

Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines youth engagement toward the conduct of the 2015 general elections against a backdrop of historical experiences. Discounting the doom youth theory of youth bulge, youth in crisis or lumpen youth culture, the article has demonstrated a paradigm shift in the youth engagement in the conduct of the elections. It holds that youth engagement in the conduct of the elections has been more constructive than in the prior elections. Within the context of dual motivation theory, it holds that their destructive engagement in the prior elections was motivated by the need to change the outcome while their constructive conduct in the 2015 elections was driven by duty to participate in public affairs in Nigeria. The change in political attitude is explained by growing consciousness of the reality of their potential as agent of change through the aid of social media coupled with recent success story of Arab spring driven by youth, the inflammable repercussions of previous elections, and the high stake the 2015 general elections carry for governance.

Keywords: Youth, election, motivation, participation

Introduction

Prior to the 2015 elections, there had been a progressive decline in the conduct of elections since the return to civil rule in May 1999 in Nigeria. With the exception of the 2011 general elections, which witnessed little improvement, all other elections represented a travesty.

This travail of electoral politics in Nigeria prompted Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) to ponder whether votes still count. In the last decade of electoral politics in Nigeria, the political class had managed to exercise monopoly over political mobilization, and undermined popular participation especially through demobilization of the youth from constructive political engagement. Through anti-democratic measures, they effectively co-opted most of the youth in the country into political engagement with inflammable consequences.

There are seminal works on youth political engagement in the electoral process in Nigeria. Within this body of studies, there are distinctive works concerned with the dynamic of anti-democratic political attitudes of the youth in Nigeria (Adejumobi, 2000; Sklar, 2004; Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006). But these seminal works are limited in scope to the elections prior to 2015. Disregarding the traditional youth theory of youth bulge, youth in crisis and lumpen youth culture, this article demonstrates the positive youth engagement in the conduct of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. Compared to earlier general elections in Nigeria's current republic, the 2015 elections have been adjudged by international and local observers as the most successful. Compared to the previous elections, there were remarkable improvements in the conduct, outcomes and management of reactions to the outcomes of the 2015 elections. In particular, the presidential election in 2015 led to the emergence of an opposition party candidate as the winner, with the incumbent and rival candidate conceding defeat even before the final declaration of results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The reactions to the outcome of the elections were peaceful in contrast to the previous elections, which were marred by post-election violence. Also, unlike past elections wherein the gullible youth were manipulated by the political class to play destructive roles such as election rigging, ballot box snatching, hooliganism, intimidation and others, in the conduct of the 2015 elections, the youth undertook various initiatives such as peace campaign, voter education, election monitoring, and polling unit administration to ensure successful conduct.

Furthermore, the article attempts to demonstrate paradigm shift from the doom youth theory reflection of youth engagement to positive

and constructive political conduct before and during the 2015 elections. It also seeks to provide explanations for the positive youth engagement within the context of dual political motivation theory, which identifies two bases for political participation (Sika, 2012). In the first type, political participation is activated by the desire to achieve a certain goal, influencing the outcome of election and control actions of governmental personnel. The second type is driven by a duty to participate in an electoral process in one's country, as a result of acquired social capital. A synthesis of the two types of political engagement, in David Campbell's aperture creates 'a dual motivation theory (Sika, 2012), which has not largely been explored to explain youth engagement in the 2015 elections in Nigeria. In attempt to appreciate the pattern of the youth engagement and their motivations in the conduct of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, this article proceeds with conceptual and theoretical notes.

Conceptual and theoretical notes on youth political engagement

In Nigeria, the youth population falls between the ages of 18 and 35 years (Olujide, 2008, the National Youth Development Policy 2001). As in most other countries of the world, youth constitutes a greater per cent of Nigeria's over 171 million people (UNICEF, 2013). Most studies on youth engagement and experiences in African societies have been dominated by the application of the traditional theory of youth bulge combined with youth in crisis and lumpen youth culture. The denominator of the traditional youth theory is vituperative characterization of youth such as 'lost generation' (O'Brien 1986), 'devils in demographic' (Urdal 2001), 'enduring limbo' (Spink 2002), 'ticking time bomb' (Schucher, 2014), 'loose molecule' (cited in Aghedo and Eke 2013), 'war machine' (cited in Aghedo and Eke 2013), and 'lumpen' (Abdullah and Muana 1998, Bangura 1997), 'Frankenstein Monster' (Ukiwo 2002)

The term youth bulge was invented by Gunnar Heinsohn, a German social scientist and made known by Gary Fuller and Jack Goldstone, American political scientists (Aghedo and Eke, 2013). Youth bulge theory denotes a situation where a country host large population dominated by young persons who are mainly marginalized, excluded, and deprived in relation to the adult population. This theory contends

that such large youthful population constitutes a high risk and threat in the country. In other words, the heavy youth population is a predictor of various forms of violence such as rebellion, warfare, criminality and other aggressive behaviours. The Arab spring and Islamic revivalism which occurred in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria are ascribed to a sync of youth bulge and limited economic opportunities (Aghedo and Eke, 2013).

