

**“KUDOS OR KNOCKS”: ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF INEC IN THE
2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

An electoral management body in any democratic polity is a key variable in democratic transition and consolidation. Election administration in Nigeria, particularly in the Fourth Republic has been that of mixed blessings. While some are described as credible e.g. the administration of the 2011 and 2015 general elections others are described as been fraught with crass anomalies and all sorts of electoral vices e.g. the administration of the 2003 and the 2007 general elections. The 2015 general elections however, have been described as depicting a major turning point in the country’s electoral history. It is however, important to note that even though the conduct of the elections have been given a pass mark, the performance of the nation’s electoral body needs to be assessed so as to discover areas of lapses with the aim of improving on them for future elections. This paper examined the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the 2015 general elections. The assessment is based on some critical issues of the electioneering process, these include: the distribution of permanent voters card and continuous voters registration, recruitment and training of ad hoc staff, distribution of sensitive and non-sensitive materials, the use of electronic card reader and Diaspora voting. Through personal experience garnered from participant observation of the electioneering process and a qualitative assessment of extant and relevant secondary data, this paper submits that the overall performance of INEC was commendable. Also, it is discovered that despite the success recorded there is still a lot to be done to improve on feature elections. This paper however, concludes by proffering some recommendations.

Key Words: Electoral Management Body, Election Administration, Election, Electoral Process, Democratic Consolidation, INEC, Nigeria

Introduction

Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in any democratic polity occupies a central position in the electoral process of such polity. EMBs take charge of the overall electoral process. They are involved in every facet of election which includes: registering candidates, regulating party and campaign finance, monitoring political party activities, maintaining voter registration data base system, continuous registration, delimitation of constituencies, organizing elections and announcement of results. These roles shows that the onus of conducting credible, free and fair elections as well as developing a viable electoral system resides with Election Management Boards. The role and performance of EMBs determines the success or otherwise of elections. As such the confidence of the electorate in the outcome of elections to a large extent depends on the voters' perception of the level of competence of the body which conducts such elections. According to Bratton, et al, (2005 in Kerr, 2012:1) popular confidence in the conduct of elections is important for consolidation of democracies. They are of the opinion that “when citizens perceive elections as free and fair they are more satisfied with democracy and are more supportive of the ruling government and more likely to accept the defeat of favoured candidates (Mohler 2009 in Kerr, 2012:1).

It suffices to say that the process and system of election administration in countries that have recently transitioned to democracy and those and those on the verge of consolidating it have been characterized by several challenges notably; political violence, flawed electoral laws and lack of confidence in the electoral body to conduct free and fair elections. The conduct of elections in Nigeria particularly in the Fourth Republic by the country's Electoral Management Body, the Independent National Electoral Commission has been that of mixed blessing, while some are regarded as free and fair e.g. the 2011 and the 2015 general elections others are described as being fraught with crass anomalies.

The 2015 general elections however, have been described as depicting a major tuning point in Nigeria's political history. The elections attracted audience from most part of the world. Observers both local and international described the election as a success. It is however, important to note that even though the conduct of the elections have been given a pass mark it is imperative to assess the performance of the electoral body so as to detect areas of challenges with the aim of improving on them for future elections. In order to achieve this, this paper is structured into fore segments. The first part gives a general introduction. The

second part contains a conceptualization of election and electoral administration and the historical evolution of INEC. The third part gives a critical examination of the nexus between EMBs and democratic consolidation and overview of the 2015 general elections. The fourth part gives an assessment of the performance of INEC based on some critical issues. The fifth segment comprises of the conclusion and some policy recommendations.

The Concepts of Election and Electoral Administration

Election

Elections are generally understood to refer to the process of chosen people for particular jobs by voting (Ojo, 2008:6). In the political realm, elections are conceived as a formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern? Who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out? It is simply the process of elite selection system (Ojo, 2008:6). In other words

Elections encapsulate the mediating institutional and psychological process and anchors for citizens, as adults in an organized and routinized manner to express their choice among those who seek public political office (Jinadu, 2005:3).

The conceptualization of election in the political realm rests squarely on the concept of liberal democracy (Nohlen, 1996:1). It is almost impossible to comprehend the theory and practice of democracy without linking it to the process of elections. In the view of Lindbergh (2004:6), every modern vision of representative democracy entails the notion of elections as the primary means of selecting political decision makers. As a matter of fact, earlier attempts at conceptualization liberal democracy equated it with the phenomenon of elections. Democracy however, should not be reduced to be process of elections only. It is a mixed bag of elements that transcend the mere holding of elections. They are nevertheless acclaimed as the “the heart of democratic order” (Chiroro, 2005:38) and a hall mark of democracy (Ojo, 2007:6). To buttress this view Bratton (1998:52) aptly captured the significance of election to democracy while recognizing the fact that “elections do not, in and of themselves, constitute a consolidated democracy, but they remain fundamental, not only for installing democratic governments, but as a necessary requisite for broader democratic consolidation. Election as a concept to Shively (1997:187) entails a complex process that involves a chance between

candidates or a choice whether or not a particular policy is to be adopted. In his own view Ojo (2007:7) posit that elections are “institutional mechanisms that implement democracy by allowing citizens to choose among candidates or issues”. In another conception Obi (2008:73) defines election as “a modality of freely choosing representatives. Summarily, election entails a process of choosing people for positions through voting.

Elections play an important role in the larger project of democracy. Elections have technical and social significance. In the technical sense they are the process through which an office is assigned to a person by an act of volition that requires the simultaneous expression of many people’s opinions. In the social sense, an election is the process by which a person linked to an office through the due participation of the people who will bear the weight of his or her authority. It is noted that it is this social aspect with the consent of the governed, and that this boils down to democracy and distinguishes election from appointment (Nwolise, 2007:157). Election as a symbol of sovereignty, serve the purpose of investigating governments with political authority and legitimacy. It ensures that citizens retain power to hire and fire political leaders. To achieve this, an election must be free and fair, or at least perceived to be so (Laakso, 2007:224).

The structures and processes of elections must be guarded by democratic ideas and principles. At the structural level there must be minimum prerequisites: a competent and relatively autonomous and impartial electoral body to administer the conduct of elections, an impartial judiciary to interpret electoral laws and adjudicate electoral matters, a viable press and an electoral system acceptable to all parties to an election. An election therefore, is not simply casting of votes during the polling day but a sum total of processes that come before and after it. It should however, be noted that elections should not be viewed as periodic one-time event but as a set of events and decisions leading to elections that have long lasting consequences once the proverbial dust is settled (Laakso, 2000:224).

