A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE MANAGEMENT OF 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA’S FUTURE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
Election management has been a critical issue in Nigeria’s political history since independence, leading to the abortion of several attempts at democratic governance before 1999. Various abuses of the electoral process had been recorded in the seven general elections held before the 2011 elections. The paper evaluates the efficiency of the election management body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in terms of preparations for the election, ability of INEC to ensure compliance to electoral laws by political parties and actors, and the level of synergy between INEC, security agencies and other institutions. The paper adopted system theory and decision making approach as theoretical constructs. The two approaches were used as platform for a content analysis of the secondary data comprising of relevant published books, scholarly journal articles, newspaper articles, conference and institutional papers, as well as materials downloaded from the internet. The paper argues that when compared with the past elections, the 2011 elections were relatively credible, free and fair. However, several shortcomings were identified including, inefficiency in the preparation for elections on the part of INEC, undemocratic imposition of candidates by all the leading political parties, and various security lapses during and after the elections. The paper concludes that INEC leadership must tackle the identified lapses, including carrying out a complete re-organization of the commission to make it more efficient, ensure strict adherence to the electoral law by all political parties and put in place security measures that deter threats.

Keywords: critical appraisal, management, general elections, future, democratic development

Introduction
Elections are a fundamental feature of representative democracy. Elections are not day activity, rather they are complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed
on one another. In representative democracy, it is regarded as the only acceptable means of either enthroning new leadership or removing an existing one. Like other concepts in the social sciences, it has been defined in different ways by various scholars. “Election means recruitment of representatives by the choice of the voters” (Johari, 2010: 358). Commenting on elections, Joseph (2009: 76) writes that election is a periodical process by which candidates seek political power using the platform of political parties. He goes on to emphasize that the struggle to achieve political power is usually demanding, with the parties and candidates alike putting all resources to work with the purpose of getting their desires realized.

Nigeria, a multi ethnic, multi-religious nation, accounts for twenty percent of the population of Africa – making one out of every five Africans a Nigerian. Located on the West coast of Africa, the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the ninth most populous nation in the world with a population of 140 million people. (Adelega, 2009:15).

Nigeria has had elected governments for only about 20 years out of the fifty-one years of its existence as an independent nation. The other thirty were accounted for by a succession of military governments, each a bit more dictatorial (and corrupt) than the one before (Beckett: 2011). In the elections that have been conducted in Nigeria, some issues stand out. The high stake and zero-sum contest between faction of political elite for power involving the use of force and electoral malpractices, the contradictions and crisis surrounding the politics of succession, and the credibility of the electoral process as a non-violent broadly representative modality of addressing the critical challenges in Nigerian federalism and democracy (Nwaodike, 2008).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopts Systems theory and Decision making approach as its theoretical construct.

System theory

System theory was first developed in the 1920s by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist. Its first introduction in the analysis of politics was by David Easton in his famous book Political Systems in 1953. Easton put forward his eight major characteristics: regularities, verification, techniques, quantification, values, systemization, pure sciences and integration; also referred to as the ‘intellectual foundation stones’ of behaviouralism (Varma, 2004: 223).

The political system, in the words of Easton: takes inputs from the society consisting of demands for particular policies and expressions of support for the regime and converts them into outputs-authoritative policies and decisions. Feedback mechanisms put outputs back into the systems as inputs, thus completing a complex cyclical operation. (Olaniyi, 2005: 71).
Decision making approach

An approach bringing the decision making process into the focus of political analysis was developed by Richard C Synder and his colleagues (Furniss, E. S., H. W. Bruck, Burton Spain, etc) after the second world war (Varma, 1982: 277 cited in Olaniyi 2005: 112). The decision-making approach to the study of politics focuses on explaining political actions (decisions) from the angle of decisions made by the political executive and other policy makers (including administrators, legislators and the judiciary). The structures involved in decision making, as well as the factors that influence the outcomes of the process, the economic/political costs of decision and the selection of actors for decision-making process also fall within the purview of the decision-making approach (Robert & Edward, 1991: 35 cited in Olaniyi, 2005: 111).

Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic, multi-religious plural state makes it necessary for decision makers on matters of national importance to consider several factors in their decision making process to avoid being seen as discriminatory of other interests outside their primary constituency. The management of elections which has been a sore point in Nigeria’s political development over the years is one of those areas that need utmost care.

