

NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN 2015: THE EXTERNAL INTEREST IN ITS ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

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Abstract:

This paper uses the historical method of analysis to provide a discourse on the phenomenal role of Western players in raising the ladder of Nigeria's electoral integrity during the 2015 general elections. It sees this role as explainable by strategic economic and security variables that go beyond the mere rhetoric of altruism and the desire of the former to partner with Nigeria in its efforts to sustain its fledgling democracy and promote other aspects of local development. The paper however notes the electoral innovations in the 2015 elections as an advance in the nation-state's electoral integrity and suggests that beside delivering on its avowed promises of stamping out corruption from the political and social fabric of the nation-state, the new government in Nigeria should, among other things, strive to sustain and deepen these reforms in order to further extend its democratic profile in the international community.

Keywords: Nigeria's Elections, African Development

Introduction

The 2015 general election in Nigeria has, contrary to wide expectations, become one of the most acclaimed peaceful, if not credible elections in the recent political history of the Nigerian State. However and from the point of view of foreign policy, this ironic twist between expectations and outcomes in the aforesaid national election can more easily be deciphered—the visible role of Western and other international players towards promoting its (electoral) integrity. There should be minimal contest, if any, in asserting that, prior to the 2015 general elections, the sorry state of governance in Nigeria has fast pushed the nation-state closed to becoming a Pariah State. Continuing poor governance has fanned up popular optimism and clamor by locals for change in the scheme of things especially in the political structure (Okoro, 2015). What was not clear however was how this change could be effected through the ballot in light of experiences of poor delivery in previous national elections. The epitomic role of Western and other

international actors in raising the ladder of electoral integrity during this election can be canvassed as a major factor to the State's safe-landing in the 2015 voting exercise. This is the premise on which the successful back-to-back democratic transition in Nigeria (where the opposition led for the first time) in the short history of its presidential elections can be explained.

Within the context of extant electoral conduct, the subject matter of electoral integrity in Nigeria's elections may be a difficult one for dilation. "In our recent history (Pre 2015), it is fact that a few governors were thumb-printed, results written and elections won before the actual voting. Such governors served out their terms in spite of tribunals and courts" (Mbadiwe, 2016).

If there were any elections however, in which electoral integrity was high in Nigeria's series of general elections since 1979, it must be the June 12 1993 election which was believed to have been overwhelmingly won by Chief MKO Abiola of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) (Akao, 2013).

By the time the 2015 general elections kicked off in March, the intense clamor for a change in the political structure of the Nigerian State, as earlier noted, has become phenomenal among in the citizenry within and those in the Diaspora (Ndibe,2015). Apparently, these clamors emanate from the many years of despondency in the ability of successive political regimes to fix the several national socio-economic challenges facing the average Nigerian due to unmitigated, poor and corrupt governance by successive governments in post-independence Nigeria. Thus, in the period leading to the 2015 general elections, Nigeria was overshadowed by fear and uncertainty over the issue of peaceful transition of government especially if the opposition won the upcoming presidential election. Because of the burgeoning political tension being whipped up during the electoral campaigns by the two major parties namely the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) –an alliance of some major opposition parties – even persons very highly placed in government, the judiciary, the army and religious leaders could not be spared of the wide apprehensions of a national political crisis that the electioneering campaigns portended (NTA,2014). Never before in history had Nigerians witnessed a campaign characterized by such a high magnitude of name-calling, calumny and threats as the 2015 presidential elections campaign revealed. Excerpts from a piece in the Premium times read:

“What is issues-based in calling Gen. Buhari a 'semi-literate jackboot'... where are the issues in the pejorative reference to Prof. Osinbajo as an 'acolyte' of Tinubu, or in describing Tinubu himself as a puppeteer... where are the issues contained in the statement by the serial

bumbler and gormandizer called Doyin Okupe, who regards ?Mr?. Buhari's refusal to enrich himself from the public till as a vice rather than a virtue? Why would a ruling party go after the jugular of the opposition simply because it took its time in choosing its presidential running mate, especially since it did not run foul of any electoral law in doing so?”(sic) (Premium Times, 2014)

Under such circumstances during the pre-election campaign period, peaceful and credible elections which define the unique character of civilized modern democratic societies looked like a mirage.

Yet in the end, the election was finally contested and the opposition as was largely feared, won. But all apprehensions of a conflagration disappeared, the new government sworn-in and it continues to rule. While still basking in the euphoria of the unexpected peaceful outcome of the 2015 general elections, an item to reasonably ponder over in the whole exercise is the role of the international players in and outside Nigeria during this election.

