

# **Institutional Constraints for Effective Performance of INEC in the 2015 General Elections**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

The relative success of the just-concluded General Elections in Nigeria has been a topical issue of discourse among political analysts since April 11, 2015. Just like any other issue of national importance, the elections have generated varied reactions among participants, observers and scholars depending on their orientations, affiliations and interests. However, there is a general consensus that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) did its best to offer the country credible general elections albeit some obvious inadequacies. This paper examines some of the institutional and societal constraints that militated against the complete success of the INEC's conduct of the 2015 general elections. The paper argues that some of the lapses in the conduct of the 2015 elections were traceable to internal institutional constraints of the INEC itself while some are basically beyond its mandates but those of other stakeholders. It is shown in the paper that while such internal issues of card reading machines, permanent voter's card and poor staff strength were some of INEC weak points, the complementary activities of such stakeholders as the political parties, security agencies, civil societies, observer groups and the general public were critical to the success or otherwise of the elections. The paper concludes that the success of the electoral process goes beyond the electoral body but a collective duty of all stakeholders.

## Introduction

Democracy is arguably one of the most widely known forms of government in modern time. This is because it is the form of government adopted by most developed countries of the world particularly the leading Western nations (Pennock, 1979; Schmitter & Lynn, 1991; CIPE, 2014: 1). Democracy has some basic features which include the supremacy of the law, existence of political parties, equality of all citizens, fundamental human rights, separation of powers and periodic elections, among others (Osaghae, 1994: 45). Of all the features of democracy, periodic election, usually held every four years, is one of the most fundamental. This is due to the fact that smooth change of government is basic to democratic practice. Periodic elections have remained the major test of democratic experiments in most countries of the world particularly in Nigeria where elections are always war-like in nature (Akindele, 1994: 74).

In Nigeria, the years of the general elections, since 1959 when the first general elections which ushered in national independence were held, have always been chaotic and challenging. This is due to the heterogeneous and multi-ethnic nature of the state. The Nigerian state as is currently constituted was a deliberate creation of the British colonial government in 1914 (Tamuno, 1972; Olaniyan & Alao, 2003: 6). The political entity created by the British in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is made up of diverse ethnic nationalities with different historical, geographical, political, religious and socio-economic specificities and peculiarities. These diverse ethnic groups at differing levels of socio-political and cultural sophistication were forcefully constituted into modern Nigeria to promote British mercantile interest. By divide and rule, the artificial creation was administered delicately for several years before it was granted political independence in 1960 (Asiegbu, 1984: 1-10; Crowder, 1962: 1-15).

Due to the imperfect and imbalance political foundation of the state, Nigeria has continued to experience several challenges of nation-building since independence (Osuntokun, 1979: 91-108). The conduct of general elections has been one of the major political problems facing the state since independence as the long years of military rule have truncated several democratic experiments of Nigeria (Falola, et al., 1994). It was not until 1999 that civil democratic rule was restored. Since then, general elections had been held every four years with far reaching consequences for the country. General elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-Present) particularly the 1999, 2003 and 2007 exercises were fraught with irregularities and were widely rated below average. To this end, there were much anxiety and high expectations about the credibility and success of the 2015 general elections.

The 2015 general elections which were held on March 28 and April 11, 2015 attracted an unprecedented local and international interest and attentions due to several reasons. One of these reasons was the famous prediction of the United States that Nigeria may possibly disintegrate in 2015. Second, the contest in the elections was between two major political parties – the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the successful amalgam of four major opposition political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC). Another factor which made the 2015 general elections very tough was the fact that it was a battle royal between the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP and four-time contender General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC. Other factors which made the 2015 general elections so crucial to the Nigerian corporate included the ethnic and religious dichotomy between the north and south of the country, the threats of war from certain sections and quarters if the elections do not go in their favour, the poor state of security in the northeastern part of the country ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgents, the high level of corruption, dire

national financial quagmire, and a host of other critical national issues (Ezeife, 2014; Ahmadu-Suka, 2015: 6). These and other national issues made the 2015 general elections crucial to Nigeria's national existence.

Premised on the above-described state of the nation, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which is the national body charged with the responsibility of conducting elections was faced with an arduous task of organising credible elections in the face of daunting challenges confronting it. The Commission squarely rose to the occasion, introduced new techniques, conducted the elections and recorded some relative successes. The INEC could have achieved greater successes in the conduct of the 2015 general elections but for some institutional constraints that militated against it.

Against this background, this paper examines the institutional constraints that militated against the total success of the conduct of the 2015 general elections on the part of INEC on one hand and on the part of other key institutional stakeholders on the other hand. The paper relies on critical analysis of extant literature on Nigerian political history and news reports. Deliberate effort is made not to mention specific names of people and groups of people to avoid indictment or libel except on rare occasions for the purpose of precision and clarity. The paper is divided into five major parts with the first part introducing the thrust of the paper and the second part provides a brief historical survey of electoral bodies and general elections in Nigeria since 1959. The third part examines some of the electoral innovations introduced by INEC to improve the conduct of the elections and ensure a credible electoral process. In the fourth part, some of the external institutional constraints that contributed to the lapses in the conduct of the elections are examined. The sixth part concludes the paper on the note that the success of general elections in Nigeria depends on collective contributions of all stakeholders and not that of INEC alone.

## **From FEC to INEC: A Survey of Electoral Bodies and General Elections in Nigeria, 1959-2015**

There is consensus among scholars and practitioners that competitive elections are not only of the most important features of democracy but they are also the principal tests of democratisation and democratic consolidation in any state. To this end, in the political history of Nigeria from 1959 when the first general elections were held to usher in the first independence government in 1960 till date, general elections have been held only 13 times and they were conducted by five electoral bodies with similar mandates and challenges but different players. A brief assessment of the previous electoral bodies and general elections in Nigeria since 1959 is necessary to putting the INEC and the conduct of the 2015 general elections in proper historical perspectives.

