



Journal of Social and Political Sciences

Sule, Babayo, Sani, Mohd Azizuddin Mohd, and Mat, Bakri (2018), Nigerian 2015 General Election: The Successes, Challenges, and Implications for Future General Elections. In: *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, Vol.1, No.2, 183-204

ISSN 2615-3718

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.01.02.13

The online version of this article can be found at:
<https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>

Published by:
The Asian Institute of Research

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Nigerian 2015 General Election: The Successes, Challenges, and Implications for Future General Elections

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Abstract

The Nigerian 2015 General Election is one of the elections in the world that drew lots of attention and analysis as a result of its uniqueness and the many successes and challenges recorded which provide a lesson for future elections in Nigeria and other countries in the world. The aim of this work is to investigate the successes and challenges recorded in the election with a view to providing a better alternative for an improved election in future. The problem is the way many Nigerians and those outside Nigeria overwhelmingly are carried away by the defeat of the incumbent by the opposition which made them to perceive the election wholeheartedly as credible despite many challenges that it faced. The research used qualitative method of data collection and analysis. It is a qualitative particularistic case study which used primary and secondary data. The primary data was interview from different stakeholders that are involved in the electoral process, and the secondary data is the use of available literature on the subject matter. The data obtained was presented in tabular and figurative forms and analyzed using thematic analytical interpretations for findings. The research discovered that the 2015 General Election is an improvement on the previous elections especially in the Fourth Republic as a result of the techniques adopted in the conduct, but there are still challenges that must be looked into in future to make the election more credible. The research recommends that the areas that recorded significant improvement should be maintained while in the areas of challenges it should be looked into against the next election.

Keywords: Election, Nigeria, Successes, Challenges, Implication, 2015.

1.1 Introduction

The 2015 General Election in Nigeria differs from the previous elections in the Fourth Republic (1999-Date) because it recorded some significant improvements in the conduct and outcome of the election at local and national levels. It has been adjudged a credible election because of the manner and procedure in which it was conducted (Nwachukwu, 2015). Elections in Nigeria are usually bedeviled with irregularities such as violence, corruption,

rigging, ballot snatching and stealing, ballot stuffing, vote buying, manipulation of results and ethno-religious politics (Isma'ila & Othman, 2015).

The 2015 General Election in Nigeria was conducted in an atmosphere of intense fear, insecurity, political alliance and re-alliance while the campaign was dominated by great issues of national concern such as: insecurity, corruption, unemployment, and poverty as observed by many scholars. These scholars also stressed that the Boko Haram insurgency, corruption, poverty, unemployment and poor economic policies compelled for the campaign process to be on matters of national interest and that has made a significant impact on the outcome of the election (Centre for Public Policy Alternative 2015, Africa Centre for Strategic Studies 2015, Ewi 2015, Orji 2015, Ayanda & Odunayo 2015, Chukwudi 2015, International Republican Institute 2015, Omilusi 2015, Ahar 2015 and Oji 2015).

There are many factors that made the 2015 General Election successful famous among them is the use of smart card reader which was believed to have drastically curbed rigging and the merger of major opposition parties to form an alliance which successfully challenged the ruling party squarely and the burning national issues of poverty, corruption, insecurity, unemployment and insurgency which made the electorates to become determined for change (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015: 10). The above are some of the successes and factors that made many scholars as observed above to conclude that the election is credible. However, there are many challenges faced which must be addressed if the future elections are to be more credible and successful such as the excessive campaign spending unregulated (USAID/UKAID 2015), the failure to use card readers in many places during the election which allowed for manipulation, insecurity and other factors. Thus, this research studied academically these successes and challenges and provided an alternative framework for future elections in the country.

2.1. Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this work is qualitative data collection and analysis. Qualitative data method is the use of research philosophy and paradigm not only for the collection of data but for generation of ideas and meanings from words and other sources which can be qualitatively interpreted to give a sound outcome. In other words, it is the gathering of a rich few data that can be analyzed and interpreted using different approaches and multiple idea presentation and analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). This work is a case study type of qualitative data and particularly particularistic case study because it studied a particular case study of the 2015 General Election.

The research generated data from two major sources; primary and secondary. The primary data was gathered through a personal in-depth interview with selected informants/participants from selected categories that are directly related to the area of study. Informants were selected from politicians, party stakeholders, senior officials of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), academicians and members of civil societies. In the section of politicians, 6 were selected across the various ranks of elective offices one from each, 4 from

party stakeholders of the major political parties that participated in the election across the nation, 3 were selected from the INEC senior officials who are directly related to the operation and conduct of election, 3 were selected from academicians who are experts in the area of study and 8 were selected from eight different civil societies which are base in Abuja Nigeria for accessibility. A total of 24 informants were obtained relying on the maximum number of qualitative interview provided by Sharan (2002) of 30 for data collection. Other primary documents were also used such as the Nigerian 1999 Constitution, Electoral Act 2010 and reports by international organisations and agencies. The secondary data involves the use of textbooks, articles in journals and internet sources for literature review and formation of the theoretical framework.