From this onset, therefore we proffer the argument, around which this paper has been organized, that the role of the international players in promoting electoral integrity in the voting exercise remains one fundamental explanation for Nigeria's electoral success in 2015. This is in view of the fact that free and fair elections, in other words, elections with integrity, have over time remained elusive in Nigeria's post-independence history and it would appear that the role played by the international community during the 2015

general elections suggested some immense solutions to this question. While acknowledging this role as very significant in raising the ladder of electoral integrity in Nigeria, this paper however proposes that the phenomenal role of international actors in the elections can only be explained by factors that go beyond the mere rhetoric of altruism and the popular argument by the Western players "of supporting new and growing democracies" in Africa (Lagon,2011; Lynn-Jones,1998). This is the focus of analysis in this paper.

Theoretical And Historical Background Of Nigeria's Electoral Integrity

The subject matter of electoral integrity may vary in context with the domain (State) in which it applies but in a more general and international perspective, it represents the application of standards and global norms or principles that govern the appropriate and effective conduct of public elections. These principles originated in the documents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which were published in 1948. According to article 21(3) of the UNDHR, "the Will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this Will, shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures." (Young, 2009). African Union (AU) members (and hence Nigeria), by implication of their endorsement of several of such international protocols, have individually and collectively endorsed these norms and principles relating to the proper conduct of elections.

Electoral integrity according to a Sydney University Project centers mainly on three questions namely: "When do elections meet international standards of electoral integrity; what happens when elections fail to do so; and

what can be done to mitigate these problems?" Countries around the world (Nigeria inclusive), according to the Sydney project, "face common challenges of holding contests meeting international standards of electoral integrity." (Electoral Integrity Project, 2013).

"When citizens go to the polls and cast their votes, they aspire not only to elect their leaders, but to choose a direction for their nation." (Annan, 2013). Democracies according to Annan should not only see elections as a foundation of true democratic governance where political leaders see themselves, like other nationals do, as mere custodians of the State's political power, but also as a "catalytic" tool for driving national political, social and economic change. Such change provides the States with an opportunity to peacefully resolve political conflicts, equip the people (electorate) with the power to confer legitimacy and public trust on elected officials, provide security for the losers and ultimately offer the recipe for the much-needed good governance, security and development. "The power ultimately rests with the people. We elect leaders to act on our behalf so that we can go about our lives, caring for our families, teaching at our schools, staffing our hospitals and running our businesses. At election time, the power returns to the people – and they in turn empower the elected."(Annan, 2013). In this context therefore, elections are not just mere formalities –ones used to resolve the question, to be or not to be – but they represent a conscious desire of a people to deepen their love for one another and periodically assess the degree of the their individual commitment and belonging to a common national course.

The subject of electoral integrity locates within

the purview of several theoretical frameworks surrounding the issue of fair (and unfair) elections. One of these –the Public Choice Theory - strikes us more potently here. The Public Choice analysis originated in Economics from the writings of Kenneth Arrow (Arrow, 1963), James Buchanan and Duncan Black among other Social Choice analysts. The theory has also found relevant application to Political Science phenomena. As a theory which utilizes basically economic tools in resolving traditional problems of governance, the public choice perspective sees the recognition of self-interested groups in a society such as voters, bureaucrats, women groups, civil servants and youth organizations as important determinants of the behavior of the general public on given political questions. .What does the public want? What is its major choice? What does it want to achieve in a public process like election? How can it achieve these in a political process such as an election? These among other issues pop up in a public choice thinking. Yet it may be difficult to specify which of the many social variables significantly play more roles in the making of a “public choice.” In his “impossibility theorem” Kenneth Arrow shows that “there is no mechanism for making collective choices, other than dictatorship, that translates the preferences of diverse individuals into a well-behaved social utility function.” (Shughart II, n.d.). Public choice arguments center on the need for people to use institutional mechanisms to pursue individual or public interests. Institutions are prisms through which the behavior of the State can be viewed. Mbaku sees certain variables found in a state's behavior such as corruption problem in most of the African States as 'rules-related' and therefore to understand and place them in appropriate contexts, one must start with an

examination of the rules that govern socio-political interaction in the State. Rules determine the incentives faced by participants and as a result, the behavior of state can only be examined effectively within the context of the State's existing constitutional rules (Mbaku, 1997, 2008). It is a matter of public choice that State elections as institutionally controlled should possess great degree of integrity.

