

## **Electoral Topography: A Contextual Perspective on Credible Election in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** -Electoral stakeholders – partisan and nonpartisan, media practitioners, parties, voters, including academics collect evidences of electoral malpractices enough to explain problems of electoral credibility facing different nations. While lively, none of these, particularly the academic debates, interrogates the significance of electoral topography to elections quality. Here I bridge this gap using Nigeria’s electoral geography as a case example. Inclusively, attention is on how the Nigerian electoral topography constrains or empowers partisan and non-partisan political actors – political parties, candidates, voters, electoral officials – and ultimately influences the quality of elections. Using the comparative method of process tracing, the paper establishes that election quality in Nigeria has been problematic, complex, subject to numerous challenges, among which is the electoral terrain. It providescore political actors with fragile electorates that are vulnerable to manipulations and weak institutions that could be used as exclusionary political tools.

**Keywords:** *Election, context, politicians, candidates, parties*

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Voting is an important component of establishing the legitimacy to rule. Electoral mandate, however, are often made outside electoral norms, rules and procedures. There are various explanations of candidate exclusion, tailored constituencies, skewed campaigns, unequal campaign finances, muzzled media, ill-informed electorates, and soon in several elections across the globe (Norris, Frank and Coma 2014).The growing decline of the quality of election prompts scholarship in comparative politics to focus on electoral integrity (Bogaaards 2013, Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009, Morse 2012, Norris 2013, Norris, Frank and Coma 2014a, 2014b).

To contribute to the debate, this paper examines the significance of electoral topography in the conduct of good elections. How does electoral topography constrain or empower partisan and non-partisan political actors and eventually influence the conduct of elections? Moreover, political actions only have meaning when they are set in meaningful contexts (Axford 2005). This article studies the four contextual variables - demography, political background, institutional settings and dominant power dynamics among elites – which seem the most relevant to electoral politics in the country. For conceptual clarification, electoral topography refers to the political playing field within which election, as a political process, takes place. The rational is to emphasize the importance of the assertion that our understanding of politics is better enhanced when individual is seen as a ‘lead player’ in the political world (Axford 2005: pp.23-5).

While the approach might appear descriptive, it provides, a qualitative way to examine the hidden linkages between contextual factors and challenges to electoral integrity. While it does not seek to replace the quantitative research efforts, but it explores other salient factors that could enhance our understanding of political undercurrents of both the incumbent – government and opposition. The subsequent discussion concentrates on four identified factors of demography, institutional settings, political settings and dominant-power politics that characterised the most recent elections conducted in Nigeria.

### *Demography*

The contemporary geographical landmass called Nigeria while a home to 140,431,790 million officially recognised people (NPC, 2006) remains a subject of debate. To some scholars and observers, data from 40 years ago (1963 population census) looks more reliable (Mustapha, 2006) than more recent attempts, including the 2006 census figure (Bamgbose 2009). As a result, government statistical information in use is arguably based on estimates. This lack of accurate data has affected the conduct of elections in the country. In fact, from the 1959 to the 2011 general elections, each electoral commission has to conduct fresh voter registration exercises, thus diverting its attention and resources away from the election proper. The challenge of registering Nigeria’s teeming voters who are scattered in the remote areas distracts successive electoral commissions in the country. For example, in the 2003 elections the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was logistically constrained to the extent that it failed to provide

... compartments for thumb printing [which] undermined the secrecy of the vote and exposed the voter to the machinations of those that would have preferred “community voting” [and INEC] did not make adequate arrangements for the transportation of sensitive

election materials to polling stations and to collation centres. [Consequently,] result sheets disappeared and re-appeared in different forms at collation centres (TMG 2003: p.120).

Perhaps the observed dependence of INEC on governments at the states and local level for election logistics (ERC 2008; Kew 2004) may be due to overconcentration on voter registration during every election. Consequently, strategic field electoral officers, including Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs), are left at the mercy of politicians and other partisan stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

Also, politicians appear to make use of this inaccuracy and manipulate each registration exercise to ensure success. It is said that the national voter register has been an object of manipulation by incumbent parties and candidates and a major component of electoral rigging (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006 and Lewis, 2003). A possible explanation for the absence of a traceable record of the electoral voter list in the 1964/65 elections is the extent of the manipulation in the western and mid-western regions (Table 1).

