and in widening their political consciousness.

As has been described above, political consciousness represents the political awareness, as well as participation in the public affairs of one’s country – the awareness and involvement of oneself in the activities associated with the governance of one’s country or area, as well as the electoral processes. The just concluded 2015 general elections ushered in an era of active political participation and awareness on the side of the electorate. This can be seen in the areas of youth engagement, women active involvement, the role of the media, the aggressive enlightenment campaign mounted by INEC, as well as civil society organizations, the political debates organized by the Nigeria Elections Debate Group (NEDG), the role of the judiciary and the contesting political parties.

On the side of the women, the 2015 general elections ushered in an era of active women participation in politics. This is not only in the area of support mobilization, but also in contesting for certain sensitive elective positions. For instance, the senatorial candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), in the just concluded general elections, in Anambra State, was Senator Uche Ekwunife, who defeated the senatorial candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Senator Chris Ngige, who was a serving senator. Similarly, some of the gubernatorial candidates in some states, had women as their deputies. They include Dr. Alex Otti of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), who had Mrs. Uche Emeh Uche as his deputy, Nyelson Wike of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who also had a woman deputizing him, and so many others.

The “Nigerian Women Strategy Conference,” with the theme: “Building Bridges of Opportunity: 2015 and Beyond,” was an outcome of the 2015 general elections, aimed at widening women’s active political participation as well as their political awareness. “Redefining the role of Nigerian women in political life” was the focus of this conference held “for female political leaders at the national and local levels, from the leading political parties and women legislators in the National Assembly” (Eme, Onyeishi, & Nwoha, 2014, p. 1). The two-day conference, focused on “enabling women to earn positions of leadership within and outside political parties, to be more strategic and effective within those roles, and to raise the profile of Nigerian women as an important voting bloc” (Eme et al. 2014, p. 1).

Part of the strategy, adopted in this conference, towards increasing women's engagement in politics include women's use of the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis conducted by them and their parties in the conference to identify specific strategies they could use to develop an effective communication strategy within their respective political party, and to identify strategic alliances across different political parties and organizations to be able to challenge their male folk during the 2015 general elections. It was agreed in this conference "that women should also remain focused on the importance to remain authentic in politics, develop a political message, motivate party members and supporters and engage party decision-makers at all levels to be able to mobilize support across party and religious lines" (Eme et al. 2014, p. 9). For instance, it was concluded in this conference that women politicians should inform voters, using SMS messaging, about issues of importance. Again, it was advised that "women politicians should make efforts to meet politicians from other countries at international forums, to learn different strategies that are used in different countries to be able to achieve success come 2015" (Eme et al. 2014, p. 9). The essence of the above discussion is to demonstrate the aggressive enlightenment and high level of political consciousness attained by women during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. In other words, the 2015 election was a political eye-opener for them, in that it ushered in for them, an era of active political participation and in widening their political consciousness. This means that it provided a series of effective collaborations between them and increased their political capacity in Nigeria. Furthermore, it provided a basis towards launching "The Nigerian Women Inter Party Forum," which will offer a platform "for women beyond conferences, town hall meetings and political gatherings, to share experiences, network, advocate and lobby for political space for women within and outside the political parties" (Eme et al. 2014, p.10). This platform will further empower and encourage aspiring women politicians for political leadership and governance positions, which is critical to societal and human development.

Youth active engagement in politics, in the just concluded election, is also a by-product of 2015 general elections. No election, in the political history of Nigeria, has elicited positive youth engagement in politics more than the just concluded 2015 general elections. In our tertiary institutions, for example, one can hardly see groups of people gathering without discussing politics. This indicates a high level political consciousness amongst them. For instance, parties like the "PDP and APC have their youth wings" (Pogson, 2013, p. 9), which participated actively in voter enlightenment and education. Although, there have been reported cases of violence in some areas of the country, where the services of some youths were elicited to foment troubles, the majority of them are now politically wiser and enlightened to be used for such purposes. This is a product of the 2015 general elections enlightenment campaign.

The resilience shown by the youths in the last election is another pointer to the fact that "the average Nigerian has become more politically conscious" (Dagona, 2013, p. 2). This was demonstrated in their determination in seeing not only that they voted in the last election, but also in their unprecedented patience to wait and see the result of the elections even at the polling unit levels. A clear example here was a case in Kastina state, where a sick person insisted on being brought to his polling unit to cast his votes. This was shown live on Channels Television, where this sick youth was being helped by the hospital officials to cast his vote. This shows that Nigerians are becoming more passionate and conscious about the activities of governance and electoral processes in the country. Thus, the Nigerian attitude of characterizing the electioneering process as *selection* instead of *election* is gradually phasing off. The introduction of the smart card reader, as well the integrity of the INEC boss – Prof. Attahiru Jega – also boosted the political confidence of the Nigerian youths that the elections can hardly be rigged or manipulated.