### **I. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) and the 1959 and 1964 General Elections**

The first general elections which ushered in the first Nigerian indigenous government at independence were held on December 12, 1960. The elections were conducted by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) under the chairmanship of Mr. R.E. Wraith (O.B.E.), a Briton and Senior Lecturer in Public Administration at the University College Ibadan (Post, 1963: 165). The period preceding the elections were characterised by serious inter-party, inter-regional and inter-ethnic rivalries and disagreements which the constitutional conferences had tried unsuccessfully to mitigate. The major political parties of the era were regionally-based

and inclined. The major political parties of the era were the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Action Group (AG), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and some other minor parties (Sklar, 1963: 15-25). All these political parties were regionally based and ethnically affiliated with the NPC which controlled the Northern Regional Government dominated by the Hausa/Fulani people, the AG which was a Yoruba-dominated party controlled the Western Region while the NCNC which ran the affairs of the Eastern Region was dominantly controlled by the Igbo (Falola, 1990: 166; Akinyele, 2003: 152-153).

Consequent upon these, the 1959 electoral process was characterised by violent political activities ranging from electioneering campaigns, political meetings, mobilisation of the electorates and other political activities targeted at ensuring electoral successes in the general elections that would usher in the first government of an independent Nigeria (Post, 1963). The underlying factors of electoral political of 1959 were the desires of political parties to retain their strongholds on one hand and to gain the control of the Federal Government on the other hand. This was because the parliamentary system of government requires that the political party that had the highest number of seats at the Federal House of Representatives would not only present the Prime Minister but would also form and control the Federal Government. To achieve this, political parties and politicians had to engage in cross-regional political campaigns to canvass for votes and gain supporters and members from Regions under them and those controlled by other political parties. The attempts by all these political parties and their leaders to extend their popularity and acceptance through membership drive and support base to places where they were not so popular created new problems and challenges which threatened law, order and peace of the country in the prelude to the 1959 General Elections (Ige, 1995: 6).

In spite of the turbulence, the elections were held and the results showed that no political party had the required number of seats to singly form the government at the central level. After series of inter-party consultations, the NPC entered into a coalition with the NCNC to form the central government while the AG became the official party at the House of Representatives in Lagos. As a result, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the NPC retained his position as the Prime Minister, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC became the Governor-General (renamed President in 1963 when Nigeria became a Republic) while Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the AG became the Opposition Leader at independence in 1960 (Lawal, 1990: 9).

Shortly before the expiration of the four-year term of the NPC/NCNC coalition central government in 1964, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was asked to conduct fresh general elections. Thus, in 1964, Mr. Eyo Esua FRO Cross River State was appointed as the first indigenous chairman of FEC to succeed Mr. R.E. Wraith. Mr. Esua-led FEC organized the first post-independence general elections in Nigeria held on December 20, 1964 (Mackintosh, 1966). The 1964 general elections were contested by two main political alliances. Prior the period of the elections, the 1960 alliance of NPC/NCNC had been cracked due to some political misunderstanding relating to the 1962/1963 census controversies, the AG crisis of 1962 and the state of emergency declaration and so on. Therefore, for the 1964 elections, the NCNC teamed up with the AG, UMBC and NEPU to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) led by the Premier of the Eastern Region, Chief Michael Okpara while the NPC joined the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) formed by Ladoke Akintola out of the AG, the Mid-western Democratic Front (MDF), the Niger Delta

Congress (NDC) and the Dynamic Party to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) led by the Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello (Mackintosh, 1966).

The electioneering activities of 1964 were worse than those of 1959 as the politicians resorted to all sorts of crude and obnoxious campaign strategies, nomination of candidates, intimidation of opponents, collusion between the security agents the ruling parties and hoarding of electoral materials while the FEC was helpless. Due to the high level of irregularities, the UPGA called for postponement of the elections but the FEC went ahead with the elections as scheduled but it was boycotted by the UPGA in the whole of Eastern Region and some parts of Western and Mid-Western Regions. At the end of the elections, the NNA 'won' a comfortable majority. Describing the 1964 elections, Wale Ademoyega (1981: 19) writes:

The elections of December 1964 turned out to be a farce. It was completely boycotted in the Eastern Region, where the NCNC Government used its powers to ensure that no election was held. It was also partly boycotted in the West, North, Mid-West and Lagos, with the effect that the election results lacked credit and were nationally unacceptable. However, while the UPGA rejected them, the NPC and its allies of the NNA, which single-handedly carried out the elections, accepted them. There followed a national stalemate.

The results of the massively boycotted December 30 Federal elections showed that the NNA won 198 seats while the UPGA won only 45 seats (Dare: 1989: 118). The disputes that trailed the results were so serious that the President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, refused to invite the Prime Minister as leader of the victorious party to form the government because he did not have confidence that the elections were free and fair (Dare, 1989: 117; Daily Times, 1965: 19). The problem continued for six days before a compromise was achieved through the agreement on a six-point formula brokered between the two parties by the Chief Justice of the Federation, Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, and Sir Louis Mbanefo, the Chief Justice of Eastern Nigeria (Arikpo, 1967; Dare, 1989: 121). For the sake of unity and continued existence of the country as a single entity, the president invited the NPC to form an all embracing government on January 4, 1965. Therefore, the lingering political problems facing the country were swept under the carpet and the nation was in a state of fragile peace.

In this fragile state of the nation, the stage was set for the October 11, 1965 elections into the Western Regional House of Assembly. It would be recalled that the AG had lost the control of the government of the Western Region to Chief Akintola's NNDP in January 1963 when he was reinstated as the Premier after the period of the state of emergency ended. The AG had entered into an alliance with the NCNC, NEPU and UMBC to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) to contest the 1964 Federal elections (Dare, 1989: 119). It was through the UPGA that the AG fielded its candidates for the 1965 Western Regional elections. The elections were seen by the supporters and admirers of Chief Awolowo who was in jail at the time as an opportunity to show their solidarity with him by voting for AG and disgracing Chief Akintola's NNDP (Dare, 1989: 119). The electioneering campaigns were hot and the various political parties strove hard to get the support of the people. At the end of the polls, even though public opinion and majority of the people allegedly voted for the AG, the results of the elections were falsified and most NNDP candidates were declared winners at the expense of popular UPGA candidates in most of the constituencies. Wale Ademoyega (1981: 21-22) again argues that in the October 1965 Western Regional Elections:

The Akintola government publicly (interfered) with the results of the elections. In very many cases, AG candidates who held certificates that they were duly elected in their constituencies later heard their names mentioned as defeated candidates through governmental news media.