Also, youth crisis combines with youth bulge to engender violent and criminal engagements. Youth crisis is a condition in which young people find it difficult to attain the requisite qualities of adulthood due to slim socio-economic and political opportunities. Youth crisis issues from the irresponsiveness and insensitivity of the national government in addressing their genuine needs and aspiration through sound policies and programmes. Thus, in desperation to navigate the difficult path of life the youth engage in an aggressive and risky behavior. In the face of fading hope, youths take their destiny in their own hands through engagement in various criminal behaviours such as armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, bunkering, vandalism and insurgency amongst others. The Boko Haram insurgency in North Eastern Nigeria is in part linked with scanty economic opportunities and access (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014). Objective socio-economic condition as manifested in youth unemployment and poverty has been linked with ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria (Jega 2007). In Kenya, youth exclusion and marginalization from the political process is cited as contributory to youth participation in post-election violence in 2007/2008. About 70% of the participants in the post-election violence were youth (Mutisi, 2012).

Furthermore, another variable which conflates with youth bulge to engender youth engagement in violence and criminality is what Abdullah and Muana (1998) and Bangura (1997) characterized as lumpen youth culture. The lumpen youth culture is a sense of antisocial and anti-establishment orientation. The lumpen youth, which Usman (2009) described as expendable youth are young people who are not matured, materially dependent, gullible to manipulation. They are characterized as largely unemployed and unemployable youth, mostly male who engage the street for livelihood. They are susceptible to be

manipulated as an instrument for the perpetration of electoral violence. They act as party thugs and are used by party stalwarts for political violence and criminal activities for a token sum, and sometimes pittance. They are often fed with dangerous drugs and other intoxicants and armed as ruthless agents of destruction. They actively participate in electoral activities that undermine the conduct of credible elections and jolt public confidence in the electoral process.

The traditional or doom theory on youth is dominated by the notion that youth are Frankenstein Monster and victims of electoral violence. The theory tends to play down on the distinctive initiatives of the youth in the conduct of an election and electoral change processes in which youth participated. The preponderant notion of youth as loose molecule underestimates the potentials and rights of the youth to participate and contribute meaningfully to social change processes in the conduct of an election. Also, the notions of the doom youth theory tends to influence the seeming absence of sound policies and programmes for inclusion of youth in the mainstream political participation and the harnessing of their potentials for improvement in the conduct of credible elections. Instructively, a few scholars such as Mutisi (2012), Boyden and De Bery (2004), Sommers (2006) have recognized the potentials and asset value of youth in bringing about social change processes in their countries. As a social spectrum, youth are associated with certain traits such as exuberance, dynamism, high-risk-taking, mobile thought and desire for a quick result (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1991). According to the National Youth Development Policy (2001:1):

Youth is the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character, and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.

In consonance with this emerging notion of youth as an asset for shaping national development, this article focuses on their political

engagement in the conduct of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The constructive youth engagement depends on what has been characterized as their structural luminosity. Structural luminosity means that in most situations in the society, the youth can easily navigate through and to take advantage of emerging socio-economic opportunities. They have the time, skills and motivation for activism. Hence, they are considered as valuable constituency (Editorial 2011). This article demonstrates how the youth is becoming matured and committed to bringing about change in Nigeria that had been predicted as being on the path of perdition or disintegration by the United States Department of Intelligence (Adedoja, 2012).

Historical overview on nationwide elections prior to 2015

Since 1959, the question about election integrity in Nigeria had been raised. Before then, after the introduction of elective principle under the Clifford Constitution of 1922, elections were restricted to Lagos and Calabar with franchise exercisable only by adults possessing not less than 100 pounds (Azelama, 2010). Suffrage was later extended to the other regions of the country under the Richard Constitution of 1946. Even the areas where the elections were held the adoption of the adult suffrage resulted in the exclusion of the youth in the electoral processes.

In preparation for independence, the first nationwide direct elections were held in 1959. The elections constituted the basis for the formation of the post-independence central government. The elections were acclaimed to be characterized by cases of violence, intimidation and repression (Diamond, 1988). In the subsequent federal and regional elections held in 1964 and 1965 respectively, there were allegations of widespread irregularities and rigging, molestation of electoral officials, abduction of candidates, and use of security agents to intimidate voters and facilitate election malpractices in parts of the Mid-western, western and eastern regions. The results of the elections were rejected by the opposition and subsequently resorted to violence, killing, arson, looting and destruction of property particularly in the south western region. The youth being the most energetic category of the population dominated the violent and conventional engagement in the electoral processes. On the basis of the impropriety in the election, President

Nnamdi Azikiwe delayed the re-appointment of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister. This sparked off a constitutional crisis, which took the intervention of the court and political negotiation for peace to be brokered which ensured the formation of a broad-based government headed by Balewa (Osaghae, 2002). But the attendant crises, disillusionment, disenchantment and loss of confidence by the majority of the population in the government, significantly motivated the military to usurp political power on January 15, 1966.