PREPARATION FOR 2011 GENERAL ELECTION

Preparation for the 2011 general election began far back as August 3-4, 2009 with a strategic retreat by the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Abuja. This came against the backdrop of a number of challenges that confronted the commission. One of these was the credibility problem, especially those that arose from the conduct of 2003 and 2007 general elections (This Day, 2010). To overcome these challenges, the first step taken by the Federal Government was to build public interest on the credibility of the 2011 election through the appointment of Professor Attahiru Jega as the new INEC chairman to replace Professor Maurice Iwu who conducted the controversial 2007.

The preparations for the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, on the part of both INEC and the different political parties fail below expectation in some respects. Among the shortcomings that were not in accordance with democratic ideals were: non adherence to Electoral Act 2010 and lack of internal democracy in the parties, especially in terms selection of party candidates; lack of sufficient credible candidates; adjustments of the timetable and postponement of election days; inadequate logistics by INEC; amongst others.

Non-compliance with Electoral Act 2010 and Lack of internal democracy in the selection of candidates.

The primaries were to enable political parties to democratically nominate candidates for elections as required by Section 87 of the Electoral Act, 2010. According to Section 87 of the Electoral Act, “A political party seeking to nominate candidates for elections under
this Act shall hold primaries for aspirants to all elective positions. The political party that adopts the direct primaries procedure shall ensure that all aspirants are given equal opportunity of being voted for by members of the party”

The Act mandates parties to adopt indirect primaries for presidential candidates to hold special conventions in each of the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, “where delegates shall vote for each of the aspirants at designated centre in each state capital on specified dates” The directive also stated that INEC would not accept consensus candidates from any party in line with the new Electoral Act.

Party politics in Nigeria has been characterized by lack of internal democracy as well as non adherence to party constitutions. Since the re-introduction of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, various parties have engaged in willful imposition of candidates to fly the flags of the parties in elections at elections at the different levels of government. The problem has been as clear in the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), as the other parties. There is usually no serious attempt by the parties to obey their own constitutions or implement their manifestoes (Sun News Publishing, 2012)

In the build up to the last April 2011 general elections, all the major parties engaged in one form of imposition of candidate or the other. In the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) no primaries were conducted in the selection of ACN presidential candidate, as the party leaders picked Malam Nuhu Ribadu as its presidential candidate to the consternation of other presidential aspirants like former Sokoto State Governor, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa. The same scenario played itself out in the selection of candidates for various elective positions in all states were ACN fielded candidates. The Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) in states like Kano, Katsina, Bauchi and Kano amongst others was alleged to have engaged in imposition of candidates for the governorship race. The PDP also experienced several law suits following allegations of imposition of candidates by some party members in some states including Ogun and Oyo states (Esan 2011; Vanguard, 2011).

In all the cases, INEC did not sanction any of the parties for either breaches of their constitution or the electoral process, as some of them even engaged in withdrawal of names of candidates after the deadline. The parties concerned used various court orders submit names of people who did not participate in INEC supervised primaries as candidates for general elections.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the political parties was the ability to field qualified candidates for the various elective positions. Owing to the past experience where candidates used fake certificates to gain political positions, this time political parties were careful in fielding candidates at least with minimum qualifications for the various positions. Besides, unlike the past, 2011 general election paraded more professionals, technocrats and academicians at the federal and state levels. This made the election to be keenly contested. For instance, out of the sixty-three registered political parties, twenty-one fielded candidates for the presidential election. (Wikipedia, the free
encyclopedia.htm). The three prominent candidates were Nuhu Ribadu of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), a former police boss, Mohammadu Buhari of Congress of Progressive Change (CPC), a former head of state and army general and the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan of People Democratic Party (PDP).

**Inadequate logistics and preparations by INEC evidenced by last-gasp passage of electoral Act, leading to postponements**

The Independent National Electoral Commission was not pro-active in its preparations, as it was close to the election before it realized that the enabling laws for the conduct of election were not in place. Less than five months to the scheduled 2011 general election, fears and apprehension gripped the polity over evolving constitutional issues on the election. Upon the passage of the amended version of the 1999 constitution by the National Assembly, section 132 and 178 of the new amendment, mandated that the election commission to conduct elections between 120 and 150 days to the expiration of the current tenure indicated imminent constitutional crisis. Section 21 of the Electoral Act makes it mandatory for claims and objections, ratification, correction and final certification of the voters register not less than 60 days to an election. By this standard, the process raised other pertinent concerns about the elections. (This Day, 2010).

