

Electoral Verdicts: Incumbent President Defeated for Re-election in Nigeria

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Abstract: The history of elections in Nigeria at the presidential level has shown that incumbent presidents always have a political advantage over their challengers. However, history was made when the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan was defeated by the main opposition candidate, Mohammed Buhari in the 2015 presidential elections. In this article, I examine the determining factors in the political discourse that were responsible for the defeat of the incumbent president. Contrary to the insinuation in some quarters that the incumbent president was defeated due to ethnic gang up and the compromised of the electoral empire. I find from the political discourse that the high level of insecurity in the Northeast, institutionalized corruption in the incumbent president's administration, united opposition alliance and the mismanagement of the Nigerian economy were the salient factors responsible for the defeat of an incumbent president in Nigeria.

Keywords: Presidential Election, Incumbency Advantage, Incumbent President, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The history of elections in Nigeria at the presidential level has shown that incumbent presidents have what it take to win re-election. For instance, Tafawa Balewa was the head of government in 1960 and got re-elected 1964, Shehu Shagari became the first executive president 1979 and got re-elected 1983, same as Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 and 2003. The incumbency advantage has been playing a pivotal role in presidential elections in Nigeria and that was what gave the former Chairman of the People Democratic Party (PDP), Vincent Ogbulafor in 2014 the impetus to predict that the PDP ruling federal government will rule Nigeria for sixty years. He was relying on the power of incumbency which presumably can allow the PDP to be in power for sixty years. The PDP federal government has been in power since 1999 after the installation of democratic governance not until the electoral victory of Mohammed Buhari which marked the first time an opposition candidate beat an incumbent president since independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 (Kay and Onu, 2015).

Many Nigerians also have the assumption that it is difficult for an opposition candidate to defeat an incumbent President. For instance, prior to the 2015 presidential election, some Nigerians have predicted that the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan will defeat his arch rival, Mohammed Buhari absolutely this is because they believe the presidency is a powerful institution that has the political power to manipulate the electoral process to its favour (see Eurusia Research Group Analysis on the 2015 presidential elections for details). That is why Momoh described the manipulation of the electoral process by sitting presidents in Nigeria as 'Presidential Authoritarianism' (Momoh, 2005).

However, Bayo Olupohunda, a columnist with the Punch Newspaper was one of the very few Nigerians who foresee the imminent defeat of an incumbent president for the first time in the political history of Nigeria (See Punch Newspaper with the title Politics 2015: GEJ Might Lose As an Incumbent, And Here's Why).

The nature of the incumbency power has been of concern to political analysts. Bonneau asserts that "the nature of the incumbency advantage has been the source of much debate in the political literature" (Bonneau, 2005). Political analysts seek to know if the electoral advantage of incumbents is a prerequisite for an electoral victory for an incumbent to be returned to office (ibid).

One unprecedented feature of the 2015 presidential election is that an incumbent president was defeated by the leading opposition candidate for the first time in Nigeria. What can be responsible for the defeat of an incumbent president despite the enormous political advantages at his disposal and by virtue of his status as an incumbent president? In this paper, I examine some of the salient factors in the political discourse that analysts have attributed to the defeat of the Good luck Jonathan, the first incumbent president in Nigeria to be defeated by the main opposition candidate Mohammed Buhari in the 2015 presidential elections.

2. Nature and Structure of Incumbency Advantage

Do incumbents have a higher advantage over their challengers? This discourse continues to vibrate in the field of political science. The nature of incumbency advantage makes them (incumbents) win election as often. However, studies have shown that weak, unpopular and inept incumbents can be defeated by their challengers. Better still, the characteristics of the challenger and financial power can make incumbents be defeated. Other things being equal, “that is, there are certain things candidates can do to increase their chances of defeating an incumbent; by the same token, the incumbent can do certain things to either improve or reduce her chances of winning re-election” (Bonneau, 2005). Scholars have investigated to know if the electoral advantage incumbents have is endogenous to the office they hold or whether the electioneering manoeuvres of the incumbents and their rivals can substantially influence the likelihood that an incumbent will be re-elected (Bonneau, 2005). There are numerous ways for an incumbent to politically gain an advantage (Ansolabehere S. *et al.*, 2000). The incumbent president preparing for elections may develop a variety of strategies, he/she can make the country be productive, be hostiles to his/her main challenger or he/she can create public goods (African Development Bank Group, n.d) Better still, incumbents may woo the electorate with political promises in order to secure their votes during elections (Horiuchi and Leigh, 2009). For instance, in the run-up to the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria, the incumbent president promised to construct the much awaited second river bridge for the benefit of travellers in the southeast and he also promised to establish the first ever cooperative university in the southwest if re-elected into office. Furthermore, the popularity of incumbents may secure them more votes from voters. In addition, an incumbent may face a challenger with a low profile which may give the incumbent sounding victory at the polls (ibid).