After thirteen years of military rule, Nigeria was returned to civil rule vide the nationwide elections held in 1979. In the lead to the 1979 elections, some measures aimed at overcoming the shortcomings in the elections in the First Republic were introduced. They included constitutional requirement of nation-wide presence in 13 out of the 19 states as part of the requirements for party registration, and requirement that the person to be elected as president in addition to securing the highest number of votes cast should receive a minimum of 25 percent of votes cast in two-thirds of the 19 states. These reforms were aimed at social engineering and national integration against the backdrop that electoral mobilization for support in the First Republic was along ethnic and religious lines (Ogbeidi, 2010).

However, the declaration of the winner in the 1979 presidential election was allegedly questionable and controversial. It took the intervention of the Supreme Court and an alleged conspiracy of the departing military regime for the issue to be laid to rest. Four years later, in 1983, another general election during the Second Republic was held. The conduct of the elections was characterized by misuse of the power of incumbency, money influence, thuggery, violence, massive rigging, irregularities, falsification of results, and other malpractices. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), police, and other state agents allegedly colluded with the ruling party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), to commit electoral fraud. The results of the elections were hugely disputed. Virtually every assembly and governorship election result was subject of litigation at tribunals and courts (Osaghae, 2002). A few of the fraudulent elections were upheld in court on technical grounds. Expectedly, as the court could only reverse a few cases of the disputed election result, tension, uncertainty and insecurity

characterized the period. In some states like Ondo and Oyo, the governorship elections resulted in a large number of cases of arson and murder (Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010). Consistent with the doom youth theory, the youth dominated the violent engagement. As the nation was on the edge of a precipice, the military on December 31, 1983 quickly intervened again in politics.

Between 1983 and 1999, the military dominated political power. However, within this period, there was a convoluted transition programme to return Nigeria to civil rule, the so-called Third Republic. Some measures were put in place to ensure transparent and credible elections. These included registration of two parties, National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), the ban of discredited politicians, and use of open ballot system. In addition, the Directorate of Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and National Orientation Agency were established to inculcate civic education of democratic culture in Nigerian politicians and voters, which are predominantly youth.

Within this period, elections were held into the legislative assemblies at the state and federal levels as well as offices of state governors. Also, on June 12, 1993, the presidential election which was the last of the staggered elections in the prolonged transition programme was conducted. The election was described by many observers as the freest and fairest election in the annals of Nigerian political history. Nonetheless, the Babangida regime cancelled the results of the election on allegations of corruption, bribery, and malpractices. These allegations by the Babangida regime were regarded as a flimsy excuse, as it contrasted the report of participants and observers of the election. Moreover, the election outcome compared to those of previous elections in the First and Second Republics, represented social engineering and national integration. The presumed winner of the election, Chief M.K.O. Abiola secured popular support across regional and ethnic divides (Bolaji, 2015).

The annulment of the election result generated resistance and civil disobedience across many parts of the country from various youth organizations such as the National Association of Nigerian Students

(NANS) and other prominent civil society groups. Over 100 protesters were believed to have been killed by the military and anti-riot police squad during street protests. Meanwhile, there were some youth groups formed to rally support for government (Osaghae, 2002). In addition, the lumpen or expendable youth participated in the civil disobedience and riots as it offered them the opportunity to break into public and private offices to remove valuable property

Toward the march to the Fourth Republic, in December 1998 major transition institutions were established. These were the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) chaired by S.K Dagogo Jack and Transition Implementation Committee chaired by Mr. Justice Mamman Nasir (Osaghae, 2002). Thereafter, five political parties were registered. A major threat to the General Sani Abacha's transition was the politics of self-succession bid. To realize this goal, Abacha and his agents deployed coercive measures such as intimidation, blackmail, detention and assassination against internal oppositions, and coerced the support of members of the political class who formed the five parties to adopt Abacha as a consensus candidate for the presidential election in August 1998. Also, 18 youth organizations such as National Council of Youth Association (NCYA), and the Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA) rallied support for Abacha's self-succession bid in Abuja (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2000). In 1998, YEAA led by Daniel Kanu organized a two-million-man march in Abuja. The march had 200,000 people in attendance. These attendees comprised rented youth and some civil servants threatened by their state military administrators with a sack if they fail to represent their states and local governments at the so-called two million-man march. The attendees were provided free transportation and accommodation. The organization of the march cost the government ₦500 million (US\$6.2 million). The march was aimed at pressurizing Abacha to continue in office before his sudden death in June 1998 (Olukoshi, 2002). This type of participation fits into the first tier of the dual motivation theory. It is also consistent with assumptions of the doom youth theory as most attendees of the march were manipulated or coerced to participate in the march.