Electoral Administration

Election administration has been described as the management and organization of all stages of electoral process. It involves the planning organization and the conduct of elections (Ajayi, 2007:144). Election administration can be classified into three stages which include pre-election, election and post-election activities. The pre election phase involves delimitation of constituencies, registration of political parties and eligible voters. It also includes screening

and verification of candidates for elections. (Ajayi, 2007:144). Election activities includes: voting by eligible and registered voters, counting of votes, collation and announcement of final results, and the declaration of results. Post election activities according to him includes: attending to election complaints and litigations by aggrieved candidates and parties (Ajayi, 2007:144). This definition this tends to revolve around voting activities alone. It did not take into consideration other aspects of electoral process such as the implementation of electoral act and polices. Election administration involves the facilitation of voting and management of elections at all levels, from local to federal. It includes the organization of election agencies, the behavior and characterizes of state and local election officials, the process of conducting elections and the implementation of election policies. Election administration at the local level includes running election on election day and post election activities such as maintaining voter registration lists, drawing precincts, selecting polling place site, procuring equipment, recruiting and training poll workers, evaluating and implementing improvements to the electoral process itself. Election administration ranges from the maintenance of the state-wide voter registration and the implementation of federal and state laws and policies concerning elections (www.earc.berkeley.edu/faq.php).

In his own conception Iwara (2010) in Ebirim (2013:12) see election administration as the organization and conduct of election to elective or public offices by an electoral body. Election administration to him comprises the bureaucracy that is set up or established to organize and conduct elections. Process on the other hand comprise the rules procedure and activities relating to among others, the establishment of electoral bodies, the appointment of their members, the registration of voters, the nomination of candidates, balloting, counting of the ballots, declaration of results, the selection and training of electoral officials, constituency delimitation, voters education and in some cases, registration of political parties and supervision of party nomination congresses (Iwara, cited in Ebirim, 2013:13). Considering the above conceptualizations, one can observe that common to all of them are the aspects of voting process, and the electoral system. Therefore, election administration can aptly be described as the management of a country's entire electoral process and the personnel involved in the process by an independent and impartial electoral management body.

Electoral Management Bodies and Democratic Consolidation: The Nexus

Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are important institutions for democracy-building. They deal directly with the organization of multi-party elections and indirectly with governance and the rule of law (López-Pintor, 2000:13). Election Management Bodies (EMBs) not only ensure that elections are organized and managed efficiently, but also promote fairness, openness and transparency, and hence contribute to the legitimacy of democracy and the enhancement of the rule of law. EMBs plays prominent role in the process of democratic design and consolidation in third wave democracies (Carter and Farrell, 2009:20). The sine qua non of representative democracies is a process of elections that is fair and competitive. This is the role of electoral institutions, which determine how elections are contested, how the act of voting results in the election of political representatives and the determination of which political leader (in a presidential system), or party or set of parties (in a parliamentary system), is to form the executive leadership for the next few years (Carter and Farrell, 2009:20).

An EMB is an organization or body that has the sole purpose of and is legally responsible for managing some or all of the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments such as referendums, citizens' initiatives and recall votes if those are part of the legal framework. These essential elements include: determining who is eligible to vote, receiving and validating the nominations of electoral participants, conducting polling, counting the votes, and tabulating the votes (www.aceproject.org). In addition to these essential elements, an EMB may undertake other tasks that assist in the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments, such as voter registration, boundary delimitation, voter education and information, media monitoring and electoral dispute resolution. However, a body that has no electoral responsibilities other than, for example, boundary delimitation (such as a boundary delimitation commission), electoral dispute resolution (such as an electoral court), election media monitoring (such as a media monitoring commission), or the conduct of voter education and information (such as a civic education commission) is not considered an EMB (www.aceproject.org).

The importance of the study of election administration in a consolidating democracy cannot be overemphasized. According to Omotola, (2009:7) comparative Africa democratization is an emerging field of study with a growing body of knowledge in

circulation. He is of the opinion that much of the studies in comparative African democratization have focused on core institutions of democracy where elections have been identified as a central theme in competitive democratic politics. He however, concludes that this explains why the focus of research in elections and democratic consolidation now pays much attention to electoral administration. Scholars over the years have strived to establish a relationship between administration of elections and the emergence and consolidation of democracy (Elkit and Reynolds, 2000, Lopez-Pintor, 2000, Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002). Elkit and Renolds (2000:5) argued that “elections are complicated processes, most, especially when it comes to administration. Because it is not certain that elections will run smoothly, they argued that the quality of election administration be included among the factors that must be studied and analyzed carefully before any serious explanation of the level of sense of individual efficiency or its relation to the level of legitimacy in a post authoritarian or emerging democratic system can be ventured.

The significance of credible, free and fair elections to democratic consolidation cannot be overemphasized. According to (Animashaun, 2010:3), elections represents the lifeblood of modern democracy and the frequency, fairness and openness of elections are crucial to the political stability of the polity. The extent to which election advances democratic order depends largely on the existing electoral system, its nature and its acceptance by the stakeholders in the electoral process (Animashaun, 2010:3). In the words of Omotola (2009:8), the perceived centrality of elections to the democratization process of any country has been predicated upon a number of reasons, which revolve around the multiple roles credible elections can play to reinforce democracy.

Elections help to institutionalize the process of democratic succession. They do this by creating a legal-administrative framework for handling inter-elite rivalries and providing a modicum for popular backing for the new leaders (Hughes and May in Omotola, 2009:8). Also, elections help in institutionalizing the process of democratic competition and participation. Under an ideal situation, elections afford all eligible adults the right to vote and be voted for. By so doing, elections allow the people to participate in choosing representatives and by extension, in the forming of the government in a competitive fashion (Omotola, 2009:8). That elections will aid the consolidation of democracy in a polity is a function of how efficient the electoral body is in conducting democratic, free and fair elections. It has

been argued that EMBs as one species of Independent Administrative Agencies (IAAs) are usually not at the forefront of the discussion on democracy, but has become crucial as an institution when talking about democracy in the sense of free and fair elections (Aaken, 2009:298). She further argued that even though most states conducts elections, the fairness of the election and the free expression of the voters' will are by no means guaranteed. According to her elections can be unfair, either because they are intentionally rigged, because campaign conditions disproportionately favour the incumbent, or because administrative inefficiencies exist (Aaken, 2009:298).

