

NIGERIA'S 2015 ELECTIONS AND THE CHANGE REVOLUTION

JOHN TOR TSUWA, PhD
Department of Political Science,
Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria
johntsuwa@gmail.com; +234-8060442948

SELUMUN TYONA,
Department of Organizing, Benue State Sports Council,
Makurdi, Nigeria.
selumuntyona@gmail.com; +234 - 7035829795

Abstract

This paper investigates Nigeria's 2015 Elections and the change revolution. The deprivation theory was used as theoretical underpinning. The paper takes a historic excursion into the elections, party politics and the military intervention in Nigeria's democracy from the pre-independence era to the contemporary President Jonathan era. The paper revealed that since 1959, the common perception has been that Nigeria had not had a civilian President who actually chose to become one. It further revealed that in the entire history of democracy in Nigeria, only General Muhammadu Buhari contested for the office of the President on his own for twelve (12) years and finally won in the March 28, 2015 polls. It concludes that the 2015 presidential elections had shown that politics in Nigeria can be changed from one political party to another at any given election.

Key words: Elections, Change Revolution, Presidential, Democracy, Politics.

Introduction

The notion of election refers to the process of choosing a person or group of people via voting for an elective position. To Ogenyi (2015) the 2015 general elections came with rumblings and agitations which were not new in Nigeria's political horizon. Indeed, the first elections in Nigeria which took place in 1959 underscored regional agitations and conflicts that were the focus of the independence discussion in London in 1958. The dominance of the hate campaigns and the culture of partisanship strangely deployed were obvious drawbacks of the 2015 elections. One of the noticeable developments of the 2015 Presidential elections was the active involvement of the US in the events prior, during and after the elections. The defining moment of the United States of America's involvement in the elections was to see through the process, to the very end, and in this regard the US along with Britain issued a joint statement asking the Nigeria Government not to interfere with the collation process. Therefore, the subject matter of this paper is on party politics and the Presidential elections since independence, the alliance between parties with common ideology seeking to capture and consolidate power. Most importantly, the paper discusses the 2015 Presidential elections in Nigeria where an incumbent President was defeated in the polls to another party which is the first time of such political change in the democratic history of Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinning

Theoretical framework is ideologies that describe, analyze and explain why things happen or exist in the society. Attempting to explain socio-political issues that affects the society, especially in academic research without a theoretical support can be quite frustrating (Abagen and Tyona, 2018:189). Therefore, this study is anchored on deprivation theory.

The theory of deprivation is a phenomenon that pulls in the domino effects of reactions in the polity. If the environment is healthy, the institutions will be healthy and if the environment is deprived of basic healthy etiquettes then, the institutions which it will produce will be deprived. The deprivations as applied in this study are deprivation due to unequal distribution of political, social and economic largesse. The theory does not claim that in all social groups, one will find consensus in values rather it considers some of the consequences of situations where there is consensus. Where people do not agree on values, relative deprivation can also be noticed. The theory came out of a need to understand the motivations behind the social activist movements of the 1960s. It seeks to give answers to questions like, what is the impetus that motivates an individual to agitate for a change in his life? (Jolaade, Ngwube, and Idowu, 2018:34).

The theory posits that (collective) actions stems from individuals psychological reactions to the gap between expected circumstances and actual ones. The gap becomes apparent when they perceive themselves to be in a relatively unjust position vis-à-vis another person or group to which they might reasonably compare themselves. Equally, the key to understanding the feeling of deprivation is a matter of which of these characters are comparing themselves with. Why do they think they deserve better than what they have? Wh is their point of comparison? What choices do they think they should have open to them? Relative deprivation theorist have argued that perhaps it is not Ego Relative Deprivation (ERD) that motivates individuals, but rather perceptions of group, or Collective Relative Deprivation (CRD). Therefore, Collective Relative Deprivation occurs when the individual feels that his or her group has been deprived (Tougas and Beaton, 2002, Alam, 2013).