*Table 1 Colonial and Post-colonial Voter Registration in Nigeria*

<i>Elections</i>	<i>Registered Voters</i>
1959	9,043,404 <sup>a</sup>
1964/65	-
1979	48,633,782 <sup>f</sup>
1983	65,304,818 <sup>b</sup>
1992/93	38,866,336 <sup>g</sup>
1999	57,938,945 <sup>h</sup>
2003	60,823,022 <sup>c</sup>
2007	61,567,036 <sup>d</sup>
2011	73,523,040 <sup>e</sup>
2015	68,833,476 <sup>i</sup>

*Sources:* a) Bendel (1999: 704); b) Bendel (1999: 704); c) African Election Database (2011); d) INEC (2007: 26); e) ND (2012: 7); EUEOM (2011: 2); and INEC (2011: 4); f) Bendel (1999: 704); g) Bendel (1999: 704-720); h) African Election Database (2011); and i) Channels TV as sourced from INEC on 14 March 2015.

For other elections where records are available, analysts are suspicious about the reliability of the records as incumbents deliberately inflated the figures (Lewis 2003). According to Darren Kew in the 2003 elections ‘... somehow, the numbers of the registered voters were bursting at polling stations across the nation, implausibly so for the rural districts in which I observed’ (Kew 2004:p.149). It can be assumed that the surge which Kew referred to could have also occurred in previous elections. Consider, for example, the 65.3 million declared registered voters by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) during the 1983 general elections. This figure seems inflated as 20 years after, the commission barely registered 60 million eligible voters inclusive of the dubious records which Kew expressed his doubts about. Equally, although the 2007 voter registration exercise had its own forms of contaminations, INEC was still only able to register 61.5 million eligible voters. It could be argued that the 1983 registration exercise was more accurate when compared to 2007 as the latter had clear evidence of fake voters. However, a critical look at the subsequent exercises in 1992/93, 1999, 2011 and 2015 seem to complement the conclusion that ‘... the [1983] general election was anything but free and fair. The only political parties that could complain of election rigging are those parties that lack the resources to rig.’<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, except for the last two elections (2011 and 2015) no any registration exercise had the equivalent number of total registered voters recorded in the 1983 elections. Perhaps, explaining the need for a biometric voter register in the conduct of 2011 elections. Indeed, for the immediate past INEC-chair, cleansing the voter list was necessary as ‘the integrity of the elections is associated with the quality of the voter’s register’ (Jega 2012). Also, incorrect voter list could be a source for voter disenfranchisement. For example, it was reported that an ‘... entire neighbourhood presumed to be opposition strongholds showed up on election day (2003 elections) to find that their members had been disqualified or not registered’ (Kew 2004:p.149). Such instances when prevalent could ignite suspicion and threaten legitimacy.

Secondly, religious and regional divisions are obvious in Nigerian politics. Nigeria is composed of numerous nationalities that have lived for 54 years using a single “official language” but remain ethno-religiously distinct (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Controversies aside, Nigerian geopolitical configuration, on a conservative perspective, is unequally divided (Oyovbaire 1983). There is the ethnically populated Hausa/Fulani group in the north, and Yoruba and Ibo who each dominated western and eastern parts respectively. In fact, as far back as the 1952 population census, the north had more than half (55.4 per cent) of the national population, while the east and west each had less than a quarter (20.9 per cent and 23.7 per cent). The same pattern is replicated by the 2006 population census which showcases the north as having 53.6 per cent, with the west having less than a quarter (19.7 per cent) and the east with slightly more than a quarter (26.7 per cent) of the national population (Table 2).

**Table 2** Nigeria’s Population 1952 & 2006

Region	Total Population 1952	Total Population 2006	% Total Nat Pop 1952	% Total Nat Pop 2006
North	16,835,582	75,239,722	55.4	53.6
West	6,352,472	27,722,432	20.9	19.7
East	7,215,251	37,475,636	23.7	26.7
Total	30,402,205	140,437,790		

*Source:* National Population Commission NPC (2006)

In addition, the country is ‘... the largest country in the world that is seen as about half Muslim and half Christian’ (Paden, 2012: p.13). According to the available records, the country is made up of 50.2 per cent Muslims and 48.5 per cent Christians of the national population. These divisions provided politicians with a population that could easily be targeted for political ends. During every election ethnicity and religion take a centre stage and the elites nurture ethno religious sentiments to rally support. Hence, we find expressions like ‘southern Christian incumbent facing off a northern Muslim challenger’ (Paden 2012: p.3) used to label presidential party tickets. The Obasanjo-Atiku, Yar’adua-Jonathan, and Jonathan-Namadi presidential tickets in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections were described as Christian-Muslim and Muslim-Christian tickets respectively (Ayantayo 2009). While this did not play well during the 2015 elections, its usage could not be denied as it manifests in the campaign trails of both the two leading contenders.