In addition to these she opined that since EMBs control the moment of the set-up of government i.e. the election which is a crucial moment as the de facto accountability of governments depends on it, unfair elections or unfair electoral set-ups destroy the roots of accountability (which is one of the major aims of holding elections) and that if the re-election constraint on politicians is the most powerful mechanism for re-alignment of the citizens-principal with the politicians-agents interests, then the moment of re-election is also the most sensitive moment as potential conflicts of interest of the agent is at its peak. On the one hand, she has to stand for re-election in order to achieve legitimacy by holding free and fair elections on the other hand, there is a strong incentive to rig elections in order to stay in power. She however sees one solution for mitigating the problems in the EMB (Aaken, 2009:298).

The nexus between elections and democracy can be located among various electoral variables particularly that one that has to do with the efficacy of Election Management Boards. Kerevel (2009:2) posit that several studies (Pastor, 1999, Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002, Hartly, McCoy and Mostillo, 2008) see election administration as a major variable in understanding democratic transitions and consolidation. When EMBs conduct elections that are credible, the confidence of the citizens in the electoral process is bolstered. However, the conduct of free, fair elections by the electoral body largely depends on the existence of some variables some of which include independence from government influence and impartiality of the electoral body itself. According to López-Pintor (2000:65), one of the most important ways in which elections can be regarded as legitimate is through the development of credible election administration institutions. EMBs that are independent from interference by other government institutions and political interests, impartial in their decision-making and

professional in their make-up are considered a crucial component for conducting free and fair elections in newly democratic states (Wall et al. 2006:12). On the contrary, EMBs with excessive partisan influence or exclusive commissions that limit political input in the administration of elections may lead to a perceived lack of professionalism and impartiality that lead citizens to question the fairness of the election process (Kerevel, 2009:3).

He further argued that citizens may also question the validity of election results due to a perceived lack of professionalism in the conduct of elections or as a result of perceived bias in electoral administration. He therefore, concluded that individuals who have little confidence in the EMB may have reduced confidence in the accuracy of how ballots are counted. Such lack of confidence in election results may have additional consequences, such as reduced electoral participation, or an increased propensity to engage in protest activity (Kerevel, 2009:3). These impede the democratization process. For elections to foster democratic consolidation, the expertise and technical know-how necessary for electoral management on the entire matters of the electoral process requires an impartial and autonomous Electoral Management Body. The place of EMB in democracy cannot be underestimated. The growing importance of EMBs to democratization must have accounted for the growing attention given to electoral administration in electoral and democratization studies. Such focus has specifically being directed towards Election Management Boards (Lopez-Pinto, 2000). Omotola (2009:20), emphasized that based on their administration, elections can either be a positive or negative reinforcement of democracy, depending on the quality of the elections. He stressed that quality of elections depends on three important variables, namely: participation, competition and legitimacy. These indicators according to him can only be guaranteed provided the EMBs satisfy some important conditions that strengthen effective electoral administration.

In addition he considered these conditions to include the autonomy of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), measured basically in terms of their structure, autonomy, motivation, transparency and general capacity. These conditions are important in order for the EMBs to effectively discharge their duties. Other relevant structural agencies like political parties, mass media, civil service, the security agencies, civil society groups (CSOs), also need to effectively play their roles, including the provision of logistic support, which is vital to the operation of the electoral body (Omotola, 2009:20). The Nigerian experience as regards

the conduct of democratic elections has not been palatable. Elections conducted during the First and Second Republics were accomplished by massive fraud and violence. Some of the elections conducted in the present Fourth Republic also share some of these features. Iyayi (2004) posit that elections in these periods have are characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation of political opponents and controversy, increasing materialization of politics, electoral brigandage, thuggery, violence and warfare. He is of the opinion that elections and electoral process in Nigeria have failed to establish a platform for the establishment of democracy. He summed this up in the following words:

The incontrovertible and overall conclusion that can be drawn from the history of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria is that they have failed to promote the emergence of a democratic culture even within the limited application that it has within a bourgeois social order. Indeed, each set of elections seems to deepen the culture of violence, authoritarianism, abuse of human rights, corruption and crass materialism in Nigeria. Each succeeding election seems to perfect in an even more perverse sense, the abuses that characterized the earlier elections. Thus with each successive election, the ruling elites are not only more and more isolated from the people, they also come to relate with them increasingly through violence, contempt, repression and authoritarianism (Iyayi, 2004).

The crisis of representative democracy according to Iyayi (2004) can be exemplified in the failure of the Nigerian electoral system. The remedy to this according to him can be found in the Nigeria's Electoral Management Body. This further emphasizes the importance of electoral bodies in a democracy. In the Nigerian context he called for greater autonomy of INEC. Crucial to the proper functioning of EMBs generally is the concept independence. In a comprehensive piece on EMBs, Wall et al. (2006:7) classified EMBs into three. These include: the independent model, governmental model and the mixed model.

The Independent Model of electoral management is used in countries where elections are organized and managed by an EMB that is institutionally independent and autonomous from the executive branch of government; its members are outside the executive. Under the Independent Model, the EMB has and manages its own budget, and is not accountable to a government ministry or department. It may be accountable to the legislature, the judiciary or the head of state. EMBs under this model may enjoy varying degrees of financial autonomy and accountability, as well as varying levels of performance accountability (Wall et al.

2006:7). In countries with the Governmental Model of electoral management, elections are organized and managed by the executive branch through a ministry (such as the Ministry of the Interior) and/or through local authorities. Where EMBs under this model exist at the national level, they are led by a minister or civil servant and are answerable to a cabinet minister. With very few exceptions, they have no 'members'. Their budget falls within a government ministry and/or under local authorities (Wall et al. 2006:7). The Mixed Model of electoral management usually involves two component EMBs and a dual structure: a policy, monitoring or supervisory EMB that is independent of the executive branch (like an EMB under the Independent Model) and an implementation EMB located within a department of state and/or local government (like an EMB under the Governmental Model). Under the Mixed Model, elections are organized by the component governmental EMB, with some level of oversight provided by the component independent EMB (Wall et al. 2006:8).