In view of the above assertions, therefore, the deprivation theory is relevant to this study based on the premise that it appreciates the reasons that motivates a person or group to agitate for a change, be it socio-economic or socio-political endeavours. With particular reference to the 2015 Nigeria's presidential elections, thus, some group felt that they were deprived of equal distribution of socio-economic and socio-political largesse and as such were motivated to agitate for a change in the leadership of the country. It was against this backdrop that brought about the change revolution in the Nigeria's 2015 presidential elections.

Party Politics and Elections in Nigeria Since Independence

Political parties are one of the key elements or instruments of electing leaders' to occupy positions in any democratic government. Thus, this section looks at political parties and elections in Nigeria from the pre-independence era to the contemporary 2015 general elections. Nigeria's independence was ushered in by the 1959 general elections.

In 1959, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) led the polls with 134 seats in parliament followed by the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) with 89 seats and the Action Group (AG) with 73 seats. An alliance between the NPC and the NCNC later saw the emergence of their leaders as Prime Minister and President respectively. Nigeria under the British Parliamentary Model had the Prime Minister, Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of NPC as Head of Government while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of NCNC was President with only a ceremonial clout. Bickering and acrimony in the government lasted until the December 1964 elections which NPC in alliance with Akintola faction of AG won. Leadership crisis in 1963 had fragmented AG into two factions, each factions, headed by Akintola and Awolowo. The later faction in alliance with the NCNC formed the opposition. Violence and malpractices was reported in the 1964 elections (Ogenyi; 2015).

Therefore, the violence that took place during the 1964 – 1965 elections is the then Western Region (popularly referred to as the “Wild Wild West”) which found expression “Operation Wetie” culminated in the first military intervention in Nigeria. The first military intervention in the Nigerian polity was carried out by a section of the Nigerian Army in the bloody coup of January 15, 1966 that assassinated Prime Minister Balewa alongside other prominent Northern politicians/elites. Then Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi' took over the reins of government from what was left of the leadership of the first Federal Republic of Nigeria, all political parties were abolished. The military junta headed by General Aguiyi Ironsi briefly lasted for a period of six months, that is, January 15, 1966 – July 29, 1966 (Tyona, 2018:68; Abagen and Tyona, 2020; Feinstein, 1973:131).

Yakubu Gowon, born on October 19, 1934 became Head of State of Nigeria on July 29, 1966 via a bloody military coup, which is the second in the history of Nigeria since independence in 1960. This second coup led to the death of General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi, Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi and many military personnel of Eastern origin. By then, Yakubu Gowon was a Lieutenant Colonel and the most ranking officer in the Army from the Northern Region and he became the new Nigeria's Head of State at a very young age of about thirty-two years old and he remains the longest serving Nigerian leader both military and civilian regimes in Nigeria's political history. Yakubu Gowon ruled from July 29, 1966 to July 29, 1975, exactly nine years. His regime was engulfed in a 30 months civil war that began on July 6, 1967 and ended on January 12, 1970. General Gowon was overthrown in a military coup on July 29, 1975 that brought on board, the dynamic and radically inclined military government of General Murtala Ramat Muhammed (Abagen and Tyona, 2020).

General M. R. Muhammed was in power for just six months and his regime came to an end on February 13, 1976 when he was assassinated in a bloody military coup attempt. General Olusegun Obasanjo his Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters succeeded as the new Nigerian Head of State. It is imperative to note that this period is mostly referred to in text as the “Murtala Muhammed/Olusegun Obasanjo regime”. General Olusegun transmitted power to the democratic elected government of President Shehu Shagari in October, 1979 (Abagen and Tyona, 2020).

According to Ogenyi (2015) frontline political parties in the 1979 elections included the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari who later won and emerged as President, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Aminu Kano's Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Waziri Ibrahim's Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) and Tunji Braithwaite's National Advanced Party (NAP) also participated in the race. The Second Republic witnessed an experiment with the American Presidential Model. Ethno-religious sentiments of the past trailed the election with reported malpractices and misgivings that were drawn in the mirth and laughter from the restoration of democracy.