For so many reasons bordering on time factor and logistic problem, the 2011 election was characterized by series of amendments and postponements which almost marred the entire electoral process. For instance, the election could not hold as scheduled in December 2010, then postponed to January 2011. When it became obvious that January 2011 was unrealistic, the election was finally rescheduled for April 2011.

In the face of these amendments the National Assembly Elections scheduled for April 2, 2011 was postponed. The reason given by INEC for the postponement was non-availability of some “sensitive electoral materials”. Consequently, on the account of this postponement, the election days for the presidential, governorship and state assembly elections were affected. Even though INEC had constitutional backing for these changes, the entire exercise again portrayed the flaws in Nigeria electoral process.

**Review of the 2011 General Elections**

April 2011 marked another milestone in the history of Nigeria as it completed a mammoth round of elections: for the federal bicameral legislature (April 9), the federal presidency (April 16), and governors of the 36 states (April 26). The scale of the exercise was enormous in every way (very much including cost which has been estimated at more than half a billion dollars). Some 325,000 poll workers manned 120,000 polling stations scattered throughout a vast country where communications and transportation infrastructure remain limited. Sixty-three political parties were registered; at the presidential level, 21 fielded candidates (Beckett: 2011).
When compared with past general elections in Nigeria, it is believed that the 2011 general elections was a very remarkable improvement.

The Independent National Electoral Commission, under its new chairman, Attahiru Jega, significantly improved the conduct of the elections, creating a new voters’ register, improving transparency in reporting results, and publicly pledging to hold accountable those who broke the rules. Elections were held in most areas of the country in a largely peaceful atmosphere, with fewer reported incidents of violence or blatant police abuses than in previous years. Despite the improvements, though, there were still incidents of violence, hijacking of ballot boxes by party thugs, and reports of police misconduct, particularly in southeast Nigeria and the volatile Niger Delta region. Violence linked to the party primaries and campaigns, and on the days of the elections, has left at least 165 people dead since November 2010. One of the leading gubernatorial candidates in Borno State was assassinated in January 2011, bombings in four states – Bayelsa, Borno, Kaduna, and Niger – left dozens dead, and clashes between opposing party supporters or attacks by party thugs during the campaigns killed dozens of others (Sahara Reporters, 2011).

INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

The influence of the media, especially the broadcast and social media in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria was enormous. The pro-democratic groups, civil activists and individuals readily used the internet to reach millions of Nigerians. For instance, the “Enough is Enough” (EiE), a pro-democratic group, played a prominent role in sensitizing and mobilising the Nigerian youths for the election. According to one of the leaders of the group: effort for 2011 revolves around what has now become the RSVP campaign It’s the acronym for Register, Select, Vote and Protect. We asked young people in particular to REGISTER as voters (especially as the new INEC launched an effort to create a new Voters’ Register), and we saw some really great response. We used social media to achieve our objectives in this area. From Facebook to Twitter, we engaged youth by providing the required information, motivating them (including asking celebrities to lead registration walks), providing technical solutions to problems (we set up hotlines to address the problems encountered during the exercise) and asking youth to show off their Voters’ Cards by posting pictures on Facebook and Twitter. Other aspects – Select, Vote and Protect – continue to enjoy our social media expertise as we make information available to the electorate on the candidates standing for elective offices (Ajao, 2011). It has been observed that the social to great extent assisted in the success of the elections. The social media facilitated the transmission and exchange of information during the elections. Four ways by which the social media were used were: through the massive used of blackberry messenger; YouTube, Skype, facebook, twitters, GSM, SMS. One fundamental way by which the social media contributed to the success of the election was
that social media were used to frustrate criminal attempts to disrupt elections in polling booths, collation centers (Ishola, 2011 cited in French Institute for Research in Africa-Nigeria, IFRA, 2011).