Likewise, during electioneering political parties use religious sentiments to build support. For example, during the 1999 elections, Obasanjo was portrayed as ‘born again’ in Abacha’s prison camp and a blessing to Nigeria (Obiyan and Amuwo 2013). In fact, for some scholars, the genesis of Nigerian political crises lies in the actual and potential usage of ethno-religious differences as instruments for political mobilisation, success and legitimacy (Kifordu 2011; Mustapha 2006; Suberu 1997). Consequently, the administration of elections is dragged into pre-existing sentiments to the extent that ‘if [a] village or clan [is] in conflict with another and got hold of election materials because a son of the soil happened to be an election officer, every trick in the book [is] employed to deprive rival[s] of equal access’ (Diamond, Kirk-Greene, & Oyediran 1997: pp.137- 8).

Lastly, a large percentage of Nigerians are severely impoverished and most live in remote rural areas. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) placed 57.3 per cent of Nigeria’s population as living under severe deprivation and 54.1 per cent under multi-dimensional poverty, with each surviving on less than 1.25 US dollars per day.<sup>3</sup> It is said that a hungry, malnourished and poor population is easy prey for elites’ manipulations (Magaloni 2006). Bratton’s study (ed. 2013) indicates that in the 2007 elections political elites calculate their best interest and move their respective positions, making sure that resources at their disposal played a central role. In the context of such gripping poverty, vote buying was found to have enhanced partisan loyalty among rural Nigerians (Bratton 2013: p.38) and created what scholarship called a ‘tragic brilliance’. A tragic brilliance is when the electorates’ choices are constrained by other circumstantial conditions to the extent that they are denied the ability to exercise their rights to free choices (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009). Also, the poor conditions of people including those recruited to serve as electoral officials make them vulnerable to elite manipulation unless they are sufficiently paid by the electoral commission.<sup>4</sup> The demographic features enumerated have and continue to inhibit appropriate democratic tradition in the country.

*Political Context*

The Nigerian state is a neo-patrimonial state which makes it possible for incumbents to use state resources to their advantage. Before independence, the British through their conflicting policies had nurtured on the one hand a polity based on ethnic and religious divisions and on the other a disintegrated whole that spent 54 years staggering in search of unity in diversity (Adejumobi, 1997 and Agbaje, 1997). This was done despite noticeable elements of democratic traditions and possibilities for unity among the precolonial societies. Constitutions were fashioned to run colonial Nigeria not in accordance with the prevailing understanding of self-government in London (Kirk-Greene 1997 and Osaghae 1998). Thus, when provision for the election of Nigerians to the legislative council in the 1922 Constitution was made, it was confined to the municipal areas of Lagos and Calabar (Agbaje 1997 and Kirk-Greene 1997) and only four – three for Lagos and one for Calabar – out of 46 council seats were made available to male residents of 21 years of age with a minimum income of £100 – £120 per annum (ERC 2008). Also, the 1946 Constitution did not provide any considerable changes as participation remained restricted to the elite or only open to people with £50 per annum or politicians with records of achievement – defined as people with ‘... western education, firsthand exposure to Euro-American ways of life as former slaves, wealth or a combination of these’ (Agbaje 1997: p.368). So, the party system was only made available to political elites as few Nigerians fulfilled the set criteria. From inception, therefore, political parties were fashioned to be ‘vote gathering associations of the privileged classes, for the privileged classes by the privileged classes ... [and the colonial electoral process] did not give the nascent parties the incentive to make direct contact with the mass people’ (Agbaje 1997: pp.368-73).

In addition, because strong personalities were made to combine party leadership with leadership of ethnic, religious and regional ideas, political parties of the first republic were fostered on the art of electoral rigging against fair competition. For example, it is alleged that the British participated in the manipulation of the 1959 elections ‘even in areas where (the supporters of the party favoured by the British) were in a minority’ (Iyayi 2007: p.3). Thus, ‘ethnicity became the crucial vehicle of political mobilisation. Personalities and clientele networks predominate; internal discipline is weak; internecine battles are common’ (Lewis 2003: p.134). The very person or group of persons who are the major beneficiaries of free and fair elections turn out to be the leading impediments of democratic elections(Olagunju, Jinaidu and Oyovbaire 1993).

This political arrangement provided politicians with a great advantage in shaping electoral outcomes. Politicians use political parties to connect to state resources and build political loyalty. Such political advantage provides incumbents with a chance to ‘... outspend on campaigns, deploy legions of canvassers, and, most importantly to supplement policy appeals with patronage goods that bias the voter in their favour’(Greene 2007: p.5). For example a party chief described his party as ‘a winning machine where we win elections without winning the hearts of the people’ (Channels TV, 19 January 2011). Similarly, former president Obasanjo explained that ‘parties and candidates together spent during the [2003] elections more than [is required] to fight a successful war’ (FGN 2005: p.5). Perhaps, this explains why the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) is ‘... full of members who fraudulently obtained their party membership cards’ (Tribune, 23 November 2005) and at a point the party dismissed all its members to literally enjoy the privilege of being the only ‘... ruling party in world history without a single member’ (Ibrahim & Garuba 2010: p.20).