Electoral integrity perhaps draws a new and separate attention as a domain of discourse in Africa away from the traditional subject matter of election. In some parlance, electoral integrity may be equated with just having good electoral practices or just the fight to end electoral fraud (Stedman, 2015) but in others, it goes beyond this boundary. For instance, the report of an international commission avers clearly that an election has integrity if it is “based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle.” (Global Commission on Elections. Democracy, and Security, 2012). It further believes that if confidence in a public election becomes very weak, there will be widening propensity for people to challenge the legitimacy of the government that emerges at such an election. The leaders and officials of such a government are deemed to lack accountability to the public. By allowing for peaceful resolution of political and other forms of conflicts, opening up a scheme for a cohesive dialogue, debate, and information sharing amongst leaders and the public, the commission feels that, electoral integrity is at the very root of the political problem in a State. Integrity is a subjective concept to measure

and it depends on the quantum of public confidence in electoral and other political processes. "It is not enough to reform institutions; citizens need to be convinced that changes are real and deserve their confidence. Inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability are all fundamental to developing that confidence." (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy, and Security, 2012)

The salience of electoral integrity in national elections epitomized in the foregoing discourse appears to be more easily canvassed in Nigeria where the vagaries of electoral practice in the short history of its democracy leaves much of integrity to be desired.

In spite of the several reform attempts by successive Electoral Commissions to raise the status of national and or regional elections, the country has yet suffered from years of flawed elections characterized by electoral rigging, fraud and corruption (Awopeju, 2011). The experience of ballot snatching, ballot stuffing, multiple voting, underage voting and party agent collusion/bribery are just a few of the many reflections on the spate of electoral malpractice typical of most Nigeria's past elections. Opposition parties are strident in raising issues on the inability of the electoral body to conduct credible elections. In one such instance, Muhammadu Buhari himself was quoted to have expressed pessimism at an African Diaspora Conference in London, saying, "All the present indications are that INEC ... would be unable to deliver any meaningful elections in 2015... its impartiality is totally lost." (National Mirror, 2013)

Beside the electoral body, another institution for ensuring credibility is the court. Previous electoral laws in the Nigerian State have provided for post-election reprieves in form of the establishment of Electoral Tribunals which

try cases of electoral fraud among contestants in attempts to infuse some discipline into the electoral system. However, the expectations of the people on the performance of these tribunals have been relatively low against the background of what their common experiences at the polls have been.

On the part of government, it had made several reforms to try and mitigate election malpractices but no sooner these reforms are introduced than they are either abandoned or abused. For instance, in the 1993 presidential and gubernatorial elections, Humphrey Nwosu, then Chairman of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) introduced a unique voting system known as "Option A4" which was designed primarily to check electoral rigging. The Babangida's military government at the time had approved this new voting proposal and the commission went ahead to use it in the 1993 elections. In Option A4, also popularly nicknamed "open ballot system", accredited voters at the polling stations were never given a ballot paper nor were there any ballot boxes to cast in their votes. Rather, the accredited voters were the "ballot instruments" themselves. At the close of accreditation and the commencement of voting, the electoral official would publicly announce the names of each specific candidate/party and the voters would physically queue up in lines according to the candidate/party of their voting choice being announced. When all voters have successfully queued up in their respective lines, the electoral officials would manually count the voters on each line and record same against the respective candidate's/party's columns on the election result-sheet for that polling station. The election at that station was then over in a short period and the results publicly known by all around (voters, election officials,

party agents and security officials alike). This ingenuous innovation was hailed by most Nigerians who believed that integrity had been brought to the electoral system in Nigeria after many years of distrustful secret ballot system. There was minimal, if any, postelection judicial contest during the 1993 presidential election, except that this had been accounted for by the fear created by the military government in its annulment of the results for reasons which it could not justify. The annulment statement itself did not indicate any uncommon reasons for the government's action than the usual "bluff" of the military whenever it wants to seize power by force. Such claims include, "allegations of irregularities and other acts of bad conduct", "documented evidence of widespread use of money during the party primaries", "conflict of interest between the government and both presidential candidates", "a huge array of electoral malpractices" and that the "courts had become intimidated and subjected to the manipulation". With such excuse handy, the Babangida's military government announced in a nationwide broadcast:

"under this circumstance... the National Defence and Security Council decided that it is in the supreme interest of law and order, political stability and peace that the presidential election be annulled." (Vanguard, 2013)

In subsequent elections Option A4 was abandoned by Electoral Commissions with no tenable reasons for doing so. Yet prior to 2015, some people including politicians feel that Option A4 remains relevant as "the only alternative for attaining credible elections in Nigeria." (Ezeagu, 2014)