To achieve the conduct of free, fair, democratic and impartial elections which will secure the confidence of the electorate the independent model is recommended. International IDEA (2012:5) suggests that Independent Model of electoral management may be the most suitable for most transitional contexts, while EMBs based on other models (Governmental and Mixed) may find it more difficult to build a public perception of themselves as the impartial arbiters of electoral contests. It however, warned that the independent model itself is not a guarantee of actual independence but that the guarantee of independence in principle. The actual independence should be demonstrated in action (International IDEA 2012:5). This is a pointer to the fact that the functioning of EMBs should not be subject to the control of any other person, authority or political party. It must function without political favouritism or bias. The EMB must be able to operate free of interference, simply because any allegation of manipulation, perception of bias or alleged interference will have a direct impact not only on the credibility of the body in charge but on the entire election process (Lopez-Pintor, 2000:42).

For an EMB to achieve this it must operate independently both in principle and in practice. One of the ways to ensure this is through the composition and structure of the electoral body. The composition and structure of electoral bodies have great effect on the elections it conducts. Therefore for an EMB to be independent and free from control its members or commissioners must not include government officials or members of political

parties. It commissioners should be chosen on the basis of their skills and expertise, by way of an open and transparent nomination and selection procedure. A fixed period of tenure for commissioners is advisable. To be fully independent, an EMB needs to have and maintain appropriate, secure and transparent sources of funding and should develop its own budget. External auditing of EMB funds and accounts can verify an EMB's continuing independence. Equal distance must be maintained from political parties, the government and the security forces. Transparency in all actions is, of course, imperative. It is also important that the electoral commission be granted full power under the law to execute its duties without interference (International IDEA 2012:5).

Election Administration in Nigeria: Tracing the Historical Evolution of INEC

The commencement of electoral politics in Nigeria can be traced to 1922. This was made possible by the introduction of the elective principle for Lagos and Calabar. The elective principle was a principle of the Clifford's Constitution of 1922 and represented the basis for political representation and party politics in the colonial period (Seteolu 2005 in Jibrin, 2010:15). The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the Nigeria youth movement contested in the indirect elections that were conducted under the system (Jibrin, 2010:15). The conduct of the elections and the electoral process was supersized by the British colonial masters. The 1959 pre-independence general elections set the stage for the establishment of Electoral management Boards in Nigeria. The first of such was the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) (NERDC, 2005:12). The ECN administered and supervised the elections which ushered in the Nigerian First Republic at. Inception the commission was headed by sir Kofo Abayomi and was later headed by Mr. Eyo Esua following the resignation of sir Kofo Abayomi (Aderemi, 2005:327).

The Electoral Management Body the ECN was later changed to the Federal Electoral Commission by the late sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa administration. The new electoral commission conducted the 1964 general elections and the western region elections of 1965. According to Olaniyi (2005) in Luqman (2009: 61) the ineptitude displayed by the FEC in the conduct of the elections partly accounted for the collapse of the First Republic. The collapse was to be followed by thirteen years of military rule, under which all political activities were suspended and which consequently led to the demise of the electoral body. However, showing interest to return the country to civilian government, the Obasanjo administration through

retroactive promulgation of Decree 41 of 1977 established the Federal Electoral Commission. Chief Michael Ani was appointed as the chairman (Jibrin, 2010: 16). The newly established electoral commission had the responsibility of conducting the 1979 general elections. It also conducted the 1983 general elections. The conduct of the commission on during the elections was described as unsatisfactory. This was reported in the following curds.

FEDECO was soon to be tested for its competence, impartiality and integrity under the chairmanship of Michael Ani and his successor, justice Victor Ovie –Whisky-sadly the very contentious issue of two-thirds of nineteen states “ (of vote cast in 1979) soon turned around to be the acid test for Chief Ani’s FEDECO. The Apparent allegiance of his successor justice Ovie-whisky, to the federal government and the largely fraudulent elections of 1983 made the commission one of the most scandalous of all Nigeria’s electoral commission (Jibrin, 2010:16).

The military coup of 1983 led by General Mohamadu Buhari put a stop to the embattled electoral body and in 1987 a new electoral body was established by General Ibrahim Babangida who in 1985 in a counter coup became the Head of State. The new electoral body was named the National Electoral Commission (NEC) headed by Professor Eme Awa and later headed by Professor Humphrey Nwosu after Eme Awa’s removed. The commission was charged with the responsibility of managing the electoral process during General Babangida flamboyant transition process. Though NEC managed the local, state and National Assembly Elections, the annulment of the June, 12 1993 presidential election rendered utterly useless NEC efforts at conducting a free, fair and competitive election in the aborted Third Republic (Olaniyi 2005 cited in Luqman, 2009:61). However, the public outcry, protest, demonstration and riots by the Nigerian populace forced the Banbangida to “step-a-side” thereby paving way for the inauguration of an Interim National Government headed my Chief Ernest Shonekan. The IMG barely lasted for there months when it was overthrown in a palace coup led by General Sanni Abacha.

On getting to office General Sanni, Abacha dissolved NEC and replaced it with the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). The new electoral body was led by Chief Summer Dagogo-Jack. However, the death in office of General Sanni Abacha paved the way for General Abubakar Abdulsalam to assume the position of the Head of State. On assumption of office General Abdulsalam almost immediately announced a transition programme to democratic rule. In order to achieve this elections conducted under Abacha

regime were declared null and void consequently, the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) was dissolved and was replaced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The commission came into being through the enactment of the Decree No 17 of 1998 (now act of parliament) (Luqman, 2009:61). At inception the commission was chaired by Chief Ephraim Apata. The commission successfully conducted the 1999 general elections which ushered in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The commission has since then been responsible for the conduct of presidential and National Assembly elections as well as the Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly elections, the most recent being the 2015 general elections.

2015 General Elections: An overview

Preparation

The 2015 general elections which was the fourth in the series of election in the Fourth Republic was unique in that it was the first democratic election held that will unseat an incumbent president. The elections were conducted under the auspices of Professor Attahiru Jega who also conducted the 2011 general elections. One of the key points in the preparation for the elections was the distribution of permanent voters' card (PVC) and continuous voters Registration (CVR). Another important area of preparation was the use of card Reader which was used to authenticate the validity of PVC and to make sure that a prospective voter is originally registered and has his or her name in the INEC voters' database. In preparation for the general elections the electoral body had to contend with security challenges. The elections took place in a period when the country was waging war against general insecurity majorly occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency. All the aforementioned issues posed serious challenges to the conduct of the 2015 general elections.

