

NIGERIA'S POLITICAL CHANGES AND FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Faculty of Social Sciences 2nd National Conference

16th - 18th June, 2016

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

Edited by

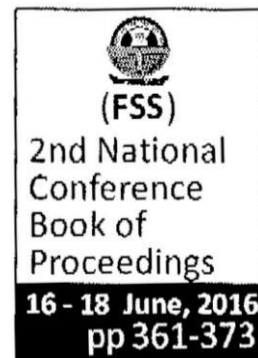
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**A PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,
BENUE STATE UNIVERSITY MAKURDI**

NIGERIA'S 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

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Abstract

Elections in any society measures the level of democratic maturity and constitutes a useful determinant for assessing democratic consolidation in such society. However, Nigeria's 2015 general elections represented the fifth in the series of elections since the return of the country's political administration into democratic path in 1999. The conduct of these elections recorded mixed outcomes. Though, fears that elections would be marred large scale violence were allayed to a certain extent with some instances of technical hitches, ballot box stuffing/snatching, vote buying and other forms of electoral irregularities were recorded in some parts of the country. This paper, therefore, critically assess the 2015 general elections and how the elections contributes to consolidating Nigeria's democratic practice. The study revealed that electoral fraud, conflicting judicial pronouncements on election cases and lack of independence on the part of the electoral body, among others, has seriously threatened the survival of democracy in Nigeria. These identified problems are potential clog in the wheel of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The methodology used in this study is both descriptive and analytical. The study however recommends, among others, that the National Assembly should enact punitive laws against electoral fraud as well as laws that strengthen the autonomy and capacity of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the country. The paper, therefore, concludes that until all the democratic political institutions in the country are allowed to function effectively and democratically, the quest for democratic consolidation would be a complete mirage and untenable.

Key words: Democracy, democratic consolidation, elections, electoral fraud, 2015 general elections.

Introduction

The Nigeria's 2015 general elections were the fifth consecutive general elections since the return of the country to democracy in 1999. The elections

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represent a milestone towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The elections were historic in the sense that it was the first time electronic accreditation were introduced through the use of Card Reader Machines. Despite the challenges inherent in the new electoral policy, it seemed to have remarkably increased the efficacy of Nigeria electoral process. Also, it was the first time in the democratic history of Nigeria that an incumbent President lost to the opposition party (Moveh, 2015). Despite some pockets of irregularities and electoral-related shortcomings evidenced in late arrival or non-availability of election materials, falsification of election results, ballot box stuffing/snatching, partial failure of the Card Reader Machines, collusion of politicians with security agents to subvert the electoral processes, the outcome of the 2015 general elections has been generally accepted to be credible, transparent and a considerable improvement on the past elections in the country.

The role of judiciary in the electoral system also calls for serious concern. Conflicting judicial pronouncements on electoral issues in most situations throw INEC into confusion on which court order or decision to obey, especially when the decision comes from courts of the same hierarchy. Under this experience, democracy cannot be seen to be consolidated because the judiciary constitute one of the core elements of democratic consolidation. However, empirical evidence over the years revealed that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) still lacks the basic autonomy needed to sufficiently carry out its assigned duties and responsibilities impartially. Essentially, the objectives of this paper are as follows:

- * To examine the role of INEC as it relates to democratic consolidation.
- * To ascertain the impact of conflicting judgments on election matters after the 2015 general elections.
- * To establish how electoral-related fraud during the 2015 influence democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Elucidating the Concept of Elections and Democracy

Elections are regarded as important institutional mechanism of democracy through which political leaders derive their legitimacy. Elections generally represent a means of measuring political expression and the exercise of state power legitimized and accepted as being the basis of people's consent (Udu, 2015). According to Bone and Ranney (1971) in a democratic nation "periodic elections of executives and legislator constitute the principal institutional device for making sure that government shall derive its just power from the consent of the governed" (p.1).

Essentially, elections present the most legitimate means through which citizens of a country decide who leads them in line with democratic rules governing

the entire electoral process. Adejumobi (1998) situates the importance of elections within the context of popular sovereignty and expression of social pact between the states and the people. Momoh and Adejumobi (1999) underscores the efficacy of election in political decision when they unequivocally stated:

Elections occupy a central place in the democratic process through the animating force they provide for representative government. On one hand, they serve as an instrument of legitimization for the state power while on the other, they ensure political transparency and accountability to the people (p.142).

