

The 2015 General Elections:
Voter Turnout, Voting Behavior and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Paper prepared for presentation at the Post Election Conference
The Electoral Institute, Abuja

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1. Introduction

In a statement on the 2015 Nigerian General Elections the *Freedom House* (2015a) congratulated Nigerians for an election that “appears to be one of the smoothest and least violent in Nigeria’s history,” and, hoped that “the democratic transition occurs peacefully and with respect for human rights of all.” Yet, despite the positive remarks Nigeria was categorized as “partly free” using ratings from political and civil rights enjoyed by the citizens.¹ In fact the Organization (2015b) placed most African states in the same category as Nigeria stating that the continent “saw overall if uneven progress toward democratization during the 1990s and the early 2000s. However, recent years have seen backsliding among both the top performers, such as South Africa, and the more repressive countries, such as The Gambia and Ethiopia.”

Why is this assessment important and what do elections and voter turnout have to do with it? The democratization project concerns primarily the guaranteeing and enjoyments of civil and political rights for citizens. Democracies make these rights possible through citizen participation in elections and governance. A major difference between countries where democracy is consolidated (established democracies), and countries undertaking democratic transitions and consolidation (democratizing countries), is the *extent* to which these rights are guaranteed or restrained. It should be born in mind however, that measures of countries which are “free” or “partly free,” and why, may be controversial but these have been explained and represent, approximately, the situation in the countries (*Freedom House*, 2015c).

Based on these observations, this paper argues that it is too soon and misplaced to claim that the successful 2015 General elections represent the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. (The Guardian newspaper (Editorial: 28/04/2014) for example concluded that “in spite of some challenges, a new culture has evolved for the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria.” We can posit at best, that the result and outcome of the elections offered a great chance for Nigeria to embark on democratic consolidation. New policies and reform of institutions which are required for consolidation of democracy do not exist which theorists have identified as prerequisites although they have failed to equally analyze the requirements which make such reforms possible or difficult especially for countries in Africa, that is, level of popular support and legitimacy which enables regimes to successfully initiate the reforms needed for democratic consolidation.

¹ The political and civil rights assessed include the electoral process; political pluralism; functioning of government; freedom of expression; associational and organizational rights; rule of law; and personal autonomy and individual rights.

This paper therefore attempts to contribute to the theory of democratization in Africa by examining the amount of support an incoming regime must have in order to successfully carry out needed reforms for democratic consolidation using data from the 2015 General elections in Nigeria. It will be argued that the voter turnout and the voting behavior in the elections offer a clue to whether the incoming regime of President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) has the initial support to successfully embark on the process of democratic consolidation. The premise of the paper is that the concepts of voter turnout and voting behavior can contribute to theories of democratization and suggest ways in which a synthesis of the concepts could increase our understanding of the process of democratic consolidation with particular reference to Africa. Knowing the initial support regimes have at inception, they can work to increase popular participation for further legitimacy.

The questions for investigation include the following: what are the requirements for democratic consolidation? What was the voter turnout and voting behavior in the 2015 Nigerian General Elections? What was the regional ethnic pattern of voting? And, finally, what are their implications for democratic consolidation under the incoming regime? Answers to these questions will help us determine the likelihood or otherwise of democratic consolidation under the incoming regime. In the sections that follow, I first review the theories of democratic consolidation, and bring back-in what I consider the missing link –voter turnout and voting behavior – to supplement the theories. Second the propositions from the above are applied to the 2015 General elections with a view to assessing the incoming regime’s prospects for democratic consolidation. Third and finally, the paper suggests ways the various stake holders can contribute to enhancing voter turnout and voting behavior. Theoretically, the assumptions made in the paper will be fruitful in future empirical research linking voter turnout and voting behavior (generally the idea of public political participation) to democratic consolidation in Africa.²

2. Theorizing Democratization and Democratic Consolidation

What is democratic consolidation and how is it achieved? The term became prominent since the “Third Wave” of democratization and has assumed various interpretations. However, as Schedler (1998: p. 91) noted, “originally, the term ‘democratic consolidation’ was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual ‘reverse waves.’”

Democratic transitions and consolidation are interrelated in a continuum. Authoritarian regimes are discarded one way or the other by democratically-elected leaders in free and fair elections. The success of this stage ushers in a democratic transition. This stage is multi-faceted as different means and strategies could be involved to reach the initial elections (Bratton and van de Walle,

² This paper assumes that the difficulties facing African experiences in democratic transition and consolidation are similar in many ways because of the social structures in which politics take place. Findings from the Nigerian experience are therefore likely to be applied to other African countries. Since most of the consolidation challenges are in Africa, our efforts could also contribute to more robust theories about democratic consolidation in general.