Therefore, Tyona (2019) notes that corruption was deemed pervasive during the administration of Shagari. It is in this light that Abagen and Tyona (2020) opines that President Shehu Shagari government ended on December 31, 1983 via a military coup which ushered in General Muhammadu Buhari as the new Nigeria's Head of State. General Muhammadu Buhari and his fellow – coup planners accused the President Shehu Shagari led government of corruption and deteriorating the economy. In the same view according to Tyona (2020:71-72) General

Muhammadu Buhari military junta came to an end on August 27, 1985 via a military coup led by his Chief of Army Staff, Major-General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida.

General Babangida took over power from General Buhari on August 27, 1985. And became the sixth military Head of State in Nigeria. In fact, studies have it that he declared himself "Military President", hence became the first Military President in Africa and probably the world (Tyona and Abagen, 2019). Within the Nigerian polity, General Babangida's regime brought on board two political party system, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) to facilitate his 'Transition Programme' (Abagen and Tyona, 2020). Therefore, following the country's debilitating transition programme by the Babangida government, it became evident when the June 12, 1993 presidential election was annulled. To stem the ugly tide, he hurriedly put in place an 'Interim National Government' (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan who lasted for about three months. General Sani Abacha toppled the ING on November 17, 1993 and became Nigeria's new Head of State (Tyona and Abagen, 2019)

To Ezonbi (2014: 546) the Abacha administration was so fraudulent that it was not capable of ushering in an ideal democracy. He registered five Political Parties to ease his self successive bid, the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), and the United Nigerian Congress Party (UNCP). But all the calculation ended up on 8 June, 1998 with his death. Then General Abdulsalami Abubakar became the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigeria Armed Forces. General Abdulsalami Abubakar was committed to return the country back to civil rule. This led to the formation of new political parties. Out of the nine political association, only three were registered to be full political parties. The registered political parties were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The Presidential election of 27 February, 1999 ended the Abdulsalami Abubakar transition and ushered in the Fourth Republic on 29 May 1999 after General Olusegun Obasanjo (Rtd) won.

Obasanjo won the elections under the platform of the PDP and did two terms in office, i.e. 8 years, from 1999 – 2007. He handed over power to Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua still of the PDP. Suffice to note that General Buhari of the defunct All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) contested in 2007 against Yar'Adua of PDP. Although PDP was declared the winner at the polls, ANPP went to court and lost. This did not deter Buhari and in 2011 he emerged on the platform of the defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and challenged President Goodluck Jonathan in the Presidential election. He won twelve States or 12 million (22%) votes against twenty-four States or 22 million (58%) votes of President Jonathan (Ogenyi, 2015).

Clearly, therefore, the above analysis has shown that the 1964 elections witnessed a high level of violence and malpractices as well as the rise of ethnic tension in the government which paved the way for the first military intervention in Nigerian's democracy. Again, when democracy was restored in 1979 which was the Second Republic, it lacked discipline and there was high level of corrupt practices, thus a fundamental reason for the military to return to rule in December, 1983. And the military stayed on power apart from a brief interlude of a three months Interim National Government headed by a civilian and a Yoruba man, Chief Ernest Shonekan which was established on August 27, 1993 by the General Babangida military junta to ease the raising ethnic tension in Nigeria due to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections presumed to have been won by a Yoruba Man, Chief MKO Abiola. Thereafter, the military continued to rule until 1999 when democracy was restored in the country. And henceforth, the Nigerian nation-State has

continued to practice democracy up till today. The next section dwells on the 2015 elections and the change revolution.

The 2015 Elections and the Change Revolution

The 2015 general elections had fourteen Presidential candidates including the incumbent President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the PDP, General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC, who were the main contestants. KOWA party had the only female contestant, Oluremi Sonaiya among other contestants. To Ogenyi (2015), the obvious voices on the scene were agitation for continuity and change. Proponents of continuity believed in the Jonathan Presidency, while those for change argued that Buhari Presidency would offer a better alternative under the current socio-economic demands.