Since the elections were believed to have been clearly rigged in favour of the NNDP, the Action Group (AG) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) rejected the results.

What followed were mass demonstrations and riots in many cities across the Western Region resulting in mysterious disappearance of many people, killings, maiming, abductions and other vices (Nigerian Tribune, 1965: 1). The highest point of this disorderliness was spraying houses and cars with petrol and setting them on fire. This gave the disturbance its popular Yoruba designation *wetie* which means “soak him/her/it up with petrol and set in fire”. It was a large scale destruction of people and property and the general atmosphere of insecurity in the Western Region made many people flee from the area for safety to other parts of Nigeria. It was unprecedented in the history of political disturbances in the Region. Expectedly, the people hoped that the Federal Government would intervene to restore law and order, declare a state of emergency, appoint a sole administrator and hold fresh elections as it did in a less serious situation in the same region in 1962. In contrast, the Federal Government feigned ignorance of the situation and refused to act promptly as it did in the case of a lesser disturbance in 1962 (Ojiako, 1980: 214-227).

It was in this state of lawlessness and anarchy that the military took over power on January 15, 1966 when it became very glaring that the police was incapable of arresting the ugly situation and assuring people of their safety (Elaigwu, 2003: 107). In the coup d'état tagged *Damisa* (Hausa word for leopard) led by a young Igbo officer, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, many prominent Nigerian political leaders were murdered. The list included the Prime Minister, Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh and many military officers mostly of Northern origin such as Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, Colonel Mohammed Kur, Lt. Colonel Ahmed Musa, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Pam and others (Adekola, 2002: 104). It was, however, only after the Commonwealth Conference hosted by Nigeria in Lagos from January 10-12, 1966 to discuss the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Ian Smith that the soldiers struck (Nigerian Army Educational Corp, 1992: 126). In the early hours of Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966, the first military coup d'état in Nigeria took place and brought the First Republic to an abrupt end.

After the January 15 1966 coup, General Aguiyi Ironsi became the new Military Head of State. On July 29 1966, a counter-coup took place and brought General Yakubu Gowon as the new Military Head of State. The military held sway in the Nigerian administration from 1966 to 1979, suspended the constitution, ruled through military decrees, disbanded the political parties and their activities and truncated the democratic experiments of Nigeria. The infusion of ethnicity and corruption in the military threw the nation into a three-year civil war between 1967 and 1970. The successive military administrations refused to successfully transfer power to elected politicians until 1979 when the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo which had come into power in 1975 after peacefully toppling Gowon's administration organised general elections in December 1979 (Falola, et al., 1994).

## **II. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and the 1979 and 1983 General Elections**

Chief Michael Ani from Cross River State was appointed as the chairman of the Federal Electoral Commission acronymed FEDECO which organized the 1979 General Elections in Nigeria. The elections were held on August 11, 1979 and were contested by the five registered political parties namely the National party of Nigeria (NPN) the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigeria People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) and the People's Redemption Party (PRP) (Ojiako, 1981: 254-260). The 1979 general elections were unique because they took place under the newly introduced presidential system of government unlike the 1959 and 1964 elections which were to form a Cabinet system of government. The elections were held at different dates to elect the first executive president, 19 state governors, members of House of Representatives, Senators and members of State Houses of Assembly.

All these elections were alleged to have been marred by series of irregularities particularly the presidential elections held on August 11, 1979 which was most controversial. The controversy arose as a result of the fact that none of the candidates was able to win 25% in two-thirds of the states of the federations. Alhaji Shehu Shagari who was eventually declared the winner won 25% of the votes cast in 12 states of the federation. The mathematical riddle that arose was what should be  $\frac{2}{3}$  of 19? The NPN formula of  $12 \frac{2}{3}$  was accepted by FEDECO and Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared the winner. Chief Awolowo who came second took the matter to the presidential elections tribunal headed by Justice B.O. Kazeem and later to the Supreme Court presided over by the then Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Atanda Williams and all declared that the election of Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the NPN was in order (Ojiako, 1981: 316-322).

The 1983 general elections were conducted by FEDECO under the chairmanship of Justice Ovie-Whiskey, the then Chief-Judge of Bendel State. He was appointed by President Shehu Shagari to conduct the December 1983 elections. One political party, the Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP) was registered as the sixth political party along with the five parties that participated in the 1979 elections (Falola, et al., 1994: 25-40). The general elections of 1983 in Nigeria were of historical importance to the country. In the first place, unlike the 1979 elections that was conducted under the watchful eyes of the military, the 1983 elections were the first to be organized and held solely by the civilians after 13 years of military rule. The general elections of 1983, like all the previous general elections since 1959 were marred by widespread irregularities. The electoral officers were accused of rigging in favour of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). All the five political parties that contested the 1979 elections did not make changes in the candidates fielded for the 1983 elections except Mr. Tunji Braithwaite who was the presidential flagbearer of the new NAP.

The NPN presidential candidate, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared the winner in the face of alleged massive rigging. The most controversial of all the elections was the gubernatorial election in which NPN was said to have won in ten of the 19 states including some states traditionally controlled by the UPN such as Oyo and Ondo States. The large scale rigging that characterized the elections sparked off violent rioting, arson, hooliganism, looting, etc, especially in Yorubaland. Though the Supreme Court reversed the Ondo State gubernatorial election results, the outcome of the declaration of NPN candidates as winners in Ondo and

Oyo States was reminiscent of the 1965 western regional election episode. The NPN much vaunted landslide victory was replaced with “military-slide” coup d’etat on December 31, 1983 which brought the Second Republic to an abrupt end like the First Republic (Falola, et al., 1994).

### **III. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the Botched Third Republic, 1992-1993**

The military regime of Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon was busy implementing its War Against Indiscipline (WAI) programme when it was overthrown on August 27, 1985 by a new military government led by General Ibrahim Babangida. The Babangida administration held sway from 1985 to 1993 with intermittent democratic experiment at the state and local levels in 1992-1993. The transition programme of General Ibrahim Babangida from 1985 to 1993 only succeeded in organising elections into the 21 states, state Houses of Assembly, House of Representatives and Senate on the platforms of the two government registered political parties – the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) from 1992-1993 (Oyebade, 2002: 161).