1997; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). The theories also contend that the initial political party that ushered in the transition is further replaced over time, by another political party also in free and fair elections. This is when the consolidation begins. But so many things can go wrong during the transition period as the subtitle of O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) correctly referred to "*Uncertain Democracies*" in the subtitle to their book. The transition regimes are susceptible to reversals, breakdowns or total failures as witnessed in Africa by the end of the 1990s and early 2000s (Freedom House, 2015b).

What makes democracies certain is the subject of the consolidation theories. Quoting O'Donnell, (1999: 37), Schedler (2001: 67) embraced "the classical and most widespread definition that considers a democratic regime to be consolidated when it is 'likely to endure.'" The conditions that make democracies "endure" in relation to Africa are thought to include the "evolution of political rights," the "meaningful representation of ethnic, racial, religious, and other minority groups in the political process" (and) fostering the "alternation of power between rival political parties" (Schraeder, 2004: pp. 236-7). Other theories focus on institutions such as adoption of "federalism", "proportional representation versus majoritarian electoral systems" "elite behavior" and "party structures" etc. (Diamond, 1999). Although these institutions are directly or indirectly related to participation, popular participation was not considered equally significant for democratic consolidation. Yet, comparatively for Africa, Milam and Jones (2011) correctly observed that, "the failure of African states to create the institutions and political culture that can assure peaceful transitions for legitimately elected leaders continues to impede the continent's search for sustainable democracy" (p. 177).

Furthermore, there is currently a new focus on "democratic recession" (Diamond, 2015), and "democracy in decline" (Plattner, 2015), without addressing the effect of popular support for regime success or failure at consolidation. Instead the emphasis has still been for example, on issues of bad governance, leading to "the failure of many new democracies to build effective modern states" (Plattner, 2005: p. 7). It has been noted that several African regimes suffered from these democratic setbacks, but could it be that most of these states face a popular participation deficit in the process of democratization? Further research should explore this possibility especially in Africa where elections are often marred by low voter turnout. The discourse on elections often center on free and fair elections for good reasons. But what happens when free and fair elections are by a national majority (or a minority of the voters)? This question leads us to investigate voter turnout as a credible causal factor (even if partly) for democratic reversal or consolidation in Africa.

3. Bringing Voter turnout and Voting Behavior Back- In to Democratic Consolidation

A perennial question about democratization and democratic systems has been the extent to which citizens have a say in the affairs of their governments. The question has featured in the discussions of types of democracies (representative or direct) and the question continues to generate interest among political theorists for the reasons discussed in this section.

Voter turnout simply means the percentage of voting age population (or the percentage of registered voters) who actually came out to vote in an election. In democratizing societies, voter

turnout is the most common form of political participation. Unlike in advanced democracies where citizens engage in various types of participation, people in the former do not have the economic means or the time to engage in other forms of participation. Also, most of the political systems also frown on other types of participation which may be regarded as opposition to the authorities. It is therefore important to examine voter turnout as the main form of political participation and its effects on regime legitimacy.

Most of the existing theories of voter turnout deal with either the determinants or how to enhance turnout either at the national level (Powell 1982; Jackman 1987; and Lijphart 1997); or local level (group-based) mobilization (Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978); Blais (2000); and individual level determinants (Leighly and Nagler 1992; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In addition, most of the studies of voter turnout have been concentrated on the experience of the advanced democracies and very little on the African experience.³ However the focus on determinants of voter turnout is important, and should be investigated for the reasons to be analyzed below.

But is the voter turnout important in an election? And for who and which institutions is turnout important in the process of democratic consolidation? These questions have been subsumed in theories but rarely studied in-depth. One of the few attempts to account for political participation as a crucial factor for democratic consolidation is Schedler (2001) who examined three foundations for democracy: behavioral, attitudinal and structural. Of particular relevance to this paper, Schedler identified the *normative foundations* (within the structural foundation) constituting democratic legitimacy, qualified as “the genuine, non-instrumental, intrinsic support for democracy by political elites and as well as citizens” to be “the most important, and even defining element of democratic consolidation” (p. 75 in reference to Diamond 1999, and Linz and Stepan 1996). To emphasize the point, Schedler (2001: p. 75) stated that:

No democracy embedded in a ‘democratic consensus’ has ever broken down. At the lower end, things look more ambiguous: Democracies may survive despite low levels of popular support. Still there is little doubt that high reserves of mass support provide a valuable cushion that help democracies to prevent the emergence of crises, as well as overcome critical moments as they arise.