The data obtained were coded and analysed. The informants were coded into five groups with category A as politicians, and each is given a number meaning category A1 to A6 in this group, category B is party stakeholders also coded as B1 to B4, category C is senior INEC officials coded as C1 to C3, category D is Academicians coded as D1 to D3 and category E is Civil Societies coded as E1 to E8. Their views are summarised and presented using thematic analytical interpretations and tables and also models where applicable.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The work adopted Rational Choice Theory of Election to explain the context of the literature, the methodology and the research findings and discussions. The Rational Choice Theory of Election is a political economy approach to understanding and explaining behaviourally why and how voters and candidates behave or choose their actions and make a decision during elections based on some economic factors or considerations. The theory was derived from the economic root of the theory of consumer behavior which explains the rationality in choice by consumers and the desire or decision of manufacturers to maximize profits even amidst an intense competition (Downs 1957 and Arrow 1986).

It is assumed that, if the rational choice can explain consumer behaviors, choice and decision making and also the producers of goods and services in a market, it can also explain clearly the economic benefits, performance and other indicators of rational benefits of the electorates and politicians during an election. The theory established a similar correlation between consumers of goods and services and voters and between enterprises and political parties. This is because if corporations seek to maximize profit while consumers seek to maximise utility, then it can be theorised that, voters seek to maximise the utility of their votes as the parties act to maximise electoral gains obtained from their political proposals (Downs, 1957 and Arrow, 1986)

The Rational Choice Theory of Election is built on two major foundations; evaluative and non-evaluative. The evaluative is anchored on voting by the electorates on regime performance while the non-evaluative is based on clientelistic considerations such as patronage, ethnic belonging, family ties and material benefits obtainable (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). Animashaun (2015) believed that both evaluative and non evaluative rational choice took place during the 2015 General Election in Nigeria. Farber (2009)

emphasised that individuals derived utility from voting a certain candidate or party just the way consumers derive utility in spending their money for a particular products in such a way that they are aware that their votes determine the winner either the one they chose or the or the loser.

Swing-voting can also take place under Rational Choice Theory of Election which is a voting pattern based on certain criteria or rationality in new democracies like that of Nigeria in which political parties and candidates that can give maximum satisfaction to the voters' ethnic identity, clientelism, poverty eradication persuade voters to vote for them instead of common public goods (Lindberg & Weghorst, 2010). Three basic assumptions of Rational Choice Theory of Election are identified (Antunnes 2010) as follows: I. All decisions are rational; II. The democratic political system is consistent and III. There is a level of uncertainty in the process of choice.

This theory is a good explanation of elections in Nigerian context in general and in particular in the 2015 General Election. The political parties are expecting a maximum utility to derive in their emergence as winners in the contest. While the then; ruling PDP continued to build on the status quo and want to maintain power at all cost amidst several corruption charges, the APC is capitalising on political and socioeconomic changes it was anticipated to bring to the electorates through a decisive stern promise of an anti-corruption crusade. Thus, the two major strong political parties in the 2015 General Election in Nigeria have a rational for their contest and the maximum utility they sought to achieve on assuming office. The other political parties that contested the elections though; knew probably that might not win, they stillaverational choice reason that influenced their decision to participate.

On the other hand, the electorates or voters are like consumers in the market under a competing demand for patronage. They voted in the 2015 General Election based on rationality for the maximum benefits that they will derive when the outcome of the election is favorable to them. Many electorates are believed to have voted for the opposition political party; the APC as a result of their high expectation of the utility they will maximize from the outcome of the emergence of APC's Presidency. The APC contestant for Presidential Election built is campaign promises on three major issues: fight against corruption, fighting the insurgency and reinstating economic development of the country. Many voters from all the six geo-political zones subscribed to the ideas of the APC Presidential candidate and were expecting a positive change and a better restructuring of political and socioeconomic sectors of the country. The outcome of the election results proved so.

4.1 Literature Review

In this section, various scholastic literature was critically reviewed on the subject matter of study in thematic forms. It is pertinent to examine briefly the concept of election, rules of election conduct in Nigeria during the 2015 General Election, challenges of election conduct, the issues and features of 2015 General Election, the 2015 General Election conduct and outcome and the results.

4.1.1 The Concept of Election

The election is considered as the backbone of democratic rule, and it is the system or an institution that sustains democracy and provides healthy competition for power and control of the government. An election is a periodic event that is prepared in which an individual is elected or voted for a given office (Kapur, 2009:142). The periodic election is an accepted norm and standard of global practice and method of that determines who gets power or control policy making. The election has been the normal practice in which modern representative democracy operates (Almond & Verba, 1963: 63).

The election is a legitimising phenomenon which has the role of giving leaders the authority to govern. In a democratic regime, there is provision for participation through a periodic election where citizens are allowed to vote for their leaders and where the leaders compete for power through selling their ideas in a competitive contest (Dahl, 2000). Hence, the election is a major requirement for a healthy and sustainable democracy irrespective of the system of democracy operated. As observed above, the election in Nigeria has been taken place periodically since the resumption of democratic rule in 1999. The problem with the election in Nigeria is the conduct and the procedure in which it is undertaken and the outcome which has not been encouraging since 1999 until in 2015 General Election which has been perceived as an improvement from the previous ones.