Election quality and consolidation of democracy is contingent upon a number of factors. Thus:

The regularity, openness and acceptability of elections signal whether basic constitutional standard, behavioural and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule...while you can have elections without democracy, you cannot have democracy without elections. If nothing else, the convening of scheduled multi-party elections serves the minimal function of making democracy's survival (Bratton, 1998, p.52).

Lending credence to the above, Lindberg (2006) contended that the positive implications of conducting repeated elections are not necessarily limited to credible elections, especially at the early stages of the democratization process. Lindberg (2006) pointed out that electoral fraud such as political violence, fraudulent voting and counting of votes, inflation of vote figures and intimidation of voters and political opponents may provoke activism in the society more than credible elections. In the Nigerian political system, little interest is taken in the rightness or appropriateness of the procedures through which elections are conducted. Even the international community appears to be satisfied once an authoritarian regime initiates multi-party elections. Whether the elections were manipulated or rigged usually raises little or no qualms (Adejumobi, 2000; Schedler, 2002a, 2002b; Ikpe, 2004, Edet, 2015). Elections do not constitute consolidated democracy, though, they remain fundamental, not only for establishing democratic government, but as a prerequisite for broader and expanded democratic consolidation (Bratton, 1998). Breytenbach (1997) avers that though elections are insufficient to guarantee democracy, they are crucial and symbolically powerful means of measuring public support. In this context, the efficacy of a free, fair and transparent elections as means of measuring acceptable electoral outcome is essential. Diamond (2002; 2008) and Lindberg (2006) advocates a highly inclusive level of political participation in the choice of

political leaders, through regular, free, fair and credible elections in a way that all social component of the political system is included. Jinadu (2003) argues that democratic politics is tied to the conduct of free and fair elections. Diamond (2002) argues that democracy is:

A system of government that meets three essential conditions: an extensive competition among individuals and groups (especially political parties) for all elective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies at least through regular and fair election, so that no major (adult) social group is excluded, and a level of civic and political liberties (freedom of expression, free of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (p.14-15).

Democracy therefore clearly requires institutional mechanisms, established procedures and organizations such as legislatures, interest groups, judiciary, political parties, etc. through which public opinions are translated into public policies (Udu, 2015). Democratic practice entails the conduct of periodic and credible elections in which the public officials are held accountable for their activities and those who performed below expectations are defeated at the polls. Janda (1989) said that the threat of defeat motivates public officials to be responsible and responsive in their performance. The most important elements in the democratic agenda are popular participation, popular sovereignty, representation and majority rule. These attributes empower citizens to make inputs in the public policy processes. Therefore, democracy consists not only electoral processes but an established organic social relations between the people and the public officials (Odofin, 2005). From the foregoing elucidation of elections and democracy, it is imperative to conclude that elections and democracy are inseparable, interwoven and fundamentally related concepts. Elections remain a stabilizing factor in any democratic society. Democracy is the root of credible election and credible election is the fruit of democracy. Democracy fades into a mere literal concept when not consolidated with credible elections. Elections therefore constitute the body, soul and spirit of democracy (Edet, 2015).

Conceptualizing Democratization and Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democratic consolidation entails the sustenance of newly found democracy. Democratization on the other hand entails the process of becoming a democracy as well as entrenchment of democratic values and norms in a hitherto undemocratic polity (Edet and Asua, 2013). Democratic

consolidation refers to the process through which new democracy developed in such a way that it might be impossible to revert to authoritarianism without an external shock (Durotoye, 2015). Bratton (2008) argues that democratic consolidation involves the widespread acceptance of rules to guarantee political participation and political competition. Diamond (2002) describes democratic consolidation involves the widespread acceptance of rules to guarantee political participation and political competition. Diamond (2008) describes democratic consolidation as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation in a way that such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other alternative they can imagine.