And as Hague, et al (p. 206) also stated

“Elections in liberal democracies are often seen as ‘bottom up’ institutions which enable the ruled to control the rulers. But they can also be viewed as ‘top down’ affairs enabling the authority over the governed. They are better seen as “an exchange of influence between rulers and ruled. Voters exert some influence over government for obedience to decisions they only partly shaped.”

Of the various forms of political participation, none is more important than the act of voting in a democratic political system as a fundamental right. Voting in elections serves as a measure of

³ A major reason for this neglect could be due to the easier access to data in the advanced democracies and the difficulty to get same in Africa. Also the focus on elections in Africa has been on such concepts as the “patrimonial” tendencies in the elections, but the societies are changing and the elections getting better. The voter turnout data no matter how imperfect could still help our theoretical analysis.

popular support for regimes and state legitimacy. This is one reason why “landslide” victories are celebrated, while attempts to boycott elections are often discouraged. For these reasons the classical theorists equate citizenship to participation in politics. Pateman (1970) refers to arguments of Rousseau, Mill and Cole, to state the fact that “feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment (p. 105). However, Urbinati (2008) observed that “the liberal theory and practice of representation managed to empty citizenship of its political character and to create the identity of the elector’ (p. 148).

As will be discussed later, for democratizing countries (more than in matured democracies), such initial burst of energy from a high voter turnout provides the popular support for the reforms and changes needed. Most of the time, even the institution of political parties itself is not enough to bring about changes. Vested interests of the parties and elites could take advantage of low popular support to prevent or even derail desired changes for consolidation. But if popular support is high, the executive can ride on it for the initial reforms. From the analysis we can develop the proposition that *a regime with a solid base of support from high voter turnout, could use such as an initial political resource to initiate new policies and make desired reforms to achieve them. A high voter turnout ushering a new regime is therefore an antecedent variable determining the success of needed reforms towards democratic consolidation. This in turn may contribute to further support in subsequent elections.* It can be represented as follows:

Antecedent Variable -----→Independent Variables -----→ Dependent Variable
(High Voter Support) (Policy and Institutional Reforms) (Democratic Consolidation)

As Beetham (1983) noted,

“ . . . from the standpoint of popular control, elections exert an effect well beyond the time when they are actually taking place. This is due to the well-known law of anticipated reactions: power is operative even when it is not being exercised. The fact of the vote casts a long shadow in front of it, as it were. It acts as a continuous discipline on the elected requiring them to give public account of their actions and to take constant notice of public opinion through its various channels of expression. . . .” (pp. 63-64)

A high voter turnout for an incoming regime would enable it undertake significant reforms and initiate policies with little opposition, while a really low voter turnout will lack such support.⁴ This does not mean, however, that other sources of regime legitimacy and support could not be generated elsewhere, but the antecedent variable provides a ready reserve of support (or political capital) to start the process. Since it is likely that regimes have four years or at most a two-term period of eight years, time is not on the side of regimes needing formidable institutional reforms which must be undertaken for democracy to be sustained in societies.

⁴ This proposition can be empirically studied in future research as a contribution to the theory of democratic consolidation in Africa.

Voting Behavior

Voting behavior refers to how the electorates vote and what determines the way they vote. According to Ball and Peters (2000), voting behavior is “important in those political systems in which the voter has some sort of choice, no matter how limited” (156). They identified three broad approaches to voting behavior namely: party identification model; the rational choice approach; and the sociological approach (Ball and Peters, 2000: 157). They described the approaches as follows (p. 160): In the party identification model, party identification determines the choice of candidate to vote for even though personality of candidates and presentation of issues and organization of campaigns could help change the choice. In the rational choice approach the choice is based on expectations of the voter and but some traits of the voter may intervene in making the choices between candidates. The sociological factor focuses on the voter’s class, religion, age gender and group tend to stand the time even though still has further issues within. Of the three approaches however, the sociological approach best explains the Nigerian (and most democratizing societies’) elections.