The 2011 general election had a heavy presence of the broadcast media as well as the press in the form of radio and television jingles, as well as newspaper advertorials as the various papers targeted the voting masses. However, there were some shortcomings in the activities of the broadcast media regarding the elections. These include:

- technical hitches that prevented or marred the airing of advertised debates and discussions; poor quality of presentations and discussions, limited exposure of anchors and presenters which hindered the robustness of discussions on the elections. … interferences in the activities of some state-owned stations by the ruling elites before and during elections, were among the many limitations that confronted the broadcast media in the last general elections (Ishola 2011 cited in IFRA 2011).

The privately owned media organizations were more objective, though some of them showed favourable inclinations to whichever candidates their owners were favourably disposed to.

SECURITY OPERATIVES AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE DURING THE 2011 ELECTIONS

The significance of security in the conduct of election particularly in Nigeria, cannot be overemphasized. Like in 2007, the 2011 general election did not show much progress in security matter. While high measure of success was generally recorded in the southern part of the country (previously considered volatile), the story was quite different in the north where the election left behind undesirable experiences regarding the security of electorates, electoral officials and election materials, making it the most violent election in the northern part of the country since independence (Eminent Leaders Magazine, 2010).

The first indicator that no adequate security measures had been put in place by the Nigerian Police for the 2011 general election, was the hijacking of some of the Direct Data Capturing (DDC) machines (for the voters registration exercise) on arrival at the airport by hoodlums. There were also political assassinations before the election and bombings which as usual remained unraveled by the police.

Nigeria has had a history of electoral violence in all its elections. “Electoral violence generally refers to violence that is directly or indirectly connected to protest against an election” (Adokie, 2011). Electoral violence has also been defined as:
any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes” (Igbuzor, 2010 cited in Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011)

Electoral violence could be pre, during or post election, and is therefore not limited to violent actions on a given election day. The International Foundation for Election systems which has carried out comprehensive studies on electoral violence defines it as: “any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period” (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011).

The major electoral violence of the 2011 general election was the post-presidential election violent protests that took place in some northern states; particularly in Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano and Plateau States, resulting in the death of more than 500 persons (including 10 corps members). Many more were wounded with much property loss, much personal displacement and much loss of personal sense of security. The election and its aftermath have further exacerbated the dangerous combination of anger and fear at the Muslim/Christian interface, especially in the northern states. (Beckett: 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2011).

In the face of post-election violence, both the police and the military showed lack of capacity to effectively control it, showing that despite earlier experiences of electoral violence they were not prepared. In some places they were implicated in the excessive use of force and other serious abuses while responding to the rioting and sectarian violence. Human Rights Watch documented eight cases of alleged unlawful killing of unarmed residents by the police and soldiers in the cities of Zaria and Kaduna, and received credible reports of more than a dozen other incidents (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

In many of the northern towns and cities, Christians found refuge in police stations and military barracks. In southern Kaduna State, Muslim women and children flocked to police stations for safety. The police successfully protected people in many cases, but they were largely ineffective at controlling the rioting and violence in other places. In Bauchi, a Youth Corper who ran into a Police station for protection was later reported dead by the authorities (Nwakanma, 2011).

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELECTION ON NIGERIAN FEDERALISM**

The presidential election that retained Goodluck Jonathan of the People’s Democratic Party was generally peaceful and fair, as remarked by the international observers, the
results may still prove dangerous for the future. The victory of Goodluck Jonathan (Christian, from a southeast minority ethnic group) who represented the dominant party (PDP) was expected by most people. He garnered nearly 60% of the popular votes cast, winning 24 states and the Federal Capital Territory outright. Meanwhile, his principal opponent, Muhammadu Buhari (Muslim, Hausa-Fulani, from Katsina) swept the 12 most northern states, but failed to carry any states outside that group (including those that in past elections have tended to associate with the “far north”). The results of the presidential election seemed to expose some undercurrent realities of increasing regional, ethnic, and religious separation, the magnitude of which had not been seen before. (Beckett: 2011).

A Nigerian commentator however, observed that it was a reality that had been existence before the 2011 elections, as the middle belt had always been the determinant of where the pendulum of power would swing in the country.

