An Assessment of Determinants of Electoral Integrity: A Case of Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria

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Abstract.
The paper examined determinants of Electoral integrity in Nigeria with a view to amongst others identifying the ingredients of credible elections and underlying factors that could drive the integrity of election. It is also aimed at comparing the integrity of election in Nigeria prior to 2011 and beyond. The paper relied on primary and secondary sources of data which include administration of questionnaire on relevant stakeholders, consultation of books, journals and internet surfing. The study revealed that Electoral integrity is a term that cannot be underestimated in transitional and developed democracies. The paper also discovered that transparency, capacity building and independence of the commission are the major variables that could improve the integrity of election in Nigeria. Furthermore, the 2015 election was empirically adjudged to be the freest and most acceptable election in Nigeria, while 2003 and 2007 elections were declared to be the most unacceptable elections in the country. It also revealed that unless some of the identified factors or variables shaping the integrity of electoral process are addressed, the outcome of not paying attention to these factors may result to violence at worst.

1. Introduction:
Understanding the integrity of electoral process is a vital precursor for understanding any other aspect of electoral politics (Norris, P. 2013a). It is a fact that most developing countries have been one time or the other confronted with various political, socio and economic challenges partly because the results of their elections were questionable and unacceptable due to manipulations. For a country to be seen as being above board in her process of conducting election, every bit of the processes must be taken into consideration. Hence, all aspects of electoral process should be evaluated before concluding as to the credibility or otherwise of such election. Conducting an election especially in a transitional democracy is a huge challenge which among others...
involves the complex management of 3ms, namely: men, materials and money. It has been established that while many elections around the globe are conducted with a high standard, there remains evidence of poorly conducted elections in developing countries most especially in African countries (James Toby, 2014). The integrity of elections around the world has been a major concern of national and international organizations to the extent that a colossal amount of money has been spent on the improvement of electoral integrity. For example, the European instrument for democracy and Human Rights spent approximately EUR 307 million on over 700 projects relating to democracy between 2007 and 2010. Nigeria as a country benefited immensely in the funding.

In Nigeria, the issue of electoral integrity has been a major concern since independence. Between 1959 and 2007, most elections conducted by the various election management bodies were marred by irregularities and allegations of violence (Omotola J.S, 2010) except in 1993 Presidential election which was won by Chief M.K.O Abiola. The election was adjudged the best in the history of conduct of election before that time. Unfortunately, the result was annulled by the then President Ibrahim Babangida (Jinadu, Olagunju, Oyovbaire, 1993). The election years of 1999, 2003, and 2007 could be described as bad, worse and worst respectively in the annals of election administration in Nigeria. 2007 general election witnessed the highest level of election petition against the Electoral Management Body (EMB) in the country (1,475).

This was buttressed by the main beneficiary of the election – Alhaji Musa Yaradua who out of clear understanding of the discredibility of the election promised to carry out electoral reform in the country (National Mirror April 27th, 2007). However, the coming of Prof Atahiru Jega in 2011 saw a lot of reforms, restructuring and innovations in the administration of electoral process in the country.

2. Statement of the Problem:
Over the years, the integrity of electoral process in Nigeria has been a major concern. Most elections conducted before 2011 were adjudged to be fraudulent, violent and far from being credible, free and fair.

Bearing in mind that the credibility of an election plays a major role in the sustainability of democracy in any civilized country, the need to assess the integrity of elections conducted between 1999 and 2015 in Nigeria becomes important.

3. Objectives:
The general objective of the study is to assess the determinants of electoral integrity in Nigeria while the specific objectives are as follow:

1. Identify the ingredients of electoral integrity
2. Determine the roles of INEC in the improvement of electoral integrity in Nigeria
3. Assess the integrity of election conducted between 1999 and 2015 using empirical evidence.

4. Literature Review:
In many countries, Nigeria inclusive, Electoral Management Bodies have been identified as key institutions that could carry out reforms that would lead to improved quality of election (Catt and Helena et al 2014). Despite this assumption, it has been observed that the relationship between the contribution of EMBs and election integrity is positively correlated in some Latin America and African countries, while there is a negative correlation in some countries around the world (Birch and Sarah 2011). By negative correlation, we mean that the EMB in question performed poorly in their contribution to electoral integrity. Similarly, it has been found that factors such as capacity of EMBs, the personnel, network structure and institutional design of electoral management boards are key variables that could shape the quality of elections (Clark Alistair 2015).