In their characterization of political participation in the less developed countries, Hague et al noted that participation is “typically limited in quantity and manipulative in quantity” (167); among the reasons include low levels of education, poverty and generally “limited state penetration of the country side” (p. 168). In the final analysis, what drives politics is the patron-client relationship. The consequence of this pattern of voting based on regional/ethnic considerations will be discussed as it related to the 2015 General elections. However, the pattern is not as negative as some observers have noted as long as groups have channels of communication for their group and individual interests. As Beetham (1993) pointed out, “the political liberties intrinsic to democracy depend upon a plurality of power centers capable of checking one another . . . ,” (p. 66).

4. The 2015 General Elections and the Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Given the Voter turnout and voting behavior examined above, and their correlation to democratic consolidation what can we make of the democratic consolidation awaiting the regime of President Muhammadu Buhari? This section examines the data from the 2015 General Elections to answer the question. The voter turnout is presented in Tables A, B, and C.

Table A. shows the basic voter turnout of 42.65% of registered voters. This figure included the 1.25% of votes rejected which, in the conventional approach still counts as participation since those voters showed. Typically this turnout is not as impressive as it should be. The fact that the campaign was “considered too close to call” and given the vigorous campaigns by the two main parties --- Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Party (APC), the turnout could have been better. Besides the APC was riding in a wave of change while the PDP branded itself as needing more time to finish what it has started. Of course the fact that the PDP lost

shows that the electorate did not buy the campaign message of continuity by the PDP. However, studies have identified the causes of low voter turnout which might have affected the elections, namely: difficulties of registering and of voting, voter fatigue, negative campaigning (Niemi and Weisberg, 1998; Krupnikov, 2011), security lapses leading to fear by voters, etc. The 2015 General elections suffered these lapses in varying degrees and in some locations. These are areas where the election process can improve. At the end of this section, the various groups and agencies which could help towards that are identified.

Table A: The Voter Turnout in the 2015 General Elections (by INEC)

		% of Registered Voters
No. of Valid Votes	28,587,564	42.40%
No. of Rejected Votes	844,519	1.25%
No. of Votes Cast	29,432,083	43.65%
No. of Accredited Voters	31,746,490	47.08%
No. of Registered Voters	67,422,005	

Source: inec.gov.ng/

Table B. shows the margin of victory by the candidate of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari. The Electoral rule states that the candidate with the most votes wins the first round as long as he/she receives at least twenty-five percent (25%) of the votes in two-thirds of the thirty-six (36) Nigerian states. The APC candidate received fifteen million, four hundred and twenty-four thousand, nine hundred and twenty-one (15, 424, 921) votes while the closest candidate of the PDP received twelve million, eight hundred and fifty three thousand, one hundred and sixty two (12, 853, 162) votes for a margin of two and a half million votes. Also as the rule states the winning candidate also received the required twenty five percent of the votes in two thirds of the thirty-six states of the federation. Although losing candidate (incumbent President) conceded defeat and has been praised for doing so, he simply did what he was expected to do. But because it was not done before in Nigeria the public accorded him praises for it.

Table B: Votes Received in Presidential Elections (by INEC)

	CANDIDATE	GENDER	PARTY	VOTES	REMARK
1.	MUHAMMADU BUHARI	M	APC	15, 424, 921	ELECTED
2.	GOODLUCK EBELE JONATHAN	M	PDP	12, 853, 162	
3.	AYENI MUSA ADEBAYO	M	APA	53, 537	
4.	ALH. GANIYU O. GALADIMA	M	ACPN	40, 311	
5.	CHIEF SAM EKE	M	CPP	36, 300	
6.	RAFIU SALAU	M	AD	30, 673	
7.	DR. MANI IBRAHIM AHMAD	M	ADC	29, 666	
8.	ALLAGOA KELVIN CHINEDU	M	PPN	24, 475	
9.	CHIEF MARTIN ONOVO	M	NCP	24, 455	
10.	JCI SEN. TUNDE ANIFOWOSE-KELANI	M	AA	22, 125	
11.	CHIEF (DR.) CHEKWAS OKORIE	M	UPP	18, 220	
12.	COMFORT OLUREMI SONAIYA	F	KOWA	13, 076	
13.	GODSON MGBODILE OHAENYEM OKOYE	M	UDP	9, 208	

14.	HIGH CHIEF AMBROSE N. ALBERT OWURU	M	HOPE	7, 435	
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Source: inec.gov.ng/

Table C below presents more interesting and analytical material than the previous tables. First, it provides an additional turnout figure – Voting Age Population and Voting Age Population turnout (VPA). The figure is actually less impressive than the turnout of those who registered. The voting Age population is the total population of those who are eligible to vote but for various reasons did not even register to vote. The turnout of 32.11 % is dismal. This is clearly an area of responsibility of the Electoral body to go after all eligible voters and make sure that a high proportion of them register to vote. In the absence of compulsory voting in Nigeria, INEC should use all resources for this purpose. Although the president is duly elected, but it means that those who voted for him were a fraction of the 32% of the voting age. There should be programs to increase the numbers to make the task of democratic consolidation easier for the regimes.