4.1.2 Rules of Election Conduct in Nigeria

There are basically two major sources of laws for the conduct of the election in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic; the 1999 Constitution and the 2010 Electoral Act. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution as Amended and the Electoral Act 2006 and the amended Electoral Act 2010 are the electoral legal document specifically that have several provisions targeted for electoral conduct, electoral offences, parties' activities, political party financing and other regulations related to the election as provided in Section 227 and its Sub-Sections in the Nigerian Constitution and Section 82 to 90 of the Electoral Act 2010 which were used during the 2015 General Election.

Thus, all the requirements for the contest in an elective office, political party activities especially financing and campaign expenditure, offenses and their sanctions, powers, and role of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and electoral procedures are all designed and stipulated clearly in the sections and the sub-sections mentioned above.

4.1.3 The Challenges of Election in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

One of the major issues of election conduct in Nigeria is the transition process itself which is faltering and faulty from the inception of the Fourth Republic. The transition is perceived by many as pseudo transition organised, supervised and ushered in by military in militaristic style. Candidates were imposed, and election results were pre-determined in which electoral process was violated, and democratic governance was not in accordance with democratic principles (Yagboyaju 2011). The electoral body is another major challenge of the election in the Fourth Republic. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was designed

to be neutral and independent in its structure and function, but it has been compromised on many occasions by politicians to manipulate the results (Yagboyaju 2011).

The politics of ethnicity, religion and regional sentiments are other problems of election conduct in the Fourth Republic. Voters voted in most of the elections not based on performance but according to candidates that belong to their ethnic, regional and religious sentiments (Adeyemi 2012). Violence characterized elections in the Fourth Republic where politicians established ethnic militias to intimidate and harass opposition to win at all cost (Abdullahi 2015). The nature of political parties also constitutes a problem in the conduct of the election in the Fourth Republic with the parties devoid of ideology or any democratic principles except capturing of power for personal gain at all cost (Auwal 2015).

Another major challenge of election conduct in Nigeria in the present democratic dispensation is the influence of money politics and excessive spending which discredit the electoral process and led to corrupt practices in the procedure because politicians engaged in bribing of electoral officials, security agents and vote buying, as well as the money bag godfathers who sponsored their godsons that are not competent and this, led to the emergence of unqualified and poor leadership as well as misgovernance (Adetula 2008).

4.1.4 Issues and Features of 2015 General Election

The 2015 General Election in Nigeria differs from the previous elections in the history of Nigeria since political independence in 1960. There were ten General Elections that took place since 1960 with two of them in the First Republic, two in the Second Republic, one in the Aborted Third Republic and five in the current Fourth Republic. What made the 2015 General Election unique are combinations of many factors that were not hitherto, obtainable in the previous ones. These factors include: the emergence of strong opposition political party never witnessed in the history of Nigeria, the first time an opposition political party won the Presidential Election against the incumbent and other majority seats at the National Assembly and State levels, the use of electronic voting system in the process of the election, campaign activities based on issues instead of the usual traditional ethno-religious and regional alliance, the emergence of awareness on the issue of political financing and campaign promises and many other issues. All these were not applicable in the previous elections.

Party positioning is an important feature of the 2015 General Election the PDP ruled for sixteen years on the zoning arrangement between the North and the South with the South starting in 1999 for 8 years, but when Yar'Adua died in 2010 the PDP violated the rule, and the Southerner continued in 2011 which led to fraction in the party, and the North opted for another party against the PDP (Paden, 2015: 7). There was the merger of strong opposition parties including Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and new PDP to form a new party All Progress Congress (APC) which emerged strong enough to challenge the PDP in the election (Paden, 2015: 8, IRI 2015 and Adibe 2015).

A concern was displayed prior to the 2015 General Election on the security of lives and properties during the election and the level of preparedness of the electoral body as revealed by a study (CLEEN Report 2015). The Report also revealed that 74 % of the people surveyed indicated that the performance of the PDP government was poor in key economic sectors such as employment, poverty, corruption and other areas of development. The Report concludes that the election took place at the most challenging time of insecurity in the history of the country with the insurgency in many parts of the country.

The lingering North-South dichotomy still exhibited a division during the 2015 Election with the North being the majority Hausa/Fulani dominated, the Southeast and Southsouth being a Christian dominated and the Southwest being a mixed Muslim/Christian region and the election took place along this pattern in most cases. The General Election was expected to witness the influence of money, incumbency power and other dominant factors (Adibe 2015). Parties contested election faced many challenges such as logistics, delays, low turnouts, the incidence of violence, as well as procedural irregularities in some states, still, the 2015 General Election, as transparent and credible expression of the will of the Nigerian people (IRI Report, 2015). The INEC preparation was generally commendable according to IRI report (2015).

The 2015 General Election was the first time an accurate prediction took place by a pre-election poll. In another study conducted by ANAP FOUNDATION; NOI Polls (2015), (a Polling Analytic Databank Strategy) ahead of the coming 2015 General Election, the opinion poll revealed a tightly contested race between the incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the ruling PDP and Muhammadu Buhari of opposition APC. All the interviewers selected were those who registered and have collected their voters' card ready for the election. From the results, the respondents were asked on who they are going to vote between Muhammadu Buhari of APC and Goodluck Jonathan of PDP. They responded in this way: 32 % Muhammadu Buhari of APC and 30 % Jonathan of PDP. This showed a slight margin of win in favor of opposition APC.

