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**INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC) AND ELECTION
MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THE 2015 AND 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS****TAIYE A. AWOTUNDE**

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Abstract

All over the world, democracy and by extension, election has served as a peaceful means of changing leaders. This is unlike military rule which has long been regarded as aberration. In Nigeria, the elective principle was introduced in 1923 by the Clifford's Constitution. Post-independence elections have resulted to crisis, for instance the 1964 general election crisis. Subsequent elections too have not been devoid of violence. However, there was a remarkable reduction with regard to the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. The paper examined the way and manner the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) managed the 2015 and 2019 general elections from a comparative perspective. The paper observed that there exist remarkable differences and similarities in INEC's management of the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The study utilised the rational choice theory as theoretical framework. The methodology adopted was qualitative and the study made use of secondary sources of data like textbooks, magazines, newspapers and on-line materials. The study found out that there were remarkable similarities and differences between the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The study recommends more political enlightenment for the electorates. It also recommends that the federal government should provide adequate logistics during elections, in order to have credible elections.

Keywords: Election management, democracy, violence, rational choice

Introduction

Globally, there is the growing influence of election as means of having people in different political offices. Elections have also proven to be a means by which leaders are made accountable to their followers, while also promoting democratic values. As opined by Bello (2008:13), "elections could be said to be the heart of any democratic political process". This is based on the fact that the issue of how and when leaders are to be elected to govern the people is important (2003:136). There is also no doubting the fact that the electoral process has witnessed tremendous improvement over the years, right from the period of the Greek City States. In Nigeria, democratic values were promoted among the Igbos in the pre-colonial period, however, it was the colonial government that introduced the elective principle in 1923 under the Clifford Constitution. The last election to be conducted in Nigeria in the colonial era was the 1959 general elections.

In the First Republic (1960 – 1966), two alliances were formed to contest the elections in 1964. These were the United People's Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) (Bello, 2008). Nigeria operated the presidential system of government and a multi-party system. In the 1979 and 1983 elections, the NPN emerged victorious with the highest number of seats in

the Gubernatorial, National Assembly and the Presidential elections (Bello, 2008). The Third Republic was aborted by the military regime of President Ibrahim Babangida. In the Fourth Republic, elections were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. These elections helped to consolidate democracy in the country. Existing studies on the management of elections in Nigeria centres on the elections that were held before the 2015 general elections. A large number of the existing studies were not also of comparative in nature.

The main objective of this paper is to examine how INEC as an electoral body has managed the 2015 and 2019 general elections from a comparative perspective. The specific objectives are (i) to examine the differences in the management of the 2015 and the 2019 general elections; (ii) to examine the similarities of the management of the 2015 and the 2019 general elections. The methodology adopted for the work is qualitative and it is also descriptive in nature. The paper involves the use of secondary sources like textbooks, newspapers, magazines and monographs.

Statement of the Problem

The role of election in contemporary democratic practice cannot be overemphasized. Elections serve as means of integrating a community and at the same time enhancing their choice of leaders that they desire to govern them, while bequeathing on them the desired freedom.

However, in Nigeria; election management is a major challenge facing the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) because of population and terrain of some communities and the issue of do or die affair among the politicians which had resulted to ballot snatching, vote buying, and outright violence during elections. This in turn results to low voter-turn-out during elections.

Theoretical Framework

The theory on which this work is premised is the rational choice theory. The rational choice theory is a theory that sees social phenomena based on assumption that the actor will be rational or is always rational in his choice (Coleman, 1990; Hachter and Kanazawa, 1997 in Sato, 2013). In a similar vein, Ogu (2013) opined that the imperative of rational choice theory otherwise known as choice theory is that when people are faced with numerous courses of action, they choose a course of action they feel will have the best overall outcome. With rationality an individual acts as if he or she is balancing costs against benefits as a way of arriving at action that will maximise to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantage (Friedman, 1953 in Ogu, 2013).

Rational choice theory has been applied to the field of political science. There is the belief that voters during elections try to be rational in their choice among the candidates for elections. The rational choice theory originated in the late 18th century based on the work of Cesare Baccaria (Wright, 2017). With respect to the field of political science, it has been perceived to have developed as part of behavioural revolution in America in the 1950s and 1960s. Anthony Downs (1957 in Ogu, 2013) applied it for the first time to the study of electoral behaviour. This enabled him to see the rationality in voting for candidates.

