

THE CRISIS OF PERMANENT VOTER CARDS AND THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS: EXPLORING MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

The 2015 general elections were a watershed in the history of electioneering process in Nigeria with reference to the biometric voting technology that underscored the expediency of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). Therefore, the thrust of this paper is a critical examination of the euphoria of PVCs and its causality in the Nigerian election process. This discourse argues that the process of distribution and collection of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) was immersed in organizational inadequacies which led to the disenfranchisement of over 12 million Nigerian voters in March 28, 2015 Presidential and National Assembly elections. Hence, it is established that this absurdity stems from INEC's dysfunctionality as regards the adoption of the theory of structural functionalism. The methodology of this study is descriptive where the author adopted a documentary source and non-participant observation of data collection and, content-analyzed data and events. It thus, opines that institutional reforms, civic sensitization and advocacy are imperative in strengthening Nigeria's electoral democracy.

Keywords: Election, Independent National Electoral Commission, Permanent Voter Cards, Democracy.

Introduction

Nigeria, as an emerging democracy, is bedeviled with myriad of challenges, especially electoral irregularities which have tended to undermine her efforts towards democratization. Hence, the limitations that constrained mass participation in a preference-driven process otherwise known as an election underscored the crux of this discourse. Thus, election as the most influential facet of a democratic political process is a legitimizing process of political governance and enhances the essence of participatory politics.

Elections are the hallmark of liberal democracy. This is attested by the fact that the sovereignty of a state and power to exercise this sovereignty conferred on political leaders are derived from elections. In reference to this factuality, Appadorai, (1975, p.523) writes that "representative government as distinguished from direct democracy is based on the principle that popular sovereignty can exist without popular government. The primary means by which the people exercise their sovereignty is the vote. It is therefore instructive to state that the emergence of a

popular government is accentuated by the imperative of an election.

However, an election in Nigeria since her political independence has had a chequered history of irregularities and violence. Before the advent of the current dispensation in 1999, state-wide elections held in 1964, 1979 and 1983 were warfare influenced by murky inter-party politicking, political thuggery and centrifugal tendencies of ethnic politics and regionalism. Moreover, the past elections under the present democratic dispensation with reference to 2003 and 2007 elections illuminated the abuse of power of the incumbents and structural deficiencies of the electoral management body with adverse effects on governance and political stability in a fragile-democratizing federation.

Significantly, the national elections of 2011 were relatively credible though constrained with enormous logistic inadequacies and post-election violence. In spite of these challenges, the conduct of the election was applauded by the international community and Nigerian people alike. In this regard, Paden (2012, p.20) remarked:

In general, international observers felt the presidential election day voting was peaceful and credible. Some announced in their reports that this was the best election in Nigeria's history. This swift count process of the US National Democratic Institute produced sample results that were almost identical to the official tally announced by Professor Jega.

Invariably, the credibility of the 2011 national elections was a function of certain systemic variables as succinctly indicated by Egwu (2014, p.1):

- i. The revamped Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the leadership of Professor Attahiru M. Jega, a Political Scientist.
- ii. The political will of the incumbent president to conduct credible elections.
- iii. The enthusiasm of Nigerian citizens towards election integrity and mandate protection.
- iv. The commitment of vibrant network of civil society organizations to advance electoral democracy and democratic governance.

As noted in 2011, this development was a paradigm-shift from what is obtained in the previous elections. To further sustain the people's confidence in the electioneering process, INEC introduced the biometric voting technology by which biometric voter's cards were issued to Nigerians across the federation towards the hitch-free conduct of the 2015 elections.

However, the process was trailed with public anger and disillusionment over difficulties to obtain the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and lopsided distribution of the card technology between states and geo-political zones which led to the disenfranchisement of millions of eligible Nigerian voters and undermined the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission. Apparently, the unavailability of PVCs, massive failure of the card-readers to authenticate the biometric data of the eligible voters in the South and widespread underaged voting in the North showed the unpreparedness and failure of INEC, to organize and conduct

credible Presidential and National Assembly Elections in March 28th, 2015.

Accordingly, this work is divided into five sections. The first section introduced the thrust of the analysis, the second section explicated the relevant terms to the analysis of the discourse, the third section established the relevance of an appropriate theory to the discourse, the fourth section provided an empirical background to the crises of 2015 general elections, explored the irregularities that fraught the distribution and issuance of PVCs and presented detailed tables and graphical analysis of the registered voters, PVCs collected and PVCs not collected from the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory and, the fifth section concluded and made appropriate recommendations.