Democratic consolidation, according to Yagboyaju (2007) involves the continuous actions and changes directed towards the replacement of an existing authoritarian and undemocratic rule. O'Donnell (1996) said that institutionalization of electoral rules is not the most crucial feature of democratic consolidation, but the informal practices of actors are very vital in democratic consolidation. However, there is currently a new focus on "democratic recession" and democracy in decline". The question about democratization and democratic consolidation has been to what extent had citizens contributes to the affairs of government either through elections or participation in policy making. This question has featured prominently in the discussions of types of democracies. At the centre of this question lies the pertinent issue of elections. Elections are significantly democratic if they are credible, free, fair, participatory, competitive and legitimate. According to Diamond (2008) this is possible:

When they are administered by a neutral authority; when the electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud; when the police, military and courts treat competing candidates and parties impartially; when contenders all have access to the public media; when electoral districts and rules do not grossly handicap the opposition;...when the secret of the ballot is protected; when virtually all adults can vote; when procedures for organizing and counting the votes are widely known; and when there are transparent and impartial procedures for resolving election complaints and disputes (p.25).

From the foregoing conceptualization, it is imperative to note that elections bridge the gap between democratization and democratic consolidation as well as serves as the necessary agent of any genuine democratic process.

The Conduct of 2015 General Elections, Results and Prospects for Democratic Consolidation

The 2015 general elections represent a positive step towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The peaceful outcome of the elections came to many as a surprise considering the tense political and security environment under which the elections were conducted. Historically, Nigerian elections are usually characterized by aggressive competition and controversial results. The election was aggressively competed prompting concerns of the likelihood of large scale violence (Dode and Edet, 2015). However, the actual conduct and outcome of the elections defied expectations. The elections were not only adjudged to be the most credible, free, fair and transparent since independence, they represent a step toward democratic consolidation in the country. This is so because the elections enable citizens of Nigeria to make alternative choice at the presidency for the first time in history (Moveh, 2015).

The success of the 2015 general elections was attributed to the innovations of the electoral commission, that is, INEC. This was evidenced in the introduction of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and Card Reader Machines to checkmate electoral fraud such as impersonation, underage voting, rigging, over-voting, etc. This success supports Lindberg's (2006) argument that repeated conduct of elections, even when they are not fully free and fair, promotes democratization. This further set the country on a trajectory towards democratic consolidation. Despite these successes, the elections, especially the presidential elections, had some flaws. For instance, Zaggi (2015) in a media article, titled: "Transparent but flawed presidential elections" averred that:

Some of the noticeable faults of the presidential elections, as observed on the day of the election at the polling units monitored, include: late arrival of electoral materials; malfunctioning of Card Reader Machines; insufficient and in some cases, none availability of electoral materials; overcrowding in polling units, and voting throughout the night which exposed the votes to high risk (p. 3).

These flaws ended up disenfranchising many eligible voters in many parts of the country. In spite of the challenges confronting the electoral body during the elections, the elections took place on March 28, 2015 for the Presidential and National Assembly and April 11, 2015 for Gubernatorial and State Houses Assembly. Below are the tabulated 2015 general elections voter turn out, President and Gubernatorial election results as well as presidential election results (1979-2015). They are presented in tables 1 – 4.

Table 1: 2015 General Elections Voter Turn Out.

		% of Registered Voters
No. of Valid Votes	28, 587, 564	42.40%
No. of Invalid Votes	844, 519	1.25%
No. of Votes Cast	29, 432, 083	43.65%
No. of Accredited Voters	31, 746, 490	47.08%
No. of Registered Voters	67, 422, 005	43.65%

Source: inec.gov.ng/ (INEC, 2015)