Laura Chinchilla, former president of Costa Rica stated during her closing address to the conference
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on electoral integrity in Latin America that if there is anything that can stop the dismantling of democracy in Latin America, it is electoral integrity. The conference of electoral integrity in Latin America identified six ingredients for election with integrity.

1. Gender perspective in electoral process
2. Impact of political finance - the relevance of electoral act is important.
3. Measures one may consider in the prevention and control of election related violence e.g encourage openness in the conduct of the election
4. Access to justice and the role of media
5. Building resilient institutions to safeguard electoral integrity.

Other measures include but not limited to:

**Inclusiveness** – equal opportunities to participate as voters, men, women, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs), prisoners, elderly persons, and a host of others.

**Transparency** – each step of election is open to scrutiny and stakeholders can independently verify whether the process is conducted honestly or accurately. All the pre and post-election activities as well as election-day activities should be transparent

**Accountability** – all stakeholders in election such as EMB, security agent, political party candidates must be accountable.

**Competitiveness** – elections are competitive when citizen have reasonable and equitable opportunities to be elected. Parties and candidates must be able to campaign, voters should cast their votes freely.

The integrity of any election is a function of how an election is run. A number of checklists have been suggested to allow an assessment of electoral administration within a country (Elklit, J. and Reynolds, A. 2001). Theoretically, twelve steps have been highlighted in the electoral process and subdivided these steps into 47 different variables. One of the approaches of assessing the integrity of election is to identify these steps and do a national and international comparison. The best practice may be identified when objective comparison is made. Part of the processes to monitor and observe include but not limited to registering of potential voters, registering of political parties, opening of poll, campaign finances, voting procedures, collation and counting of votes.

On a global level the following factors have been identified to determine electoral integrity of a country.

1. **The size and concentration of the electorate:** Proponents of this school of thought believe that the more the size of electorates the greater the pressure on electoral administrators and consequently the performance is negatively affected. A smaller concentration of electorates would affect positively the performance of the election administrator (Clark 2014b).

2. **The number of election conducted at a time simultaneously** might affect the integrity of the election as more pressure would be too much on the election management body.

3. **Organizational or institutional factors.** This could be in the form of resources committed to the conduct of election. A well-funded election may not likely have integrity problem since money will be available to do all that are necessary. It has been established in the literature that there is a link between the amount of fund made available for the election and malpractice, stating that there could be a reduction in malpractice if adequate fund is made available.

4. **Ability of EMBs to compare procedures and use the best standard to influence policies that would lead to improvement in the integrity of the election.**

5. **Independence:** EMBs should be free from governmental interference or dictation by the government in power. An EMB that enjoys
non-interference would be the best to provide best service to the people.

6. Leadership skill: This involves the already acquired and on the job acquired skill by members of the EMB. Emphasis is laid on training and retraining both locally and internationally.

7. Centralization/decentralization. The question here is to what extent should the local electoral officials be given power to use their discretion. Should they always take policy directive from the center or allowed to use their discretion? Research has shown that there are both advantages and disadvantages of centralization and decentralization.

8. Performance benchmarking. Comparing notes from neighboring electoral bodies as well as international monitoring of election is a good tool towards improving electoral integrity. Hence the commission should encourage this.

9. Poll Worker Survey. Knowledge about the quality of electoral management is vital for diagnosing the problem with a process. Research work should be carried out by EMBs on the integrity of electoral process. This can be done by questionnaire method of finding out the feelings of stakeholders as regards the entire process, taking into consideration various variables that determine the integrity of election.

10. Voting and registration procedures. The way and manner voters register is compiled matters a lot. One of the major instruments of measuring the integrity of an election is the quality of register used for the election. The credibility of the register partly determines the credibility of election. Similarly, the procedure for voting should be simple. If technology is deployed, such technology should be user friendly, robust and accessible to the electorate.

4.1: The Status of Electoral Integrity in Africa:
In a study carried out by Hanns Seidel foundation, it was amongst others revealed that:

1. The degree of threats to electoral integrity is more severe in Africa when compared to the rest of the world.

2. Election can fail long before the election day so attention should be paid to the electoral dynamics and institutional quality over the entire election cycle, not just election day.

3. State resources are important in the conduct of election but not absolutely the determinant.

4. The types of problems in Africa are similar to those found in the rest of the world. Put simply, there is no African electoral exceptionalism.