Also, the political environment makes it easy for elites to use state power and resources to win by establishing patron-client relations regardless of the cost. For instance, Lindsay Berrett observed that by 2006 it was obvious that:

Obasanjo was building the party’s future on his personal political preference.” He seemed to be saying that “the real dividends of democracy were to be gained from heeding his own decisions rather than from depending on the choice of the people since those whom he regarded as his best collaborators were those whom he had personally handpicked to serve without any political linkage between them and the elective process (Isumonah, 2012:p.52).

In other words, for the PDP ‘... all known rules of democracy [are to be] thwarted. The party does not care a hoot about the processes of elections or selection, it violates them at will’ (Agbaje and Adejumobi 2006: p.36). The decision over who is to occupy what position of authority was made available only on the exclusive list of the president and those around him (Iliffe 2011). This indicates that ‘the public domain is the sole property of rulers and that it is theirs to control as they please’ (Ekeh 1997:p.90). Hence, the incumbent dispenses patronage to intimidate opponents and suppress popular view.

Presumably, while there are some many reasons behind the inability of oppositions to dislodge incumbent government in Nigeria, the importance of patron-client relationship cannot be undermined. Many ‘...candidates vie for office for the privilege of acting as intermediaries in patron-client relations ... and the incumbent manipulate [the process] to ensure their favoured candidate wins’ (Gandhi & Lust-Okar 2009: p.407). However, it can be argued that the ruling elites are not alone in their attempts to manipulate elections as they collaborate with some of the citizenry.

*Table 3 Incumbency Rate 1959 - 2015*

<i>Election</i>	<i>Wining Party</i>	<i>Main Opposition</i>
1959	NPC/NCNC	AG,
1964	NPC	AG/NCNC
1979	NPN	UPN & NPP
1983	NPN	UPN & NPP
1999	PDP	APP & AD
2003	PDP	ANPP & APGA
2007	PDP	ANPP & AC
2011	PDP	CPC, ACN & ANPP
2015	PDP	APC

*Source: Authors’ compilation*

For instance, it is the people who apparently inflate the voter register while acting as registration officers, used their houses as venues for illegal thumb printing of ballot papers, as returning officers alter election results and deliver the same (the result) to collation centres, and are used as political thugs to intimidate political opponents (Olagunju, Jinaidu, & Oyovbaire 1993). While these acts seem realistic, political parties and candidates always have grand designs, preparing and outspending oppositions to remain perpetual winners. Indeed, Table three indicates that the ruling-NPC remained in power until some military officers staged the coup that killed the most prominent politicians of the First Republic.

Similarly, in the Second Republic NPN seemed to enjoy the benefits of incumbency and emerged victorious in the 1979 elections and retained same during the 1983 elections. The ruling-PDP appeared to have enjoyed this privilege it assumed power in 1999 until when it was ousted out during the last concluded 2015 presidential election by the opposition (I shall return to this soon).

In short, the political context provides politicians - incumbents and the opposition, especially the former with a fertile environment to manipulate electoral behaviour, processes and outcomes. It has created an electorate vulnerable to fragile political parties that seem disconnected to respective constituencies.

*Institutional Setting*

Having gained independence on 1 October 1960, Nigeria is a federal republic of 36 states, comprising 774 local governments. The country operates a bicameral legislature with 109 senatorial districts and 360 federal constituencies. Each district and constituency is represented by an elected member who serves a tenure of four years. The president and governors are elected as executives for a period of four years each with a chance of a second term. In terms of electoral administration, this composite whole is administered by one Chairperson, 12 National Commissioners and a Secretary in Abuja. The Commission is represented at state level by 37 residential electoral commissioners, 774 electoral officers and at least three polling staff per unit. Presently, Nigeria has 8,800 functional registration areas and 111,119 polling units (INEC, 2011).

This organisational structure has passed through nine structural models in search of a viable ‘federal democracy.’ A federal democracy is a structural arrangement that gives constituent units substantial power to operate as independent parts of a central government.<sup>5</sup> The first two northern and southern protectorates were established when Nigeria was under colonial rule which were later changed to three (north, west and eastern) regions. They were seen as independent federating units between 1914 and 1954 (Paden 2004). However, it is difficult to accept this conclusion as the regions were administered ‘under a scaffolding Governor-General with two subordinate lieutenant governors’ (Oyovbaire 1983:p.10). In addition, none had absolute control over its resources as the Nigerian state was under an imperial domination (Ekeh 1997).