Table 2: 2015 Presidential Election Results

S/N	STATES	APC	PDP	%APC	% PDP	WINNING PARTY
1.	Abia	13,394	368,303	3.51	96.49	PDP
2.	Adamawa	374,701	251,664	59.07	40.93	APC
3.	Akwa Ibom	58,411	953,304	5.77	94.23	PDP
4.	Anambra	17,926	660,762	2.64	97.36	PDP
5.	Bauchi	931,961	86,085	93.42	6.58	APC
6.	Bayelsa	5,194	361,209	1.36	98.64	PDP
7.	Benue	373,961	303,737	52.89	47.11	APC
8.	Borno	473,543	25,640	94.01	5.02	APC
9.	Cross River	28,368	414,863	5.18	94.74	PDP
10.	Delta	48,910	1,211,405	6.96	97.82	PDP
11.	Ebonyi	19,518	323,653	41.48	93.04	PDP
12.	Edo	208,469	286,869	41.48	58.52	PDP
13.	Ekiti	120,331	176,466	40.02	58.69	PDP
14.	Enugu	14,157	553,003	3.95	96.48	PDP
15.	FCT	146,399	157,195	47.72	51.24	PDP
16.	Gombe	361,245	96,873	78.85	21.15	PDP
17.	Imo	133,253	559,185	19.24	80.76	PDP
18.	Jigawa	885,988	142,904	85.39	13.77	APC
19.	Kaduna	1,127,760	484,805	71.56	28.44	APC
20.	Kano	1,906,999	215,775	89.82	10.18	APC
21.	Katsina	1,345,441	98,937	92.83	6.85	APC
22.	Kebbi	567,883	100,972	85.39	14.61	APC
23.	Kogi	264,851	149,987	62.86	35.10	APC
24.	Kwara	302,146	132,602	69.50	30.50	APC
25.	Lagos	792,460	632,327	55.65	44.35	APC
26.	Nasarawa	236,838	273,327	46.30	53.46	APC
27.	Niger	657,678	149,222	81.43	18.57	APC
28.	Ogun	308,290	207,950	57.82	39.00	APC
29.	Ondo	299,889	251,368	53.45	44.80	APC
30.	Osun	383,603	249,929	59.69	38.89	APC
31.	Oyo	528,620	303,376	59.98	34.42	APC
32.	Plateau	429,140	549,615	43.85	56.15	PDP
33.	Rivers	69,238	1,487,075	3.89	96.11	PDP
34.	Sokoto	671,926	152,199	81.53	18.47	APC
35.	Taraba	261,326	310,800	48.21	52.79	PDP
36.	Yobe	446,265	25,526	95.41	4.59	APC
37.	Zamfara	612,202	144,833	86.24	13.76	APC
	Total	15,424,921	12,853,162	53.96	44.96	APC Elected. Victory Margin- 2,571,759

Source: inec.gov.ng/ (INEC, 2015)

Table 2 above shows the margin of victory the candidate of the All Progressive

Congress (APC), Muhammadu Buhari. According to the Electoral Act (2010) as amended, for a presidential candidate to win in a presidential elections, he or she must receive at least twenty-five percent (**25%**) of the votes in two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the thirty-six (36) states including the FCT. The APC candidate received fifteen million, four hundred and twenty-four thousand, nine hundred and twenty-one (**15,424,921**) votes while the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate and the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan received twelve million, eight hundred and fifty-three thousand, one hundred and sixty-two (**12,853,162**) votes. Though, President Jonathan also received twenty-five percent (**25%**) of votes in the two-third of ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the states in the Federation, he lost because he could not gather majority of votes casts in the elections.

Table 3: 2015 Governorship Election Results

1.	Abia	Alex Otti Nyere Anyim	APGA APC PDP	180,882 45,567 264,713	PDP Elected
2.	Adamawa	Jibrilla Bindo Markus Gundiri Nuhu Ribadu	APC SDP PDP	206,576 124,326 46,519	APC Elected
3.	Akwa Ibom	Udom Emmanuel Umana Umana Samuel Akpan	PDP APC AP	996,071 89,865 10,598	PDP Elected
4.	Rivers	Nyesom Wike Dakuku Peterside Tonye Princewill	PDP APC LP	1,029,102 124,896 10,142	PDP Elected
5.	Plateau	Simon Lalong Gyang Pwajok	APC PDP	564,913 520,627	APC Elected
6.	Jigawa	Badaru Abubakar Aminu Ringim	APC PDP	648,045 479,447	APC Elected
7.	Gombe	Ibrahim Dankwambo Inuwa Yahya	PDP APC	285,369 205,132	PDP Re-Elected
8.	Ogun	Ibikunle Amosun Gboyega Isiaka Akin Odunsi	APC PDP SDP	306,988 201,440 25,826	APC Re-Elected
9.	Oyo	Abiola Ajimobi Rasheed Ladoja Alao Akala Teslim Folarin	APC AP LP	327,310 254,520 184,111 79,019	APC Re-Elected
10.	Enugu	Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi Okey Ezea Kanayo Oguakwa	PDP APC PDC	482,227 43,839 4,814	PDP Elected
11.	Lagos	Akinwunmi Ambode Jimi Agbaje	APC PDP	811,994 659,788	APC Elected
12.	Delta	Ifeanyi Okowa Great Ogboru O'tega Emerhor	PDP LP APC	724,680 130,028 67,825	PDP Elected
13.	Bauchi	Mohammed Abubakar Auwal Jatau	APC PDP	654,934 282,650	APC Elected
14.	Katamina	Aminu Masari Musa Nashuni Yakubu Lado	APC PDP PDM	943,085 476,768 50,361	APC Elected
15.	Kaduna	Nasir el-Rufai Ramallan Yero	APC PDP	1,117,635 485,833	APC Elected