The 1992 elections were organised by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) under the chairmanship of Prof. Humphrey Nwosu from Anambra State who had succeeded Prof Eme Awa of the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka who was appointed as the chairman of NEC in 1987 but resigned in 1987. Prof. Nwosu served as the chairman of NEC from 1989 to 1993 and organised elections into various executive and legislative positions at the state and federal levels including the famous June 12 1993 presidential elections on novel voting system of Open Ballot System locally tagged Option A4. The 1993 presidential elections have presumed to have been won by Late M.K.O. Abiola of the SDP. The elections were later annulled by Military President Babangida (Oyebade, 2002: 160-170).

After the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections, General Babangida appointed Professor Okon Edet Uya as the new chairman of NEC to replace Prof. Nwosu who resigned following the impasse that followed the cancellation of the June 12 1993 presidential elections. He served from 1993 to 1994 but could not conduct any fresh elections in office until Babangida stepped aside and installed Chief Ernest Shonekan as the Head of the National Interim Government (ING) on August 27, 1993 (Oyebade, 2002, 163).

### **IV. The National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) and the Abacha Transition Programme, 1993-1998**

The ING was toppled by a new military government led by General Sani Abacha on November 17, 1993. The new military government dissolved the NEC, sacked Prof. Uya and incarcerated Chief M.K.O. Abiola who demanded that he be sworn in as the president based on his victory in the 1993 presidential elections. General Abacha thereafter appointed Chief Sumner Dagogo-Jack to head the new National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON)

which he set up. Chief Dagogo-Jack's NECON organized elections into the local councils and national assembly on the platforms of five registered political parties – the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), the Consensus National Party (CNC), the National Consensus Party of Nigeria (NCPN), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and the Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM). It also hoped to conduct the presidential elections when all the five political parties had endorsed General Abacha as their sole candidate. Before the presidential elections were conducted and even before the winners of the previous elections were inaugurated, General Abacha died on June 8, 1998 and that signaled the end of that transition programme (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 234).

## **V. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 Elections**

The death of General Sani Abacha brought General Abdul Salami Abubakar as the new Head of State in 1998. After his swearing-in ceremony, he promised to conduct quick general elections within one year. Not long after, Chief M.K.O Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections died in prison while the process of his release was going on. General Abubakar's transition programme was planned to lead to hand-over to a democratically elected government on May 29, 1999. To achieve this, the Independent National Electoral Commission was established under the chairmanship of Justice Ephraim Akpata. The INEC registered new political parties among which three became nationally influential. These were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 235).

In the presidential election that took place on February 20, 1999, the APP and the AD allied together to field Chief Olu Falae, a Yoruba man from Ondo State as their presidential candidate while the PDP fielded General (Chief) Olusegun Obasanjo, also a Yoruba man from Ogun State and a former military Head of State as its presidential candidate. The concession of the presidency to the Yoruba in 1999 was to placate them for the denial of Chief M.K.O. Abiola the presidency in 1993 and his subsequent death in the prison in 1998 (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 236) . At the conclusion of the elections, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP was declared the winner of the elections in spite of widespread allegations of rigging and manipulations of electoral process.

The INEC also conducted the 2003 general elections under the chairmanship of Sir Abel Guobadia who succeeded Ephraim Akpata in January 2000 when he died. In the elections, Chief Obasanjo was re-elected for a second term of four years defeating General Muhammadu Buhari of the APP and other contestants in a very flawed electoral process contested by 20 political parties and which recorded 69.1% turnout. The 2003 elections were characterised by such irregularities as multiple voting, ballot snatching, ballot stuffing and so on (African Elections Database, 2015).

The tenure of Abel Guobadia expired in June 2005 and he was succeeded by Professor Maurice Iwu. The 2007 general elections were organised by INEC under Professor Iwu and they were condemned as the worst in the history of presidential elections in Nigeria due to unprecedented electoral malpractices in the forms of smuggling and snatching of ballot boxes, multiple thumb printing as well as intimidation and harassment of opposition parties

(New Nigerian, 2007: 1; BBC News, 2007)). A total of 62 political parties took part in the elections but the only three old political parties were national in outlook – PDP, ANPP (formerly APP) and the Action Congress (AC), the former AD. (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 242). The percentage turnout of voters was 69.82 (BBC News, 2007).

The results of the elections showed that Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar’adua of the PDP ‘won’ the presidential elections but other political parties particularly the ANPP and AC not only rejected the results but their candidates – General Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar respectively also challenged the results up to the Supreme Court (Abubakar, 2007). The new president, Umaru Yar’adua openly confessed that the elections that made him the president were flawed and promised to reform the electoral process before the 2011 general elections (Jibrin, 2007: 4). In order to fulfil his promise, President Yar’adua constituted an electoral reform committee headed by Justice Muhammadu Uwais but before the report of the committee could be fully implemented and before the conduct of the 2011 elections, President Yar’adua died in office on May 5, 2010 giving way to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to emerge as the new President in 2010.

In order to continue the electoral reform started by his predecessor, President Jonathan appointed Professor Attahiru Jega, a former President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and a former Vice-Chancellor of Bayero University Kano, as the chairman of INEC in 2010 to succeed Professor Iwu who had been widely condemned for the poor organisation and manipulation of the 2007 elections (New Nigerian, 2007). The elections were held in April 2011 and recorded significant improvement on the previous elections in the history of general elections in Nigeria. The relative success of the 2011 general elections was premised on the personal integrity and record of Professor Jega and the commitment of President Goodluck Jonathan to free, fair and credible elections.

In the 2011 general elections, the PDP’s candidate, incumbent President Jonathan won the elections by defeating General Muhammadu Buhari of CPC, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau of the ANPP and Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the ACN among other numerous presidential candidates of the minor political parties. Although the elections of 2011 were acknowledged as being an improvement on the previous elections in the Fourth Republic but they were not without some irregularities in many parts of the country (Gberie, 2011: 1). The point to be noted in the conduct of the 2011 elections is that the personal integrity of the president and the chairman of INEC gave many Nigerians hope in the possibility of reformation, sanitisation and credibility of electoral process in Nigeria unlike the dispositions of previous leaders and umpires who were bent on favouring the ruling parties in a ‘do-or-die’ electoral process.