Another instance of policy abandonment was in 2011 when the nation expended hugely on electronic registration of voters with the promise of accompanying it with electronic voting during the succeeding elections. Yet with hot criticisms from within the leadership of the extant ruling political party (PDP), the government was (perhaps) intimidated (by party godfathers and or their strategists) from using electronic voting and it acquiesced to using manual voting – a phenomenon that witnessed one of the worst incidents of obscene electoral malpractice - that went beyond the purview of the numerous international observers who monitored and reported on the 2011 general elections. The complimentary failure in several instances of the postelection tribunals to deliver reprieves on the expectations of the common people on these previous cases of flawed elections marred the state of integrity which the people reposed in the nation's electoral system and its so-called reforms prior to the 2015 general elections. The constitution of those tribunals was such that members according to Nwagboso (2011) "were not only corrupt, but unfit to correct the perceived anomalies in the Nigeria's electoral process."

While the introduction of modern technology however, in the conduct of national elections may appear to be a way out of persistent electoral fraud in many public elections among developing countries, it would appear that the dexterity and or sophistication of electoral fraudsters are in fact sharpened by such innovations. Surmising on her findings in a study of 136 elections, an electoral analyst and researcher found that among manipulators of elections, "a more frequent tactic is to alter election laws, often as a means of deterring opposition candidates or gerrymandering unlosable constituencies." (Birch, 2012). The

presence of outside observers, often called electoral observers (or monitors) is, according to Birch, complicating the election-rigging business, requiring dodgy politicians to work harder and more cleverly while “most manipulators make only sparing use of blatant election-day frauds.” In light of the forgoing and within the context of the Nigerian electoral experiences, the need for a more relevant technology becomes germane in minimizing the instances of electoral fraud. Perhaps, this need informed the introduction of the electronic card reader which was used in the 2015 general elections. This technological innovation would make the subject matter of electoral integrity in Nigeria become more intriguing.

The International Role In Nigeria's Electoral Reform

The growing interest of the international community towards ensuring credible elections in Nigeria provides continuing fresh impetus not only for local stakeholders to dilate on the need to reform electoral system but also for the path to academic discourse on the subject matter of electoral reform in Nigeria to be less amorphous and blurred.

As Nigeria's democratic practice develops into strength and maturity, the stakes of the various interest groups whether local or international continue to appreciate in an effort to nurse and fully nurture this world's largest black democracy from receding into obscurity. The growing interest of the international community is typified among other things, by the increasing number of international observers at, the rising technical and material support for, and the growing purveyance in the international media of, elections in Nigeria particularly since the 2007 general election slot.

That the Nigerian State has suffered from years of poor management of its natural resources is a point that has probably been over celebrated in academic literature. While for most part of its over-half-a-century of political independence from Britain, its economy has grown in nominal terms from the exports of its natural resources with the economy experiencing only meaningful and respectable GDP growth rates that averaged over 6.5 percent per annum between 2006 and 2010, this growth, as notes the National Bureau of Statistics (2015) “neither generated corresponding employment nor helped in attenuating poverty” more so as the oil and gas sectors, the level of development per capita have in contradiction plummeted in severe terms. This disposition is against the background of a burgeoning population of unemployed human and material resources. In 2012 the structural composition of the nation's estimated 167million population figure, now estimated at about 173million (World Population review,2015) shows that the youth subsector accounts for about 50 percent of the total population out of which about 11million is unemployed (Akande,2014). There is thus a strong clamour for change each moment of electoral opportunity. Thus, even at high personal costs, the Nigerian voter gets enlisted during voters' registration exercise and is also very committed to endure long and painful waiting queues at electoral (polling) stations during voting sessions.

Voter commitment in Nigeria may be explained in more realistic terms by the need to preserve one's own nation among the Comity of Nations from slipping into international obscurity. Secondly, there is a seeming acceptance of the view that politicians in Nigeria are basically the same in

character and none should be worth taking fatal risks for. Thirdly and perhaps most likely, the perception that justice, especially in the view of the aggrieved party (who often is in the opposition) is hardly ever served at electoral tribunals during post election legal contests (as the 1993 annulment speech indicated earlier).

President Goodluck Jonathan's historic congratulatory phone call to (now his successor), Muhammadu Buhari, a retired army general, in the evening of Monday March 30, 2015, may have come not without the chance of his challenging the results or that there is the belief that the whole electoral process had been overtly credible in theory and practice. In a more plausible ground of argument, the president's action may be explained within the context of the responsible view that the nation must come first above any other considerations. This paper is strongly of the opinion that the external role in the president's action remains very crucial.