In surmounting these challenges the Independent National Electoral Commission declared that as at 27th of February, 2015 it has distributed 54,377,747 (Fifty-four Million, Three Hundred and Seventy-Seven Thousand, Seven Hundred and Forty Seven) PVCs to persons registered for the general elections. This represented 78.93 percent of the total number of voters registered by INEC (Hassan, 2015). The figure indicated three percent increase from the last collection rate which was recorded two weeks earlier. Also, in order to ensure the effective usage of the electronic card reader, the electoral body carried-out a test-

run of the card readers in 225 polling units and 358 voting centres across 12 states drawn from the 6 geo-political zones on Saturday, 7th March, 2015 (CLEEN, 2015:2). The test was however, declared as a success even though hitches were recorded (CLEEN, 2015:2). To allay the fears of violence, INEC ensured an enhanced stakeholder participation that guaranteed an enduring platform for inter-party collaboration and which contributed to the signing of a peace pact among leading political parties in the run-up to the 2015 polls (Omotola and Nyuykonge, 2015:5). Also, in order to ensure that capable hands are employed as ad-hoc staff to take charge of the general elections INEC employed about 750,000 ad hoc staff (Idowu, 2015).

The voting process

The 2015 general elections were initially scheduled for the 14th and 28th February, 2015 for the Presidential and National Assembly elections and the gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections respectively. But coupled with the challenge of insecurity and renewed offensive against Boko Haram (CLEEN, 2015:2) as well as fresh allegation of non-collection of PVCs the Independent National Electoral Commission rescheduled the polls for 28th March 2015 and 11th April 2015 for the presidential and National Assembly elections and the Gubernatorial and state assembly elections respectively. The Presidential elections were contested by 14 political parties among these were two major parties, the Peoples Democratic Party and the All Progressive Congress (APC). The Peoples Democratic Party nominated the then incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan to fly the party's flag in the presidential elections. He had the then incumbent Vice President Namadi Sambo as his running mate. On the other hand, the All Progressive Congress, had the former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari as its candidate and Yemi Osibanjo, a lawyer and Professor who served as Lagos State Attorney General and Commissioner for justice from 1999-2007 (Thurston, 2015:7). Presidential, National Assembly and State House of Assembly elections were held in all the 36 state, while gubernatorial elections were held in 29 states.

Like that of the 2011 general elections accreditation started by 8am and ended by 1pm or until the last person on the queue before 1p.m is accredited. The voting process commenced by 1p.m or whenever the process of accreditation ends. The presiding officer of each polling unit after arranging the unit in the approved lay out started the voting process by announcing to prospective voters that voting proper was about to begin. In order to be

accredited an intending voter was expected to go to the polling unit where he or she registered with his or her permanent voters' card. The voter however, presents the card to the polling officials for verification. The presiding officer tests the PVC using the card reader to authenticate its originality. Once the voter's information appeared on the screen the voter will be duly accredited but if it does not this signifies that the card is not from INEC or may either be cloned or it belongs to another person. The prospective voter will consequently be disqualified from voting.

Although, it was reported that several polling units across the country opened later than scheduled (www.premiumtimesng.com) the voting process was generally peaceful except for some isolated cases of violent incidents. The delay however, in opening of some polling units across the country has been attributed largely to logistics challenges occasioned by the late arrival of election officials and materials (www.premiumtimesng.com). The polling environment was relatively peaceful. Members of the Nigerian Police and other security agencies as well as paramilitary officers were present in each polling unit. The general view of the security presence at polling units was positive. Notwithstanding there were cases of intimidation and harassment of voters by overzealous security agents and party thugs and supporters (www.premiumtimesng.com).

The general conduct of voters at polling units was satisfactory. Voters turned out en masse and even got to the polling units as early as seven am, before the arrival of election officials and materials. This showed the enthusiasm to exercise their civic rights. This turnout has been attributed to the success of the civic education and determination of people to exercise their franchise. Voters were well behaved even in the situation of challenges encountered during accreditation and voting. In many polling units in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara state, voters remained calm when accreditation and voting did not start as scheduled due to logistics challenges.

Results

A total number of 31, 746, 490 Million registered voters were accredited out of the 67,422,005 registered voters in Nigeria (CPDA, 2015:1). As earlier mentioned, 14 political parties contested the elections. INEC released the results as follows:

Party	Votes received	% of votes received
APC	15,424,921	53.96
PDP	12,853,162	44.96
APA	53,537	0.19
ACPN	40,311	0.14
CPP	36,300	0.13
AD	30,673	0.11
ADC	29,666	0.10
PPN	24,475	0.09
NCP	24,455	0.09
AA	22,125	0.08
UPP	18,220	0.06
KOWA	13,076	0.05
UDP	9,208	0.03
HOPE	7,435	0.03

Source: www.ineenigeria.org

According to CCPA (2015:1) the 2013 presidential elections and the result were in many ways different from other elections most especially the 2011 edition. It noted among others that the incumbent lost by a relatively wide margin of the total votes cast to the opposition, about 20% (2,574,781). Also, the opposition won more states (21) and had at least 25% of votes on more states. Furthermore, the PDP lost approximately 43% of the votes it controlled (22,495,187 in 2011 to 12,853, 162 in 2015). In contrast the APC gained approximately 26% more votes between 2011 and 2015 (12, 214, 853 to 15, 424, 921). In addition the PDP won 31 states in 2011, but could only win 16 states in 2015. The PDP did not only lose 15 of the 31 states, it also lost same percentage of votes in the states it retained

(CPPA: 2015:1). However Muhammadu Buhari of APC having satisfied the requirement of the law, and scored the highest number of votes was declared the winner and returned elected.

In the National Assembly elections the PDP won 48 Senatorial seats while APC own 61 seats. Out of the 352 House of Assembly seats the PDP won 126 while the APC won 226. In the gubernatorial elections the PDP won 8 out of the 29 states where elections were held. The APC however won 21 states. It was observed that since the return to democracy in 1999, the PDP has held power making it 16 years at the helms of affairs. The party has also been dominant in the legislative arm, winning outright majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representative and producing the legislature's principal officers since the return to democratic rule. The 2015 general elections however, turned around the fortunes of the party by losing power in the executive arm and losing control of the two legislative houses (Egbulefu, 2015).