Conceptualization of Terms

It is pertinent to conceptualize the terms germane to the analysis of this study.

Independent National Electoral Commission

The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, is Nigerian Electoral body entrusted with the fundamental role to organize and conduct free, fair and credible elections. Nnoli (2003, p.223) embellished the rationale for electoral body in the contest of political preferences: Since elections involve competition among individuals and groups. It is necessary to have an umpire or referee who ensures that the competitors follow the prescribed rules and regulations governing the competition. The overarching goal is to ensure that elections are free and fair. Also, Madubuegwu (2010, p.112), observed that elections are a management process which requires the participation of competent and credible administrators. Furthermore, the responsibilities of the Independent National Electoral Commission are provided in the Third Schedule, section 115 of the 1999 Federal Republican Constitution as amended.

It is obvious that INEC has the constitutional role to enfranchise the Nigerian electorate by establishing procedure and modalities for their active participation and expression of civic preference between dialectical variables. As such, this study is a critical examination of the managerial and logistic challenges that INEC faced in the distribution and issuance of PVCs and their adverse effects on the 2015 Presidential and National Assembly elections.

PVC

The term “PVC” is an acronym for Permanent Voter’s Card within the context of Nigerian electoral system. It was produced as a replacement for the Temporary Voter’s Card (TVC) and was the condition for voter eligibility. The card has an inbuilt microchip containing the biometrics of a voter. The PVC is designed as a high-tech and bio-data voters’ ID which contains vital information such as names, local government, state, registration area, date of birth, occupation and residential address of the Nigeria elector. Thus, the PVC is issued by the INEC whose guideline for Permanent Voters’ Card Distribution (2014, p.3) states:

Issuance of voter's card is the responsibilities of the Independent National Electoral Commission. The proprietary right in the voter card is vested in INEC. The PVC is a smart card-based-information such as bio-data, biometrics and facial image. The card technology provides adequate security features to reduce vulnerability to counterfeiting. The PVC shall be used for identification and authentication of voters during elections.

As a matter of fact, the introduction of the Permanent Voter card (PVC) in the 2015 general elections represents the unflinching commitment of the INEC leadership to improve on the inadequacies of the past, entrench credibility in the voting process and mitigate against certain irregularities obvious in:

- i. Falsification of the Voter I.D.
- ii. Multiple registrations of voters at the registered area and polling units.
- iii. Inflation of the figure or statistics of the voters at the polling units.

Furthermore, these irregularities can be checked if voters are present in their area of registration along with their cards and participate in the accreditation exercise which begins in the polling units and involves the scanning of the finger prints of the voters using the Smart Card Reader (SCR) to verify the bio data and facial image of the voter as expressed in the PVC. If there is any discrepancy between the information in the PVC and what (SCR) reveals then the voter is disqualified from voting.

In this study, the writer examines the challenges which led to the hitches experienced in the distribution and issuance of the PVCs and consequent disenfranchisement of many Nigerians in the 2015 Presidential and National Assembly elections.

Democracy and Elections

Democracy is a concept of historical antiquity. It is a popular and participatory system of mass-driven government that emerged and flourished in the vortex of Athenian imperialism and Pericles (500-429B.C). This classical democratic form of governance was exemplified in Athenian Ecclesia and Spartan Apella which underscored the relevance of political liberty and equality. To this extent, democracy conventionally represents, 'people-participatory form of governance' and, its meaning (which transcends centuries) replete with plethora of definitions among scholars of political science.

The collapse of feudal oligarchy and industrialization of the productive forces of Western Europe facilitated the growth and advancement of modern democracy alternatively contextualized as representative democracy. In this regard, Gauba (2003, p.426) explicated on the structures of modern representative governance and the expediency of an election:

In modern representative democracies, decisions are taken in several bodies-legislatures, committees, cabinets and executive or regulative bodies. Majority rule means that in all these decision-making bodies, from the electorate to the last committee, the issues are to be resolved by voting. Political equality is secured by the principle of “one man, one vote” which implies that there will be no privileged sections claiming special weightage, nor any underprivileged sections whose voice is ignored.

Political liberty and equality are fundamentals of modern democracy which reflect on democratic attitude, structures and processes of governance. Mahajan (2013, p.271) shared this view; liberty and equality are the foundations of democracy. In a democratic government, the people are the sovereign.

These principles are further entrenched in the electoral process. However, the failure of INEC to ensure the equitable operational process of distribution and a hitch-free collection of the PVCs has undermined the principles of civil liberty and equality in the context of the electioneering process in Nigeria. In addition, the advancement of liberal democracy is inextricably interlinked with elections which entrench stability in the contest for political power and state. Accordingly, Amucheazi (2008, p.157) writes that elections have critical roles to play in the democratic process. Specifically, elections make for an orderly change of government and political stability, equitable representation of interests and choice of capable leaders.