4.1.5 Nature, Dimension, and Conduct of the 2015 General Election

The March 28 and April 14, 2015, General Election marked another turn in the history of Nigerian politics as it was the first time that the opposition unseats the incumbent President in a successful election. Of the sixty-seven million and four hundred and twenty-two thousand and five (67, 422, 005 million) registered voters, only thirty-one million and seven hundred and forty-six and four hundred and ninety (31, 740, 490 million) disagreed 2015 Presidential Election. Twenty-nine million and four hundred and thirty-two and eighty-three (29, 432, 083 million) of the votes were cast with 97% of the votes valid. The 2015 General Election and the outcome were entirely different from the previous elections in Nigeria in many different ways (CPPA, 2015).

In the 2015 Presidential Election, 14 (fourteen) political parties contested for the post of Presidency, less votes were cast in 2015 than in 2011 by 25%; the incumbent lost to the

opposition by 45% to 54%, the opposition won more States 21 out of 36 (CPPA, 2015). The above analysis showed that the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria set a culture of departure from the previous norm of the incumbent always winning in every re-election without a serious challenge. It was also the first time that campaign activities were dominated by issue-based politics and the voters voted across all regions, unlike the previous situation where every contestant was elected by voters from his geographical region and religion. The election also pointed to many changes that will continue to impact on the future elections in the country. The summary of the 2015 General Election was presented below.

Table 1: 2015 Presidential Elections Results in Nigeria

Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Muhammadu Buhari	APC	15, 424, 921	53.96 %
Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	PDP	12, 853, 162	44.96 %
Adebayo Ayeni	APA	53,537	0.19 %
Ganiyu Galadima	ACPN	40, 311	0.14 %
Sam Eke	CPP	36, 300	0.13 %
Rufus Salau	AD	30, 637	0.11 %
Mani Ahmad	ADC	29, 665	0.10.%
Allagoa Chinedu	PPN	24, 475	0.09 %
Martin Onovo	NCP	24, 455	0.09 %
Tunde Anifowose Kilani	AA	22, 125	0.08 %
Chekwas Okorie	UPP	18, 220	0.06 %
Comfort Sonaiya	KP	13, 037	0.0 5%
Godson Okoye	UDP	9, 208	0.03%
Ambrose Albert Owuru	HP	7, 435	0.03 %
Invalid votes	All Parties	844, 519	-
Total	14 Parties	29, 432, 849	100 %
Registered voters		67, 422, 005	100 %

Source: INEC 2015 (Computation into percentage was made by the Researcher).

The 2015 Presidential Election disclosed a low voter turnout of less than 50 % despite all the high anticipation from the electorates of a free and fair election. The final results disclosed that Muhammadu Buhari of APC won the election in an unprecedented electoral victory making history as the first opposition party to win the Presidency and dislodged the incumbent party from power. The 2015 General Election also showed that the tradition of PDP winning the majority of the seats in the Governorship election and National Assembly was upturned as the opposition APC went ahead to win the majority of the seats. The results of the Governorship elections are presented below (see table 5.14).

Table 2: 2015 Governorship Elections Results

Party	Seats	Percentage
APC	19	61.29 %
PDP	12	38.71 %
Total	31	100 %

Source: INEC 2015 (Computation into percentage was made by the Researcher).

The above results indicated that state Governorship election took place in 31 of the 36 states in the country as the calendar for election in other states differed. The newly ruling party APC won 19 out of 31 making a total of 61.29 % of the states while the newly opposition PDP won 12 or 38.71% of the seats. There was already a state controlled by APGA Anambra and Osun controlled by APC, Ondo Labour Party, Edo APC and Bayelsa PDP which made a total of 36 states if added together. In total, APC controlled 21 states (58.33%), PDP has 13 seats (36.11 %) with APGA and Labour Party each controlling one state (2.78%).

Thus, APC set the record of capturing power at all levels within less than three years of its formation from 2013. Such feat was obtainable also in the National Assembly (see table 5.15 below).

Table 3: 2015 National Assembly Elections (Senate and House of Representatives)

Party	Seats (Senate)	Percentage
APC	60	55.05 %
PDP	49	44.95 %
Total	109	100 %

Party	Seats (House of Reps)	Percentage
APC	225	62.5 %
PDP	125	34.72 %
Other parties	10	2.78 %
Total	360	100 %

Source: INEC 2015 (Computation into percentage was made by the Researcher).

One of the distinguishing features of the 2015 General Election is; it is regarded as the most credible of all the previous elections in the Fourth Republic much that position (Nwachukwu, 2015, Ayanda & Odunayo, 2015, Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2015). Such position is also agreed upon by many of the informants in this research that were consulted during the field work that the 2015 General Election as the most credible in the Fourth Republic. And this position has been agreed upon by both the ruling and opposition parties after the election.

5.1 Discussion and Findings

In this section, it is discussed in detail the major factors that led to the success of the 2015 General Election and the major challenges faced by the election so as to project into the future the best method of conducting elections in Nigeria with an improved procedure and more credibility. The analysis was done using thematic analytical interpretations where the informants' views, scholastic discourses, and theoretical underpinnings are combined in the discussion as presented below accordingly.