Rational choice theory has its own strength and weaknesses. A strength of the rational choice theory is that, it is a clear and straightforward theory, easy to comprehend and also gives room for evaluation and consideration of other decisions (Chrusciel, 2017). The individual is thus able to come up with a decision that is satisfactory to him or her.

A weakness of the rational choice theory is that individual may not be able to come up with good decisions when faced with challenge that has to do with inadequate information and uncertainty (Ogu, 2013). This implies that the individual is ill-equipped so cannot make good decisions.

The relevance of the rational theory to this paper thus is that the electorate in making choices among alternative candidates presented by political parties endeavour to be rational in their decisions.

Conceptual Clarification

In attempting a clarification of concepts, the concepts that are to be dealt with are election and election management.

Election: Election can be perceived as a means by which the citizenry or electors in a country choose those that will represent them in government. As Egwu (2007) posited, since the inception of the modern state, election has offered an avenue through which the people exercise the right to determine their rulers. In other words, election is a procedure by which preferences of a particular kind are aggregated (Mackenzia (1967) in Egwu, 2007). In addition, as Jega (2014) also posited, credible elections make leaders to be accountable and responsive to the yearning and aspiration of the people from whom they derive their mandate to govern. This implies that elections help to foster good governance in a country.

Election Management: As observed by Tom and Desmond (2008), an election management body "is the administrative agency responsible for organizing and conducting elections in a political system". It can further be seen as an independent and unbiased umpire that has the responsibility of conducting and organizing elections in a state (Ton and Desmond, 2008). The election management body oversees the conduct of elections with a view to having credible elections. Election management often calls for transparency, hard work and integrity on the part of those who are in charge of the elections. Election management refers to the way and manner election is being organised in a state. As asserted by Bello (2008), "election is being managed in Nigeria through an Electoral Act, the latest is that of 2006 as well as the Provisions in the Constitution of which the latest is the 1999 Constitution". Bello (2008) posited further that the management of election in Nigeria is expected to be as follows: (i) Registration of voters and the display of copies of voters list and other necessary things, (ii) fixing of the day of election and appointment of electoral officers who are expected to take oath of loyalty, (iii) registration of political parties and monitoring of the parties, given of grants to the political parties, (iv) the period of filling petition and notification of election tribunal and appeal.

In Nigeria, the election management body has undergone a lot of reforms and reorganisations in order to make it efficient and effective. Some of the reforms have been influenced significantly by the government in power sat different periods. Below are the ratings of the post-independent election management bodies in Nigeria.

Table 1: List of Election Management Bodies in Nigeria

Head of Electoral Commission	Name of Electoral Commission	Election Conducted	Rating
Eyo Esua	Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)	1964 Elections	Below Average
Michael Ani	Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)	1979 General Elections	Below Average
Victor Ovie Whiskey	Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)	1983 General Elections	Poor
Eme Awa	National Electoral Commission (NEC)	Conducted election on zero party basis	Average
Humphrey Nwosu	National Electoral Commission (NEC)	1993 Presidential Election	Below Average
Okon Uya	National Electoral Commission (NEC)	No election was conducted	Poor
Ephraim Akpata	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	1999 General Election	Average
Abel Guobadia	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	2003 General Election	Below Average
Maurice Iwu	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	2007 Elections	Poor
Attahiru Jega	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	2011 and 2015 General Elections	Above Average

Source: Newswatch Times Magazine May, 2015 (Arranged in the order above by the Author).

Comparison of the 2015 and 2019 General Elections

In comparing the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria, it would be seen that there exist remarkable differences and similarities between the two general elections.

Youth Participation: An overview of the 2015 election would reveal the fact that youth participation have been mostly reduced or relegated to a supportive role, as demonstrated by National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) support for a particular presidential candidate (Martins, 2015). The youths did not come out forcefully to contest in the elections and were not even appointed to political positions after the elections. In the 2019 general elections, youths were proactive as they performed more than a supportive role for a party or candidates that contested the elections.

Management of the Elections: The 2011 and 2015 General Elections took place under different managers. The 2015 general elections were conducted by INEC under the chairmanship of Professor Attahiru M. Jega. He (Jega) served as the 11th Chairman of the electoral management body in Nigeria. The then chairman of INEC has been perceived as somebody who exhibited great administrative tact as the chairman of the commission "considering the way he doused the tension that came up before the general elections, and his impressive conduct of the 2011 and 2015 general elections by which he was rated above average (Adurotoye, 2015). The 2019 general election was anchored by Professor Mahmood Yakubu who is also an academic. Professor Mahmood Yakubu was appointed to office by President Muhammadu Buhari on 21 October,

2015.