Precisely, an election like other concepts in Political Science is replete with definitions among scholars. Awopeju (2011, p.3) defined elections as a procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it. Hence, an election is a regulated process, and avenue for the expression of choice between contending political parties, candidates and programmes.

Nigeria’s democracy is undoubtedly constrained with crises of governance and political legitimacy exacerbated by a flawed electoral process. The 2015 general election has its peculiar challenges which emanated from administrative and organizational lapses of INEC as related to the eligibility of Nigerian voters. Obviously, these challenges led to the non-collection of millions of PVCs beside security threat and postponement of elections earlier scheduled to hold on 14th February and 28th February to 28th March and 11th April 2015. The lopsided distribution of the eligibility cards (PVCs) among states and geo-political zones and the difficulties that marred its collection elicited strident views among the Nigeria electorate as remarked by Efiio-Ita Nyok (2015, p.34) as cited by Adibe (2011,p.2):

Today begins with, out of 68 million eligible Voters only 48 million had collected their Permanent Voter cards, PVCs. But Jega’s INEC insisted on their readiness. There may be explanations but other considerations discredit these alleged

justification. For instance, it has been revealed that of the 20 million remaining to collect their PVCs, a majority were from the South- East and South-South of the country where we have traditional supporters of the presidential aspirant of the PDP. Why was it so? How did the North succeed to distribute 95% of its PVC despite the present security challenges.

Curiously, these questions raised pertinent issues on the organizational competence and fairness of INEC, lopsided distribution of the PVCs between the North and South and the credibility of the 2015 elections. In the analysis of this discourse, the researcher assesses critically the factuality of these unpleasant situations, factors responsible and the adverse effects on the democratization process in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Political science is a scientific and analytical discipline. Accordingly, political phenomena are systematically identified, described, explained, interpreted and predicated from a methodological perspective which underscores the imperative of a conceptual framework. In this empirical discourse, the application of the assumptions and principles of an appropriate theory accentuates the essence of scientific analysis and generalization.

Therefore, this study adopts the behavioural theory of structural functionalism to examine and analyze the criticality and causality of INEC's dysfunctional roles in the process of distribution and collection of PVCs within the context of 2015 electioneering process. Thus, structural functional framework further indicates the essence of multi- disciplinary research and analysis in the study of political phenomena. In other words, the conceptual framework acknowledged the fact that the occurrence, dynamics and synthesis of political phenomena are functions of myriad of variables of non-political character and trend.

In this regard, Gauba (2003, p.95) etymologically conceived structural functional framework as a hybrid theory:

It originated in the sphere of social anthropology in the writings of Radcliffe-Brown and B, Malinowski. Then, it was developed in the field of sociology by Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton and Marion Levy. Gabriel Almond and his associates developed it into a tool for political analysis.

Similarly, as an off-shoot or a derivative of systems analysis, the analysis of structural-functionalism is a means of explaining what political structure performs what basic functions in political system, and it is a tool of investigation (Johari,1982, p.86). In other words, structural-functional framework explains the structures, functions and process of the political system. In reference to the assumptions of the structural-functional theory, Hara-Das and Choudhury (1997, p.39) indicate:

The basic assumptions of structural-functionalism shown that,

- i. All systems have structures which can be identified.
- ii. These structures perform functions within the system, which have meaning only in terms of the system.
- iii. They (these structures) are dependent on the system as an active entity for their existence.
- iv. They are dependent on the system as an active entity for their existence.
- v. They are also dependent on each other for their activity.
- vi. The society is a single inter-connected system, each element performing a specific function.
- vii. The interaction among the components is necessary for the maintenance of the equilibrium.
- viii. The different parts of society are inter-related and tension are resolved with mutual help; and
- ix. The broad aims of the principles underlying social structures can be identified.

The inter-disciplinary orientation of structural-functionalism gained popularity in the 1960's particularly among American behavioural scholars of political science, Almond, Apter, Easton, Kaplan and Mitchell. From their scholarly discourse, it is established that the process, stability and persistence of the political system are driven by structures and functions. Hence, the character, dynamics, intensity, challenges and outcome of the process of the political system can be analyzed and predicted from the functions performed by its structures.

Furthermore, Verma (1975, p.213) highlighted Almond's functional categories (which had gained heightened relevance in the discourse of structural functionalism).