## **The INEC and the 2015 General Elections: Preparations, Innovations and Constraints**

Indeed, the years between the conclusion of the 2011 elections and the commencement of the 2015 general elections afforded the INEC chairman, Professor Jega the opportunity to prepare adequately for the 2015 elections. Having learnt from the mistakes and inadequacies of 2011 general elections and other staggered elections in Edo, Ondo, Anambra, Ekiti and Osun States, the INEC under Professor Jega worked assiduously to prepare for the 2015 general elections particularly in guarding against areas where electoral fraudsters had exploited to cheat the electorates and the electoral system. In order to achieve this, a number

of new electoral mechanisms were put in place apart from the general preparations for the elections by the INEC.

One of the first things that was done by INEC under Professor Jega in the move towards the conduct of the 2015 general elections was appointment of credible personalities into key positions of the commission at the federal and state levels. This is very important because the people that would organise, supervise and monitor elections must be people of proven integrity and sound national orientation. These people were renowned professionals, technocrats and respected academics. From the eight National Electoral Commissioners, 37 Resident Electoral Commissioners, 37 Administrative Secretaries, 774 Electoral Officers (EO), 774 Assistant Electoral Commissioners, Supervisory Presiding Officers (SPOs), Presiding Officers (Pos) to Assistant Presiding Officers and all other electoral officials, the INEC strove not only to give proper training but it also endeavoured to inculcate national patriotic orientations. This was necessary because, according to Professor Jega (2015: 1):

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 orientations, these officials will ensure that the conduct of elections conforms to international benchmarks that will produce transparent and acceptable outcomes. 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 Officials must not only be well-trained, but also be diligent and committed to their duties. Since Election Officials are mostly seen as the face of elections, they must be therefore uphold the highest ethical standard in the discharge of their functions.

In addition, the commission identified six principles which must guide the activities of election officials which were: integrity, impartiality, transparency, professionalism, gender sensitivity and due concentration and support for the elderly, pregnant women and the physically challenged. With these principles, the INEC and its staff (both permanent and ad-hoc) at all levels were poised to conduct a general elections that would be praised locally, continentally and globally and this eventually occurred at the conclusion of the elections (ECOWAS, 2015; AU, 2015; Commonwealth, 2015; UNO, 2015; Obama, 2015).

Closely related to the above point in the INEC conduct of the 2015 general elections was the process of recruitment and training of its ad-hoc staff across the country. It is generally acknowledged that the permanent staff of the electoral commission could not sufficiently man general elections across the country. Therefore, recruitment of ad-hoc staff is the usual practice since inception of representative democracy in Nigeria during the colonial period. However, a unique practice under Professor Jega's INEC is the use of academic and non-academic staff of federal institutions of higher learning across the Federation as ad-hoc collation officers at different levels and the use of National Youth Service Corps members and final year students as ad-hoc polling officers in the 2015 elections. Not only this, the selection of these ad-hoc staff was centralised at the INEC headquarters in Abuja for a closely monitored recruitment exercise but their training was done at the state level. The INEC also ensured that employees of state government were not used. All these were to prevent collusion of electoral officers with local politicians for undue electoral advantages through irregular acts. This proved, to an extent, effective because in the previous elections

when state workers were used and when state or local INEC offices handled recruitment of ad-hoc staff, there were allegations of political party members serving as ad-hoc staff of INEC and the results were better imagined.

The INEC also did relatively very well in other aspects of the electoral process. These ranged from prompt release of electoral calendar one year before the elections (INEC, 2014), voter's education and information, production and secrecy of electoral materials, timely distribution of electoral materials and timely commencement of electoral processes in most parts of the federation, provision of adequate security at polling and collation centres among others. These may seem ordinary but they were some of the lapses in the previous elections which gave room to manipulations by fraudulent politicians.

Beyond these and other regular expectations of the electoral body, the INEC in the 2015 elections went two steps further in ensuring that the votes of the electorates count. The previous general elections in Nigeria from 1959 to 2011 have been criticised for widespread manipulations leading to elections' results not reflecting the wishes and aspiration of the electorates. The previous elections in the current Fourth Republic since 1999 have been regarded as mere selections and not elections because results were allegedly merely written by highly placed politicians particularly of the ruling political parties while the actual votes from the field were discarded. This has led to political apathy on the part of so many Nigerians who have lost hope in the Nigerian electoral process and have ceased from participating in it (Luqman, 2008: 97). To correct this anomaly, curb the excesses of highly placed election riggers and restore people's faith in the electoral process in Nigeria, the INEC under Professor Jega introduced for the first time Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) and insisted on its use in the 2015 general elections in spite of opposition from some political and interest quarters (INEC, 2015). The use of PVCs in the 2015 elections drastically reduced electoral manipulations which used to manifest in incredible voter turnout, incident of ghost voters in some parts of the federation and unscrupulous election results in the past. In fact, the mere publication of total number of PVCs collected in the respective states of the federation already reduced the possibility of inflation of vote tallies from the outset. Indeed, the 2015 elections recorded a mere 43.65% voter turnout unlike the previous elections of 2011, 2007 and 2003 which recorded inflated voter's turnout of almost 70% (IDEA, 2015; BBC News 2007).

Because of the possibility of dubious politicians distributing cloned PVCs, the INEC under Professor Jega also introduced the use of electronic smart card reading machines to authenticate PVCs during accreditation of voters (Oluokun, 2015:32). The card reader was part of INEC Voters' Authentication System (IVAS), a great innovation in the Nigerian electoral process. The card reader was used to verify the biometrics of the voter thereby checkmating all forms of impersonation by voters. The card reader was also used at the ward collation level where the collation officer checked that the number of voters accredited by the machine tallies with what the polling officers had entered in the result sheets. The card reader was capable of detecting cloned cards, authentic INEC card brought to a wrong voting unit, INEC authentic card in possession of a person other than the owner and so on. A major advantage of the card reader not known to many of its critics is that every genuine INEC card that is inserted into it is noted and accounted for and accredited either as success or failed depending on the correctness of other necessary elements while the total of all accredited voters is stored. Without mincing words, the use of card reader reduced to a great extent the level of electoral fraud in the 2015 general elections. Although there were different levels of compliance with the use of card reader with some complying fully, some partially used it while some states of the federation outrightly did not use it for obvious reasons. Whatever

was the case, the introduction and use of the card reader brought about reduction of irregularities in the 2015 elections and this has been commended globally (ECOWAS, 2015; AU, 2015).