Following independence, a democratic regime was built along the Westminster parliamentary model which maintained the three regional arrangements until the creation of the Midwestern region in 1963. The electoral crisis of 1964-65 led to the first military intervention in Nigeria’s federal experiment which apart from the Second Republic (1979 to 1983) and various dots of unsuccessful and distorted transitions (1992/1993 and 1996), continued to rule the country from 16 January 1966 until the 29 May 1999 (Table 4). When viewed from a democratic prism both the colonial and military regimes were less relevant as both negate the idea of democracy. However, when the focus is on electoral politics each of these stages has its own associated effects. For example, the colonial arrangements were accused of providing politicians and parties with some ethno-linguistic safe havens to build political loyalty along ethnic, regional and religious sentiments (Agbaje and Adejumbi 2006, Agbaje 1997). Consequently, partisan political actors in all the three regions deployed ethnic and cultural differences to enhance their competitiveness and access political power (Kifordu 2011, Agbaje 1997).

**Table 4 Search for Viable Federation**

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Regions/States</i>	<i>Degree of Autonomy</i>	<i>Regime type</i>
1914	2	Very high	Colonial
1954	3	Very high	Colonial
1963	4	High	Democratic/parliamentarian
1967	12	Low	Military
1976	19	Low	Military
1979	19	Medium	Democratic/presidential
1991	30	Low	Military
1996	36	Very low	Military
1999	36	Medium and rising	Democratic/presidential

*Source:* World Bank, Nigeria: Washington DC, report No. 24477-UNI. 23 July 2002.

Thus, the Action Group (AG) won the 1959 regional government elections in the western Yoruba dominated region with 49.5 per cent of the total votes. The National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) alliance won the eastern region with 64.6 per cent of the votes and NPC won the Hausa-Fulani dominated northern region with 61.2 per cent of the votes (Bendal 1999: 707; Osaghae 1998).

Similarly, after the 1966 coup the military distorted the structure by suspending the Westminster model and replaced it with a centralised unitary system of government. The system was later reversed to federal arrangement after the counter-coup of the 29 January 1966. The military stayed in power until 1979 when they fashioned and facilitated the transition that culminated in the formation of the Second Republic based on the American presidential system of government. The republic, however, did not last long, and terminated by

another military junta. Since then, Nigeria remained under military rule for 16 successive years. During these two military regimes, the federal structure was reconstituted in 1967, 1976, 1991 and 1996 from the existing four regions into 12, 19, 30 and 36 weak federating units respectively (Table 4). This, although in conformity with the '... appropriate objective structural conditions of the large majority of the Nigerian people' (Oyovbaire 1983:p.20), has dislocated the federal arrangement and '... concentrated power in one person, thus opening the gates ... for the worst form of Jacobin dictatorship' (Ibrahim 1997: p.164).

The most obvious implication of this weak federal structure is the overcentralisation of political and fiscal power (Suberu 2004). On the political side, the presidents' relationship with the state governors is a 'superordinate-subordinate relationship rather than a coordinate relationship ... who must carry out instructions from the president' (Obiyan 2013:p.92) and by extension the local government chairpersons. Two examples illustrate this point. First, there is the operation of joint account by almost all the states of the federation which denied the local governments their respective federal allocation for developmental activities. A joint account is the practice of holding an account into which all funds accruable to local governments are deposited and managed by other tiers of governments for the local governments. This has rendered the local governments ineffective as few could function as independent tiers of government. Secondly, on two occasions the federal government was seen taking charge of governance at the grass roots level. The most recent was the approval on 17 January 2007 by the federal government to deduct money from all local governments to finance the construction of comprehensive primary health care centres in the local governments. This practice led to the state governments taking the federal government to court for redress.

Also, the pattern of the separation of power seems obscured and cunning, rising tension among the three arms of government. The executive and legislature at the center, for example, become engaged in power tussles which ignite impeachment proceedings, either against the executive or leadership of any of the two houses – the Senate or House of Representatives – between 1999-2003(Obiyan and Amuwo 2013, Isumonah 2012). To neutralise the tension, Obasanjo was reported to have, allegedly, masterminded the 2003 elections to ensure that only those he approved either won back their seats or gain entry as fresh members of the legislative chambers(Isumonah 2012). Similarly, the judiciary which ordinarily suppose to check such excesses also appeared consumed by the incumbent. The body looked '... sandwiched in the executive and has often been smeared in corruption to pass contradictory judgements in favour of the incumbents' (Nweke 2013: p.67). It is argued that corruption among judges on electoral trials has compromised the independence of the judiciary.<sup>6</sup>Indeed, an investigation carried out by the National Judicial Council (NJC) in 2004 recommended compulsory retirement for some judges on allegations of corruption (FGN 2005).