5. The difficulties in regulating campaign finance extend across the continent.

6. The vote count is consistently the highest rated part of the election cycle.

5. Conceptual Frameworks:

5.1 Electoral Management:
The term electoral management encompasses both the agency responsible for governing elections and the various mechanisms, roles and functions this agency may have. While all democracies have an election administration of some kind (often referred to as Electoral Management Body) the responsibilities of this agency may vary substantially. For example, in Nigeria, the roles are to conduct free and fair elections, register political parties, register potential voters, and conduct referendum among others. Consequently, as EMB, the need to ensure all aspects of any electoral contest meets global standards and norms become necessary. As a follow up, the EMB should follow the fundamental guiding principles of elections including independence, impartiality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, professionalism and a host of others.
5.2 Electoral Integrity:
The concept of electoral integrity can be approached from either a broad or more narrowly defined perspective. Some scholars have defined it to mean the observance of international conventions and global norms as it relates to electoral cycle including pre-election period, polling day activities and post-election activities (Norris 2013a). Such international norms include fundamental freedoms, democracy promotion and human rights without which elections cannot be classified as free and fair. Nigeria is a signatory to some international treaties such as OAU/AU Declaration on the principles governing democratic elections in Africa, African charter on Democracy, Election and Governance. For example, people are expected to be given equal opportunities in political participation. Similarly those that are qualified to vote (18+) in the case of Nigeria should be given equal opportunity. A sound electoral process should ensure the adherence to the rule of law, guaranteeing fair, transparent and equitable election administration, which provides an effective aggregation of the vote. Consequently, these variables and others are germane to electoral integrity (Schaffer, F. C. 2008)

6. Methodology:
For the purpose of this research, both primary and secondary sources of data were employed. Primary data includes the administration of questionnaire on relevant stakeholders in electoral process, while secondary source was derived from the consultation of books, journals and internet search. A set of questionnaire was administered on relevant stakeholders such as electorates, INEC staff, and political party members from three states in the south western part of Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique is used because of the large size of the country (Ekiti, Ogun and Ondo) States are assumed to be representative of the entire country. Similarly a group discussion was carried out amongst some purposively selected stakeholders in the three states afore mentioned.

7. The Nigerian Experience:
Several Elections were conducted in Nigeria since independence. Most of these elections conducted till 2007 were adjudged not credible and falls short of international standard. The coming of Prof. Jega in 2011 saw a dramatic change in the process of conducting election. Jega reformed the process to a reasonable extent before he left in 2015. Part of the revolutionary changes carried out to ensure integrity of election which was hitherto battered was in the area of recruitment of ad hoc staff, production of credible register, innovations in the area of technology deployment, establishment of a strong legal framework through the amendment of the Electoral Act 2010, ensuring gender balance in the participation of women in politics and a host of others.

The question now is can we say the integrity of the election in Nigeria has improved? Based on the results of 2011 and 2015 general elections as observed by national and international communities, one may to a reasonable extent say that the integrity of electoral process has shifted from what it used to be before 2011 to a better form. This does not mean that all is completely well with the commission. Further improvement is required to meet the international standard.

8. Empirical Investigations:
Questionnaires were administered on three states namely Ekiti, Ondo and Ogun States. Twenty staff each of the states above were randomly selected for the purpose of administration of questionnaire. The members of staff were drawn from ICT, Operations, Election Planning and Monitoring, Legal, General Administration and Field Services. Below are the results of the respondents on the administration of the questionnaire.
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Table 1: Identification and Rating the Ingredients of Electoral Integrity

| STATES VARIABLES                                      | OGUN MEAN | EKITI MEAN | ONDO MEAN | Average Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| On electoral process                                  | 3.80      | 3.95      | 3.30      | 3.68         |
| Measures to consider in prevention and control of elections related violence | 4.50      | 4.70      | 4.45      | 4.55         |
| Building resilient institutions to safeguard electoral integrity | 4.30      | 4.60      | 4.15      | 4.35         |
| Access to justice and role of media                   | 4.10      | 4.10      | 4.05      | 4.08         |
| Impact of political finance                           | 3.70      | 3.50      | 3.50      | 3.57         |
| Inclusiveness- equal opportunity to participate as voters, men, women, PWDs, prisoners and elderly people | 4.50      | 4.40      | 6.35      | 508          |

Source: Field Survey March 2018

Key 1- Not Agreed
   2- Slightly Agreed
   3- Moderately Agreed
   4- Strongly Agreed
   5- Very Strongly Agreed

Measurement is on a 5 point Likert scale

8.1 Identification and rating of the ingredients of Electoral Integrity:

In Ondo state as indicated in the table above, equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process by women, men, voters, PWDs, Prisoners and elderly people was ranked first amongst the variables of ingredients of electoral integrity. This translates to the fact that for the integrity of electoral process to be guaranteed, greater attention should be paid to the above categories of people in the electoral process. Similarly, in Ekiti State, openness in the conduct of elections which has tendency to reduce violence was ranked first (4.7). Hence there is a direct relationship between openness, electoral integrity and violence. Put differently, if the EMB is more open, there is tendency for violence to reduce.