The platform for effective electioneering campaign reportage as well as voter education and enlightenment were also provided by the 2015 general elections. The press briefing often carried out by the INEC boss, provided key insights into the activities of the commission. This provided a forum where the key actors in the electioneering process come together to dialogue. The essence of this was to broaden the political knowledge of the average Nigerian voter, whose votes would actually determine the outcome of the election. Although, the media have been accused of aiding and abating hate campaign during the election, it did not derail from its primary role of voters' enlightenment and education.

The primary functions of the media in electioneering campaign include "reporting and interpreting events, defining issues, portraying personalities and investigating report" (Agba, 2007, p. 262). To a greater extent, the media shared in the responsibility of channeling the electoral process towards the desirable goal of integrity and transparency. For instance, "the media focused on serious matters that portended serious consequences for the people and their political choices" (Aghamelu, 2013, p.167). It clarified issues during campaigns, portrayed the personalities of the contestants, thereby, bringing aspirants close to the electorate, and teaching the differences between party and candidate, which enabled the electorate to make a wise choice. Furthermore, the media helped in enabling the electorate to analyze campaign messages of politicians and setting the correct political agenda for the audience. The Magic FM, Aba, for instance, organized an audience participatory programme captioned: "People and Politics," aimed at educating the masses concerning the 2015 general elections. The essence of this was to help them make informed and enlightened choices. It is important to note that the 2015 general elections

provided the platform for this voter education. Furthermore, the political trend in Nigeria, with regard to the electoral process, demands specialist political reporters. This should cover critical areas as knowledge of legal issues in campaign reporting, investigation and balanced judgment that allows the establishment of gathered facts. In the light of this, the media, with special reference to Magic FM, Aba, was able to carry out a critical and objective analysis of candidates during the general elections, with the aim of educating the electorate. In this capacity of impartiality, they acted as a catalyst between the candidates and the electorate. With this trend, the average Nigerian voter was more politically enlightened to make informed choices about the candidates who would represent them in the election. The overall outcome of this was an informed, enlightened and politically active citizenry, whose political confidence in the electioneering process have been restored.

The political debates organized by the Nigeria Elections Debate Group (NEDG), during the 2015 general elections, was also a political eye-opener to the Nigerian electorate. Here, the manifestoes of different political parties for the election were thrown open to the assessment of the Nigerian voters themselves. According to the Board of Trustee Chairman of the group, Mr. Sola Omole, “the debates are very important components of the democratic process aimed at giving the candidates the opportunity to speak directly to Nigerians” (Vanguard, January 28, 2015). The implication of this forum is putting the Nigerian voters at the forefront of decision making in the election, as against the previous Nigerian political culture of “Godfatherism,” who would *select*, instead of allowing the Nigerian electorate to freely *elect* their leaders. The antecedents and previous performances of each contestant were also assessed, and this put the electorate in an enlightened mood to make informed political choices. The most interesting aspect of this exercise is that it adds credibility, integrity and transparency to the electoral processes and as such, a catalyst towards restoring the political confidence of the Nigerian electorate in the electioneering process as well as making the candidates more politically accountable to the people. Furthermore, it means “directing the goals of electioneering campaign to the desirable goal of responsible democratic principles that recognize the sovereignty of the people’s votes” (Aghamelu, 2013, p.164).

The 2015 general elections, in addition, created the centre stage for the alertness of different political parties. Because of the stiffness of the competition introduced by the exercise, different political parties no longer dwelt on empty political promises, but quickly swung into action in executing those promises, even before the election proper. For instance, the gubernatorial candidate of Progressives People’s Alliance (PPA) in Abia state, Sir Chikwe Udensi, seeing that the electorate are wiser and already tired of empty promises, embarked on rapid road construction in the state as a campaign strategy. Other political parties immediately followed suit. This is an indication that Nigerian electorate are becoming more politically wiser and aware of the power of their ballot. It is important to note that the 2015 general elections created the platform for this stiff competition. The contesting candidates are now fully aware that it is no longer “business as usual,” given the credibility and transparency of the exercise.