Perhaps, this institutional setup accounts for the incumbents use of state resources to stay in power. For example, in preparation for the 2003 general elections the executive refused to release any funding for [(INEC)] until late 2002. The president provided monies for the election itself just forty-eight hours before polling day. Both financing delays served as a body blow to INEC efficiency, forcing it to scramble first to organise the registration (Kew 2004:p.148).

Secondly, the weak federal structure has subjected the electoral commissions and officials to monetary and financial inducements from politicians. For example, during the 2003 elections it reportedly also suffered from a host of infrastructural problems that left it ripe for abuse, not least of which were the poor salaries for its critical polling station officers, who earned a mere [one thousand Naira (N1000 equivalent to)] less than US \$8 per day for the few days they worked. ... we saw INEC polling station officials demanding payments from a local PDP leader, who assured them that the LGA chairman (also PDP) would settle accounts once the process was complete (Kew 2004:p.150).This act damages the image and credibility of The Commission and the elections at large.

Confounding this is the control over the security apparatus by the central government. While this may not appear to be a problem elsewhere, in Nigeria where politicians appear to act with impunity the control of security apparatus has significant implications on electoral conducts and outcomes. To effectively manage elections INEC requires the services of security personnel (Olurode and Jega 2011). The apparent control of the police by the presidency provided incumbents with a potential agent of coercion which could be employed during elections to ensure victory. For instance, during the 1983 elections, a returning officer of the Ondo state governorship elections was questioned by UPN agents over the submission of false results by NPN agents and he replied that he '... could no longer entertain any argument because he had his order from Lagos (the then Federal Capital) that Mr. Omoboriowo should be declared as elected governor. He said this in front of policemen, [(National Security Organisation)] NSO men, and some FEDECO officials' (Guardian 22 August 1983: 2 & 16). In fact, both the domestic and foreign election observers reported an indifferent Nigeria Police officers who failed to act while electoral frauds were on (EU EOM, 2007; NDI, 2008; TMG, 2007).

Also, the institution that is supposed to remedy such unrestrained behaviour appeared inactive and usually sided with the government in power. The controversial interpretation of 2/3 of 19 states by the Supreme Court during the 1979 elections was a classic example. The electoral law demands for a candidate to be duly

elected as president, to score the highest votes cast; and not less than one quarter of the votes cast in each of, at least, two-third of all the states of the federation. Nobody doubted Shagari's highest number of votes and that he had the required one quarter of votes in 12 of 19 states except for Kano where he managed to get about 19.4 per cent (Oshagae 1997: 127-29; Okoye 2009: p.137). The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) challenged the return of Shagari by FEDECO on the ground that he had not secured the above legal requirement. The first tribunal held the results arguing that:

... It does not require the opinion of an expert in mathematics or a computerist to work out what  $2/3$  of 19 means. It is enough to say that any student in a primary school, tutored in the subject of 'fractions' in simple arithmetic, will have no difficulty in getting 12 if asked to find  $2/3$  of 19 (Osaghae 1998: p.128).

Awolowo appealed to the Supreme Court which dismissed the petition and held that:

If the number 13 which is the number nearest to  $2/3$  of States had been intended, the Federal Military Government would have said so in clear terms. In any case, as between 13 States and  $12 \frac{2}{3}$  States, the figure of  $12 \frac{2}{3}$ , considering all the circumstances, appears to us to be the intention of the Federal Military Government in the context of sub paragraph (ii) of sub section (1) (c) of section 34A. Furthermore, it is, we think, fallacious to talk of fractionalisation of the physical land area of a state when the operative words of section 34(AO (1) (c) (11) relate undoubtedly to the votes cast by the voters in the state at the election(Okoye 2009: p.137).

The two judgements, argued some scholars, were made in favour of NPN because the party was the Federal Military Government's chosen party (Sahara Reporters 2013;Osaghae 1998).

Lastly, the institutional arrangement has set up a fertile ground for executive arbitrariness. For example, it was alleged that Eme Awa was removed from the office of the chairperson of the National Electoral Commission when the president realised that Awa was not amenable to manipulations (Ibrahim 1997) just as Obasanjo was alleged to assume the power to determine the political fate of some elected governors. Consider Governor Ladoja's narration of what transpired between him and Obasanjo at the latter's Ota Farm: 'Obasanjo asked whether I came to beg [(to apologise)]. I said no. He said I should go and resign. I said no. He said I will be impeached. I said you cannot get two-thirds. He said two-thirds is my foot' (The Nation, 2 October 2011: 10). Governor Ladoja was indeed impeached and the court ordered his reinstatement the then incumbent refused to enforce the order. In short, the federal arrangement has serious implications for the conduct of elections in the country.