Propagation of hate speeches: Hate speeches became rampart in the 2015 general elections. This was propagated mainly through the use of social media, and the print media. As observed by Sule, Sani, Mat (2018), social media like facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp were used in the build-up to 2015 general election. Apart from their use to propagate hate speeches, social media were also used by two organisations, Betalsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) and ANAP Foundation to sample the electorates in relation to their preferred candidates (Sule, Sani and Mat, 2018). Realizing the enormity of the use of hate speeches, the Federal Government resorted to sensitizing the citizenry about the effects of hate speeches. The phenomena of hate speeches were also noticed during the campaigns, while political thugs operated in some communities.

With regards to the 2019 general elections, while the use of the social media like whatsapp and twitter was on the increase, hate speeches reduced drastically. The campaigns focused more on issues such as the economy, security, and unemployment rather than personality issues, despite the fact that 14 political parties contested the elections.

Similarities between the 2015 and 2019 General Elections

Low Voters Turnout: Both the 2015 and 2019 general elections recorded low voters' turnout as noticed in the presidential elections. For the 2015 presidential elections, this can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Drop-off in voters' participation at various stages of the electoral process (2015 presidential election)

Category	Number of People	Percentage
Eligible voters	87,784,373	49.5% of total population
Total number of registered voters	67,422,005	76.8% of eligible voters
Total number of PVCs distributed	56,350,776	83.6% of registered voters
Total number of accredited voters	31,746,490	56.3% of voters with a PVC
Total number of votes cast	29,432,083	92.71% of accredited voters

Source: 2015 Election Observation Report – Page 13 [www.iri.org/2015%20nigeria%](http://www.iri.org/2015%20nigeria%20report)

In the 2015 general election, less than 5% of the voters turned out to vote in the presidential election. The International Republican Institute (IRI), as election observers, noted a situation where many polling units appeared to be busy, but when the observers compared thetotal number of voters that registered at each polling unit with the number of voters that were accredited and the number of ballots cast at the polling unit, it showed that turnout was low. The above table shows the drop off at various levels of the electoral process in Nigeria. As could be seen, 67,422,005 registered to vote while 29,432,083 people voted in the presidential election. This indicates that 33.53 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the 2015 presidential election. The poor turnout had been attributed to some reasons like fear of violence. There was the complaint by some voters that they could not collect voter's card before the election thereby resulting in their disenfranchisement (Adigun et al, 2015). Some others were discouraged by the stress involved in spending long time at the polling stations.

In the same way, the 2019 general elections also recorded low voter's turnout as could be seen in the presidential election. In the table below, Alfred and Ejalonibu (2019), presented the discrepancy observed between accredited voters, votes cast and the percentage of voters' turnout to registered voters.

Table 3: Differences between Accredited Voters, Votes Cast and Percentage of Voters' Turnout in the Presidential Election held on 23rd February, 2019