The multiple litigations witnessed during the 2015 general elections are another political eye-opener for the Nigerian electorate. It was during the issue of the “certificate saga” that most Nigerian electorate became aware of the constitutional requirements for contesting for certain elective positions. Before that incident, most Nigerian electorate were ignorant of what the law says concerning who is qualified or who is not qualified for certain elective positions in the country. Furthermore, the elections brought to the fore, the hidden antecedents of most political contestants. For instance, it was during this period of election that the issue of certificate authentication of the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, as well as that of All Progressives Congress (APC), Mohammedu Buhari, came to the fore. The overall outcome of this is that the 2015 general elections deepened the political consciousness of the average Nigerian, who is now politically wiser and highly informed to make critical political choices. It also brought with it some political lessons, which the average Nigerian politician should incorporate into his political attitude and in subsequent elections in the country. This forms the pivot on which the following section rotates.

6. The Nigerian Politician and the Political Lessons of 2015 General Elections

The just concluded 2015 general elections have enormous political lessons for the Nigerian politicians. This can be seen in the actions of Goodluck Jonathan, in conceding defeat, immediately after the presidential election. This act is, indeed, legendary and worthy of emulation. It demonstrates the spirit of statesmanship, which every Nigerian politician should emulate. Because of this, the former president has been described as “The Father of New Nigeria” (Africa Research Bulletin, May 18, 2015).

On March 31st 2015, the former President publicly conceded defeat in the presidential election to President Mohammedu Buhari, expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to lead the nation: “I thank all Nigerians once again, for the great opportunity I was given to lead this country and assure you that I will continue to do my best at the helm of national affairs until the end of my tenure” (Africa Research Bulletin, May 18, 2015). Jonathan’s public admission of defeat in the nail-biting election came more than six hours after he rang Buhari to concede defeat, earning him widespread praise for statesmanship. “The official final result had not been announced yet, but Buhari ended the race with 2.5m votes ahead, marking the first democratic transfer of power in Nigeria’s

history” (Africa Research Bulletin, May 18, 2015). This informed why the Executive Secretary, Nigeria National Summit Group (NNSG), Mr. Tony Uranta, in an interview with the Daily Times Newspaper, opined that “the most important aspect of Jonathan’s acknowledgment of defeat is that it crowns him as the ‘Hero of Democracy in Nigeria”” (Daily Times, April 25, 2015). This is, because, if Jonathan had not created and allowed for the existence of an enabling environment, a free and level playing field, and if he had not subscribed and encouraged freedom of information, freedom of discourse, freedom of association and protest, on a level that we have never had in Nigeria, this democratic history would not have taken place in the country. This is, indeed, a lesson for the Nigerian politician, which is worthy of emulation. More than this, the former President went ahead and allowed Nigeria to exist as one nation till this moment, because of the potency of the danger which was about to engulf us – the reality that Nigeria may have been on the skid, about to break up, post-March 28, after the presidential election. However, through his gracious acknowledgement of defeat, and by compelling his party (PDP) not to contest the outcome of the presidential election, he did not only create a democratic history for the first time in Nigeria, “but has gone into the annals of history as a leading African leader” (Daily Times, April 25, 2015). In such circumstances, where Nigeria found itself then, and where the whole world, led by the United States, had already foretold our failure, the former president held back and allowed peace to prevail. That is the lesson we have to learn and the first thing we have to recognize. This is, because, “President Jonathan has shown that he is a man greater than even the office of the president of Nigeria” (Daily Times, April 25, 2015).

On the other hand, President Buhari’s perseverance, resilience and determination are worthy of emulation. His persistence and doggedness in the presidential race is a food for thought to the Nigerian politicians. This is, because, the President, through this resilience, has demonstrated to Nigerians that victory can come only with hard work and perseverance. One is only astonished that despite his age, the President was repeatedly contesting for that office and not being deterred by the fact that he was consistently losing. Just like Abraham Lincoln, he came, saw and conquered. Furthermore, by changing his title from *General* Mohammadu Buhari to *President* Mohammadu Buhari, the president has demonstrated to Nigerians that he is truly a democratic civilian President in the new Nigeria, where peace, democracy, rule of law and respect for other people’s sensibility have to take control. Indeed, he has already begun to win people’s heart by announcing that he will “not nominate or appoint anybody into public office, who has not sworn to declare his assets in Court, not just to the Code of Conduct Bureau” (Daily Times, April 25, 2015).

The peace agreement signed by both parties of PDP and APC to avert post election violence is another act worthy of emulation. On March 26th 2015, Jonathan and Buhari signed a non-violence pact, seeking to avoid the repeat of previous elections, which were marred by deadly post-poll clashes between rival supporters, exacerbated by ethnic and religious tensions. The meeting was brokered by the National Peace Committee for the 2015 General Elections, led by retired Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, which was aimed at extracting commitment from the leading candidates towards ensuring that the elections would be violent-free. The action of these parties coming together to sign this peace agreement is a lesson to the Nigerian politician, which demonstrates that election is not “a do or die” affair. The upcoming politicians should, thus, key into this standard already set by both parties.