For Africa in particular, and within its regional geopolitical and economic spectrum, the expectations of the international community is that Nigeria's political stability is a sine qua non for the sustainability of Africa's growing democratic profile since the dismantling of Apartheid in the last quarter of the 20th century. The phenomenal use of South Africa and Nigeria as quintessential reference points in the discourse on modern democratic practice in the African region is informed not only by the consideration of the size of each of these States in terms of human population, but also their relatively comparable heterogeneous ethnic structures and historical (especially colonial and post-colonial) experiences. A significant number of African States still looks up to South Africa (and

Nigeria) as pivot(s) of Africa's drive towards modernity in democratic governance and overall development. Nigeria, one of the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), precursor to the current African Union (AU), has enormous responsibility to the African region which it cannot easily wish away, even if internal politico-economic realities require it to do so. Nigeria's commitment to African regional affairs would lend support to the proposition that she has some form of manifest destiny to lead in Africa on many fronts as illustrated by her several commitments to the AU in "visible areas of financial responsibility, pursuit of peace and security and promotion of integration and development on the continent." (Okereke, 2012). The glossary of Nigeria's key Africa-centered roles in the region's post-independence foreign policy is unending, including among many others, her celebrated contributions towards the dismantling of Apartheid in the Pretoria regime in South Africa, the resolution of the Angolan, Liberian, Sierra Leonean conflicts, the almost single-handed restoration of democratic government of president Fradique de Menezes, deposed by the military in Sao Tome and Principe in 2003, her role in the resolution of post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire between December 2013 and March 2014 and her continuing dogged fight against terrorism in the West African sub-region. High electoral integrity in Nigeria's election is therefore an assurance of sustainability of its leadership role as a regional power in contributing towards the resolution of local (African) issues/challenges prior to factoring in the role of the wider international community.

At the economic front, credible elections and peaceful democratic transition in Nigeria mean a lot to South Africa in particular and

several other African States in sustaining the robust commercial potentials of the Nigerian economy from which the latter States continue to tap. For instance, beside its growing insurance and banking businesses in the country, South Africa enjoys in Nigeria, its largest single telecommunication market in Africa, with the South African-based mobile phone provider MTN[®] as of 2014 enjoying a dominant share of the market in the telephony industry (Goodie, 2014). It is also important to propose that South African-based pay-per-view television outfit, DSTV[®] has a Nigerian subscribers' base that outstrips that of any other African market. There are probably more English premiership football (soccer) fans in Nigeria viewing costly pay-per-view telecast of league matches than any other African society. A review of those who make post-match fan phone-in via Skype and other social media platforms to SKYY[®] TV networks (which relay these matches) shows that Nigeria fans who utilize these facilities through their subscription to DSTV outstrips all other African States. The significance of Nigeria in South Africa's trade relations rekindles undeniably even in the midst of alleged xenophobic attacks on Nigerian citizens in Johannesburg during the first quarter of 2015 which led to some diplomatic rows between the two African giants. In the end, Jacob Zuma, was among the first presidents, who attended the democracy-day swearing-in (coronation) ceremony of Nigeria's newly-elected president Muhammadu Buhari on May, 29, 2015. Within the West African sub-region, regional economic activities revolve around Nigeria's widening trans-border consumer and oil and gas markets. It is impossible to imagine a luxuriant West African economy without Nigeria in the centerpiece. Nigeria car consumers continue to sustain the Cotonou motor-shop for used vehicles (imported from France and other European countries) estimated in 2010 at a yearly value of over FCFA 162 898 270 (Walther, Tenikue and Kuepié, 2012). This phenomenon also explains the increasingly heavy motor traffic at Nigeria's S?m? border with the Benin Republic. The moral and physical support from major West African sub-regional actors like Ghana, Togo and Liberia toward ensuring peaceful credible elections during the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria was massive. Outgoing Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) chairman, Ghana's president John Dramani Mahama made several trips to Nigeria during the period prior to the 2015 general elections at the height of the political tension between the two dominant contestants – then incumbent Goodluck Jonathan and opposition leader Muhammadu Buhari. Mahama's trips were apparently to appeal to the conscience of the seemingly desperate duo and Ghana played a significant role in facilitating the now highly celebrated peace-accord originally brokered by former UN Secretary-General and Ghana's-owned Kofi Annan in January 2015. The accord was later reaffirmed by the two major candidates who signed a reassurance agreement forty-eight hours before the election –this time at the instance of local statesmen notably Senator Ben Obi. Yet, the African economic interest is only but a single dimension of the high stakes of the international community in Nigeria's peaceful and credible elections. The socio-cultural and security dimensions are by no means less significant. For instance, Nigeria's current multi-frontal confrontation with militants especially in the Niger Delta oil-rivers/creeks and the Boko Haram insurgents in the Northeast provides handful agenda for security concern for the African region as a