S/No.	State	No. of Registered Voters	Total Accredited Voters	Total Votes Cast	Diff. between Accredited votes & votes cast	Percentage of Voter Turnout to Registered Voters
1.	Abia	1,932,892	361,561	344,471	17,090	18%
2.	Adamawa	1,973,088	874,920	860,756	14,164	43%
3.	Akwa-Ibom	2,119,727	696,677	605,140	91,537	28.5%
4.	Anambra	2,447,996	675,273	625,035	50,238	25.5%
5.	Bauchi	2,462,843	1,075,330	1,061,955	13,375	43.1%
6.	Bayelsa	923,182	344,237	335,856	8,381	36.3%
7.	Benue	2,480,131	786,069	763,872	22,197	31%
8.	Borno	2,315,956	987,290	955,205	32,085	41.2%
9.	Cross River	1,517,289	461,033	446,046	14,987	29.3%
10.	Delta	2,845,274	891,647	882,254	9,393	31%
11.	Ebonyi	1,459,933	391,747	379,394	12,353	26%
12.	Edo	2,210,534	604,915	599,228	5,687	27.1%
13.	Ekiti	909,967	395,741	393,709	2,032	43.2%
14.	Enugu	1,944,016	452,765	451,063	1,702	23.2%
15.	FCT	1,344,856	467,784	451,498	16,286	33.5%
16.	Gombe	1,394,393	604,240	580,649	23,591	41.6%
17.	Imo	2,272,293	585,741	542,777	42,964	24%
18.	Jigawa	2,111,106	1,171,801	1,149,922	21,879	54.4%
19.	Kaduna	3,932,492	1,757,868	1,709,005	48,863	43.4%
20.	Kano	5,457,747	2,006,410	1,964,751	41,659	36%
21.	Katsina	3,230,230	1,628,865	1,619,185	9,680	50.1%
22.	Kebbi	1,806,231	835,238	803,755	31,483	44.5%
23.	Kogi	1,646,350	570,773	553,496	17,277	33.6%
24.	Kwara	1,406,457	489,482	486,254	3,228	34.6%
25.	Lagos	6,570,291	1,196,490	1,156,590	39,900	17.6%
26.	Nasarawa	1,617,786	613,720	599,399	14,321	37.0%
27.	Niger	2,390,035	911,964	896,976	14,988	37.0%
28.	Osun	2,375,003	613,397	605,938	7,459	25.5%
29.	Ondo	1,822,346	598,586	586,827	11,759	32.2%
30.	Osun	1,680,498	732,984	731,882	1,102	43.5%
31.	Oyo	2,934,107	905,007	891,080	13,927	30.3%
32.	Plateau	2,480,455	1,074,042	1,062,862	11,180	43%

33.	Rivers	3,215,273	678,167	666,585	11,582	20.7%
34.	Sokoto	1,903,166	950,107	925,940	24,167	48.6%
35.	Taraba	1,777,105	756,111	741,564	14,547	42%
36.	Yobe	1,365,913	601,059	586,137	14,922	43%
37.	Zamfara	1,717,128	616,168	597,224	18,944	35%
Total		84,004,084	28,632,225	27,882,398	750,929	33.1%

Source: Alfred and Ejalonibu, 2019.

From the table above, it would be seen that the total number of registered voters in all the states of the Nigerian Federation, and the Federal Capital Territory was 84,004,084. The total votes cast was 27,882,398 (33.1%) - percentage of voters' turnout to registered voters (INEC in Alfred & Ejalonibu, 2019). This demonstrated a great disparity vis-à-vis previous elections, since 1979 which were (1979 – 42.5%, 1999 – 52.6%, 2003 – 70%, 2011 – 53.4% and 2015 – 38.4%) as observed by Alfred and Ejalonibu (2019).

Shift in Election Dates: The helmsmen of INEC in the 2015 and 2019 elections respectively shifted the election dates. The independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the leadership of Professor Attahiru Jega announced a shift in the 2015 general election from February 14 (Presidential and National Assembly) and February 28 (Governorship and House of Assembly) to March 28 and April 11, 2015 respectively (Tukur, 2015). The postponement was at the instance of security agencies indication that they would not be available on the previously chosen dates, because of their intention to commence a six-week special operation against the Boko Haram insurgency scheduled for the North Eastern part of Nigeria (Tukur, 2015). Though Jega's Commission was not coerced by any individual or group to postpone the elections, but his concern for the lives of about 700,000 workers that would be utilized for the elections prompted his decision. The decision was also taken in order to avoid poor outcome.

In the same way, the 2019 general elections were postponed though, in this case, it was few hours to the election time. The current Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Mahmood Yakubu attributed this postponement for one week to logistics and operational plan issues (Toromade, 2019). There was the issue of bad weather which affected flight operations, and consequently delivery of materials (Fabiye, Olorok and Baiyewu, 2019). Various groups including Civil Society Organisations condemned the postponement. The February 16 Presidential and National Assembly Elections were re-scheduled for Saturday February 23, instead of February 16. The Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections were held on March 9, instead of March 2, 2019.

Card Reader: Another similarity between the 2015 and 2019 elections was in the use of Card Reader and Permanent Voter's Card. The two were introduced for the first time in Nigeria in 2015 for the purpose of conducting the 2015 general elections. It has been observed that they were new innovations and approaches that gave the 2015 general elections credibility (Adigun et al, 2015).