Another unusual scenario in the conduct of the 2015 general elections was the fact that elections were extended to the following days in places where authentication of voters were delayed due to card readers malfunctioning (BBC, 2015). This was against the usual practice where remaining ballot papers were thumb-printed by politicians with the collusion of election officials. The INEC also organised for the first time in Nigerian electoral history mock elections in selected states of the federation weeks before the dates of actual elections to test-run its instruments in the preparations for the elections. It was also reported that the INEC used different colour of ballot papers and other sensitive electoral materials in different states and constituents of the federation to guard against use of materials meant for a place in another place or places. These were rare scenarios in the previous elections characterised by massive riggings at the voting, collation and declaration of results levels.

The transparent, publicised and even televised system of collation and declaration of results introduced and adopted by INEC since the 2011 elections was improved in the 2015 elections. This was another innovative practice in Nigerian electoral process. In the previous elections before 2011, results of elections were not publicly collated and declared in the presence of all stakeholders. At best, collation officers and returning officers just gathered in a closed-door venue and 'collated' the results which on most occasion were different from results got from the polling units to the chagrin of the electorates. The 2007 elections were worst and they were referred to as farce (Soyinka, 2007; SMH News, 2007). The adoption of public and open collation and declaration of results went a long way in contributing to the credibility and transparency of the 2015 general elections. In fact, the final collation of the presidential election results could have been possibly disrupted, the election declared inconclusive and the nation thrown into chaos by some political agents if not the televised broadcast of the proceedings to local and international audience (Ebhomele, 2015: 4). The televised broadcast also revealed the probable collusion of some returning officers who found it difficult to present original result sheets and some could not even read results allegedly hand-written by them. In sum, the public and open collation and declaration of results introduced by INEC under Professor Jega is a welcome innovation in Nigerian electoral process (Tinubu, 2015)

Perhaps one of the major landmark legacies of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria was that, for the first time in the history of general elections in Nigeria, a sitting president lost his re-election bid. Not only this, an opponent regarded as serial loser, having lost three consecutive times, defeated an incumbent president (Schneider, 2015). While it is not the failure of the sitting president or the victory of the serial loser that is important here, the historic issue is that INEC under Professor Jega and his team conducted elections that were near the reflections of the wish and aspiration of Nigerians and that were close to restoring the hope of Nigerians in the electoral process of their homeland. It is interesting to note that President Goodluck Jonathan not only accepted the results and conceded defeat, he even said that the credibility of the elections was one of his achievements for he has fulfilled his promise of free, fair and credible elections to Nigerians (Jonathan, 2015).

In spite of the relative success of the 2015 general elections, there were certain obvious constraints on the part of INEC which prevented total success of the exercise. The first of these constraints was that INEC suffered from lack of full cooperation from other stakeholders in the electoral process as would be analysed in the next section of this paper.

There was also the constraint of funding as electoral planning requires huge amount of money. This explains why INEC could not contract out several sensitive and non-sensitive electoral materials on time including a number of PVCs meant for voters across the federation. In fact, so many PVCs did not arrive in the states of destinations till elections were conducted and concluded.

The INEC also faced a serious challenge of time constraints in the organisation of the 2015 elections due to some staggered elections which it conducted in some states of the Federation. The INEC would have even done better it had begun distribution of PVCs two years before the election dates to enhance wider and greater distribution percentages. Similarly, instead of test-running the card readers in a mock election in eight states of the federation, the INEC should have endeavoured to test the viability of the machines in the staggered gubernatorial elections in Edo, Ondo, Anambra, Ekiti and Osun States. The INEC's over-reliance on ad-hoc staff might also be counter-productive because the integrity and credibility of ad-hoc staff could not be easily ascertained and this might prove fatal to the credibility of the electoral process. While it is true that the INEC could not single-handedly man elections with its staffers alone, but the truth is that INEC is under-staffed at all levels particularly at the local government level and this is where electoral manipulations take root (Oluokun, 2015: 33). The INEC's reliance on the transport unions for the transportation of electoral materials and officials to and from voting and collations centres was also problematic in some instances where these transporters failed to show up on time or at all or collude with politicians to divert sensitive electoral materials.

Despite all these internal constraints, the INEC under Professor Jega recorded appreciable success in the conduct and outcome of the 2015 general elections. The above-identified constraints were obviously unavoidable given the large territory and huge population of the country and the inadequate funds, personnel, equipments and short time at the disposal of the commission. Arguably, the major lapses in the conduct of the 2015 general elections were due to the constraints external to the INEC as analysed in the next section of this paper.

### **Stake-holders or Stake-breakers?: External Institutional Constraints of INEC in the 2015 General Elections**

The success or otherwise of an electoral process goes beyond the confines and mandates of the electoral body. Organising a successful election is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders in a polity. In contemporary Nigeria, the conduct of free, fair and credible elections is a shared responsibility of all Nigerians irrespective of status, ethnic, religious and political affiliations and leanings. This fact has been generally realised in Nigeria of the Fourth Republic which is already in its sixteenth year. So many Nigerians even elected and appointed political office holders still see the organisation of credible elections as the business of INEC alone. This explains why many of the critical stakeholders in the 2015 elections performed below expectations before, during and after the elections. The argument here is that some of the major lapses in the conduct of the 2015 general elections could be laid at the door steps of critical electoral stakeholders such as the political parties and politicians, security agencies, the electorates and the general public, the media, religious groups, ethnic associations, the judiciary and so on. Some of the ways through which these expected critical stake-holders acted as 'stake-breakers' are summarised as follows:

**Political Parties and Politicians:** If periodic competitive election is a major feature of representative democracy, then the existence and functions of political parties are sine qua non to democratic sustainability and consolidation. In an ideal situation, political parties not only seek to win elections by fielding candidates, they also carry out some functions which are meant to facilitate the success of the electoral process as a whole whether they win or lose. These functions include formulation of parties' ideology and manifestos, provision of voter's education to the electorates, giving welfare services to their members, mobilisation of voters and stimulation of their interest in the electoral process and assisting the electoral bodies in their efforts to organise credible and free elections among others.