#### *'Dominant-power politics syndrome'*

The discussion so far focuses on the character of Nigerian state as the pitch for electoral contest, with the political elite's dynamics taken for granted. This ignores an important aspect that could have an effect on the electoral behaviour of both partisan and nonpartisan electoral actors – the 'dominant-power politics syndrome.' This is a political configuration in which one political grouping either as 'a movement, a party, an extended family, or a single leader dominates the system in such a way that there appears to be little prospect of alternation of power in the foreseeable future' (Carothers 2002: pp.11-12). Elections conducted under such arrangement witness excessive use of 'state's main assets' – resources, jobs, instruments of public information, and the police power - in service of the overriding group, Carothers explained.

Election in Nigeria, especially in the recent past, appears to fit this depiction. The 2007 general elections for example witnessed a president who seemed committed in his effort to take over the ruling-PDP, expanding and consolidating his political fortunes. Obasanjo is said to be at the peak of the party, dispensing patronage to secure loyalty (Iliffe 2011:p.254). For instance, it was alleged that the President continued to mastermind the replacement of the party's chairmanship replacing individual leaders almost every two years – from Solomon Lar, Barnabas Gemade, and Audu Ogbah, to Ahmadu Ali. This, presumably, to ensure the emergence of an amiable party leader (Isumonah 2012). This, possibly, explains the description of the party by the International Financial Institution as a patronage network of powerful individuals, lacking any ideological unity but apparent lust of power (Punch, 16 April 2006).

Also, the dynamics of intra and inter party group relations which usually manifest in symbolic cooperation and coordination of elites became volatile. The ruling-PDP suffered the most serious setback with many of its members leaving for other parties despite politicians' normal inclination to belong to the ruling party. For example, virtually almost all the leading founders of the PDP had left the party before the 2007 elections and there is no state chapter of the party that was not immersed in serious crisis (Odukoya 2013). Indeed, this party infighting appeared to have effects over the conduct of the 2007 elections and seemed the major cause of serious legal battles that characterised the 2007 elections.

While the 2007 elections supposed to signal the institutionalisation democratic process in Nigeria, the elections witnessed a President who continued to control the country's electoral landscape. Obasanjo and his PDP-installed machineries remained instrumental in the elections, defining who was to contest for what

position. The president is believed by many, including the then leader of the ANPP Caucus in the House of Representatives, to have embarked on a desperate journey ‘to destroy all existing political structures in Nigeria including the one that brought him to power’ (Vanguard 22 February 2006). A Professor reported that when he asked a friend of his plans to run for the Senate seat, the friend relied ‘we are still waiting for signals from [Obasanjo]’ (Isumonah 2012: p.57).

Accordingly, governmental institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and INEC, as well as the seemingly faulty constitutional provisions, were allegedly engaged to block prospective and formidable politicians. For example, governors who have fallen out with Obasanjo such as Rashid Ladoja, Peter Obi, and Joshua Dariye of Oyo, Ekiti and Plateau States respectively were charged with corruption and impeached in an apparent attempt to discredit their political future. In fact, to a former Nigerian Ambassador to Switzerland and chairperson of the Plateau State PDP Elders Forum, ‘the EFCC in today is worse than Hitler’s Gestapo and unless it is called to order, it will destroy the very fabric of our nascent democracy through its selective prosecution of perceived opponents’ (This day 12 November 2006). Others, such as the Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, was forced to leave the party, harassed and excluded from the contest by INEC despite a court restraining order and honest advice of concerned groups (Tar and Zak-Williams 2007).

The informal power dynamics entrenched deep seated party divisions, engendering infighting among members who broke away to form or join other political camps. The Vice president and his people together with other politicians including the former Lagos State Governor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, joined hands to form the Action Congress (AC). A union that in the later years prove very effective in nurturing a strong opposition in the country. Indeed, in the 2015 general elections, the All Progressive Congress (APC) not only overthrew the ruling-PDP at the centre – both in executive and legislature, but also succeeded in taking over 23 of the 36 states of the federation.

Unlike the 2007 elections when the then president appeared well engaged with the political fortunes of his party members, the 2011 electoral context appeared different. The President during the 2011 elections is not only a product of a fraudulent election, but also a person who assumed office through presidential incapacitation and death. These realities quickly lead to confrontation with an existing elite dominant-power pact. This is a sort of PDP-in house consociational arrangement that seeks to share the country’s highest political office among the country’s existing divides – north and south dichotomy. The failure of party to honour this gentleman’s agreement seems the beginning of the mapping out up of the successes and failures of the 2011 elections.