Following the death of Abacha, his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, re-started the transition to the Fourth Republic

in 1998. Guidelines were set for political parties to participate in the electoral process. Part of the guidelines required political parties to accept the principle of power sharing and rotation of key offices and active presence in at least 24 states of the federation (Ogbeidi, 2010). Nationwide elections into offices of state and federal assemblies, state governors and their deputies, president, and vice president were held in 1999. The 1999 elections were characterized by widespread electoral abuses such as horse-trading, undisguised financial inducement of voters, stuffing of ballot boxes with pre-marked ballot papers, snatching of ballot boxes, falsification of election results and violence (Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010). For example, while the international observers put the voter turnout to be 20 percent, the results indicated about 30-40 percent (Ogbeidi, 2010). According to Jimmy Carter, head of the election monitoring team;

there was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final result that has been reported from several states. Regrettably, therefore, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election (Ogbeidi, 2010:51).

In fact, the opposition party, All People's Party (APP) in the presidential election rejected the result of the election on account of brazen electoral fraud and went to court to contest the outcome. Although the court threw out the lawsuit, it took much pressure and appeal from Nigerians and the international community for the APP to accept the election results just to avert reliving the bitter experience of another annulment (Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010). Arguably, these unconventional and anti-social behaviours were particularly associated with the lumpen youths who are readily manipulated by desperate politicians.

Four years later, in 2003, general elections were held. The conduct of the 2003 general elections was progressively worse than the 1999 nationwide elections. As part of the preparations for the conduct of the 2003 general elections, the 2002 Electoral Act was introduced. The Act among others made provision with respect to how political parties can source or receive their funds and the extent political parties could make electoral expenses. This was rarely enforced. Other reform

measures included registration of new parties, which increased the number of parties from 3 to 30, and computerization of voter registration to check manipulation and fraudulent practices (Osumah, 2010). Despite these measures, the conduct of the election was largely unsuccessful. Both international and domestic observers roundly described the conduct of the elections as a travesty of electoral democracy. The malpractice, which characterized the conduct of the elections, generated massive protests from the organized labour, civil society, and opposition parties. Leaders of the opposition parties rejected the outcome of the election and called for the formation of Interim National Government of Unity. Over 56% of the 2003 election results were challenged in courts (Osumah, 2010).

Notably, the youth were recruited and mobilized to execute some of these violent and corrupt activities. Preparatory to the elections, there was a general apprehension about the recruitment and arming of militia groups as a political machine to harass and intimidate political opponents, rig the elections, commit brigandage and organize violent protests. For example, major opposition politicians in Abia and Anambra states alleged that the incumbent governors in the two states were using the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group made up of mainly youths, to settle political scores. In fact, there was a general apprehension that the vigilante group was being manipulated by the governors to rig their re-elections or safeguard against being rigged out in their re-election bid. Although the governors attempted to deny the allegations of manipulating or politicizing the vigilante group, the leadership of the Bakassi Boys in Abia state alleged that factions from both the All People's Party (APP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the state approached the group for support. In Anambra state, the attempt to use the Bakassi Boys to stop the state chapter of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) from a strike action over government failure to pay workers salaries for four months was a pointer to the politicization of the vigilante group (Ukiwo, 2003).

Similarly, in Rivers state, preparatory to the 2003 general elections, the Niger Delta Vigilante, and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force were sponsored and armed by machine politicians in the ruling PDP (Chigbo, 2004). Besides, the politicization and

manipulation of militias, the youth engagement in the electoral processes was partly shaped the phenomenon of consensus candidates in the internal politics of major parties dominated by the political class or imposition of exorbitant fees for nomination of candidates for elective positions (Osumah, 2010).

Like the 2003 nationwide elections, the approach to the conduct of the 2007 general elections was not different. In fact, the conduct of the 2007 general elections was reportedly worse than that of the 2003 nationwide elections. The contest for the election was regarded by the ruling PDP as a do-or-die battle. International and domestic observers described the election as a rape of democracy. Flurry allegations of impropriety presumably perpetrated by the lumpen youths trailed the election results. Indeed, 1,290 petitions were filed at election tribunals to litigate against the declared results by INEC (INEC Report, 2011). The courts reversed some of the disputed cases. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua even as a key beneficiary of the electoral fraud during his inauguration acknowledged that the conduct of the 2007 general election did not satisfy the conditions of best practices, and expressed desire for electoral reform.

Under President Yar'Adua, Electoral Reform Panel, chaired by former Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Mohammed Uwais was constituted. The Panel made recommendations to improve the quality of elections. Following the death of Yar'Adua in 2010, President Goodluck Jonathan became president and continued with the introduction of measures to ensure quality and integrity-driven election. One of such measures was the appointment of Attahiru Jega, a professor of Political Science reputed for integrity and honesty, who was also a member of the Uwais Panel (Bolaji, 2015).