Another important fact from Table C is the falling rates of voter turnout since 1999. The overall voter turnout was in the 50 and 60 percentiles between 1999 and 2011 but down to 43.65% in 2015. Although the credibility of the elections and reliability of the figures may be in question in those other years, the figure is not impressive. As for the voting age population, it has been increasing since 1999 from 52.7 million in 1999 to 91 million in 2015 but the voting age turnout has been decreasing. This does not augur well for the country’s young democracy. Various stakeholders have responsibilities to ameliorate the situation as discussed at the end of this section.

Table C: 2015 General elections Result: Presidential from International IDEA

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting Age Population	Population	Invalid Votes
2015	43.65%	29, 432, 083	67, 422, 005	32.11%	91, 669, 056	181, 562, 056	2.85%
2011	53.68%	39, 469, 484	73, 528, 040	48.32%	81, 691, 751	155, 215, 573	3.19%
2007	57.49%	35, 397, 517	61, 567, 036	49.85%	71, 004, 507	131, 859, 731	
2003	69.08%	42, 018, 735	60, 823, 022	65.33%	64, 319, 246	129, 934, 911	6.00%
1999	52.26%	30, 280, 052	57, 938, 945	57.36%	52, 792, 781	108, 258, 359	1.40%
1993		14, 039, 486		27.79%	50, 526, 720	105, 264, 000	
1979	35.25%	17, 098, 267	48, 499, 091	44.83%	38, 142, 090	77, 841, 000	2.00%

Source: International IDEA: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=NIG>

Key to Voter Turnout Terms:

1. Voter Turnout: The voter turnout as defined as the percentage of registered voters who actually voted
2. Total vote: The total number of votes cast in the relevant election. Total vote includes valid and invalid votes, as well as blank votes in cases where these are separated from invalid votes.

3. Registration: The number of registered voters. The figure represents the number of names on the voters' register at the time that the registration process closes (cut-off date), as reported by the Electoral Management Body
4. VAP Turnout: The voter turnout as defined as the percentage of the voting age population that actually voted
5. Voting age population: The voting age population (VAP) includes all citizens above the legal voting age
6. Population: The total population
7. Invalid votes: A vote needs to fulfill a number of criteria to be considered as valid.

Evidence from the above tables shows that Nigeria can do better to increase the voter turnout as has been argued. The same challenges have affected African democracies and it is possible that the democratic reversals and setbacks experienced were due to the low voter turnout. This is a potentially fruitful empirical research project.

The presidency and Voter Turnout

Of the three branches of government – the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary—the Executive is the most affected by voter turnout. In general cases, when we talk of the regime, we often mean the executive, thus its popularity and legitimacy is affected by voter turnout than the others for the following reasons: first, the functions of the executive affect citizens more directly and therefore it is the most scrutinized by the public. The performance of the executive is evaluated most often in assessing whether the government is performing well or not.⁵ When citizens are not satisfied with the government, it is the executive that bears the burden of failure or gets benefit of success and that often affects the other branches or the party of the executive.

As for the legislators they are less directly influenced by public opinion. Public opinion questions their role may be on particular bills and who supported or opposed it. They may also vote for bills based on what their constituencies want so they are not judged personally on a national level. Like the legislature, the judiciary is often judged on particular laws and even though they may be judged by public opinion, their decisions are often seen as simply indicating their ideological convictions or different knowledge of the law. This leaves the executive as the main target or beneficiary of public opinion. When the President (or head of government) has problems even with the legislature, he/she can appeal to public opinion on his role and use that to sway the legislature to support his position. A high voter turnout coming in is often an advantage

⁵ In the advanced democracies, periodic opinion polls always ask questions about the performance of the president or prime minister and hardly about the Judiciary or the legislature. For the judiciary, questions are usually on specific judicial decisions, and on the legislature questions are usually on specific bills, etc. it is only the executive that is evaluated on performance of the government.