whole, let alone the West African sub-region. Barely twenty-four hours after Buhari's investiture, Boko Haram made a quadruple strike at various public locations in Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria's northeast apparently to register their determinism to challenge the Nigerian State in their terrorist campaigns. Further to this, Nigeria's neighbors, particularly Cameroon, Chad and Niger earlier in 2015 made several independent strikes on Boko Haram insurgents, albeit uninvited by the Nigerian authorities. These neighbors need no further sermonizing on the dangers of a Nigerian loss in its fight against Boko Haram. Thus, during the build-up period to the 2015 general elections, her neighbors were very concerned advocates of peaceful and credible elections in Nigeria even when some of these States are not typically stable and resilient democracies on their own. At the end of the election exercise, Nigerian national dance troupe were among the international entertainers celebrating Muhammadu Buhari's coronation gala nite in Abuja. What all these signal is that Nigerian neighbors, like other actors have high stakes in Nigeria's credible elections and peaceful democratic transitions.

But beyond Africa, electoral integrity in Nigeria means a lot to several key global players. President Barack Obama of the United States of America was in the frontline among other key international players advocating for Nigeria's use of the more modern technological resource – the electronic Card Reader machine - in the nation's 2015 general elections. During the immediate pre-election period, the psychological impact on Nigeria is enormous, from the intense purveyance on the Nigerian and international media, of Obama's advocacy encapsulated in television footage on the appropriateness and relevance of the use of the card readers in the 2015 Nigeria's general election. The purveyance in some respects further depicts Western concerns about peaceful and credible

elections in Nigeria, if only to keep the democratic governance platform in the latter running. In one instance when Nigeria attempted to change the initial scheduled date of the presidential election from 14 February to 28 March 2015, the US government in a statement credited to its Secretary of State John Kerry, averred very strongly indicating its displeasure over the postponement saying: "political interference with INEC is unacceptable... the United States underscores the importance of ensuring that there are no further delay ... as I reaffirmed when I visited Lagos last month, we support a free, transparent, and credible electoral process in Nigeria and renew our calls on all candidates, their supporters, and Nigerian citizens to maintain calm and reject election-related violence." (Tukur, 2015)

The surge in the US concern about Nigeria's electoral integrity is interesting. For prior to the 2015 election in Nigeria, little can be said of the tangible outputs of Nigeria's relations with the United States of America in terms of development assistance in spite of the flurry of diplomatic exchanges between Abuja and Washington DC during the past decade. Of the less than one percent of the US GDP that goes into Official Development Assistance, (The Burgen Project, 2014) not much of it, up to the fringes of the Boko Haram upsurge reached Nigeria among the African beneficiaries of the US Foreign aid programs. In fact, apart from Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya which rank amongst the highest African beneficiaries of US foreign aid, Nigeria had hardly enjoyed meaningful assistance from the US. On an overall rating of international support towards the 2015 general elections, little is known of further physical or other technical support from the United States of America as would otherwise have been envisaged. This is a reflection of a probable USA low rating of Nigeria on credible governance. But it is difficult to interpret what other persons have in mind. Yet, Nigeria's relations with the US remained solidly on

course over the years, very cordial. For Britain and the EU States, continuing technical support for Nigeria's electoral integrity is fundamental as expressed in the enormous Western presence in Nigeria, in both physical and technical terms, not only in the 2015 general election but also in previous elections in 2007 and 2011. This has evidenced Europe's continued interest in the democratic growth and development in Nigeria.

Nigeria's growing profile in the international economy is sufficient signal for further foreign interests in the Nigerian State. Goldman Sachs had projected that Nigeria could even enlist in the world's 12th largest economies by 2050 with an estimated GDP per capita of US\$4,640 ahead of Italy's US\$2,950 provided it maintains its 8 percent GDP growth rate it achieved in and around the year 2010 (Soberlook,2012, Skyscrapercity,2015). It quickly suggests, whether rightly or wrongly that international interest in Nigeria's peaceful transition in the 2015 electoral exercise is fundamentally economic amongst other considerations.