Why do incumbents win more often over their challengers? In trying to explain this phenomenon, Brown asserts that in trying to unravel this mystery, scholars have named three structural factors as the reason for the incumbents’ advantage (Brown, 2012).

To begin with, the resources at the disposal of incumbents can easily make them promote themselves to the electorate for acceptability. For example, incumbents can do favours to voters in their constituencies (Fiorina, 1977). By doing these favours, incumbents’ popularities are increased in their districts and enhance their prospects in elections and these have benefited incumbents during elections at the polls (Box-Steffensmeier *et al.*, 2000).

Furthermore, when incumbents square up with stiff oppositional candidates, they rally behind an existing support network (Brown, 2012). For instance, when the incumbent president in 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria found that the popularity of the challenger was growing at an astronomical pace, he aligns with the Christian Association of Nigeria, the royal fathers, and social-cultural organizations for support in order to defeat his high-profile challenger. The incumbents that feel threatened by the rising profile of their challengers can organize a fund-raising campaign from donor lists and volunteer lists in order to mobilize their supporters. Once more, in the last presidential elections in Nigeria, the incumbent president received N21. 27 billion from donors boost to his campaign. On account of the existing support networks of incumbents, they can easily raise money for elections as compared to their challengers (Brown, 2012). Money spent on elections help candidates to win (Benoit and Marsh, 2003). This hypothesis is supported by the works of (Green and Krasno, 1988;1990). However, (Abramowitz, 1988; Ansolabehere and Gerber, 1994; Jacobson, 1978;1980;1990) did not totally subscribe to this hypothesis.

In addition, the ‘scale-off’ effect of a political opponent improves any other structural advantages of incumbency (Cox and Katz, 1996). A challenger may decide not to compete against an incumbent due to the enormous political advantages at the disposal of the incumbent. A case in point was when the former Vice President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar was persuaded to contest against the incumbent president, Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003 presidential elections. Atiku completely rejected the persuasion because he knew of the incumbency advantage at the disposal of the incumbent. Challengers can also withdraw in the cause of elections due to the political weight of an incumbent. In many legislative elections in the United

States, political rivals quit the election race because they do not want to contest against well-established incumbents (Stone *et al.*, 2004).

Structural theories may give absolute reasons behind the re-election of many incumbents despite the fact that voters are displeased with them (Brown, 2012). However, the fact remains going by structural theories that incumbents can be re-elected notwithstanding if they are like by the voters or not (Parker and Davidson, 1979).

3. The Incumbency Advantage and Nigeria Presidential Elections

What is an incumbency advantage? Gordon and Landa define incumbency advantage as “the electoral margin a candidate enjoys on account of her status as an incumbent running for re-election” (Gordon and Landa, 2009). Evidence has shown that incumbent office holders have an electoral advantage over non-incumbents (Gordon and Landa, 2009; Mayhew, 2008; Nwanegbo and Alumona, 2011). This has been found to be true in the presidential elections in Nigeria. After the military handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1979, Shehu Shagari who won the election under the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) conducted a civilian to civilian transition in 1983. The election was massively rigged in favour of the incumbent president. According to Abe (2008) “during the federal elections of 1983, violence was promoted to an unimaginable level where states sponsored thugs, arsonist and assassins unrestrainedly unleashed terror and fear on both opponents and voters alike”. The presidential election in 1983 was won by the incumbent government through a massive rigging and violence which led to the seizure of government by the military (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). The electoral empire and state agents were parts of the state institutions used by the incumbent to get re-elected in the presidential election in 1983. In the words of Awopeju, “in 1983 general elections, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which was to serve as an umpire in the electoral process connived with the ruling party National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to perpetrate election rigging techniques” (Awopeju, 2011).