Importantly, a new technology, known as the 'Card Reader' was acquired by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which had allayed the fear of rigging while a peace accord between the Presidential candidate of the APC, General Muhammadu Buhari and that of the PDP, incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan had given hope of a peaceful and credible Presidential elections even though as the hate campaigns engineered by the PDP continued during the electioneering period which has never been witnessed in Nigeria's elections.

According to Sekoni (2015:14), it is the promise of change inherent in Buhari/APC's campaign that must have given citizens the feeling that a regime of emancipation of the oppressed was born on March 28, 2015. Observers have given more attention to the making of the APC Presidential candidate that had been the style in the past. Since 1959, the common perception has been that the country had not had a President who actually chose to become one. The belief in 1959 was that it was Sir, Ahmadu Bello that asked Sir, Tafawa Balewa to come to Lagos to rule Nigeria on his behalf. In 1979, Shagari averred openly that his interest was to become Senator before he was drafted by the ruling club to contest for the highest office. In 1993, Chief MKO Abiola, who sought for the highest office and won the support of the people, was prevented from using his talent to govern Nigeria. In 1999, it was a group of military dictators that organized to draft General Olusegun Obasanjo to serve as Presidential candidate of a party jointly created by former military rulers and their civilian acolytes bent on protecting the interests of promoters of military rule. Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was drafted by General Obasanjo in 2007. And Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was brought to the Presidential ticket by the same forces that drafted Yar'Adua, and the rest is now history. In the entire history of civilian rule in the country, only General Buhari had sought the highest office on his own for the past twelve (12) years until he finally found APC as the instrument of victory on March 28, 2015.

Again, those who are feeling excited as the people were in 1960 when British colonialists responded to the mild nationalist struggle and bowed out in a manner reminiscent of President Jonathan's acceptance of the election that changed the guard from Jonathan to Buhari and from PDP to APC have good reasons to be optimistic, as is usually the case with change from one ruling party to another in most democracies. Despite claims by some pundits that Buhari's electoral victory rested largely on votes from the core North and the South West, it is remarkable that Buhari's win in four of the country's six geopolitical regions shows more evidence of greater freely given support from more diverse groups in the country than at any time other than at the end of the free and fair Presidential election of 1993 (Sekoni, 2015:14).

It is pertinent to note that in the 2015 Presidential polls, General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC

polled 15, 424,921 million votes spread across 21 States which gave him victory over the 12,853,162 million votes of incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan spread across 15 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja (Channels Television News, 2015) The victory of the APC in the Presidential and National Assembly elections was historic. Never had the nation witnessed an election so keenly contested yet relatively peaceful and transparent with minimal hitches. Again, never had a sitting President conceded power through an election and never had Nigerians rose in warm embrace of the dawn of a new political era. Not only did APC win the Presidential election by a margin of 2,571,759 million votes, the party's over fifty-eight seats in the 109-member Senate confirms a majority in the Red Chambers of the National Assembly in the political dispensation of May 29, 2015 – May 29, 2019.

In another related development, Sekoni (2015:14) wrote that:

Democracy requires that voters must remain alert and vigilant each minute of the political time and space they have delegated to their elected officials from the president to lawmakers and even civil servants. Such show of vigilance was greater during the regime of Jonathan than at any other time in the past. It was not until towards the end of Obasanjo's rule that anti-tenure elongation warriors raised the voice of challenge against the impunity of Obasanjo's regime. It was also at the tail end of Yar'Adua's short regime that the forces of vigilance became strong, particularly when a clique set out to rule the country on behalf of Yar'Adua after it was clear to the international community that the gentleman had passed on. Jonathan was certainly the most criticized President just as he was the most tolerant of brazen, brash, and brutal supporters within and outside the security forces. The impunity of Jonathan's regime led to the preference of voters for Buhari and APC as agents of change from a regime of repression to one of liberation.