The country's thorny oil and gas economy suffering severe reverses from the vagaries caused by the unpredictable international oil price regime in the 2013-2015 period has been further seriously impaired by the unending Niger Delta crisis, as the multinational oil companies (MNOCs) continue to wind down operations in most of the fields in the region due to unfavorable and insecure business environment created by militant scuttles, thereby complementing the challenges created by bad governance in the Nigerian State. These twin economic-cum-security evils undeniably had attracted significant international interests to the subject matter of Nigeria's peaceful democratic transition and particularly stimulated a great call for (albeit investment in) its electoral integrity. The Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC), records no less than 107 independent

observer groups including twenty-five international observer missions present in Nigeria to monitor and report on the conduct of the 2015 general elections (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2015). Of these, the EU observers were particularly very active and phenomenally outspoken during the elections. There were a total of 90 election observers from the EU EOM (EU Election Observation Mission) comprising of officials drawn from 26 EU Member-States as well as Norway and Switzerland.

In its final 58-page report on the Nigeria 2015 general election, posted on the mission's website, the EU observers are the most profound and articulate: "now is the time for the new office holders, legislative bodies, INEC and other stakeholders to demonstrate their commitment to electoral reform. Legislation can be further developed and each off-cycle election is an opportunity for implementing improved practices. In this regard, we have made 30 recommendations that would help provide for improved future electoral processes." (EU EOM,2015)

European interest is instructively phenomenal on several grounds. Firstly, European trade in the sub-region is growing especially in the service sub-sectors. An insurance company chief executive has acknowledged how electoral integrity especially as demonstrated in the 2015 general elections has promoted these growths. The Chairman of AXA Insurance®, Jean-Laurent Granier was quoted as declaring that the country's free and fair elections will even boost the economy of the entire African continent. His company which has major stakes in Africa Re,® a major key-player in African insurance business, is delighted to see a peaceful election in Nigeria when the CEO disposed:

"We are not making a political interpretation of this outcome. This reinforces and

confirms our will to grow in Nigeria. The stakes ... will allow AXA to get more complete understanding on insurance markets' evolution across the whole continent. We are selecting places where we want to go because we think a country has a critical size and is ready for development of insurance" (Nnabugwu,2015)

Aside the EU and America, the growing volume of Chinese trade with Africa, and particularly its investment in Nigeria especially in several technical sectors of the economy illustrates a wider dimension of international economic interests in Nigeria at this time. Growing Chinese investments in Africa at a time when EU and American commercial relationships seem to plummet is a subject of an apparently larger contemporary dilation beyond the space that this paper offers. But it may just suffice to state here that the Chinese permeation of virtually all productive sectors of the African economy from construction, manufacturing, and transportation to telecommunications, tourism and entertainment is instructive. From the Eastern and Southern Africa where the Chinese footholds have virtually overtaken EU and American economic presence in the aforesaid spheres of foreign investment in Africa, the fast-growing pace of Chinese economic expansion in the West African sub-region cannot also be overstated.

In Nigeria alone, it is on record that the volume of bilateral trade between Nigeria and China had grown tremendously from a lowly US\$2 billion in 2002, to a yearly US\$13 billion by 2012 "with bright prospects of its further

growth." (Nigerian Trade Hub News,2013). In 2016, with a whopping US\$6Billion Chinese loan to fund domestic infrastructure, the Nigerian government under Muhammadu Buhari intends to exploit all relevant, and perhaps more convenient, sources of foreign assistance in an effort to boost economic growth and shore up the already-battered value of the Nigerian currency – the Naira. Geoffrey Onyeama, Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Buhari's new cabinet believes the loan process is as easy as the regime thinks: "it is a credit that is on the table as soon as we identify the projects... won't need an agreement to be signed; it is just to identify the projects and we access it," (ThisDay,3 April, 2016). Secondly, the issue of international immigrants from Africa and other parts of the world into Europe and America also accounts for the widening interests of the international community in African affairs. Western governments currently facing several immigration challenges at home have published their determination beyond every reasonable doubt to keep the flow of migrant (especially illegal) populations seeking economic or political asylum in Europe and America at minimum. In one of its policy documents for instance, the EU's clear intention "to prevent and reduce irregular immigration, in particular by means of an effective return policy, with due respect for fundamental rights" was avowed (European Union Parliament, 2016). The document also defines an illegal immigrant as an irregular migrant "who comes to the EU without a proper visa or permit or who overstays after the expiry of their visa." (European Union Parliament, 2016). Italy particularly has faced an undaunted struggle by immigrants sailing against all odds through the Mediterranean into its shores from North

Africa. The current migrants' crisis pervading the whole of Europe from asylum seekers from the Syrian conflict (and being joined by other economic migrants from other parts of the world), supports the strong desire of the West to check the influx of migrant populations. This has underscored the Western interests in promoting global peaceful, credible, stable and good governance especially in democracies/economies at the peripheries as these would encourage populations to stay back at their respective home countries. For a sprawling democracy as Nigeria housing over an estimated 2015 population of 173.6 million representing about one-fifth of Africa's estimated 1.03 billion (World Population Review,2015), the sustained concern of the international community on Nigeria's peaceful and credible democratic transition goes beyond the mere rhetoric of sustaining democracy in Nigeria.