Logistics: There was improvement in logistics as per the 2015 and 2019 general elections. In respect of 2019 general elections, INEC set up a separate ad hoc logistic committee in order to relieve the operations committee of the stress of handling logistics and enhance efficiency in the movement of materials (Ugbade, 2019). To forestall hitches in the elections, the commission commenced the delivery of the critical materials to the States early so that all materials will get to locations about nine to ten days to the election (Ugbade, 2019). With regards to the 2015 general elections, there is consensus among election observers that the performance of INEC has improved considerably in terms of transparency and logistics (Adibe, 2015). That is, steps were

taken to ensure that elections were devoid of rigging and logistics did not serve as impediment to its conduct.

Vote Buying: Both the 2015 and 2019 general elections cannot be exonerated of corrupt activities. For instance, as analysts asserted, in the 2015 election, Governors used their security vote to buy votes from the electorates. This was also the situation under the 2019 general elections. In Benue State for instance, irate youths thwarted EFCC interception of 'Ghana-Must-Go bags' that were filled with naira notes meant for vote buying (Babalola & Emmanuel, 2019). It was also realized that there was massive and outright vote buying in Majeand Suleja in Niger State. Women were giving five hundred naira each while youths were offered two hundred and fifty naira each which they rejected and instead requested for one thousand naira each (Asishana, 2019). The issue of vote buying is not however limited or peculiar to a particular part of the country. The politicians were catching on the high rate of poverty among the electorates to perpetrate vote buying.

Election Management Body: In both the 2015 and 2019 general elections, INEC as an institutional mechanism for the management of elections had the responsibility to undertake and supervise the various elections to political offices. INEC also monitored political campaigns, and established rules and regulations by which campaigns will be monitored; conduct voter education and control referendum if necessary in accordance with the provision of the constitution (Adurotoye, 2015).

Consultation: Another similarity between the 2015 and 2019 elections was regular consultation with political parties as election time approach. For instance, political parties were intimated with the idea of card reader and permanent voters' card to which there were oppositions from among the different political parties.

Cost: In terms of cost, it has been discovered that in the year 2015, the cost of election was N120 billion, while in 2019, the cost had increased to N242.2 billion (Alfred and Ejalonibu, 2019). Some reasons have been attributed to this disparity. In the first place, there is the inflation of contract sums and mismanagement of public funds bequeathed to INEC (Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre in Alfred and Ejalonibu, 2019). There is also "the ever rising cost of voter registration, provision of electoral logistics, deployment of sensitive and non-sensitive materials for elections which gulp huge amount of amount of money are critical issues that should be looked into, so as to fashion out a way in delivering credible polls that will not cost the country huge amount of moiney (Alfred and Ejalonibu, 2019:23). Below is a table of costs of Nigeria's election from 1999 to 2019.

Table 4: Costs of Elections in Nigeria (1999 – 2019)

S/N	Year	Cost of Election (₦)
1.	1999	32 Billion
2.	2003	60.5 Billion
3.	2007	74.2 Billion
4.	2011	89.2 Billion
5.	2015	120 Billion
6.	2019	242.2 Billion

Source: Alfred and Ejalonibu, 2019

From the above table, it would be seen that the figures relate to elections in the Fourth Republic and the cost of elections kept on increasing from one election year to another, it increased from

N120 Billion to N242.2 Billion in 2019, an increase of over a hundred per cent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As could be seen from the foregoing, election exists as an important means of enhancing democracy and also ensuring democratic consolidation in a developing country like Nigeria. Its efficacy however depends on the way it is managed by the existing electoral body. The electoral act of 2006 has provided a means of promoting a vibrant electoral process. It would also be seen that the 2015 and 2019 elections have remarkable differences and similarities between them.

It is hereby recommended that the Federal Government should assist INEC in the area of logistics in subsequent elections in order to avoid shift in election dates, like it was experienced during the preparations for the 2015 and 2019 general elections. This can be done by INEC having its own means of transportation on land and sea and hiring of sound vehicles for the movement of materials and personnel under tight security.

INEC officials should also be well remunerated so that they would be able to avoid the temptation of receiving kickbacks from desperate politicians who are out to win at all costs.

Lastly, there should be drastic reduction in the salaries and allowances of political office holders in Nigeria. This would make their offices less attractive, and as a result, only those that have genuine interest of the people at heart will be willing to contest in elections and not those that want to occupy offices for pecuniary reasons. This would help to ensure that politics is not seen as a do or die affair.

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