In addition, it is the citizens that can protect Buhari from any force or forces that are opposed to change from the usual governance style that celebrates power at the expense of responsibility and promote impunity over efficiency. Correspondingly, it is the citizens that can also hold Buhari and APC down to promises given in exchange for votes. Most importantly, President Jonathan has did his bit to advanced peace and stability in the country, when he called the President-elect, General Buhari even ahead of the formal announcement of the latter's victory and making a statesman's concession speech before the world press Sekoni, 2015:14).

From the above viewpoints, it is justifiable to note that history is very important. It exposes us to the past events so that we can enhance our capacity in all spheres of human endeavours (Tyona, 2015:243). Therefore, history has revealed that since 1959, Nigeria has not had an elected President who actually chose to become one. For instance, it was Sir Ahmadu Bello that asked Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to come to Lagos in 1959 and govern Nigeria on his behalf. Also, Alhaji Shehu Shagari declared in 1979 that his desire was to become a Distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria before he was drafted by the ruling political elites to contest for the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Again, in 1999, a party created by former military dictators and some influential civilians brought Olusegun Obasanjo to contest as the party's Presidential candidate and won. In 2007, it was General Obasanjo that brought the late Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to contest for the highest office. It was the same forces that drafted Umaru Musa Yar'Adua that brought Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to the Presidential ticket in 2011. The making of the APC Presidential candidate for the 2015 elections showed absolute transparency. It is important to note that, in the entire history of democracy in Nigeria, only

General Muhammadu Buhari sought for the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on his own for the past years, specifically, in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections and finally found victory on the platform of the APC in the 2015 Presidential polls. This is actually a change revolution.

To Gadu (2015:18) the elections have come and gone. Nigeria do not really reflect the reality of Nigerian geo-ethnic or geo-religious structure. These developments have brought along with them changing views and perceptions among Nigerians on the issues of governance, accountability and the opportunities offered by the democratic dispensation to make informed choices based on overriding public and national interest. As the outcomes of the elections showed, most Nigerians are now more willing to consider issue – based politics than ethnic or religious based ones. Again, it is these changes that were largely responsible for the outcome of the 2015 Presidential elections. And it mattered very much that on the canvas of public expectations especially pertaining to two critical issues insecurity and corruption – among others, which have ravaged Nigeria, President Jonathan and his Peoples Democratic Party has been adjudged to have performed abysmally. In general, Buhari whose past records against the two evils measures up favourably and coupled with his party's commitment to internal democracy as demonstrated in the conduct of its primaries, Nigerians across divides used the opportunity of the elections to make the choices that they eventually did.

Conclusion

This paper takes a bird's eye view on Nigeria's 2015 elections and the change revolution through a vigorous analysis of Presidential elections, party politics and the military intervention in Nigeria's democracy from the pre-independence era to the contemporary President Jonathan era. The analysis has shown that since 1959, the common perception has been that Nigeria had not had a democratically elected President who actively chose to become one. History has revealed that in the entire democratic rule in Nigeria, only General Muhammadu Buhari contested for the highest office on his own for twelve (12) years and finally won in the March 28, 2015 election.

The potential impact of Buhari/APC victory in the 2015 Presidential elections may not be because of Buhari's governance style in 1984 when he was Military Head of State that a majority of the country's voters choice him and his party over the incumbent President and ruling party. Indeed, it may be in spite of it. The PDP has in the last sixteen years run a Central Government of impunity while Buhari promised voters a regime of change from impunity to accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. The rule of impunity from 1999 to 2015 had become a repressive rule, a governance model that is as uncaring as colonial domination. More importantly, the 2015 elections have proven that politics in Nigeria is mobile and not static. Therefore we rely upon the change revolution to firmly guide the transition process that will eventually consolidate democracy and development in our dear nation.

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