Reaction

Prior to the announcement of the presidential election results there were insinuations from all quarters that there will be a likely occurrence of post election violence. People stayed back at home and preferred to watch the proceedings on air. A Kaduna resident expressed his fears when he said “everybody is afraid of the announcement of result. That’s why everybody hid at home, but we pray so nothing will happen, that, God willing there will be no violence (Clotney, 2015). However unlike in 2011 when violent reactions followed the announcement of presidential of the presidential election results, there was wild jubilation across Nigeria when the APC presidential flag bearer Mohammedu Buhari was declared winner.

Assessment

In preparation for the 2015 general elections the Independent National Electoral Commission said that it “accredited 107 observer groups to monitor the elections”. Notable among these were the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM), the National Democratic Institute. These were led by Mr. Santiago Fisas and Mr. Johnnie Carson respectively. Election Observer Missions were also sent from the African Union and headed by Amos Sawyer, Commonwealth of Nations and Economic Community of West African States led by Bakili Mulizi and John Kuffour respectively. The various election observer

missions observed the elections and unanimously described the elections as peaceful and credible (Adamu, 2015). In giving the general impression of its Election Observer Mission the head of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Dr. Bakili Muluzi commented that “the 28th March 2015 election elections marked an important step forward for democracy in Africa’s most populous country and a key member of the commonwealth.” He said “despite the organization and technical deficiencies, the conduct of the Presidential and National Assembly elections were generally peaceful and transparent” (Muluzi, 2015). He further emphasized that though there were technical hitches but was optimistic that there is room for improvement. He however gave credence of the peaceful conduct of the polls to all the people of Nigeria for demonstrating patience and maturity (Muluzi, 2015).

In his commendation, the head of ECOWAS Election Observer Mission and former Ghanaian President, John Kuffuor said “that the Nigerian elections are a pride, not only to Nigerians, but also to West Africa and the whole of the African continent”. He particularly praised Goodluck Jonathan for creating an appropriate environment for peaceful polls (Adamu, 2015). The UN Secretary General Ban Kimoon in his appreciation of the peaceful and credible conduct of the polls congratulated the entire citizenry and the government for conducting a peaceful and orderly election. In addition the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM) commended the Nigerian people, the political parties and other stakeholders for the successful conduct of the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections (Udoh, 2015). The Head of the mission Mr. Satiago Fisas commended all the stakeholders involved in the elections. He was quoted as follows:

The EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) commends the Nigeria people, political parties and candidates, INEC, and all stakeholders for the continued commitment to the electoral process. Overall the 11 April election process appeared to be more efficient, with staff working diligently and improvements evident in the timelier opening of polling sites (Fisas, in Udo, 2015).

The United States government in a press statement released through the secretary of state, John Kerry, congratulated Nigerians and the Nigerian government on the historic and largely peaceful elections. It applauded all voters who showed patience and demonstrated commitment to participate in the democratic process. It commended Nigeria’s Independent

National Electoral Commission and its Chairman, Attahiru Jega, on the generally orderly vote, on the use of technology such as card readers to increase the credibility and transparency of the electoral process and on prompt communication of the results. The statement noted that while there were reports of logistical problems, such incidents did not undermine the overall outcome of the election (Kerry, 2015). The government of the United States lauded both the former President Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammedu Buhari for their public commitments to the Abuja Accord signed in January and reaffirmed on March 26, respecting the official results and encouraging their supporters to do same (Kerry, 2015).

Also, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd.) former Head of State and Chairman of the National Peace Committee described the elections as peaceful. He lauded former president Jonathan for his statesmanship in conceding defeat and in congratulating Mohammedu Buhari on his victory in the presidential election (Adamu, 2015). It is important to note that the 2015 general elections drew the attention of the international community than ever before. Only few were optimistic that the anticipated occurrence of violence will not tear the nation apart. This cannot but be unconnected with the fact that the build up to the elections was characterized by hostile relationship between the two major political parties hate campaign, ethno-religious conflict, unending communal clashes in several Northern states and parts of the North Central and above all the unpleasant and radical Boko Haram insurgency. However, the international community may have been taken by a big surprise when the country concluded the conduct of the general elections peacefully with minimal incidence of violence.

Assessing The Performance of INEC: Some Core Issues

Distribution of Permanent Voters card (PVC)

The electoral act 2010 sections 16 and 49(1) (as amended) requires that INEC issues voters card (PVC) to voters which they have to present to the presiding officer at the polling unit on election day. As a result of this INEC endeavoured to produce PVC for all voters on the register (Jega, 2015). INEC commenced the distribution of PVC and the continuous registration exercise in three phases as follows:

- Phase 1: Friday 23rd May – Sunday 25th May, 2014.
- Phase 2: Friday 18th July – Sunday 20th, July 2014
- Phase 3: Friday 22nd August – Sunday 24th, August 2014

Phase one states included: Taraba, Gombe, Zamfara, Kebbi, Benue, Kogi, Abia, Enugu, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa. Phase two states were: Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Sokoto, FCT, Kwara, Anambra, Ebonyi, Ondo, Oyo, Delta and Cross River. Phase three states were: Adamawa, Borno, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, Nassarawa, Niger, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Edo and Rivers state. The collection centre was the designated continuous voter registration Area (Ward) of Every Local Government Area (www.inecnigeria.org). The PVCs contains voters' biometric information in an embedded microchip and replaces the temporary voter's card that was used in the 2011 general elections (Hedlund, 2015). However, as at 7th of January 2015, the statistics on the distribution of PVCs shows the total number of the PVC received to be 54, 341, 610, while the total number of PVC distribution was 38, 774,391. This implied that the percentage of PVC distribution was 71.35%. A total of 15,567,219 PVC were yet to be distributed as at then (www.inecnigeria.org) .

However after the three phases of the distribution of PVCs and Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) many registered voters found out that their PVCs were not available for collection at their respective places of registration. This led to public outcry. The commission however, pacified them re-register. Consequently, the Independent National Electoral Commission had to extend the date for the collection of the PVCs. This extension was occasioned by the postponement of the polls to a new date of March 28, 2015. This gave room for more PVCs to be distributed. Therefore, as at middle of March, INEC had reportedly distributed 67,206,600 PVCs across the nation (Osun defender, 2015).