A peaceful transition through an electoral process with a high integrity in Nigeria is a realistic ticket through which the international community, near or far, would access the several global economic, social and security dreams and aspiration towards Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Kimenyi has rightly observed in the publication of the Brookings Institute, that: "As the most populous country and largest economy in Africa, Nigeria is the most important country on the continent ... In addition, entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria is bound to translate into better economic performance with positive spillover effects to other countries".

It is, in the final analysis undeniable, that the international community, whether spoken or unspoken, had "much at stake during the 2015 general elections" (Hedlund,2015)

Conclusion

In the course of our analysis, one argument that we have stridently sustained is the fact that Western and other international players made significant contributions to the promotion of electoral integrity in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. This we believe, is a significant variable in not only attaining and sustaining peaceful democratic transition in Nigeria but also in protecting the diverse economic, security, cultural and political interests of the various international players towards Nigeria. The successful use of the E-card readers in the conduct of the 2015 Nigeria general elections represents a major milestone though in the history of, and effort towards deepening, electoral integrity in the Nigerian State. It can also be argued that the massive visible activism of key players of the international community, typified by the strong Western advocacy at the time, helped immensely to mobilize popular domestic support for the use of the card reader during the elections. We believe that the Western support locates, not only beyond the mere rhetoric of altruism and the explanations of providing a strong international support for Nigeria in a global development partnership, but also beyond the argument of promoting democracy and democratization in the African continent. (Olsen,1998). It is often being believed and expressed that the hope for the sustenance of democracy in Africa lies outside the borders of the continent since admissibly, that was its source of the wave of political liberalization in the 1990s (Amuwo,2001). Helping to support new democracies especially in Africa (whether by technical designs –as in electoral aids- or by direct military fiats) may make an attractive foreign policy argument for Western players in the continent. However, what may still remain

unanswered is the question on whether liberal interventionism –as in the domineering role of France in parts of Francophone-Africa especially Algeria (1996) and Niger (1991) - could help foist or foster liberal democracy (Pickering & Peceny, 2006). The support of the international actors during the 2015 general elections represents essentially the strong, realistic and multi-spherical economic, security, social and perhaps political concern of these actors towards not only Nigeria in the immediate run, but also Africa in a wider long-term spectrum. “A freer and more democratic world helps create a virtuous circle of improved security, stronger economic growth, and durable alliances—all of which better serve the long-term interests of the United States.”(Center for American Progress,2016). The card reader innovation is now also strongly believed as having come to stay in Nigeria.

Policy makers in Nigeria especially the newly elected government of Muhammadu Buhari, to which much expectation and hope of change is reposed, should underscore the need to deliver according to the promised programs of the new regime on anti-corruption, infrastructural development (especially in power and the oil and gas service sectors) and employment generation among other considerations. A primary item on the agenda of the new regime should be the conscious program of recovering and repatriating the millions of petrodollars and tax-payers' monies believably stashed away in foreign banks by their hitherto “democratic” and military predecessors. It would appear that the regime is already succeeding in its early days in making some frantic moves to recover public funds stolen by erstwhile statesmen, back to the public till. Ironically, most of these former statesmen professed a

frivolous, yet elusive dogma of “promoting dividend of democracy” to the people in the countryside (Okesola, 2013). There is also the need to improve and sustain the electoral reforms by addressing some of the operational challenges observed during the use of the electronic card readers (such as the occasional failures of the machines due to power and network issues) in the 2015 general elections. Besides, the judiciary in Nigeria should not only be independent as its professes but also be active in dispensing reprieves to aggrieved parties seeking its services in postelection legal contests. By such character, it would be promoting the rule of law and enhancing its position as an independent democratic organ of the Nigerian State if it should become more relevant among other States in the Comity of Nations. Consequently, the local and international profile of Nigeria, among developing nations, will be raised even higher on both the ladder of electoral integrity and peaceful democratic transition.

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