Some Nigerian experts think we are once again at the cusp of a major national crisis and that the signs are in the electoral map of Nigeria, drawn from this election that seems to have highlighted the North-South divide of Nigerian politics. I should mention first that this electoral map is neither strange nor unexpected. It remains the accurate reflection of Nigeria’s true political demography and it is the surprise of it mostly that has confounded many CPC voters in the North. Nigeria’s electoral map drawn from the voting pattern in the presidential elections last week point very clearly to the truth that the North Central region has become far more than ever the bellwether states in any tightly run elections in Nigeria. Whoever wins the middle-belt wins the election in the country. This analysis is borne out of the fact that this buffer region contains perhaps, the quintessential character of multi-ethnic Nigeria, being diverse, both ethnically and religiously, and having affiliations to the north and south of that divide (Nwakanma, 2011)

Of the thirteen men who have headed the Nigerian government (military or civilian) since 1960, Beckett (2011) observes that, eight have been northern Muslims (only one was a northern Christian). Six of the northern Muslims have been from the core Hausa-Fulani or Kanuri states of the far north. All four of the southern Christian leaders owed their original ascension to accidental factors (current president, Goodluck Jonathan, became President unexpectedly in May 2010, after Umaru Yar’Adua (Hausa-Fulani, Katsina) developed a serious illness and finally died in office).

Thus, the landslide election of Jonathan may mark a watershed event in the evolution of Nigerian politics. The historic pattern of at least mild hegemony exerted from the far north may have largely run its course. This assumes that Nigeria continues its “slouching” progress toward institutionalizing electoral democracy. The costs and dangers of enthroning true federalism via an enduring democracy remain great. With the country’s complex ethnic makeup, and the now bitter relations between many Christian and Muslim communities, Nigerians know that they live over a political sea of magma that could, at almost any time, erupt. (Beckett: 2011)
PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

One of the greatest shortcomings of the 2011 general election was in the area of security. Security is an aspect of the electoral process that is largely overlooked but eventually ends up being very critical as was witnessed in the post election violence in the northern part of the country, particularly Bauchi, Kaduna Plateau and Kano States. Rather than wait to simply put reports of woes together in this regard after the elections, there should be concerted effort toward ensuring that better preparations are put in place by the security agencies just the same way it was on INEC.

The Nigerian security agencies, especially the Police must inculcate the values of democratic policing in the operations to effectively ensure that there are breaches of the law preparatory, during and post elections. This will involve partnering with the citizens to proactively work to prevent all forms electoral violence in subsequent elections (Akpan, 2008).

Even though the 2011 general election was to a large extent able to resolve the problem of lack of integrity on the part of election administrators as characterized previous elections (following the performance of Jega led INEC), however, poor logistics and irresponsible behaviour of politicians still remain major challenges. There is a need for INEC to begin to put in place machinery for the conduct of 2015 general elections including all the required logistics with a view to correcting the anomalies of the 2011 elections. There also need for a massive re-orientation programme for politicians with a view to entrenching a democratic culture in their practice; which would be exemplified by internal democracy and respect of party constitutions.

INEC should implement the recommendations of the Registration and Elections Review Committee (RERC) evaluated the conduct of the 2011 voter registration exercise and the April elections. Among the recommendations of the committee is the need for INEC to quicken its internal restructuring, so as to strengthen its capacity to conduct free and fair elections in the country (Sun News Publishing, 2012). The is need for the establishment of an Electoral Crime Commission that will serve as a watchdog of the electoral commission, the political parties and contesting candidates in ensuring that political campaigns and elections are conducted according to the provisions of Electoral Act 2010. The Electoral Crime Commission should be empowered to prosecute electoral all offender regardless of their status in society. This will discourage some powerful politicians who presently feel they are untouchable recruiting and arming thugs to perpetrate different forms of electoral violence (Omodia, 2009).

Finally, security agencies must continue to maintain professionalism, impartiality and neutrality in the discharge of their responsibilities.
CONCLUSION

The reports of various independent observers of the 2011 general elections shows that Nigeria has made a major leap in its democratic development with the organization of elections that was rated as being credible, free, fair and conclusive. Massive political education of the citizenry and the political class, will to a large extent correct some of the identified anomalies, through discouragement of involvement in electoral irregularities.

The post-presidential election violence revealed the major shortcoming of the National security system of the country, which despite reports of electoral violence in previous elections could not proactively work to avert such a very unfortunate occurrence, which led to loss of innocent lives and countless property. The Nigerian government needs to train and equip its security agencies to be able to forestall violent breakdown of law and order, either before, during and after elections, utilizing the instrumentality of community policing; with the enlightened participation of the citizenry.

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