In the 2015 general elections, most of the leading political parties in Nigeria did not carry out any of the above-named functions, rather, they engaged in acts capable of truncating the electoral process. For instance, many of the political parties particularly the ruling PDP called for the sack of the chairman of INEC because he refused to dance to their tunes (Oparah, 2015). He was alleged of supporting some political parties at the expense of the others and for lopsidedness in the distribution of PVCs and creation of new polling units across the country. Some political parties even asked him to proceed on terminal leave or resign voluntarily for he had failed even before the conduct of the elections. The image makers and spokesmen of the campaign organisations also engaged in media wars with the commission by attacking every step of the commission in order to frustrate its efforts. Some even called for the indefinite postponement of the elections or cancellation of the whole transition programme and the formation of an interim government.

The various politicians and contestants and their supporters also used foul and vain languages against their opponents during political campaigns. Some political extremists advertised death wishes on their opponents in the national dailies (Yahaya, 2015). These heated up the electoral process and nearly truncated the whole process. The impact of hate speeches, disparage comments and political brigandage during the electioneering campaigns cannot be over-emphasised. In another instance, a political party which was registered by INEC few days to the elections on the order of a court of law insisted that it must be accommodated on the ballot papers which had already been printed in millions. Lack of internal democracy in all the political parties also gave INEC tough time in finalising the process of nomination and selection of party candidates. Most often, political parties and politicians sued INEC or joined it in avoidable litigations relating to party candidates. Some protesters (rented protesters most time) even bombarded the INEC headquarters and offices across the federation to protest one nomination case or the other during the period electioneering process on a daily basis disrupting the smooth operation and activities of the commission even on the eve of the elections (Oluokun, 2015: 33). The political parties and politicians also carried money politics to an extreme level in the 2015 elections leading to the dollarization of the electoral process by the major political parties (Akinsiju, 2015: 3).

All these had grave consequences for INEC's preparation and organisation of credible elections which is its main duty and they were largely responsible for the major inadequacies recorded in the conduct of the elections.

**Security Agencies:** The security agencies like the military, the police, the custom service, the immigration service, the customs, the civil defence corps and others are critical stakeholders in the conduct of general elections in Nigeria. This is because elections cannot be organised in a state devoid of peace and harmony. These security agencies are expected to be above board, non-partisan and be up and doing in providing a level-playing ground for all political parties and supporting the electoral body in the discharge of its statutory duties. Rather than

do this, the Nigerian security agencies appeared to have been politicised in the build-up to the 2015 general elections. The army and the police were the most culpable in this regard during the last elections. There were so many instances where the army did the biddings of some of the political parties and highly placed political office holders.

For instance, the Nigerian army went to the extreme of publicly declaring that the educational credentials of one of the presidential candidates purportedly in its possession could not be found even after the affected candidate had been screened and certified by the INEC for participation in the elections and more so that the said candidate had contested in the three previous elections. This was a clear partisan role and a debilitating act for the INEC. The height of the military sabotage of the 2015 electoral process was the forced postponement of the elections from February 14 to March 28 on the grounds that it could not guarantee the security of lives and property of the electorates (Tukur, 2015; Kerry, 2015: 1). This was indeed a coup on the Nigerian nation to say the least.

Also, there were so many instances of the police and other security agencies colluding with some political parties and politicians to either truncate the electoral process or tilt it to favour them illegally. There were allegations and counter-allegations of police commissioners and other top-rank officers taking orders from politicians rather than from the Inspector-General in various parts of the country. There were also series of allegations of electoral frauds perpetrated in the presence of security agents and even under the protection of uniformed policemen in several parts of the country.

The position here is that if the security agencies are compromised from the outset, the electoral body would not only be frustrated but the credibility of the electoral process would have been compromised *ab initio*. This was exactly what happened in many states of the federation during the 2015 general elections where rules and regulations guiding the electoral process were trampled upon by election officials and the electorates and the security agents looked the other way. This is what we refer to as a case of a stakeholder becoming a stake-breaker. This was a bad omen for the 2015 elections which many had feared might lead to bloodshed and possible disintegration of the country (Ojelu, 2015: 34-35)

**The Electorates and the General Public:** The electorates (i.e. the people that are registered and who actually cast their votes) and the general populace of a country are critical stakeholders in the electoral process. This is because they are the major instruments of achieving credible and transparent elections through their cooperation with the electoral body and the exercise of their franchise according to the rules of the game. However, in the 2015 general elections, some of the electorates simply defied the rules and regulations of the process and insisted on getting their ways. There were reports of electorates insisting on the use of Temporary Voter's Cards (TVCs) or refusing to get accredited by the use of card reader thereby frustrating the election officials on duty. There was also large voters' apathy in the 2015 elections as many eligible voters shunned the process and used the holidays to rest and engage in leisure and other activities. This may be partly due to lack of belief in the credibility of the process, failure of previous elected governments or sheer ignorance of the general public about the importance of participating in the electoral process (Loschky, 2015). Another area where the electorates constituted constraints to INEC's effort was the act of illegality committed by some of them such as selling their PVCs, accepting monetary and other inducements from the politicians and general disruption of polling exercise. These, in a way, covertly diminished the credibility and success of the electoral process.

**The Media:** The fourth estate of the realm, the media, is a major stake-holder not only in the electoral process but also in governance at all levels. Be it print, broadcast and electronic, the media has key roles to play in the electoral process by informing, educating and enlightening all the key stakeholders – the government, the electoral body, the political parties and politicians, the electorates and the general public. In the 2015 elections, the Nigerian print and broadcast media carried out these duties diligently save for some private and public media organisations which broke the media ethics and became instruments of smear and hate campaigns of some political parties and politicians. Worse still, the regulatory body of the media – The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and other agencies did not act promptly in addressing the ugly trends. The tensed political and electoral atmosphere before, during and after the 2015 general elections were a major minus for the conduct of the elections.

**Religious Groups and Ethnic Associations:** That Nigeria is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic state is a foregone conclusion and a reality that we have been living with since the colonial period and since independence in 1960 (Adamolekun, 2002: 58-69). The Nigerian political elites have continuously used ethnic and religious affiliations to pursue, achieve and consolidate personal and selfish political agenda. This still played out in the electoral process of 2015 with far-reaching negative consequences for the success of INEC and the general elections. In the build up to the 2015 general elections, it was a common sight and regular news for politicians to make political statements on pulpits in mosques and churches. Some clergymen from Islamic and Christian religious groups also became political campaign coordinators and henchmen. There were allegations of bribery and financial inducements in umbrella religious organisations across the country for political campaigns and other electoral purposes.