The integrity of the INEC boss, Prof. Attahiru Mohammadu Jega, also has to be commended, for overseeing the transparency and the credibility of the elections. This is, because, the INEC boss, without fear or favour, carried out his duty diligently. Although, the election cannot be described as completely perfect, it was a process which can be described as “near perfection” and a great hope towards “Future Nigeria.” Furthermore, the introduction of the smart card reader by the INEC boss, added to the credibility of the election as it drastically reduced rigging to the barest minimum. The “caveat here is that the ‘New Nigeria’ is still at birthing stage, and we have to be very careful so that it does not come out stillborn” (Daily Times, April 25, 2015). The current President should, therefore, pay attention towards strengthening the electoral processes to further build the political confidence of the average Nigerian voter. This, therefore, calls for a political re-engineering, which will usher in a new and a better Nigeria, and which forms the basis of the following section.

7. Towards a Political Re-engineering and a Better Nigeria

No doubt, the 2015 general election represents a frantic effort in restoring the political confidence of an average Nigerian voter. Unlike the previous elections, which were marred generally by high level of voters’ apathy, the just concluded election marks a sharp deviation from the past, by ushering in an era of active political participants and a high level of political consciousness on the side of the electorate. This means that it represents a political eye-opener for the Nigerian voters. However, there are still some rough edges, which the current administration, with the cooperation of all institutions, as well the entire Nigerians, needs to sharpen. This makes it highly imperative to embark on aggressive political re-engineering/restructuring, which will usher in a *new* and a *better* Nigeria and which will sustain this political tempo and confidence of Nigerians in the electioneering process, which the 2015 general elections have already set the centre stage. Critical part of this re-engineering/restructuring will focus on INEC in conducting a free, fair and credible election, more effective

electioneering reportage by the media, voter aggressive enlightenment, equipping the security agents, prompt settlement of electoral disputes by the judiciary, campaign finance monitoring, as well as training and re-training of electoral officials for effective discharge of their duties.

On the part of INEC, serious effort should be made to conduct transparent, free and credible elections. Although, the just concluded 2015 general election was not far from this recommendation, INEC should sit up to tackle the challenges posed by the 2015 election, with a view to improving on subsequent elections. In addition, they should partner with the civil society organization to embark on aggressive voters' education. Also, critical to this, is the issue of true independence of the electoral body. This portends that INEC should be truly independent and tackle the issue of logistics setbacks in subsequent elections. Improving and simplifying the voting process, as well as recruitment of competent staff, are also highly imperative. This includes training and re-training of INEC staff.

Training of election officials is not only critical, but also central to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. It is believed that with sound training and good orientation, these officials will ensure that the conduct of elections conforms to international benchmarks that will produce transparent and acceptable outcomes. This is why Attahiru Jega, in the foreword to *Manual for Election Officials 2015*, is of the opinion that "the right attitude and conduct of election officials are pre-requisites to the building of strong democratic institutions that will work for the benefit of all citizens" (Election Manuals, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, for him, "it takes well-trained election officials to ensure that all eligible and duly registered citizens freely cast their ballots and that the results arising from such elections accurately reflect the wishes of the electorate" (Election Manuals, 2015, p. 1). It, therefore, "goes without saying that in order to meet the expectations of the citizenry, election officials must not only be well trained, but also be diligent and committed to their duties" (Election Manuals, 2015, p. 1). Since election officials are mostly seen as the face of elections, they must, therefore, uphold the highest ethical standards in the discharge of their functions.

Media organizations, on their own part, should work closely with civil society, to raise awareness of voters on electoral and political processes. This informed why Peace and Security Working Group (2015) opined that "reporting around elections should be sensitive to conflict dynamics so that reporting does not intensify tensions that already exist"(p. 9). This means that they should use their platforms to promote non-violence. In the event of violence breaking out, they should proactively host on air or publish those with influence to call for peace.