INEC, under Jega's leadership, initiated various reform measures. Such measures included an open and transparent review of voter register, strategic partnership with National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and a re-modification of open ballot system. It also introduced security measures to protect ballot papers and ballot boxes such as colour-coding and serial numbering. In addition, new result collation and transition systems were adopted (Bolaji, 2015). Arguably, these

measures contributed to the difference between the 2011 general elections and the previous elections since Nigeria re-democratized in 1999. In particular, these measures minimized election-related malpractices petitions and litigations cases. A total of 731 petitions were filed at various election tribunals across the country, which though high was 57% lower than the 1,290 registered following the conduct of 2007 nationwide elections (INEC Report, 2011). However, the measures did not prevent the post-election violence in 2011, which claimed 800 lives (NDI, 2012). A greater proportion of the participants in the post-election violence were the lumpen youths.

In the context of the dual motivation theory, in the elections prior to 2015, youth political engagement was in consonance with the first tier participation, which is driven by the desire to change the election outcome for the fulfillment of a certain goal. Also, their political engagement in elections prior to 2015 largely reflects the assumption of the traditional doom theory of youth bulge, youth in crisis or lumpen youth culture.

Significance of the 2015 elections and measures to ensure its success

The 2015 general election was significant in different respects. The election was critical to the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy. It was the first general election after 100 years of Nigeria's existence as a nation by reason of the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Provinces. Also, the election was the fourth consecutive nationwide election under the civilian administration since the end of the last phase of military rule on May 29, 1999. Furthermore, the election was targeted at electing the President and members of the legislatures at the federal and state levels as well as the governors of the 36 states of the federation except in seven states (Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Kogi, Ondo and Osun) whose tenures had been altered by judicial pronouncements in past elections (INEC, 2014).

In addition, the election came when Nigeria was torn between opportunity and crisis, possibly more than ever in Nigeria's post-independence history. Nigeria, apart from being Africa's most populous country, is a leading contributor in peacekeeping operations and manager of epidemic disease such as Ebola. Despite, these great

potentials, poverty, unemployment, infrastructural deficit and insecurity blight the country. This made the election to carry a high stake or opportunity for change in governance, security and economy (Thurston, 2015).

Besides, the election was a test case for a reaffirmation of the unity of the nation, reiteration of faith in democracy and determination to fully join the free world where only the people constitute the foundation of governance. This is particularly so in view that many Nigerians believed that the prediction of the United States Intelligence Department that 2015 may be the doom-year for Nigeria as a corporate entity (Adedjoja, 2012). Although the United States denied this allegation, there was heightened attention of the international community to Nigeria's conduct of the 2015 elections. The elections also offered an opportunity for Nigeria to register its name among civilized nations in terms of the conduct of a credible election. This was against the backdrop that since the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1999, the conduct of virtually all elections prior to 2015 in Nigeria had largely been a travesty. Apart from the 2011 elections, 1999, 2003, and 2007 general elections were considered by international observers as hugely flawed (Bolaji 2015). Furthermore, the 2015 elections were considered as important to the rest of Africa. In a letter to President Jonathan, the Prime Minister of Britain, David Cameron was quoted to have stated thus: "As Africa's biggest democracy, successful elections in Nigeria are important not only for Nigeria's future but as a signal to the rest of Africa" (Onuah and Payne, 2015).

In view of the importance of the elections and challenges arising from the conduct of the 2011 and other earlier general elections, INEC introduced anti-rigging measures such as Permanent Voters Card and Card Reader devices in the conduct of the 2015 general elections. Also, two peace accords were signed by the presidential candidates for the elections to show commitment to peaceful election. The first peace accord, which was organized by the Offices of the National Security Adviser and Adviser on Inter-Party Affairs to the President, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), was signed in January 2015 by the eleven presidential candidates to show commitment to peaceful

election and proper management of reactions to the results of the polls (Ezea, 2015). The second peace accord, which was signed by All People's Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidates, Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan respectively, as a renewal of their pledge to demonstrate commitment to peaceful election, was organized by National Peace Committee under the Chairmanship of former Head of State, Abdulsalami Abubakar (Onuah and Payne 2015). This trend was replicated for governorship candidates in various states. For instance, there were peace pacts among governorship candidates in Akwa-Ibom, Kwara and Rivers States (Ashameri, 2015, Azubuike, 2015).

In addition to the peace accords, there were diplomatic calls from Western powers with an appeal to the two main presidential candidates not to stoke tension. In March 2015, United States President Barrack Obama issued a direct appeal for calm. Also, in a letter to President Goodluck Jonathan, British Prime Minister David Cameron called for transparent and violence-free elections (Onuah and Payne, 2015). Furthermore, stakeholders such as the media, security agencies, ECOWAS, AU, UN played various roles in ensuring a peaceful election. Along these formal and diplomatic measures were youth initiatives aimed at ensuring peaceful 2015 general elections. While this article focuses on the youth political engagement, it is difficult to state with certainty the levels at which the various measures ensured the success of the elections.