The distribution of the Permanent Voters Cards was one of the controversy generating aspects of the preparation for the 2015 general elections. There were claims and counter claims as well as accusations from the two political parties, the PDP and the APC for instance the PDP accused the country's electoral body of favouring the opposition party during the distribution exercise. It was reported that the distribution and collection of PVCs were skewed in favour of the APC strongholds (Odebode, Aleehenu, et al. in Omotola and Nyuykange, 2015:5). In another accusation, INEC was accused of removing the records of 1.4 million persons from the register of voters compiled in 2011 in Lagos state (Ezugwu, 2015)

However, in a press conference released by the commission's Chief press secretary Mr. Kayode Idowu, INEC refuted the allegation, though it acknowledged the fact that the commission announced a figure of 6.1 million registrants in the state. But it claimed that when

the data was subjected to the Automated Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) software, 82,892 multiple registrations were eliminated. In addition the commission claimed that there was loss of data and incomplete data affecting about one million records, said to have mostly occurred in 1,792 polling units that were identified and made public before the exercise. Thus INEC maintained that was the reason why the figure came down to about 4.6 million registrants (Idowu, 2015).

While it can be asserted that the performance of INEC in terms of the distribution of PVCs is commendable. It should be pointed out that it is most impossible that every registered voter will be able to collect their PVCs, which necessarily may not be the fault of INEC. It was personally observed in both Fufu and Moro Local Government Areas of Kwara state, that rural registrants hardly remember their place of registration. This prompted some of them to go to another unit where their data are not captured to request for their PVCs. Other factors that were also responsible for the non issuance of PVCs to potential voters include the proximity between the place of registration and the place of residence of the registrants, death, illness etc.

Recruitment and Training of Ad Hoc Staff

Unlike 2011 when INEC engaged about 300,000 ad hoc staff to conduct the general elections in that year, the Independent National Electoral Commission made use of about 700,000 temporary election duty personnel. INEC made use of four ad hoc staff (presiding officer and assistant presiding officer) per polling units and voting points (Jega, 2015). This is in contrast to the 2011 general elections when an average of three ad hoc staff was engaged per voting unit. The Presiding and Assistance Presiding Officers were mostly recruited from the NYSC scheme as well as the tertiary education sector. The 700,000 ad hoc personnel used apart from the POs and APOs included Returning Officers, Collation Officers and Supervisory Presiding Officers.

The commission embarked on a 3-day training programme for the POs and APOs. Unlike in 2011 when manual accreditation was used and when only a two-day training programme was done the training of POs and APOs for the 2015 general elections was more challenging. This cannot be unconnected with the introduction of both the PVC and ECR. Out of the three days, a day was used to give hands-on training to the POs and APOs. The Eos

and SPOs were trained earlier before the Pos and the APOs, while collation officers (CO) and returning officers were the last to be trained.

The recruitment of ad hoc staff particularly the Pos and APOs from the NYSC scheme was highly commendable. It is believed that the recruitment of graduates of Universities and Polytechnics will improve the quality of the election process. In commending the conduct of the 2015 general elections the Commonwealth observer group to Nigeria's 2015 presidential and National Assembly elections lauded the NYSC and the tertiary institution students for their impact on the electioneering process he was quoted saying:

We commended the contribution made by the National Youth Service Corps, and tertiary student, whose members worked as ad hoc INEC staff for elections. These young men and women showed dedication creativity and courage in helping to deliver a transparent electoral process, often in difficult conditions. They are a source of pride and hope for Nigeria (Muluzi, 2015).

The use of these NYSC scheme members is indeed commendable, it should be noted that the incompetence of some of the Corps members was discovered on the election. It was personally observed that on the day of the Presidential and National Assembly elections some of the Corps members confessed their inability to use the card reader effectively. One may attribute this to either lack of enough training period of the Corps members or the general incompetence of the corps members themselves. It is expected that the hands-on training of Corps members should take up to three days other than a day. Although the inability to operate the ECR did not affect the polling process as arrangements were made to correct the situation, it is important to address the issue of training to forestall such in future elections.

Distribution of Sensitive and Non- Sensitive Materials

The conduct of general elections requires the procurement and distribution of large quantities of election materials which can be categorized into two namely: sensitive and non-sensitive materials. The non-sensitive materials includes: gum, bags, envelopes, ruler, biro, pencil, cubicles, posters, calculators and twine ropes. Sensitive materials include: ballot paper, result sheets, stamps for presiding officers and other materials that are directly related to the conduct of the election process. The distribution of sensitive materials from the INEC headquarters to the states usually commences about two week or more to election. The state

on the directive from the headquarters commences the distribution from INEC State Headquarters to various Local Government Headquarters within the states.

Personal observation however, shows that the late arrival of election personnel and election materials (both sensitive and non-sensitive) are usually due to the logistics challenges of conveying the materials and the ad hoc staff from the Local Government Headquarters to Ward and voting units. It was observed that even with the presence of security personnel and members of the Nigerian Army to escort the materials and the personnel to the camping areas, the movement of such usually comes up in the night. In cases when the distance is quite long it takes several hours to get to the Wards this in turn leads to the late distribution of election materials to the Pos and the APOs. These definitely led to the late arrival of both the personnel and the materials to the polling units.

The Use of Electronic Card Reader (ECR)

The 2014 electoral Act empowers INEC to determine the form of voting it chooses to adopt, whether it is electronic or manual. Section 152 (2) (as amended) states that voting in an election under the Act shall be in accordance with the procedure determined by INEC. The card reader is a compact and portable electronic device which is configured to read, verify and authenticate the PVC issued only by the nation's electoral body. The card reader uses a highly secure and cryptographic technology that is commonly used in devices that need to perform secure transactions, such as paying terminals. It has ultra-low power consumption, with a single core frequency of 1.2GHz and an Android 4.2.2 Operating System (INEC, 2015). The nation's electoral body ensured the provision of a card reader at each voting unit in the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with a substantial number of spares to address contingencies (INEC, 2015). The body's aim of introducing the new technology is to guarantee better voter identification system, faster voting, faster and more reliable counting and transmission of results and improved accountability and transparency of the entire electoral process (Hedlund, 2015) Generally, the introduction of the card Reader to the electoral process was to eliminate or at least drastically minimize multiple voting and confer additional credibility to the electoral process (Jega, 2005).