5.1.1 Campaign Issues

The 2015 General Election campaigns took place based on issues of performance and prevailing socioeconomic and political situation in the country instead of the usual business of ethno-religious and regional sentiments. According to the views of the informants with 4 out of the 6 in category A (politicians), 3 out of 4 in category B (party stakeholders), 3 out of the 3 informants of category C (INEC officials), 2 out of the 3 in category in category E (academicians) and 4 out of 6 in category F (focus group discussion) which represents a sum of 16 out of 21 agreed that the 2015 General Election campaigns took place based on issues of performance. Many studies also confirmed the above position, for instance, CPPA 2015, Africa Centre for Security and Strategic Studies 2015, Ewi 2015;, Orji 2015, Ayanda & Odunayo 2015 and Chukwudi 2015 all concluded that the campaigns were issue-based and ethically conducted based on constructive criticism while Nwofe 2015 and Chukwudi 2015 hold a contradictory opinion citing many cases of hate speeches and campaign of blasphemy as evident in the build-up to the election. The Rational Choice theory of Election is expressed in these views of the informants where they subscribed to the ideas of campaign promises and the burning national issues that are the major concern of the electorates such as unemployment, poverty, insecurity, infrastructure and other services of life instead of what used to dominate the campaign process in Nigeria before which are ethnicity, religion, and region.

5.1.2 Money Politics

In the previous elections in the Fourth Republic, money played a decisive role in determining the winner. It is alleged that the 2015 General Election witnessed the highest flow of money politics during the campaign process. However, whether the use of money influences the outcome or affects the credibility of the elections or not, is a major concern here. In an interview with the category A, B, C, D, and E, the informants in their totality agreed that huge sum of money was used in the electoral process and campaign activities of the ruling PDP and opposition APC during the 2015 General Election. In support of the above views, there were many works which supplemented the notion that money was massively used unprecedented in the history of Nigeria during the 2015 General Election. For instance, Ahar (2015) reiterates that the 2015 General Election was the most expensive in the history of Nigeria and Africa indeed in terms of spending for both the electoral body and the politicians

in their campaign. Similarly, other scholars (Ukase 2015, Transparency International 2015, Innocent & Nkechi 2014, Olorunmola 2016, USAID/UKAID 2015, Omilusi 2016 and Adibe 2015) supported the above position that campaign expenditure by both the APC and PDP in 2015 was never witnessed in the history of the country. In addition, the Rational Theory of Election is applicable here when one considers how much money was spent by the two major contenders; the APC and PDP with the PDP believed by most or almost all the informants to have spent higher than APC yet, the APC won in a landslide victory. It means the voters and various political groups became rational in their choice by collecting money from the ruling PDP and voting for APC instead.

5.1.3 Electoral Reforms

Under the provision of the 2010 Electoral Act, the use of electronic card reader was introduced in the 2015 General Election where accreditation and voting exercise was conducted electronically to checkmate rigging and alteration of results. All the informants interviewed pointed emphatically to the role of these reforms especially the card reader in the credibility and reliability of the conduct of 2015 General Election. In addition to the above primary information by the informants, there are much existing literatures that supports the position that electoral reforms and the introduction of card readers made the 2015 General Election credible and acceptable with minimal malpractices as compared to the previous ones and these studies include: Jega 2014, IRI 2015, CPPA 2015, Africa Centre for Security and Strategic Studies 2015, Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room 2015 and Orji 2015.

5.1.4 Electoral Management

In the 2015 General Election, the INEC was applauded by both the ruling party, opposition, voters, observers, analysts and the international community for the first credible handling and management of the election successfully which averted the country of a political disaster should it failed to succeed. In this regard, all the categories of the informants from both the APC and PDP and other groups particularly the INEC officials agreed in their responses that the INEC did a credible job of handling Nigerians a reliable election and restoring confidence in the country's electoral system. Only President Jonathan debunked the proper handling and management of the conduct of 2015 General Election in the interview that was conducted with him by the editor of "This Day Newspaper" which was later published as a book (Adeniyi 2017). Many scholars (Nwachukwu 2015, Ayanda & Odunayo 2015, Adibe 2015 and IRI 2015 all supported the fact that, the electoral body (INEC) deserves credit and a big applause for an improved management of election which ushered in an election that first time to as the most credit and fair in the history of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

5.1.5 Civil Societies

In the interview conducted with the informants from category C (INEC officials), category D (academicians) and category E (Civil Societies and general public), it is observed that, civil

societies played a significant role in the entire process of the 2015 General Election starting from the voters' registration, parties' activities, civic voter education, collaboration with INEC in awareness and also collaboration with international observers and international donor agencies. The above views of the informants were supported by various existing works on the subject matter such as Mohammed (2015), Blanchard (2015) and Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (2015). They have all agreed in consensus with the views above and their submissions in their works that, civil societies played an important role in the 2015 General Election and it was one of the pillars behind the credibility or success of the election.