Almond has used seven variables. The input functions are political socialization and recruitment, interest-articulation, interest-aggregation and political communication while the output functions include rule-making, rule application and rule adjudication.

The input functions are performed by non-governmental sub-system, by the society and the general environment, while the output functions are governmental ones.

In this vein, Almond identified the structures that perform these out-put and in-put functions which are the family, peer group, school, church, interest groups, political parties, mass media and legislature, executive and judiciary.

Invariably, the political development of a polity is a function of the roles performed by the structures of the political system. This assertion takes in cognizance the Almond and Powell (1966) conceptualization of political development as the increased differentiation and specialization of political structures and increased secularization of political culture. To this end, the trends and intensity of political development can be measured from the functionality and viability of the political system structures.

However, structural-functional analysis is susceptible to limitations as seen in the critics as remarked by Gauba (2003, p.98):

Firstly, it is alleged that this form of analysis is primarily concerned with system's survival; hence it is ideologically inclined towards conservatism. Secondly, it is not suited to analysis of power relation in society. Finally, it projects western-type liberal democratic system as a standard for institution-building in developing societies rather than encouraging them to build their institutions according to their own genius and specific requirements.

In spite of its limitations, structural-functional framework remained relevant in the analysis of political structures and process of democratizing states such as Nigeria.

The applicability of the assumptions of structural-functional framework in this discourse showed that the "2015 election" was a fundamental role of the specialized structure of Nigeria's political system referred to as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Thus, the credibility and fairness of the 2015 general election is assessed from the viability and tendencies of the INEC as an electoral structure in Nigeria's political system. It is further established that the irregularities that fraught the distribution and collection of PVCs and consequent disenfranchisement of millions of Nigeria's electorate emanated from the functional inadequacies of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Hence, this unpleasant situation which is an outcome of structural- disarticulation and dysfunctional roles militated against the democratic consolidation and political development of Nigeria's political system.

Subsequently, the structural-functionalism of this discourse lends credence to the imperatives of institutional reforms of the Nigeria's election management body and synergy of roles between INEC and other relevant structures (institutions) of Nigeria political system in improving the credibility of our electioneering process.

Background to the Crises of 2015 General Election

The 2015 general election is the most divisive and intriguing process in recent times. The tempestuous euphoria of the PVCs was replete with torrents of public anger which perhaps undermined the credibility of the outcome of the Presidential and National Assembly Elections. Thus, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was at the centre of criticism from millions of eligible Nigerian voters who could not exercise their franchise because of the obvious irregularities and infractions that trailed the distribution and collection of PVCs.

Consequently, the apprehension caused by the PVCs, first elicited the concern of the National Security Adviser Col, Sambo Dasuki (rtd) who in January 2015 called on the INEC Chairman, Prof Jega to postpone the February elections on the ground that many eligible Nigerian voters were yet to collect their PVCs. The NSA stressed that the postponement was exigent upon the fact that 30 million Nigerian voters were still struggling with INECs' organizational inadequacies to obtain their PVCs.

However, the leadership of Nigeria's Electoral Commission insisted that the remaining eligible voters would collect their PVCs before the February 14th Presidential and National Assembly elections. As a result, a civil society organization, Society for the Advancement and Protection of Public Rights (SAPPR) approached the Federal High Court, praying for an order to compel INEC to make use of Temporary Voter Cards (TVCs) for the February polls on the premise of section 77(2) and section 117(2) of the 1999 Federal Republic Constitution as amended which explicitly states that INEC has no power or right to deprive any Nigerian of voting age the right to vote in elections.

Surprisingly, the two contending political parties, the ruling People Democratic Party (PDP) and All Peoples Congress (APC) shared the same view in the face of public anxiety and plights on the issue of PVCs. Therefore, they urged INEC to allow the use of TVCs. This appeal was re-echoed by many Nigerians including the Nigeria Bar Association, the Civil Society Organizations and Election advocacy groups which also raised serious doubts over INEC's preparedness to conduct credible elections in the face of obvious limitations regarding the unavailability, distribution and collection of PVCs and, widespread agitations from various parts of the country.

Akaeze (2015, p.18) has regrettably observed:

Certainly, the signs appear threatening enough. For instance, as at last week no less than 26 million voters, about 25 percent of the voting population across the country were yet to collect their PVCs from INEC. Various reasons have been cited for this shortfall, ranging from INEC's inefficiency to the insurgency in the North-East of the country that has led to the displacement of many Nigerians in Adamawa Borno and Yobe states.