Despite attempts to cleanse the Nigerian dirty electoral process and enhance its credibility, many believed that the President, a Christian and southerner, should have conceded his presidential bid and honoured the agreement. The argument is that President Obasanjo was a southerner and Christian and had served the eight years turn due for the south; he had been replaced by Umaru Yar’Adua, a northerner and Muslim who was expected to have served his region’s eight years turn. Yar’Adua’s untimely death in 2010, midway through his term, opened the door for the then-Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to ascend to the presidency. The power rotation agreement presupposes that Jonathan should not have contested the presidency because the north had not finished its own turn. Thus, when Jonathan decided to contest for the elections, many political groupings within the ruling party were upset. In other words, Jonathan’s candidature seems a possible explanation to the pattern of voter turnout in the 2011 presidential elections and his party’s apparent loss of political support across northern states.

Another underlying feature of the 2011 elections is the apparent weakness of the opposition parties and their failure to form a formidable coalition against the PDP. The strongest opposition parties during the elections both at national and state levels were CPC, ACN, and ANPP. The CPC is a power to reckon with for its vast northern support and a candidate who is generally regarded as man of integrity and above reproach. However, the CPC was a new party, having no claim to state or federal resources. The ACN was lacking a strong presidential candidate, Nuhu Ribadu, who is believed to have unfairly stepped on the toes of many political gladiators when he headed the federal government anti-corruption commission. But the party is well grounded in majority of the south-western states, plus having a couple of members in the national parliaments. This enhances the party’s electoral campaign and influence, plus it has the support of some northern elites such as Dalhatu Bafarawa, a former governor of Sokoto state from 1999 – 2007. The ANPP, although losing its political base in the north, had political representation at the national legislature and controlled three states in the federation. Before the elections there were attempts by these parties to form an alliance to face the ruling party. The much hoped alliance between the CPC and ACN is believed to have been turned down when Tinubu allegedly made a deal with the ruling party ‘in return for immunity from prosecution by the EFCC and the right to nominate the next attorney general and the minister petroleum’ (Paden 2012: pp.19-20).

In contrast to all, the 2015 general elections witnessed an interesting elite dynamics that, coupled with other factors, combined together to produce an interesting election in the country. Here, the opposition in the country



... gained momentum following the defection of a number of governors and leading figures from the PDP, which weakened the position of the previously dominant ruling party. Significantly, the resulting coalition managed to negotiate the selection of its main office holders during party primaries held in November without suffering a major split (Cheeseman 2015).

This provides the opposition All Progressive Congress (APC) party with the best hands in delivering votes. In fact, Adamawa, Kano, and Kwara States, the home state of Atiku, Kwankwaso, and Saraki respectively provided the APC with some of the best presidential election results.<sup>7</sup>In short, the 2007, 2011, and 2015 electoral contexts highlight the relevance of what Carothers' calls dominant power politics in understanding transitional regimes. The 2007 elections provided a typical example of a sitting president handpicking his successor and thus doing all it takes to ensure victory. The 2011 elections on the other hand showed a situation where incapacitation and death provided an acting-president with a chance to become a sitting president and thus blocked the possibility of Cheeseman's (2010) open-contest. The 2015 is a clear indication of the importance of shift in power dynamics which could have a significant impact on electoral attitudes.

### *Conclusion*

This analysis shows that electoral politics in Nigeria has been problematic and subject to challenges, among which is the character of the Nigerian state as the arena of political contest. It examined the extent to which the Nigerian electoral terrain structures the behaviour of partisan political actors – parties, candidates and electorates – and non-partisan actors such as electoral officials and the commission. Drawing insights from the country's historical experience, I paid attention to how demographic, political, institutional settings, and power dynamics in the country shape the behaviour of political actors in the conduct of elections.

The obvious conclusion is that the electoral topography has provided political actors with fragile electorates that are vulnerable to manipulations. The absence of an accurate national voter list has provided political elites with a proper tool for influencing electoral outcomes. Also, the sharpening of ethnic, regional and religious differences by imperialists' policies and subsequent utilisation of same by political elites had rendered the electorates easy prey to naïve political mobilisation, the very aim of which is private not collective interests. This is in addition to their poor conditions which makes them susceptible to financial inducements during elections as voters, electoral officials, party agents or local champions.

### *Acknowledgement*

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Duke, D. (2010), "How Governors Rig Elections", *Sahara Reporters* (July 18):

<http://saharareporters.com/2010/07/18/must-read-how-governors-rig-elections-donald-duke-guardian>

<sup>2</sup> National Broadcast by the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Major General Buhari on the 1 October 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Reports <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA>

<sup>4</sup> Personal discussion with a friend who has served as Supervisory Presiding Officer in three most recent elections in the country immediately after the 2011 general election.

<sup>5</sup> For detail discussion on federal democracy see (Kincaid 1999; Agranoff and Gallarin 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Interview with a former Federal Permanent Secretary and INEC Secretary on 1 November 2012.

<sup>7</sup> In Kano APC scored 1,903,999 votes, 374, 701 in Adamawa, and 302,146 votes from Kwara state (INEC, 2015 March 28 Presidential Election result).

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