16	Kwara	Abdulfatah Ahmed Simeon Ajibola	APC PDP	295,832 115,220	APC Re-elected
17	Kano	Umar Ganduje Sagir Takai	APC PDP	1,546,434 509,726	APC Elected
18	Sokoto	Aminu Tambuwal Abdalla Wali	APC PDP	647,609 269,007	APC Elected
19	Zamfara	AbdulAziz Yari Mamuda Shinkafi Sani Shinkafi	APC PDP APGA	716,964 201,938 2,385	APC Re-elected
20	Ebonyi	Dave Umahi Edward Nkwegu	PDP LP	289,867 124,817	PDP Elected
21	Niger	Sani Bello Umar Nasko	APC PDP	593,702 239,772	APC Elected
22	Nasarawa	Tanko Al-Makura Labaran Maku	APC APGA	309,746 178,983	APC Re-elected
23	Borno	Kashim Shettima Alhaji Gambo Lawan	APC PDP	610,352 34,005	APC Re-elected
24	Benue	Samuel Ortom Terhemem Tarzoor	APC PDP	422,932 313,878	APC Elected
25	Cross River	Ben Ayade Odey Ochica	PDP APC	342,016 53,983	PDP Elected
26	Imo	Rochas Okorochoa Emeka Ihedioha	APC PDP	416,996 320,705	APC Elected
27	Taraba	Aisha Jumei Al-hasan Darius Ishaku	APC PDP	261,381 326,198	PDP Elected
28	Yobe	Ibrahim Gaidam Adamu Waziri	APC PDP	334,847 179,700	APC Elected
29	Kebbi	Atiku Bagudu Sarkin-Yaki Bello	APC PDP	477,376 293,443	APC Elected

Source: www.inec.gov.ng/ (INEC, 2015)

APC - 20 states

PDP - 9 states

Total - 29 states

N/B: Governorship Elections were not conducted in 7 states of Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Kogi, Ondo and Osun as a result re-run in those states occasioned by courts' nullification of elections.

Table 3 above shows that APC won the gubernatorial elections in 20 states while the former ruling party – the PDP won in 9 states. However, gubernatorial elections were not conducted in 7 states occasional by the disruption of the gubernatorial election calendar as a result of various court decisions nullifying their elections.

Table 4: Presidential Election Results (1979-2015)

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	Voting Age Population Turnout	Voting Age Population	Population	Invalid Votes
1979	35.25%	17,098,267	48,499,091	44.83%	38,142,090	77,841,000	2.00%
1983	-	14,039,486	-	27.79%	50,526,720	105,264,000	-
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,359	1.40%
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,022	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,911	6.00%
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85%	71,004,507	131,859,731	-
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573	3.19%
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,056	181,562,056	1.25%

Source: internationalIDEA: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?countrycode=NG>

Table 4 above shows that low voter turnout of 43.65% in 2015 was subsisting despite the sixteen (16) years of democracy in Nigeria. Voter apathy increases as Nigeria tries to sustain its democratic experiment. The voter turnout dropped from 69.08% in 2003 to 43.65% in 2015. The voting age population has been increasing from 38 million to 91 million during the 1979-2015 while voter age population turnout has been decreasing despite the increase in voter age population. This does not considerably consolidate our democratic practice.

In all political processes relating to democracy, democratization and democratic consolidation, the impacts of judicial pronouncements constitute a key determining factor. In every constitutional democracy, the judiciary is one of the major pillars that sustain its principles and tenets. For instance some months after the 2015 elections, the Courts of Appeal delivered what can be termed conflicting judgments in some National Assembly and Governorship election petitions brought before them (*Thisday*, March 17, 2016). The INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, while speaking in Abuja at a National Workshop on "Election Petition Tribunals and Appeals. An Overview, held at the Appeal Court Headquarters, raised alarm over conflicting judgments emanating from the various Courts of Appeal which he admitted as frustrating the Commission's work (*Thisday*, March 17, 2016).