Constitutional government was restored in Nigeria in 1999 after the military seized power in 1983. Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as the civilian president under the party flagship of the PDP. After the tenure of his first term in office, he organized a civilian to civilian transition in 2003. The outcome of the election favoured the incumbent president. The incumbency factor played a crucial role in the re-election of Obasanjo. The election was rigged just like the previous elections. The Human Right Watch (HRW) labelled the 2003 elections as an ‘abject failure’ (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The European Union election observers described the elections as “far short of basic regulation and international standards for democratic elections” (Awopeju, 2011). The incumbency advantage is taken very seriously in Nigeria. However, recent studies emanating from scholars have established also incumbent disadvantages in some emerging economies (Macdonald, 2014). For more review on this (Uppal, 2009).

The 2007 presidential elections witnessed the democratic transition from one civil government to another. According to Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011) “the 2007 election marked the first time when a third consecutive presidential election took place and the first time when one elected leader succeeded another in the history of Nigeria’s election”. The 2006 Electoral Act provided the framework for the 2007 general election. However, there were some shortcomings of the Electoral Act. Although, the Electoral Act was far better than that of the 2002 Electoral Act. The ball was set rolling for the 2007 presidential election, one unique aspect of the election was that for the first time in the political history of Nigeria, a democratically elected government that served for two terms, organized and conduct an election that transferred power to an incoming civilian elected government without the interference of the military. Just like the previous elections, Umaru Yar’adua of the PDP won the presidential election that was held on April 21, 2007.

The election was marred by irregularity and major international observers condemned the irregularities in the election process. The level of rigging in the 2007 elections by the state institutions such as the military, the police and the electoral empire outstripped that of 2003 and 2004 elections (Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011). The HRW berated the federal government for the irregularities in the elections (Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011). President Umaru Yar’Adua was sworn into office on May 29, 2007, as the second president in the new political dispensation and he acknowledged the flaws in the election that brought him to power and he promised to up a panel to review the entire electoral process. According to him, “our election experiences represent an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Accordingly, I will set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process with a view to ensuring that we raise the quality and standard of our general elections, and thereby deepen our democracy” (Anjov and Nguemo, 2012).

Presidential elections in Nigeria have always been manipulated by the incumbents in their favour. Jacobson stated that “Incumbents are so consistently successful at winning elections, and everyone involved in politics knows it” [Jacobson \(1997\)](#). The manipulation of the electoral process by the incumbents in their favour has been classified into three categories by [Mozaffer and Schedler \(2002\)](#). These consist of rule making, rule application and rule adjudication. According to [Nwanegbo and Alumona \(2011\)](#) the manipulation of electoral process by the incumbents:

“can manifest in a wide range of activities that sustains the electoral process such as: enactment of electoral law and the constitution, appointment of electoral management body, appointment of election tribunals and the conduct of the elections. The manipulation of the electoral process can also come in various forms such as: appointment of corrupt and or compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of the election tribunals to protect stolen mandates use of state resources to bankroll election campaigns use of state security forces and apparatuses to intimidate opposition parties, denial of access to state owned media houses”

Defeating incumbents in the Nigerian context were unthinkable because sitting presidents have the power to use the state machinery to induce and coerce all electoral institutions. Macdonald declares that “the predominant characterisation of African politics as ‘neopatrimonial’ and ‘semi-authoritarian’ implies that incumbents are in a strong position to systematically manipulate the political process to their own advantage” ([Macdonald, 2014](#)).

4. Do Voters Care about Incumbency?

I will answer this question in the affirmative due to the fact that incumbent presidents in Africa are massively voted for re-election by voters in general elections. Structural theories can attest to this ([Parker and Davidson, 1979](#)). In fact, these theories can expatiate on the reasons behind the re-election of many incumbents ([Brown, 2012](#)). However, there are exceptional cases where incumbents have been defeated on the owing to voters' decision calling for a change.