5.1.6 Opposition Parties

The opposition APC consists of a merger of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) which was formed in 2013. The party was later joined by new PDP members. Thus, history was made where the strongest opposition party was formed. According to many informants and scholars, the emergence of APC as a stronger opposition party was what made the election fair and also what led to the successful defeat of PDP in the election. In an interview with informants in category A, B, D and E, all the informants except two (one from category A politicians and the other from category B party stakeholders) agreed that the emergence of APC as a strong party helped immensely in the defeat of the ruling PDP and the credibility of the 2015 General Election. The above views of the informants are supported with many scholastic views particularly the first category that believed that the APC was a great factor in the defeat and credibility of the 2015 General Election. Works such as Paden 2015, Adibe 2015, Auge 2015, Blanchard 2015 and Omilusi 2015 all agreed without any contradiction that the merger of APC and its strength in terms of financial strength and incumbency factor checkmated rigging successfully and challenged PDP squarely. The Rational Choice Theory used in this work also supported the same notion here since the voters decided to alter the rationality of their choice from the usual tradition of voting for money only or their tribal sentiments towards a better perceive candidate. The theories used in the study can be seen practically applied in this theme. First, the Rational Choice Theory of Election is explained here in the sense that, the different political parties realised that until and unless they rationally used their chance and united under one strong umbrella to face the ruling party, they will be defeated by the powers of incumbency, and they will lack the leverage of having a strong financial and other campaign strength to tackle the challenges of unseating a ruling party.

5.1.7 Card Readers

In one of its reforms in the build-up to the 2015 General Election, the electoral body introduced the use of card readers' computer gadgets to accredit and conduct the voting. This has been one of the widely accredited sources that made the 2015 General Election commendable and credible in terms of voters' transparency and curbing of rigging. Informants that were interviewed in all the categories except category admitted that card readers were central to the success of the election in 2015. The same views held by scholars also in their works including Orji 2015, Chukwudi 2015, Ayanda & Odunayo 2015 and Adibe 2015). In

the above scenario, the Rational Choice Theory featured in from the informants' views where the electoral body (INEC) felt that a good decision of using card reader will lead to an improved election or possibly a credible one. Also, the voters welcomed the process overwhelmingly seeing it as a rational policy that will prevent rigging and give them the opportunity to elect the leaders that they wish without any manipulation as it happened in the 2015 General Election.

5.1.8 Electoral Umpire

Many informants that were interviewed and scholars that investigated the 2015 General Election believed that the INEC became more credible and transparent in its conduct and the electoral administration of the 2015 General Election which made it successful and credible. The opinions of the informants in the categories listed represented their consensus on the subject without any of them disagree on the position raised above. However, there was an interview conducted by a journalist Adeniyi (2017) with former President Jonathan which was later published in form of a book titled "Against the Run of Play: How the Incumbent President Lost the Election in 2015" in which President Jonathan lamented that the INEC was biased against him and the election result was skewed in favour of the opposition. Furthermore, the works that were conducted on 2015 General Election by many scholars and organisations (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room 2015, Adibe 2015 and Orji 2015) disclosed that the elections were credible, and the electoral umpire was more credible and better organised in its administration of the election than the previous ones in the Fourth Republic.

5.1.9 International Observer Monitoring Groups

The international observer monitoring groups were present in Nigerian territory for election monitoring since 2003 and were part of the electoral process as they conducted pre-elections and post-elections assessment and reports of the situation in order to identify the challenges that were faced and how to avoid them in future and also to suggest ways of improving the elections in future. The informants consulted in all the categories except the category D almost unanimously agreed that international monitors played an important role in making the 2015 General Election credible and transparent. The views of the informants also were supported directly by the existing knowledge on the subject matter as many works indicated the positive role of international observer monitoring groups in the success of the 2015 General Election including the works of Blanchard (2015) and INEC (2015).

5.1.10 Role of Social Media

Many users of these media including Facebook; Whatsapp; Twitter and other social media were used in the build-up to 2015 General Election. One of the research organizations Betelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) and ANAP FOUNDATION NOI Polls conducted a pre-election study in Nigeria in 2015 using social media to sample the views and opinions of the electorates towards their favorable candidates. The informants that were consulted in the interview identified social media as one of the most vital tools that were used

in making the 2015 General Election credible and fair. In addition, scholars (Nwofe 2015, Chukwudi 2015 and Bartlett, Jones, Daniel, Fisher & Jespersen 2015) all presented an argument in favor of the role of social media in the success and credibility of the 2015 General Election in agreement with the above informants' views. Here, the Rational Choice Theory is applicable both within this context. In the first instance, the parties, contestants, voters, and INEC as well as civil societies utilized rationally the platform of social media to advertise their parties and supporters and also to display their manifestoes which reached people in all nook and crannies easily than before where the relevance of social media was less influential. It succeeded in convincing many voters who were before undecided to choose in favor of certain candidates as a result of information and enlightenment in the sphere of social media.

5.1.11 Fair Play in Campaign Process

In the build-up to the 2015 General Election, one of the credits given to the ruling PDP was that it allowed for opposition to play their politics without much intimidation and also they were allowed access to media and other means of the campaign with less intimidation. Many of the informants here agreed that such a scenario led to the credibility and success of the 2015 General Election. Despite the majority opinion of the role of fair play in the electoral process in 2015, two of the informants (one in category A and the other in category B) have a contrary view to the notion that, a fair play ground was provided in the campaign process of the 2015 General Election. Many scholars agreed that there was a fair play in the conduct of 2015 General Election such as Chukwudi (2015), IRI (2015), Africa Centre for Strategic Studies 2015 and Omilusi 2015. It simply means that there was an improvement in the fair play and free opposition politics in Nigeria and that made the 2015 General Election credible than the previous ones.