in this respect.⁶ As Beetham (1993) stated therefore, “. . . voting nevertheless delivers a more continuous control than might appear from its frequency or time span, and one that is complemented by opportunities for more extensive political activity and influence, and this control could be made both more stringent and more equal between citizens” (p. 65)

In fact, some Nigerians who are aware of the correlation between voter turnout and credibility of elections refer to the voter turnout when they are on the losing side as did the Accord Party governorship candidate in Oyo State when he challenged the result saying:

“during the elections, we had polling units and wards where accredited voters were not up to fifty percent (50%) of registered voters and less even voted. Do you think the total votes cast during the election were enough to say that people trooped out to vote? If we had fifty percent of voters coming out to vote then we can celebrate an average turnout. The election in Oyo state recorded 40% turnout” (Interview with Rashidi Ladoja, *The Punch*, 26 April, 2025).

As for the voting behavior, it also affects the President more than the other two branches of government since he has the entire country as his constituency. Having a broader base of votes from all sections of the country is a political resource in terms of public policy making. One observer noted the “. . . tortuous, fractious campaigns, the election results that demonstrate or amplify a sorely fragmented or divided polity along religious, ethnic and regional lines and the bated fear of probable vengeful reprisals by the new welders of political power” (Alade Rotimi-John, 2015), while another said that the “first task before President Muhammadu Buhari upon his swearing in is to reunite Nigerians that have been divided along ethnic and religious lines” (Hajia Maryam Abubakar) is its protection for whistle blowers. These are examples of issues which mass popular support can help the executive branch to deal with less difficulty. Some people also look to the president to fight corruption which was a main agenda of his campaign. The public participation in it could come through signing of the Freedom of Information Act (Bill) which the past president refused to sign. One aspect of the Bill according to Maxwell Kadiri, (2015) is the protection of whistle blowers.

Other reasons while popular support and participation is required for democratic consolidation include the following which could only be briefly analyzed for lack of space and time. First, Nigerian politics is still not ideology-driven or guided. As a result support for the regime is not guaranteed from elites or even the ruling party. In that situation public support is more reliable for the regime in terms of building public institutions for democratic consolidation. Second, the same goes for the political parties and the absence of such deeply-held ideas about governance, the regime needs the critical mass support for programs. Third, given what is now being discovered as a lot of damage done to the economy and government institutions by the previous regime, the incoming regime needs a great deal of popular support to carry out its reforms for democratic consolidation. Fourth, the current crisis in the National Assembly provides a good analogy. Those who want to draw the Presidency into the crisis are wrong. The two branches of the government are separate and each will be judged separately in terms of their functions. With a strong public support the president (and his cabinet) can continue to perform his functions as

⁶ This strategy is used in the USA when opinion polls show the president has high ratings among the population. He can thus challenge the Congress knowing that the issue or proposed policy is favored by majority of the citizens. In such cases, the Congress loses some support and the President wins.

the Executive. His functions may be affected by the National Assembly crisis when he needs them to sign a bill into law, otherwise he could do many things with public support. When it comes to public opinion, each branch will be rated separately, and that is how it should be. A president riding on strong electoral support can do so in times of need to change or transform certain institutions for further democratization. He/she can refer to public opinion to initiate reforms that the legislature may not be inclined to support. The reforms required in many of these areas will meet the resistance of some of those in power and even some in the President's own party. The president needs this initial support to embark on meaningful reforms before the party men and women gang up on him. Below are suggestions how higher voter turnout can be achieved and the roles of stakeholders for doing so.

Public Participation for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A role for Stakeholders

The argument so far is that to achieve democratic consolidation Nigeria must pursue measures to achieve a higher voter turnout in elections. The reasons for this lie in the benefit which the regime derives from it. A consolidated democracy benefits all including the opposition. To do so, various stake holders have functions to perform among which are the following:

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): The INEC has a major role to play in both aspects of voter turnout analyzed in section of this paper. As for the voting age percentage that turned out to vote, INEC can augment their registration of eligible voting age population in the country. Although citizens have the civic responsibility to voluntarily register themselves, some encouragement from the organization will be worth the effort to legitimize elections in the country. The following areas particularly need attention.