The 2015 elections and the paradigm shift in youth political engagement

Youth prior to the 2015 elections in Nigeria had not been innocent bystanders of social change. They had been innovative, creative and active participants in political processes. In many parts of the world, youth have played a progressive role. They were part of the struggle against repressive regimes in North African countries and part of the Middle East such as Syria and Bahrain. The youth was involved in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In Liberia, youth played a commendable role in the conduct of the 2015 election. The active role and potential of the youth in contributing to socio-economic and political development have been recognized by international bodies

such as the United Nations. The United Nations through its Department of Economic and Social Affairs has recognized that the youth possess innovation, energy, enthusiasm, and exuberance. In a study in 2005 on the election in Liberia, it was revealed that 54.6% of the 1.3 million registered voters were youth. Youth groups in Liberia have demonstrated consciousness of the inflammable consequences of politically motivated violence. Preparatory to the 2011 presidential election in Liberia, youth groups such as Liberia Youth Christian Men Association were involved in peace education (Mutisi, 2012). Ismail et al (2009) in a study conducted in Liberia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in the West African sub-region have revealed that over 70% of the youth expressed faith in democratic election as a mean of bringing about regime change (Mutisi, 2012).

Towards the conduct of the 2015 general elections, youth engaged in various political activities aimed at ensuring the success of the elections. The political engagements of the youth ranged from peace-promotion, popular participation, political education, and election monitoring to polling administration. These youth engagements contrast sharply with their roles in the earlier elections as represented by the doom youth theory

Election administration: This was one of the most commendable roles of the youth in the conduct of the 2015 elections. This role was ostensibly discharged through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Although, INEC was statutorily charged with the responsibility of administering the elections, the commission had inadequate manpower challenge to cover the election alone. NYSC members were recruited as ad-hoc staff to assist in the administration of polling stations on the basis of the strategic collaboration between the NYSC and INEC (This Day, 2015). INEC estimated that about 750,000 ad-hoc staff was needed to conduct the election (The Punch Editorial 2015). The NYSC corps members constituted a significant proportion of the personnel in all the 36 states. The NYSC members demonstrated great courage and resilience during voter registration and polling units operations. Their resilience was particularly tested by mammoth crowds that were sometimes unruly, impatient, discontented and violent following widespread challenges with card readers on election days. In the spirit of selflessness and patriotism, corps member operating polling

units had to work late into the night. Indeed, international observers such as the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) and National Democratic Institute reported that corps members who served as ad-hoc polling personnel were highly professional and effective (AUEOM 2015, National Democratic Institute, 2015).

Besides, they performed their duties at great risk to their lives. Although no corps member was reported to have died in the conduct of the 2015 elections, in contrast to the case in the 2011 elections in which 10 died, they were targets of politically motivated attacks. In the presidential and national assembly elections in 2015, some corps members were reported to be targets of politically motivated assault in Ijiam ward, Ikwo L.G.A. of Ebonyi State (CDD Report, 2015). Arguably, the participation of the youth in the administration of the elections at the risk of their lives is a paradigm shift from the doom theory and it epitomizes the second type of participation in the dual motivation theory, which is driven by call to duty for one's country.

Peace-promotion: The lead to the 2015 general election generated so much tension and uncertainty perhaps owing to the hate-campaign, bickering and desperation among politicians. This situation was reminiscent of the events that preceded the election and post-election violence in 1965, 1983, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections. Realizing that youth in Nigeria is the instruments and victims of politically motivated violence, youth organizations across the country campaigned for a peaceful election. Some of the youth organizations, which were actively involved in peace campaigns, included the Youth Initiatives for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), the Youth Alliance on Constitution and Electoral Reform, Niger Delta Coalition for Change (NDCC), the Young-stars Development Initiative (YDI), and Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC). These youth groups initiated various programmes to educate the youth on violence-free participation and urged politicians not to use youth to commit acts of violence or political hooliganism before, during and after the elections. Some signed peace pacts to refrain from and prevent violence during and after the election (Sahara Reporter, 2014, NDI, 2015, Jozwiak, 2015). One of the most prominent youth campaigns for peaceful election was led by a music icon, 2Face Idibia and a youth organization, the Young-stars Development Initiative. The campaign's slogan was 'vote not fight:

election no be war'. The campaign also encouraged youth to make active, positive and peaceful contributions to the 2015 general elections. As a sign of commitment to peaceful elections, the campaign encouraged Nigerian youth to sign the official vote not fight I pledge. 'I want a peaceful Naija, therefore I pledge to vote and participate positively in the elections' (Sahara Reporter, 2014).