Past electoral violence in Nigeria has been fuelled by acts or rumors of electoral fraud and the perception that authorities have a partisan bias. Media outlets are often seen as partisan and lack objectivity and credible platforms to counter rumors. The 2015 election was more challenging due to greater political tensions and a more fragile security situation created by *Boko Haram*. Breaches in the ruling party and the emergence of a strong opposition coalition made the election to be hotly contested. During this period, much of the discussion around elections focused on personalities and on attacking opponents rather than detailing manifestos for delivery, once in office. Objectivity, fairness and balance in reporting are crucial. "The media should promote engagement in elections from potential voters based on candidates' positions on issues and encourage candidate to clearly articulate their manifestos as to what they will do if elected to power" (Peace and Security Working Group, 2015, p. 10). This will enable the voters to decide which candidate to vote, based on this, and to be able to hold politicians accountable for pre-election pledges. Importantly, the media should desist from hate campaigns, in order to avoid heating up the polity.

Security agents, on their own part should be highly equipped. They should increase information-sharing and collaborate with INEC, government, and others, on security-related issues, particularly at the local government and state levels. However, the emerging dysfunctional role of the security forces in the previous elections, especially the 2003 general elections and the subsequent 2004 council polls, marks a clear departure from their traditional responsibilities. This is why Ajayi (2006) stated that "the opposition parties and election observers share the uncompromising opinion that the electoral victory of the ruling party in the elections was facilitated by the use of security forces to destabilize the opposition before and during the elections" (p. 57). It suffices to say that whichever party wins the presidency and controls the armed forces, has a greater propensity to win elections in Nigeria and be returned to power through electoral manipulations with the security forces as facilitators. The security agencies, therefore, should go back to their traditional duty of securing the election materials as well as the officials, instead of exposing them to manipulations and danger.

On the side of the political parties, the re-engineering should focus on fulfilling electoral promises, stopping violence or "do or die" politics, educating members/supporters, organizing political rallies well, responding to election results in line with process, avoiding bribery and corruption, providing responsible representation, as well as obeying INEC rules and regulations. Similarly, on the side of the government, this re-engineering should focus on providing support to INEC, fulfilling electoral promises, conducting public enlightenment campaign, providing adequate security for elections, enforcing law and order, not interfering with the electoral process, as well as shunning corruption.

The judiciary, on their own part, must ensure prompt settlements of electoral disputes to avert post election

violence. Litigants loathe delays in the administration of justice and the judiciary has the opportunity to take remedial actions to mitigate their anger. The Judges must also conduct themselves properly. This is, because, the eyes of the world will be on them. They will be scrutinized and their every conduct will be the subject of speculation and gossip. Justice is built on confidence and the judiciary must at all times strive to retain the confidence of the people. Similarly, the Nigerian Bar Association must also play a commanding role by setting up a monitoring team to monitor the conduct of lawyers appearing before some of the Judges. Prior to this period, some lawyers turned into lobbyists and consultants on behalf of some politicians and judges. Some of them took all sorts of cases to court and used subterfuge to influence their outcome. We must realize that if the edifice collapses, nobody will be spared (Okoye, n.d.). Judicial integrity must, therefore, be the watchword of the judiciary, as the Nigerian people are waiting eagerly to see how the leadership of the judiciary deals with the issue of judicial integrity in the just concluded 2015 general elections.

Campaign finance monitoring must also not be taken for granted. This is, because, “given the plutocratic realities of liberal democratic system, it is a well acknowledged fact that money is crucial to politics” (Animashaun, 2010, p. 17). At the same time, unregulated use of money portends dangers to electoral politics. Money becomes a threat to politics, when it is used arbitrarily to corrupt electoral process. This prompts democracies across the world, including Nigeria, to design regulations to combat the danger of unregulated political funds. Campaign finance regulations were breached with impunity during the 2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria. In the 2003 polls, for instance, “the self-styled organization, named ‘Corporate Nigeria,’ mobilized millions of Naira to aid the campaign of the presidential candidate of the ruling party, in breach of section 38(2) of the Companies and Allied Matters Act” (Animashaun, 2010, p. 17). Many state governors, including those of Lagos and Delta, also benefited from such illegal sources of funding. Also, SERI (2007) noted that “the ruling People’s Democratic Party spent a whopping (sum of) N809, 530,762 to prosecute Yar’adua’s presidential ambition” (as cited in Animashaun, 2010, p. 17)). This figure is far above the N500million benchmark stipulated by section 93(2) of the 2006 Electoral Act. For any effort to re-engineer political financing to be meaningful, it must meet the three necessary conditions identified by Walecki, which include “full disclosure of finance sources, independent enforcement and/oversight institutions, and reasonable state funding” (as cited in Animashaun, 2010, p. 17). With the above recommended aggressive re-engineering in place, a new and a better Nigeria will, indeed, be ushered in to further strengthen the political confidence of the average Nigerian voter in the electoral process, which the 2015 general elections have already set the centre stage.

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