Finally in Ogun State, Openness and equal opportunity to participate as voters, men, women, PWDs, prisoners and elderly people are the major variables that will shape the integrity of election.

Table 2: Determining the Roles of INEC in the Movement of Electoral Integrity in Nigeria

| STATES VARIABLES                                      | OGUN MEAN | EKITI MEAN | ONDO MEAN | Average Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Deployment of various technologies                     | 4.55      | 4.60      | 4.20      | 4.45         |
| Capacity building among INEC staff                     | 4.60      | 4.85      | 4.50      | 4.65         |
| Voter Education                                        | 4.50      | 4.75      | 4.65      | 4.53         |
| Independence of the commission in terms of appointment of EMB members | 4.40      | 4.40      | 4.55      | 4.45         |
| Financial autonomy of the commission                   | 4.70      | 4.50      | 4.20      | 4.47         |
| Engagement of NYSC members as adhoc staff             | 3.60      | 3.90      | 3.05      | 3.52         |

Source: Field survey March 2018
Key 1- Not Agreed
2- Slightly Agreed
3- Moderately Agreed
4- Strongly Agreed
5- Very Strongly Agreed
Measurement is on a 5 point Likert scale

8.2 The role of INEC in the improvement of Electoral Integrity:

INEC as a democratic institution is expected to play a major role in the improvement of electoral integrity in the country. Table 2 above indicates that independence of the commission in the appointment of EMB members plays a dominant role in improving the integrity of election. This could be supported by the existing literature where Uwais report recommended the non-partisan way of electing the members of EMBs. Specifically, the recommendation suggests that the judicial council should handle the appointment and not the presidency. Other variables include capacity building of INEC staff as well as voter education.

In Ekiti State, capacity building among staff tops the list of variables that can improve the integrity of election. Financial autonomy was rated first amongst the variables in Ogun State.

Table 3: Assessing the Integrity of Elections Conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015

| STATES VARIABLES | OGUN | EKITI | ONDO | Average Mean |
|------------------|------|-------|------|--------------|
| 1999 General Election | 2.85 | 3.80 | 2.80 | 3.15         |
| 2003 General Election | 2.60 | 3.50 | 2.55 | 2.88         |
| 2007 General Election | 2.55 | 3.50 | 2.60 | 2.88         |
| 2011 General Election | 3.85 | 4.35 | 3.60 | 3.93         |
| 2015 General Election | 4.30 | 4.60 | 4.00 | 4.30         |

Source: Field Survey March 2018

Key 1- Not Agreed
2- Slightly Agreed
3- Moderately Agreed
4- Strongly Agreed
5- Very Strongly Agreed
Measurement is on a 5 point Likert scale

8.3 Assessing the integrity of Elections Conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015

2015 was rated the most acceptable election in Nigeria in the three states with an average mean of 4.3, while 2003 and 2007 elections were the least acceptable elections in Nigeria with 2.88 and 2.88 respectively.

9. Conclusion:

The paper concluded that the integrity of election is very critical in our democratic process. Transparency, the rule of law, independence of the commission, strong capacity building amongst others are the most important variables that would determine or improve the integrity of election in Nigeria.

10. Recommendations:

1. Capacity building plays a dominant role in the improvement of electoral integrity as found in the literature and empirical investigation. INEC should further strengthen the training of both permanent and adhoc staff to enable them get acquit with relevant skills to further the improvement of electoral integrity.

2. Openness and abiding by the rule of law in the conduct of election are germane to the integrity of Electoral Process. Hence, the commission should organize workshop on a continuous basis where these concepts are well taught and encouraged.

3. 2015 election remains the best or the most acceptable election conducted so far. Hence whatever it took to arrive at this should be consolidated. Deployment of technology, independence of the commission, strong capacity building and abiding by the rule of law have been
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found to be responsible for this in the literature – INEC Report 2015

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