The first hypothesis in this paper going by the Nigerian scenario is that voters prefer incumbents to the opposition candidates

4.1. Hypothesis 1: Voters Prefer Incumbent to Opposition Candidates

Voters like associating with the incumbents, the recent victory at the polls of one of the Nigerian longest serving senator, David Mark gives credence to this assumption. Shehu Shari of the NPN won the presidential election in 1979 with just over seven hundred thousand votes over his main rival. In the 1983 presidential election, running as an incumbent, he defeated the same main opponent in the 1979 election with now a wider margin of over four million votes ([African Election Database, 2011](#)).

The investigation by political scientists has given reasons for the re-election of incumbents from what is seen above. Furthermore, incumbents use their incumbent advantage to get re-elected. For instance, “incumbents can use the perks of their office to build up their name recognition, deter strong challenger, and ultimately win more votes” ([Brown, 2012](#)).

Once more, after the return of democratic governance, the incumbent defeated the main opposition figure in the 2003 presidential election. One can attribute the victory of the incumbent to many factors, such as incumbent influence over the military, paramilitary, and electoral empire. These institutions played a crucial role in the 2003 presidential election in favour of the incumbent. In a nutshell, the incumbent advantage was more pronounced in the 2003 presidential election. For this reason, the international election observers made a critical report on the election. One patient feature of the elections was that 61% of the electorate voted for the incumbent as against 32% of the main challenger.

4.2. Hypothesis 2: State and Electoral Context

Voters in some instances always align with the winning political parties at the local and state levels, and this at times determines the political victory of an incumbent or the challenger. Giving credence to this hypothesis, Bonneau stresses that an incumbent political party can inspire her electoral victory ([Bonneau, 2005](#)). Prior to the presidential elections, gubernatorial and national assembly elections can determine the re-election of the incumbent president or her challenger. The political party that wins a majority in state governorship elections and the national assembly elections has the possibility of producing the president. For instance, since the installation of democracy in Nigeria, the PDP has been the majority party in the states and the national assembly and at the same time producing the president of the country. However, the tide changed in the 2015 general elections when the opposition party, All Progressive Congress (APC) won a majority of seats in the national assembly and winning more

gubernatorial elections. The victories of APC at the gubernatorial and national assembly elections culminated in the presidential election victory of the party.

Being associated with a political party can deny a candidate electoral victory at the polls. Some candidates with good electoral manifestos and good intention for their electorates did not win elections because they are considered to be in the wrong political parties. Campbell subscribes to this hypothesis as he states that incumbents might be penalized by the voters for being members of a 'wrong' political party (Campbell, 2002). In some states, belonging to a particular party can increase the chances of an electoral candidate in winning elections, in contrast, it might thwart others electoral success (Bonneau, 2005). For instance, in Awka Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Ebony and Rivers states, the electoral victories of the governors of the states since 1999 have been associated with their membership of the PDP. This also applies to Lagos State whose dominant political party has been producing the governors since the inception of representative government in 1999.

4.3. Hypothesis

Voters prefer challenger over incumbent- especially when the incumbent is not meeting the expectation of the electorate.

Voters can decide to do away with the incumbents for some reasons. For instance, when incumbents have stayed in power for a very long time or when the economy of the county is not performing to the expectation of the voters. The defeat of incumbent is imminent when there is a high level of voter education and poor economic conditions (Macdonald, 2014). Furthermore, evidence has shown that the mismanagement of the economy has led to many incumbents being defeated in elections (Fraenkel, 2004; 2006; Trease, 2005) (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2008; Molina, 2001; Uppal, 2009).

5. Why the Incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan Was Defeated

I did not subscribe to those that attributed the defeat of Goodluck Jonathan, the defeated incumbent president of Nigeria to ethnic gang-up and the compromised of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as being speculated by some section of Nigerians.

Voters did not actually decide to vote out the incumbent president, they clamour for change because for sixteen years, the ruling party (PDP) has not brought any meaningful development to Nigeria. For details on this (Awojobi *et al.*, 2014; Awojobi, 2014).

The democratization process and consolidation in Nigeria have given voters the impetus to choose those who they feel will govern them very well and these have made them more sophisticated. And this was what was witnessed during the last presidential elections. The issue of incumbent advantage has been dismantled for the first time in the political history of Nigeria.