Most other peace campaigns were conducted by the youth groups from different ethnic backgrounds. The background played a marginal role in their campaign. They expressed and manifested their opinions in different ways and through various media. For example, the Niger Delta Coalition for Change (NDCC) opposed the threats by some prominent Niger Delta ex-militants to unleash violence on the country if former President Goodluck Jonathan was not re-elected (News Express, 2015). Also, youths in northern Nigeria under the aegis of Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF) and their South-South counterparts of Ijaw extraction who were both supporters of the leading presidential candidates agreed to prevent any form of violence in the country during and after the elections (Eziukwu, 2015).

The impact of the activities of these youth organizations may be difficult to measure. However, compared to prior elections wherein youths were manipulated by politicians to execute violence young people increasingly played a vital role in underscoring the importance of peaceful conduct in the 2015 elections. In addition, from a comparative prism of the low number of casualties from violence associated with the 2015 elections indicates the significant impact of youth peace campaign activities coupled with other peace accords. In 2003, more than 100 young people between May and June were killed in election violence. In 2007 and 2011, 300 and 800 young persons were reportedly killed in election-related violence (Jozwiak, 2015).

Also, in the face of fading hopes on account of harsh socio-economic conditions, these initiatives undertaken by the youth represent efforts to build bridges across ethnic lines and transform the prebendal and predatory social structures of successive flawed elections. Furthermore, these initiatives undertaken by the youth despite their marginalization and exclusion in the key decision-making

are the expression of their hope in their ability to engender change in the electoral processes. This example is worth of emulation by lumpen youths who are often recruited and manipulated by desperate politicians to perpetrate violence in an electoral contest.

Political education: Voter education can make a major contribution to electoral integrity through a dissemination of balanced and objective information on what the citizens need to know in order to exercise their franchise. Towards the conduct of the 2015 elections, the youth independently and through the partnership with INEC were actively involved in voter education. Most of the youth groups were secular in outlook, with no primordial background playing a role in them. They had either single or unified political agenda but represented a broad spectrum of diverse views. They were mainly involved in raising awareness about electoral matters. Youth groups such as Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), and Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF) were actively involved in voter education. They urged youth to register with political parties, register as voters and collect their permanent voter cards and defend their votes (Sahara Reporter 2014, Jozwiak, 2015). For example, CYC educated youth on their civic rights and organized public debates on national issues across the country (Jozwiak, 2015). Voter education on issues of national importance by the youth was more felt in the social media, although the media were also used to hurl personal, ethnic and religious slurs at one another. The cyberspace also was dominated by hate-campaign and mudslinging, and ethnic politics.

At the same time, the leading presidential candidates realize that the young people represent agent of change as reflected in the campaign appeal to them for 2015 elections. This is understandably so because the youth, which constitute the highest demography in Nigeria, were the key voters in the election. By this numerical strength and being the major attendees at campaign rallies, the youth was the focus of campaign and mobilization for electoral support. The two leading presidential candidates, Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP and Muhammadu Buhari of the APC appealed to the youth for support. While Jonathan pointed to being a younger candidate and as such would represent them better, Buhari promised to tackle youth

unemployment, corruption and security challenge. Buhari also recruited 25,000 fresh college graduates to assist in his campaign (Nwosu, 2015).

Election Observation and Monitoring: Electoral observation and monitoring have become an integral part of a democratic electoral process in Africa. Election monitoring plays important roles in enhancing the transparency and credibility of elections and democratic governance as well as acceptance of election results. It also helps to diminish conflict before, during and after elections (International IDEA, 1999). Youth organizations were actively involved in observing and monitoring of the electoral process. The AUEOM acknowledged this role of the youth (AUEOM, 2015). As election monitors, they helped to deter fraud and encourage peaceful conduct across the country. Their monitoring initiatives promoted local ownership, boosted citizen participation and confidence in the electoral processes, and reinforced the credibility of the election

Although the youth played laudable roles in the success of the 2015 elections, there were a few instances where some youth engaged in acts that were destructive. The threat of war by some Niger Delta youths to unleash violence on the country, the hurling of stones on the convoy of President Jonathan in Bauchi and Katsina as well as the violent attacks in Rivers and Plateau State were destructive (International Crisis Group, 2014; Chidiogo, 2015).

In the context of the dual motivation theory, the youth groups that have participated in the issuing of threats to unleash violence on the nation if the former president loses, throwing stones on the convoy of former president and conducting other violent attacks, arguably participated on the basis of the first tier of the dual motivation theory. On the other hand, the youth groups that participated actively in the areas of polling units operations, peace-promotion activities, election observations and monitoring as well as voter education in the conduct of the 2015 elections, arguably were driven by what has been identified as second tier of participation

Understanding the drivers of positive youth engagement in the elections

A number of explanations can be constructed for the paradigm shift in the Nigerian youth political engagement in the conduct of the 2015 general elections compared to prior elections. One of the major factors central to the largely constructive youth political engagement in the conduct of the 2015 general elections was their growing consciousness about the reality that they are the locomotive engine of progress in any nation on account of their greater numerical strength, exuberance, creativity and impressionability to drive growth and development. Without the popular support of the youth, it would be difficult for any political office seeker to gain access to power through conventional or foul means. In the previous elections prior to the conduct of the 2015 elections, most members of the Nigerian political class leveraged on the gullibility of the youth in whipping up primordial sentiments or using financial inducement to ginger them into violent political engagement. Indeed, in the past elections, political ethos had been so underdeveloped and awareness at such a low ebb among Nigerians especially the youth that they exchanged their votes for little financial token or spices (Okhaide, 1996, Osumah, 2010).