5.1.12 Socioeconomic Settings

Prior to the 2015 General Election, Nigeria faced the most critical condition in its history of socioeconomic challenges in terms of insecurity, corruption, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, disease, ethno-religious crises and deep social division among the major ethnic and religious groups in the country. These issues led to the campaign and the conduct of the 2015 General Election to be the most challenging and different one from the past. Many electorates from all parts of the country decided to oust out PDP irrespective of their candidates because of the high level of the critical situation. Majority of the informants or almost all of them from all the five categories (A, B, C, D, and E) agreed without any contradiction that the critical socioeconomic situation in the country before the election made the electorates to vote the way they did. In addition to the above information, many works were conducted before and immediately after the election on the credibility and success of the election that attributed the socioeconomic and political situation in the country as one of the major determinants of the prediction of the outcome of the election and the results outcome proper. Such works include Paden (2015), Auge (2015), House of Commons Report (2015), Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2015) and Orji (2015). Furthermore, one of the theories used (the Rational Choice Theory of Election) also explained clearly the situation as the socioeconomic and political

conditions made the voters more rational in choice and behaviourally more wiser in making choice along a different line in comparison with the usual tradition that was obtainable in the previous elections in the Fourth Republic .

5.1.13 Voters' Determination

The voters in the 2015 General Election in Nigeria displayed great zeal for making their votes count and also for choosing leaders or parties that they feel will rescue them from the malaise of socioeconomic underdevelopment. This is one of the arguments of the informants that made the election credible and fair. The IRI Report (2015) and Animashaun (2015) expressed the view that, one of the key factor that led to the success of the 2015 General Election and the defeat of the incumbent by the opposition has to do with the way in which the electorates became self-determine in the voting. Again, the above views and propositions of the informants and scholars support the Rational Choice Theory of Election in the sense that, it shows how wiser and rational the voters became where despite the crazy spending alleged in billions or trillions by the ruling party higher than the opposition, yet, they chose the opposition instead of the ruling party because of their determination for change.

5.1.14 Desire for Change

One of the slogans of the campaign in the 2015 General Election is changed. The opposition APC used to change to attract voters and to secure victory against the ruling PDP. This really attracted many votes for the opposition. The informants consulted all of the five categories believed that the word "change" was instrumental in the APC ride to power in the 2015 General Election. There are writings by IRI (2015), Paden (2015), CPPA (2015) and Isma'ila & Yusuf (2016) that supported such view on the burning desire by Nigerians to replace the ruling PDP with a better leadership as a result of corruption and poor socioeconomic policies that made the life of a common man wretched and miserable for sixteen years. In this context, Rational Choice Theory of Election is derived from the views above since the desire for change from the voters led to a different pattern in the election's outcome and it also shows how the electorates became more rational in their voting behavior.

5.1.15 Politics of Decamping

The 2015 General Election witnessed the zenith of decamping in Nigerian politics where five serving State Governors, former President, ten serving Senators, 22 serving members Federal House of Representatives decamped from the ruling PDP to APC between 2013 and 2015 in addition to many prominent politicians in all parts of the country (Jiddere, 2015). Many of the informants agreed that it was the decamping of these top serving and retired politicians that handed APC its victory in the 2015 General Election. This position has been stated by scholars (Jiddere 2015, Paden 2015, Omilusi & Adu 2016, Olorunmola 2016, Lucky 2017 and Adeniyi 2017) that the decamping has helped immeasurably to the success of APC in the 2015 General Election.

5.1.16 Minimised Rigging

The 2015 General Election was given credibility for the ability of the electoral body to employ measures that prevented rigging using card readers, the determination of the voters to protect their votes and the powers of the opposition APC in checkmating rigging. Most or almost all the informants agreed that the 2015 General Election witnessed the low level of rigging. It was also supported by many scholars (Isma'ila & Othman 2015, IRI 2015, CPPA 2015 and Blanchard 2015) that the ability of the INEC, APC, and voters to prevent rigging minimised the chances of manipulation of the electoral results and that gave the APC an upper hand in securing victory during the 2015 General Election.

All the above are summarised in a model below to show practically how credible or successful the 2015 General Election is.

Figure 1: Model Illustrating the Major Factors that determine the credibility of 2015 General Election



Source: Developed by the Researcher 2017

5.2 The Challenges of 2015 General Election

Despite the above mentioned recorded success which made many scholars to perceive the 2015 General Election as successful or credible, there are many challenges that it faced which

must be identified and address in order to avoid such mistakes in future. Some of these challenges are identified below.

5.2.1 Violation of Election Rules and Regulations in Campaign Spending

The Constitutional and Electoral Act 2010 provisions on sources of campaign funds from legal sources and maximum spending limit were violated as narrated by all the informants in all the categories to that effect. A study (USAID/USAID 2015) discovered that there was a violation of campaign regulations and other conduct related to parties and candidates during the 2015 General Election in Nigeria and this must be addressed in future otherwise money politics and credibility of the procedure will remain in doubt. As observed by Rational Choice Theory of Election, politicians can use any means possible even if it is illegal and dubious to secure victory at all cost including breaking the norms and rule. Therefore, it is rational to review the maximum spending limit upward to avoid much illegality in the future.