Some studies have shown that the PDP federal government has failed woefully in bringing the dividend of democracy to Nigerians which cumulated to the defeat of the incumbent president. There is no empirical deduction to show what led to the defeat of the incumbent president. However, from political analysis and discourse, it has shown that some factors were actually responsible for the defeat of the incumbent president. So what are the attributes that led to the incumbency disadvantage? Below are the four cogent reasons in the political discourse responsible for the defeat of the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan.

5.1. Boko Haram

Boko Haram insurgency was one of the biggest challenges that faced Jonathan administration. The government was helpless in curtailing the atrocity of the terrorist group. Despite the declaration of a state of emergency in the three states affected by the insurgent activities, the killing and bombing continue unabated (Awojobi, 2014). The kidnapping of 219 schoolgirls who were preparing for their exams in Chibok dented the image of the administration. The former president Olusegun Obasanjo berated Jonathan for not believing that the schoolgirls were kidnapped. Boko Haram kill more people in Jonathan administration and Jonathan admitted to the fact that the atrocity of the terrorist group is worse than what was experienced in the Nigerian civil war (ibid). The Jonathan led federal government failed in its social responsibility to protect the lives and property of Nigerians during the life span of the administration (Wosu and Agwanwo, 2014). Furthermore, bad governance, corruption and weak institutional framework that were noticed during the administration of Goodluck Jonathan led to frustrated expectation that sustained Boko Haram atrocities (Ogege, 2013).

Many Nigerians are of the view with the re-election of Jonathan for another four years, the killings and bombings by Boko Haram will continue so for this, there is a need for change. The voting pattern in

the Northeast really showed that voters were not satisfied with the handling of the Boko Haram issue by the Jonathan administration.

5.2. Corruption

In every successful government in Nigeria, corruption has always been associated with them. However, the level of corruption in Jonathan tenure was unprecedented. The former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Muhammadu Sanusi attested to this when he declared that corruption was very massive in Jonathan's administration (Ugwuanyi, 2015). This was one of the reasons that prompted the Eurasia Research Group that analyzed the 2015 presidential elections to acknowledge that the issue of corruption will act as a stumbling block to Jonathan re-election bid (Premiumtimes, 2015). The Jonathan administration lacked the political will to curb corruption in nearly all sectors of the economy. Corruption was noticed in most sectors, even when Jonathan was told about the level of corruption in some ministries, he failed to act decisively. For instance, it took him months after pressure from Nigerians to remove the former Minister of Aviation when she was accused of corruptly enriching herself with the acquiring of two BMW armoured cars for N255 million. Furthermore, when the former Central Bank Governor (CBN) alleged that N20 billion was missing from the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) account, instead of Jonathan to order the investigation of the allegation, he decided to remove the CBN governor. Jonathan also paid no attention by keeping conspiracy silence when the former Minister of Petroleum was accused by the House of Representative for using N10 billion to hire two private jets for her personal use and that of her family members. In the words of the former speaker of the National Assembly, Aminu Tambuwa, "the president's body language seems to be encouraging corrupt practices in the country". Furthermore, the former speaker asserts:

"Take the subsidy probe, the pension, the SEC probe and recently the bullet proof car cases. After the House of Representatives did a diligent job by probing and exposing the cases, you now see something else when it comes to prosecution" (Tukur, 2013).

In addition, the award of pipeline surveillance contracts to ex-militants of Jonathan tribesmen did not go well with a lot of Nigerians. They used the presidential elections to express their anger by voting massively for the main opposition candidate.

5.2.1. United Opposition and Alliance

The PDP has been the ruling central government since the introduction of representative government in 1999. Defeating such party in a presidential election requires united and solidified opposition and alliances. And that was what really happened during in the 2015 presidential elections. Previous alliances in the country have failed to turn the tide against ruling parties. For instance, in the first republic, the alliance of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Northern Progress Front (NPF), Action Group (AG), the Northern Elements Progress Union (NEPU), the Kano People's Party (KPP), the Zamfara Commons Party (ZCP) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) into the United Parties Grand Alliance failed to defeat the government of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in parliamentary elections in 1964 (Adekoya, 2015).