Quoting Yakubu;

...contrary to the subsisting judgment of the Supreme Court, there were conflicting decisions by the Appeal Courts arising from the 2015 general elections. The Court of Appeal, in one judicial division, ordered INEC to conduct fresh elections in which only the duly qualified candidates shall participate. In another division, the Court of Appeal, under similar circumstances, nullified the elections, disqualified the candidate and allowed the political party to submit the name of another candidate for the re-run election. Yet, in another division, the Court of Appeal nullified the election and ordered INEC to conduct fresh election but silent about the status of the disqualified candidate, thereby giving room for endless commentary and new rounds of litigation on the eligibility of the disqualified candidate to participate in the re-run elections (*Thisday*, March 17, 2016, p.2).

According to Yakubu, the conflicting court decisions sometimes makes the commission to be inconsistent in the application of the law, thereby encouraging some of the disqualified candidates to initiate fresh litigation at the Federal High Courts (*Thisday*, March 17, 2016). Yakubu noted that, "in one case, a High Court defines a fresh election as new election based on dictionary definition rather than the clear and judicial precedence set by the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court" (*Thisday*, March, 17, 2016, p.2). The President Court of Appeal, Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa, admitted the challenges involves in adjudicating on electoral disputes

arising from the 2015 general elections. She said that 749 appeals emanated from the decisions of election tribunals. All of these prove to the fact that sustainable democracy can only thrive on a strong and reliable judicial system (*Thisday*, March 17, 2016).

The foregoing exploration of the democratic processes placed much emphasis on elections as a necessary tool and instrument for democratic consolidation. Free, fair and credible elections is central to competitive politics. They guarantee effective political participation and competition which in turn are pivotal to democratic consolidation. Implicit in these assumptions is that elections are important for the consolidation of popular participation, competition and legitimacy - the three core foundations of genuine democracy (Lindberg, 2004; Omotola, 2010; Edet, 2015). In this context, the 2015 general elections in Nigeria witnessed great improvement from past elections in area of organization and overall conduct, signalling hope for democratic consolidation. At the centre of some observable lapses during the elections is the weak INEC, which lacks the basic autonomy in terms of funding, capacity and staffing. Therefore, whether electoral processes will contribute to democratic consolidation, recession or regression will largely depend on the independence, capacity and professionalism of electoral institutions such as INEC, courts of law, political parties, etc. This is so because the institutional structures that enhance a fair political competition at each stage of the electoral process from belonging to a political party to contesting elections will promote the extent to which voters perceive their elections to be fair. Perceptions of election quality itself is central to democratic consolidation (Birch, 2008; Omotola, 2010; Edet, 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has argued that for Nigeria to achieve democratic consolidation, the democratic political institutions needs serious attention in terms of organization, capacity and professionalism. Despite the same hitches witnessed during the elections, the outcomes were sufficiently an improvement from previous elections organize in the country. Consolidating democracy through elections depends largely on the institutional capacity of INEC.

However, the National Assembly should enact punitive laws against electoral fraud as well as laws that strengthen the autonomy and capacity of INEC in the country. This might be through the establishment of Electoral Offences Tribunal. This tribunal should be made to dispense justice faster than the conventional courts. Any elected public office holder found guilty of electoral related offences must not only be banned from future elections, but must go to jail for the offence (s). The electoral and security official involve must also go to jail.

The electoral laws should be amended to make provision for independent candidates. This will curb the cases of imposition in political parties and the growing

issues of lack of internal democracy within political parties in Nigeria. Presidential and Gubernatorial debates must be made compulsory to enhance the quality of choice. Political campaigns should be based on real issues not on character assassination and mundane issues. INEC and National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on thorough political education and campaign to enlighten the voters on the dangers of selling their votes; engage in thuggery, ballot box snatching, etc. to discourage the perpetrators. The use of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and Electronic Card Reader Machines must be perfected to avoid technical hitches as experienced during the 2015 general elections. The National Judicial Commission (NJC) should issue guidelines to regulate the courts, particularly the election tribunals on the uniformity of judicial pronouncements. Conflicting judgments on same electoral issue does not augur well for democracy and democratic consolidation. Any judge found wanting should be punished appropriately.

The paper, therefore, concludes that until all the democratic political institutions in the country are allowed to function effectively and democratically, the quest for democratic consolidation would be a complete mirage and untenable.

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