5.2.2 Excessive Spending

This is closely related to the above with slight difference, it has been discovered by some studies (USAID/USAID 2015, Olorunmola 2016 and Sule, Azizuddin & Mat 2017) that the 2015 General Election in Nigeria faced the greatest obstacles of excessive political party financing and campaign expenditure that amounted to billions of USD and trillions of Naira which was unprecedented and affected the outcome negatively as well as questioned the rationale and credibility of the election with such huge spending which should have been used for provision of critical national infrastructure which is lacking. Again, it can be seen clearly that the theory used in this study, the Rational Choice can explain this future implications in the sense that, parties and their contestants, as well as the electorates, will find it rational in their own choice and think to continue to use money during the elections and the only way out is strict measures that should be put on ground as a rational approach by policymakers to sanitise the electoral process.

5.2.3 Bribery and Corruption

Despite the claim that the 2015 General Election is the most credible so far in the Fourth Republic, it is also the most corrupted election where bribery and corrupt practices permeated the entire process especially from the politicians and other stakeholders that are involved in the process. For instance, the former National Security Adviser Rtd. Colonel Sambo Dasuki diverted USD 2.1 billion (N777, 133,624,337, 580.00 billion) meant for procurement of weapons to fight Boko Haram for PDP campaign in 2015 shared among various stakeholders and electorates in order to win at all cost. In addition, a report in 2017 indicated that many INEC staff in all the six geo-political zones were bribed during the electoral process in order to twist the elections results in favour of the then ruling PDP where about N 23 billion (\$63, 822, 813.191 million) was allegedly distributed to the selected INEC officials by the former

Minister of Petroleum Mrs. Diezani Allison Maduekwe (EFCC, 2017 & INEC, 2017). This trend must be stopped in future elections, or Nigerian election will become a clear contradiction of democracy which promotes transparency.

It can be seen here that the Rational Choice theory is applicable here because some of the proponents like Lindberg & Weghorst (2010) postulated that, not only rational choice is possible in terms of voting for a party or a candidate that can give them better leadership but, also the electorates can go for a candidate that give them material benefit or ethnic leaning and also the parties and their candidates can go to any extent no matter how rational or irrational to win the elections. The theory can help in amending because it assumes that if voters are enlightened and are more wiser in the choice like consumers in the market, they can vote for better and credible transparent, responsible leadership and this is what the government should do and the electoral body.

5.2.4 Insecurity

Another great challenge that the 2015 General Election faced was its conduct in an extreme condition of insecurity especially in Northeastern Nigeria where many voters were disenfranchised as a result of their condition of being in IDP camps and also in which there were threats of attacks and prevention of election from taking place by Boko Haram terrorists as in the case of their attacks in Northeastern city of Gombe on 14th February where they warned that anyone that comes out for election would be killed. Such threats of insecurity should be addressed in the future election to enable for all qualified citizens to vote freely without harassment or fear of attacks.

5.2.5 Failure of Smart Card Readers in Some Places and Manipulation at Local Levels

There were many reported cases of the failure of card readers to operate effectively in some parts of the country during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections and also during the State Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections. This enables for some level of manipulation of results especially at the local level during Governorship election where it was alleged that many of them rigged the election in favor of the incumbents in their respective states. Much litigation followed, but the judiciary is one area that the country needs to seriously rework in order to ensure that justice prevailed for the disputing parties. It is also observed that while voting was made using accreditation with card readers, collation of results was made manually which also provide room for some manipulation where the politicians got the chance. The Rational Choice explains that even manipulation and illicit conduct in electoral process can be a rational choice to the electorates and the politicians in some circumstances and where they use excuses to evade due process as in the case here with the use of card readers. The Rational Choice theory can be used in addressing the future implications of Nigerian elections in the sense that, the INEC can insist that any election that is not carried out using card reader is null and void and must be conducted again.

6.1 Conclusion and Recommendation

The research concludes that the 2015 General Election is overall improvement and a significant success compared to what was obtainable before in the previous elections especially in the Fourth Republic due to many factors that were discussed above which contributed to the success of the election. Some of the factors were obtainable before while other factors were introduced as reforms which worked well in making the procedure of the election better. However, the research also concludes that there were many challenges faced by the election and it was not that totally successful as many scholars, local and international observers and commentators speculated or concluded in their analysis. There are many serious challenges that hindered the smooth operation or total success of the election and these challenges are legal, procedural and logistical which must be looked into and address by the electoral body, policy makers, civil societies, international supporting agencies, parties, contestants, electorates and all stakeholders that are involved in the electoral process in Nigeria in the future. As a result, the research recommends the following:

1. The Electoral Act 2010 should be reviewed to provide additional rules especially increase on maximum campaign spending limit to provide a flexible room for the legal backing of campaign expenditure and also to meet the reality of the nature of Nigerian money politics and current inflationary trend;
2. INEC and policymakers should ensure that the use of card reader was constituted into law for any election and it must be followed, and they should be made effective to avoid disappointment during the election period, and collation of results should also be done electronically;
3. All those caught in the act of bribery and corruption or diverting national resources for illegal campaign spending must be severely punished to deter others in future from doing the same;
4. Laws should be made to denote that any party or contestant caught breaking electoral regulations should be banned from participating in politics in Nigeria;
5. The civil societies and international donors should intensify political socialization in local language on the evil of vote buying and
6. The incumbent government must guarantee the security of lives and properties across the country to make the next election safer and credible.

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