The second republic also witnessed the merger of opposition parties in order to defeat the ruling party. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) merged as Progress Party Alliance. However, the coalition of these three political parties failed to dislodge the ruling National Party of Nigeria (ibid).

The political alliance of the Action Congress, Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) broke the jinx in the defeat of an incumbent president. The alliance metamorphosed into the All Progressive Congress (APC) and this paid off for the party by winning the presidential elections. It was very few Nigerians who gave the alliance the benefit of a doubt to succeed in 2015 presidential elections because of the incumbent advantage of a sitting president.

The APC became the main opposition party with prominent politicians in its fold such as Ahmed Bola Tinubu, the political strategist of the coalition, Atiku Abubakar, Rochas Okocha, Lia Mohammed and Ogbonnaya Onu. For comprehensive details of the alliance, see the current Minister of Science and Technology, Ogbonnaya Onu new published book, "From Opposition to Governing Party: Nigeria's APC Merger Story".

The former governor of Lagos and APC stalwart, Bola Tinubu capitalized on the crisis in the Nigerian Governors Forum by luring five governors from the PDP which include Rotimi Amaechi, Rabi Kwankwaso, Murtala Nyako, Abdul Fatai Ahmed and Aliyu Wamakko to join the opposition APC. The votes from the states of the five defected governors helped the APC in the presidential election victory.

One other prominent figure that dented the image of the incumbent president during the run-off to the elections was former president Olusegun Obasanjo, the political godfather of Jonathan. Obasanjo did not hide his disdain for Jonathan, his 18-page public letter to Jonathan was full of criticism and he accused Jonathan of dividing the country along religious and ethnic lines. The anti-Jonathan campaign by Obasanjo really affected the electoral fortune of Jonathan in the 2015 presidential elections.

5.2.2. Bad Economic Management

There is no doubt, the economy during Jonathan tenure was in shambles. The level of poverty, unemployment, fuel scarcity, low power supply, and the infrastructural breakdown was an indication that all was not well with the Nigerian economy. Despite the economic team that was put in place, the economy remained in the doldrums. The rebasing of the Nigerian economy by the National Bureau of Statistics which projected Nigeria as the largest economy in Africa and the 26th in the world did not in any way correlate to any improvement in the living standard of Nigerians. Jonathan attested to this fact

“Our Gross Domestic Product was rebased to give an accurate picture of where we are in a nation. I am glad to report to you that Nigeria is officially the largest based economy in Africa with a Gross Domestic Product of \$510 billion which also places us as the 26th largest economy in the world. This feat is a collective achievement of all Nigerians particularly when you take into account the fact that our Per Capital Income had increased by over 60% from \$1091 in 2009 to 1700 in 2013, prior to the rebasing. While this calls for celebration, I personally cannot celebrate until Nigerians can feel the positive impact of our growth. There are still many of our citizens living in poverty” (Awojobi et al., 2014).

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) described the five-year term of Jonathan as below average in terms of improving the economy and the well-beings of Nigerians. According to APRM, the government development plan was good on paper; however, “it has not succeeded in producing significant improvement. Indeed, corruption has worsened over the past five years” Furthermore, the APRM stresses that high levels of corruption, poverty, high unemployment rates, poor infrastructure, low growth rates, and widespread insecurity and crime were very noticeable in the five-year term of Jonathan as the president of Nigeria (Ovuakporie, 2015). The highest level of the unemployment rate was noticed during the recruitment of applicants into the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS). It was bizarre when over 700,000 Nigerians applied for 4,560 positions in the NIS and which led to the death of 19 applicants. This showed how the unemployment situation was in Nigeria.

The mismanagement of the economy by the economic team of Jonathan administration made voters more sophisticated and they made sure that the administration days were numbered during the presidential elections.

6. Incumbent President Good luck Jonathan Concedes Defeat

There was palpable fear during and after the presidential elections. The questions that on the lips of some Nigerians were if Jonathan lost the election will he hands over power to the president-elect? or if Buhari is defeated will the political violence that engulfed Nigeria in the 2011 presidential election between the two gladiators resurfaces again?