Ethnic groups and associations also did not help matters during the last general elections. Some of them openly supported the political ambitions of their kinsmen and overtly and covertly attacked politicians from other parts of the country or other ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups even threatened to go to war if their kinsmen were not victorious in the elections (Ahmadu-Suka, 2015) while others kept on endorsing some candidates and condemning others. Presidential candidates were even physically attacked and assaulted in some parts of the country while their local supporters and party members were subjected to many forms of intimidation, harassment and frustrations across the country. In the long run, these had negative implications for the electoral process of 2015 and affected the programmes and activities of INEC for free, fair and credible general elections.

**Civil Society Groups, Professional Bodies and Human Rights Organisations:** The role of civil society organisations and professional unions in the democratisation process in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised. These bodies featured prominently in the anti-military rule campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s particularly during the regimes of Generals Babangida and Sani Abacha (Momoh, 1994: 178-201). Some of the most prominent civil society groups and professional unions which fought the successive military regimes to a standstill include the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Campaign for Democracy (CD), the Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and a host of others (Momoh, 1994: 178-201). At the return of civil rule in 1999, most of these bodies became moribund particularly with the death of Chief Gani Fawehinmi giving way to the emergence of sponsored civil and human rights groups.

In the immediate period before the 2015 general elections, so many civil society groups and human right organisation came up and began to adopt and endorse political candidates. They also organised series of meetings and rallies where they claimed that Nigerians were begging particular politicians to contest elective positions. Some even claimed to have collected several millions of signatures appealing to some politicians to contest the presidential elections because they were the best for the country at that crucial time (The Economist, 2015; Ayodele, 2015: 31). The argument here is that while some of the credible professional bodies and civil society groups like ASUU refrained from partisan politics during the period, the stage was left for groups of political praise singers who misled many Nigerians and almost desecrated the electoral process.

**The Judiciary:** The Nigerian judicial system is also a key stake-holder in the electoral process. This is due to the fact that the judiciary does not only interpret the laws when there is disagreement or legal ambiguity but it also hears and decide complaints of irregularities in the election exercise. In the discharge of its duties before and after the last general elections, the Nigerian judiciary unwittingly compounded INEC problems and frustrations. Some of the ways in which this happened included the long delay in the dispensation of justice, the high cost of legal and judicial services in Nigeria and the frivolity of legal cases instigated by politicians to frustrate the INEC. This problem became very serious in the build up to the 2015 elections that the INEC chairman, Professor Jega, lamented the enormous number of litigations involving the commission and the toll these had on the activities of the commission (The Punch, 2014) The delay in the dispensation of justice which has become a permanent feature of Nigerian judiciary is a major minus to electoral process in Nigeria where electoral fraudsters and manipulators illegally occupy elective offices for several years before the hands of the law catch up with them. Some corrupt politicians even succeeded in buying justice and holding on to offices perpetually with other people's mandates.

The above represents some of the ways through which institutional constraints beyond the INEC militated against the total success of the 2015 general elections and past elections in Nigeria.

## **Conclusions and Reflections**

This paper has assessed the institutional constraints against the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the federal electoral body responsible for conducting elections into national and state executive and legislative offices in Nigeria since 2011. It succeeded in putting the INEC in proper historical perspectives by providing a historical survey of national electoral commissions and general elections in Nigeria since independence. This was with a view to showing that general elections had always been controversial and conflictual in Nigeria from the inception of modern democratic electoral process. Conflicts and disagreements are not unique to Nigeria but they are part and parcel of any human society. In fact, conflicts are not anti-democratic but they are actually expected in a democracy. However, the beauty of democracy is the amicable resolution of conflicts as they arise. Ojo (1992: 5) captures this fact thus:

Democracy is not about the absence of conflict, disagreement and controversy over issues of politics and power relations. Rather it is about the skilful management of problems arising from or associated with such issues of politics through the application of democratic methods and principles.

The paper has also succeeded in showing that the INEC under the chairmanship of Professor Attahiru Jega and the Presidency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan since 2011 recorded enviable improvements in Nigerian electoral process in comparison with previous elections in the Fourth Republic and past elections. This is why both men have been regarded as heroes of a sort – Jega for organising credible elections and Jonathan for facilitating electoral reforms and accepting defeat peacefully (Ebhomele, 2015: 44). The indices of these achievements included the introduction for the first time in Nigerian electoral history of the Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) and the Card Reading Machine to reduce if not eradicate multiple voting and other electoral frauds. For the first time in the history of general elections in Nigeria, the ruling party and the incumbent president lost to the opposition in keenly contested presidential elections. The conduct and results of the elections have also been widely acclaimed and praised by local, national, continental and international observers and participants. The President of the United States, Barrack Obama's position on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria is that:

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and its Chairma, Attahiru Jega, deserve special recognition for what independent international observers have deemed a largely peaceful and orderly vote. I commend INEC for its extensive efforts to increase the credibility and transparency of the electoral process (Obama, 2015: 10).

The paper, however, shows that the conduct and outcomes of the elections could have been much better, more transparent and more credible but for some internal INEC and external institutional constraints which militated against the commission's efforts. Some of these institutional constraints and their implications for INEC's performances were examined in the body of the paper.

This paper argued that some of the critical stake-holders in the electoral process whose roles were supposed to be complementary to INEC's largely faltered in the discharge of their duties with grave consequences for the electoral process. The paper concludes that the success of an electoral process depends not only on the activities of the electoral body but it is a collective duty of all stakeholders in the electoral process. Therefore, it is imperative that as the INEC under Professor Jega and President Jonathan has laid the foundation of electoral reforms and credible elections, successive governments must not only maintain the tempo but also improve on it in the conduct of future general elections. It must also be noted that electoral reforms cannot work in isolation of reforms of other key stake holding institutions which had been so much bastardised over the years (Obasanjo, 2015: 26). It is only when we downplay our divisive tendencies (religion and ethnicity) and emphasise our commonalities as a nation and every institution gets it right that we can be on the path of general progress and sustainable development This is the route to free, fair, credible and transparent elections in Nigeria.

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