Although this may not have completely changed in the 2015 elections, arguably this tended to have reduced due to increasing awareness among the youth. The growing consciousness and realization among the youth about their potentials to bring about positive change may have been influenced by the success story of the Arab Spring championed by the youth coupled with the advent of social media, which has facilitated the dissemination of information, rightly or wrongly.

Another key explanatory factor for the positive youth engagement is the unenviable record of irregularities and electoral violence and its devastating consequences. Since the advent of the civil rule in 1999, there has been a progressive increase in the number of deaths of young persons in election-related violence. In 2003, 2007 and 2011 respectively, over 100, 300 and 800 young persons were reportedly killed in election violence with over 65, 000 displaced persons in post-election violence in 2011 (Jozwiak, 2015). Apart from loss of lives, destruction of valuable property, internal displacement and increasing

sense of insecurity, the flawed electoral process had severe implications for democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. It affected the credibility of the democratic system. It legitimized and perpetuated the vicious cycle of the existing impunity culture of public officeholders and scanty distribution of the dividends of democracy.

Also, a critical driver of the largely constructive engagement of the youth in the conduct of the 2015 elections was the high stake the elections carried for governance, security and economy. Prior to the elections, especially after the January 2012 subsidy riots, there had been mass disenchantment and disillusionment among Nigerian youths about the state of the nation. The level of youth unemployment and poverty had been very high.

Unemployment rate by age grade in Nigeria in 2011

Age Group	Urban	Rural	Total
15-24	33.5	38.2	37.7
25-44	16.3	24.1	22.4
45-59	12.5	19.6	18
60-64	17.8	22.1	21.4

Source: National bureau of statistics (2012:43), social statistics in Nigeria, Abuja, NBS

The table indicates that the youth population both in the urban and rural areas has higher unemployment rate than those of other age categories in Nigeria. Where youth had been made to believe that there was job opportunity, they were fleeced. In some government ministries, departments and agencies at the local, state and federal levels, job seekers were reportedly asked by unscrupulous government officials and their collaborators to pay between ₦200,000 and ₦500, 000 to help them secure jobs (Suleiman, 2013). Many government establishments which had been reportedly involved in such practice had often come out with disclaimers to clear their names, and at the same time issuing advice to unsuspecting jobseekers to beware of job scammers illegally using their names. But this did not discount the fact that unemployed youth go through hardship in search jobs when government establishment embarked on mass recruitment. A case in point was deaths recorded at venues of interview test organized by Nigeria

Immigration Service Department in 2014. Amidst the level of youth unemployment, there were huge infrastructure deficit across the country, rising wave of insecurity, as demonstrated by the Boko Haram insurgency which has resulted in the death of over 12,000 persons (Aghedo, 2014).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated paradigm shift of youth political engagement in the conduct of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Discounting the traditional youth theory of youth bulge, youth in crisis and lumen youth culture, the article has demonstrated a paradigm shift from destructive to constructive youth engagement. It argued that there is a paradigm shift in the democratic attitudes of the youth, and their political and civic engagement levels in the conduct of the 2015 elections compared to prior elections. The democratic attitudes exhibited by the youth in the conduct of the elections showed that they believe generally in the importance of having a credible election more than ever. Also, civically and politically, the youth engaged in activities aimed at ensuring credible elections than in prior elections. This is indicative in the increasing number of youth groups which participated in various activities such as voter education, peaceful promotion, election monitoring and polling units operations. In the context of the dual motivation theory, the youth political engagement levels may have been low in prior elections, given the nature of political mobilization, exclusionary politics and corruption of the political class in quest for public offices in Nigeria. In such situation, where the political action was severely constrained, participation in the electoral process on the basis of a duty to be involved in the public affairs of one's own country was not appealing to the youth.

The 2015 elections provided the youth the opportunity to participate and change the political game. The motivation for this dynamic shift from destructive engagement to constructive engagement in part included the inflammable repercussions of previous elections, the high stake the 2015 general elections carry for governance, growing consciousness of the reality of their potential as agent of change through the aid of social media coupled with recent success story of Arab spring driven by youth. However, the youth can improve their effectiveness in

the conduct of future elections by constructively engaging stakeholders in the electoral process. Also, the youth can continue to use the various platforms to popularize positive civic and political engagement in future elections.

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