There was tension when incumbent lost the presidential elections to the opposition candidate. The fear arose from past experiences in African where defeated incumbent presidents refused to relinquish power. For instance, in Kenya, in the 2007 presidential elections, the incumbent was unable to win re-election convincingly and this led to political violence between supporters of the incumbent president and that of the opposition candidate. Just like Kenya, in Zimbabwe, presidential election in 2008, the incumbent was unable to win with absolute majority which led to a runoff. However, the challenger had to quit the runoff election due to the unfair election process. In Cote D'Ivoire, elections were held in 2010, the elections were peaceful and the outcome of the elections favoured the challenger. However, the incumbent refused to concede defeat. This led to uproar and a violent armed civil conflict which was resolved through external military intervention (Ncube, 2013).

The initial date fixed by INCE for the presidential election was February 14, 2015. However, the date was shifted to March 28, 2015. The government had claimed that there was a security threat from Boko Haram in the Northeast and there is the need for the security operatives to clear the terrorists from their safe haven in order for elections to go on peacefully in the northeast. Many of the opposition politicians did not subscribe to the postponement of the election for six weeks. They believe the government ostensibly wants to buy time in order to strategize due to the fact that the defeat of the ruling government was imminent. Some school of thought believed that if the government of Yobe state can

conduct local government elections despite the fragile security situation then there was no need for the ruling government pressurizing INEC to postpone the election.

The INEC on its part had assured Nigerians and the international community that they are prepared to conduct the elections on the initial date despite some challenges. Due to intense pressure from the service chiefs who were acting as proxies for the presidency, INEC succumbed to the pressure and shifted the date for the presidential elections from February 14 to March 28, 2015. According to the INEC Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega relying on Section 26 (1) Electoral Act (2010) as amended which stimulates:

“Where a date has been appointed for the holding of an election, and there is reason to believe that a serious breach of the peace is likely to occur if the election is proceeded with on that date or it is impossible to conduct the elections as a result of natural disasters or other emergencies, the Commission may postpone the election and shall in respect of the area, or areas concerned, appoint another date for the holding of the postponed election, provided that such reason for the postponement is cogent and verifiable” (Ogala, 2015b).

Eventually, the presidential elections were held on March 28, 2015, and during the cause of results collation, the former Minister of Niger Delta, Godsdan Orubebe disrupted proceedings at the collation center by seizing the microphone. He accused the INEC Chairman of being “tribalistic and partial” (Adebayo, 2015). Furthermore, he ordered the INEC to leave the results collation center. The INEC Chairman in his own wisdom, replied Orubebe in a subtle and suave manner:

“Mr. Orubebe, you are a former Minister of the Federal Republic. You are a statesman in your own right. You should be careful about what you say or what allegations or accusations you make. Certainly, you should be careful about your public conduct”

The final results of the elections have not been concluded, however, from the results collated and released, the opposition candidate had an overwhelming lead, which made the incumbent president to accept defeat and congratulate the opposition candidate. This was a remarkable feat in the political history of Nigeria. This also showed the maturity in Nigerian democracy.

The telephone call and congratulatory messages from the defeated incumbent to the victorious opposition candidate put to rest the anxiety that has engulfed the nation during and after the election. According to Ogala, the historic concession telephone call defused tension across Nigeria and has thrown up Mr. Jonathan as a democratic hero. That conversation is believed to have saved Nigeria from descending into anarchy in the aftermath of the election (Ogala, 2015a). Before the 2015 presidential elections, the incumbent has made it clear that he will hand over power if he is defeated. The incumbent reiterated his earlier position on a peaceful election when he said his second term ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian.

7. Conclusion

The primary aim of this article is to examine the salient factors in the political discourse that were responsible for the defeat of the incumbent president in Nigeria. Defeating an incumbent president in Africa is not an easy task, however, this article supported the third hypothesis in this article in the Nigerian scenario which states that voters prefer challenger over incumbent especially when the incumbent is not meeting the expectation of the electorate. The political discourse has attributed insecurity, corruption, strong opposition and a bad economy as what made voters prefer the challenger against the incumbent. This article has shown that incumbent president can be re-elected if voters are pleased with the incumbent president and also a party that has the highest number of governors in the state level as well as having the highest number of lawmakers in the National Assembly has the possibility of producing the president. Further research will be needed in the field of political science to support the third hypothesis of this article in the Nigerian context.

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