- i. In order to increase voter turnout so elections are more credible, a vigorous voter registration must be conducted and produce a credible voter registration well in advance of elections. The percentage of the total eligible citizens who did not register is disturbing.
- ii. The voting system should also be amended to reduce voter fatigue. The two day voting could be done in one day- and the two tier (Verification/registration and then voting could be combined so that one can verify and vote the same time.
- iii. INEC can also address the late arrival of materials and personnel at voting booths so those who come early can vote and leave for other responsibilities.
- iv. The electronic verification system has been successful except for few failed machines which can be corrected but the system could go for complete electronic voting and abandon the paper trail which could still leave room for rigging. With a complete electronic voting citizens can register anywhere they are and still be able to vote for the President from anywhere in the country. It is daunting for people to travel to their Local Government Areas for each election which reduces voter turnout for those who could not afford to make the trips, especially those who leave far away from "home."
- v. INEC with the Civil Society Organizations and the Political Parties must embark on programs of political socialization for democratic values. A conscious effort should be made to indulge on organizations and individuals to impart knowledge on the worth of the vote and accepting the rules of the game concerning elections and democracy.

- vi. Security could improve without the use of the Army. In the most civil of political activities, the presence of the armed military personnel makes voting look more like a war than an occasion of civil responsibility. Well-trained police equipped with the appropriate tools can handle elections and they should be left to do so.

Civil Society Organizations: These have been increasing in numbers especially during elections and should be encouraged to take active part in citizen political education and to take responsible positions to promote democratic values in the country. Elections in the country often bring out mushroom organizations in form of interest groups. These can grow into civil society organizations for further democratization of the system.

The political parties: The major political parties are becoming more national than regional which is a positive development. But they must play their roles not only in presenting candidates and campaigning for them, but to also serve as structures for political education and socialization. But there are still some elements of personal politics (patron-client relations) that impeded popular participation. These vices, if removed could contribute to more voter turnout and political participation in general. Negative campaigns should also be discouraged as they are seen to cause lower voter turnout.

External Agencies and monitoring groups: These have been active in our elections and have been purposeful. However, their presence should be extended to the rural areas where more atrocities and rigging take place unnoticed by international observers. Their critical watch and comments could help the election process.

The regime in power: The regime has a special role to play in improving the voting behavior noted above. The regional/sectional/religious patterns of voting isn't as bad as some see it, compared with Nigeria's past elections. But the fact that there are still signs of it means that there is need to work on nation-building. More institutions for mass participation: townhouse meetings by the president should be instituted for direct interaction with the people. The president and his ministers can initiate such in the Nigerian political system. How many times have the past president gone on community meetings to hear the people? Empowerment programs are cheap publicity tactics meant to silence the citizens.

The Media: A free press is inevitable for democratic consolidation and citizen participation both during and after elections. It is the medium for public expression as seen recently since the elections with letters and advertorials making all kinds of demands on the government. Thus the feedback mechanism offered by the media is crucial for the consolidation of democracy. Nigeria has been almost an exception in Africa in terms of maintaining a free press. Instances where the working of the press was interfered with towards the end of the last regime must be avoided.

5. Conclusion

This paper has argued that for a regime seeking to embark on democratic consolidation it requires a solid base of initial support that comes from a high voter turnout in the preceding

elections. The 2015 General elections produced a legitimate winner who met the constitutional requirements to be elected President. However, the voter turnout of less than 43.65% and Voting Age Population turnout of only 32% is not adequate for the initial public support. There is therefore need to embark upon public awareness programs for more regime support and to increase voter turnout in the future.

Although it is safe to say that with the 2015 General elections Nigeria has embarked on the road to democratic consolidation, it will take much more to build the institutions to complete the process. How the regime and the society proceed towards completing the process will depend on improvements made in our political system to increase political participation in governance since the support coming in from the election is judged to be inadequate. The trend of low voter turnout characteristic of African countries should be avoided. To this effect, the paper made some suggestions for the roles which institutions (public and private) can play to enhance voter turnout and public participation in governance.

The stakes are high for Nigeria and thus the process of democratic consolidation should not be left to governmental institutions alone, but strength must be sought from public participation. In the final analysis a proposition is made that incorporates public political participation (largely measured by voter turnout) as a major asset for regimes embarking on democratic consolidation. On this note, we can sum up the argument of this paper with de Tocqueville's (2001) observation that "When the public govern, there is no man who does not feel the value of public good-will, or who does not endeavor to court it by drawing to himself the esteem and affection of those amongst whom he is to live" (p. 195).

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