According to Jega (2015) using the card readers has great advantages. First, after configuration, the card readers can only read PVCs issued by INEC alone. Secondly, it reads the embedded microchip in the card, in addition, it allows authentication of the identity of the

voters by matching the voters fingers prints with the one stored on the chip. Again, it keeps a tally of all cards read, all cards verified and authenticated or not, with all their details. Fifth, the information can be transferred to a central server using SMS. Furthermore, the information stored on the server could enable INEC audit results from polling units as well as do a range of statistical analyses of the demographics of voting and lastly, the Registration Area and Ward Collation Officer can use this information to audit pulling unit results sheets and determine whether accreditation figures have been altered, this is being described as a common feature of electoral fraud.

Although, the commission envisaged probable challenges to the use of card readers, it seems to have instant remedies to tackle these challenges. In the event of a card reader failing, which the commission believes was a highly unlikely event enough spares were made available to be deployed before the end of the accreditation process. In a situation where it cannot be replaced, voting in that unit or point was postponed till the next day. Voters whose fingerprints were not authenticated, incidence forms were filled by the Presiding Officer of the polling unit or point after which the voters were accredited. However, experience and personal observation garnered during the election process showed that in some units in the Malete Ward of Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State some card readers did not booth to the point where it will be ready for the accreditation process. Once this was notice however, steps were taken to reach the INEC Local Government Headquarters to provide another card reader for places where such did not work. It was however, disheartening that new card reader did not get to the units where they were needed. A palpable reason for this was logistics challenge. The distance from the INEC Local Government Headquarters to the Ward was quite long. Even though the issues that occurred with the use of card reader did not lead to the disruption of the election process and voter disenfranchisement it is important that more effective remedies to perceived malfunction of the device should be provided so as to enable accreditation to commence at the scheduled time and ensure that voting ends at the normal time. While it can be acknowledged that the overall performance of the card reader was satisfactory and that the usage bolstered the credibility and transparency of the election process, it is imperative that noticeable lapses should be prevented to ensure smoother election process in future electoral endeavors

Safeguarding the Franchise of Nigerians in Diaspora

Prior to the 2015 general elections the Independent National Electoral Commission Staff categorically that Nigerians living abroad will not have the opportunity of exercising their Franchise in the 2015 general elections (Odunsi, 2014). The Chairman of the Commission said that apart from the fact that it does not have the necessary means, the Electorate Act 2010 will have to be amended to encourage such (Odunsi, 2014). The electoral Act, 2010 made provision for the establishment and functions as well as other matters relating to the elections and electoral system, it does not make provision for Nigerians in Diaspora to vote during general elections. According to Soludo (2013), there are about 17million Nigerians living outside the country. The statistical implication is that the total number of Nigerians living outside the country accounts for approximately 25% of the total number of voters registered for the 2015 general elections. Neglecting such an important part of the entire Nigerian populace certainly does the Nigeria democratization no good. It has been argued that there should be the promulgation of a bill that will incorporate Nigerians living in Diaspora into the electoral process (Ogbonaya, 2013:20). The argument is based on the premises that it has become a global practice in modern democracies for citizens in Diaspora to vote in general elections of their countries of origin (Orabuchi cited in Ogbonaya, 2013:20).

With their inability to vote in the just concluded elections, most Nigerians in Diaspora expressed their dissatisfaction with the development. They attributed their imminent disenfranchisement to the lackluster approach exhibited by both the Federal Government and the nation's electoral body (INEC) (Arhewe, 2015). The Nigerians in Diaspora lamented that while other countries make adequate preparations for their citizens at home and abroad to exercise their civic rights, the reverse is the case in Nigeria (Arhewe, 2015). It was argued that the need to increase participation of Nigerians abroad in future political activities is related to the important economic contributions they provide for country. "This is significant because once the Diaspora decides to withhold the over 30 billion USD that they remit annually to Nigeria, the economy will feel a crack" (Arhewe, 2015). While INEC expressed its willingness to carry along the Diaspora, it is however impeded by the non-provision for such in the electoral Act. The Chairman of the Commission, Professor Attahiru Jega said "denying Nigerians in Diaspora the right to vote will be an infringement on their right. He however,

expressed optimism that the proposed amendment of the Electoral Act would enable them to carry out their civic responsibility (Arhewe, 2015).

Conclusion: Improving on Future Elections

Though the much anticipated 2015 general elections have come and gone, the travails and apprehension which characterized the electioneering period cannot be easily forgotten. While it can be asserted that Nigerian elections are fierily contested, the risk of violence in 2015 general elections was particularly high. Apart from the fact that the elections took place amidst tensions occasioned by several debilitating factors such as the threat of security brought about the radical Boko Haram activities, dwindling economic fortunes, ethno-religions politics etc., the build up to the general elections generated more anxiety than over before. The build up was characterized by campaign of calumny, hate speech and acts of violence. However, the anticipated tendency to expect the worst election was cleared by Nigerians through their peaceful conduct despite the logistics challenges faced in the conduct of the elections. Even though the elections were not devoid of hitches, the general conduct have been described as been free, fair and credible, therefore, satisfying. The nation's electoral body received encomiums for conducting credible polls when majority of Nigerians were pessimistic about the credibility of the general elections.

The nation's electoral body however, should not continue to bask in the euphoria of conducting polls that were described as credible. Much still need to be done in order to improve INEC's performance so as to ensure more credible polls in future. Firstly, INEC should engage in prompt distribution of PVCs. The continuous voters registration should commence early enough so as to ensure that the PVCs are produced and distributed before the commencement of elections. Also INEC should embark on regular mop-up of the voter's register. Secondly, for future elections INEC should properly screen ad hoc staff, particularly members of the NYSC. This is to ensure that the competent ones among them are selected. Those that are selected however, should be given comprehensive training in terms of hands-on and otherwise. Thirdly, INEC should formulate implementable policies which will ensure improve ability of delivery of election materials and election personnel. Also, improved communication procedure should be put in place. This will enable the Local Government Headquarter staff communicate with polling units. Fourth, the electoral body should entrust the use of card readers at polling units to competent hands. This can be done through the

SPOs. In addition to this extra card readers should be given to the polling staff and an ICT staff of INEC should be attached to each ward to configure new card reader and attend promptly to any complain. Lastly, INEC should embark on early amendment of the electoral act. This is to give more time for the implementation of the new amendment.

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