The public outcry and pressure from the Presidency and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) later persuaded the INEC leadership to postpone the Presidential and National Assembly Elections (earlier slated for February 14th) and the Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly Elections (earlier slated for 28th February) to March 28th and 11th April respectively.

On 7th February 2015, the National Chairman of INEC, Prof Jega announced the postponement of the elections in compliance with the relevant provisions of the Federal Republic Constitution (as amended) such as section 76(2), section 116(2), section 132(2), section 178(2) and section 25 of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended. The INEC Chairman explained that the postponement was necessitated by security concerns in the North-East and further insisted that the commission was prepared! However, the preparedness of INEC and the sincerity of Prof Jega's claim to conduct February elections were challenged by the following defective conditions (just few days to the postponement).

1. 45 millions PVCs collected from the INEC's announced 68 million registered voters.

2. 700,000 adhoc staff yet to be recruited and deployed to 120,000 polling units across the federation.
3. INEC Presiding officers yet to be trained and deployed to polling units.
4. The commission's training manual (for the adhoc staff and NYSC members) was yet to be printed.
5. Resident Electoral Commissioners (REC) were yet to produce a comprehensive voter register.
6. Millions of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) were still being printed abroad.
7. Many states are yet to get their balance of card readers.
8. Fake printing ink received by states INEC and no full complement of ballot boxes.
9. The directive and logistics for the deployment of 134,000 Corp members to 120,000 polling units across the country still being awaited.
10. Proportional percentages of Smart Card Readers (SCRs) are not fully distributed and still experiencing technical failures (Umoru, 2015p.1) and Society For Electoral Reform and Advocacy, 2015 p.6).

It is pertinent to note that the six-week postponement saved the Commission from large-scale electoral irregularities that would have thrown the fragile-heterogeneous Nigerian polity into political turmoil considering the already intense centrifugal-character of the political process. In other words, logistic inadequacies related to the production, distribution and collection of PVCs, prompted INEC's postponement of the February elections. A repetition of history with regards to the postponement of April 2nd, 2011 presidential polls because INEC failed to deliver electoral materials on time to many polling units across the country.

Table: 1. The Update on the Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards Across the 36 States and FCT before the Postponement of 14th February, Presidential and National Assembly Elections.

State	No. of Reg. Voters	No. of Cards Dstribubted	Remarks	State	No. of Reg. Voters	No. of Cards Dstribubted	Remarks
Abia	1,396,162	1,020,997	73.13%	Kano	4,975,701	2,612,400	52.50%
Adamawa	1,559,012	1,239,820	79.53%	Katsina	2,827,943	2,245,303	79.40%
Akwa-Ibom	1,680,759	1,328,714	79.05%	Kebbi	1,470,648	1,232,357	83.80%
Anambra	1,963,173	1,222,002	62.25%	Kogi	1,350,883	773,197	57.24%
Bauchi	2,054,125	1,745,441	84.97%	Kwara	1,142,267	711,920	62.33%
Bayelsa	610,373	386,125	63.26%	Lagos	5,905,852	2,267,039	38.39%
Benue	2,015,452	1,132,187	56.18%	Nasarawa	1,242,667	850,619	68.45%
Borno	1,934,079	999,470	56.18%	Niger	2,014,317	1,250,379	62.07%
Cross River	1,175,623	776,977	66.09%	Ogun	1,829,534	666,752	36.44%
Delta	2,275,264	1,422,595	62.52%	Ondo	1,524,655	824,715	54.09%
Ebonyi	1,074,273	714,351	66.50%	Osun	1,407,107	995,562	70.75%
Edo	1,779,738	1,046,960	58.83%	Oyo	2,415,566	1,156,593	47.88%
Ekiti	732,021	492,869	67.33%	Plateau	2,001,825	1,141,260	57.01%
Enugu	1,429,221	738,933	51.70%	Rivers	2,537,590	1,253,606	49.40%
Fct	881,472	459,913	52.18%	Sokoto	1,611,929	1,211,717	75.17%

Gombe	1,120,023	873,698	78.00%	Taraba	1,340,652	1,079,383	80.51%
Imo	1,803,030	682,046	37.24%	Yobe	1,099,970	740,336	67.31%
Jigawa	1,831,276	1,460,620	79.76%	Zamfara	1,495,717	1,045,855	69.92%
Kaduna	3,407,222	2,976,628	87.36%	Total	68,833,476	42,779,339	62.15%

Source: Tell magazine, February 9, 2015 page 23.

Irregularities that Bedeviled the Process of Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs)

The sovereignty of the Nigerian government and state belongs to the Nigerian people as clearly provided in section 14(2) a, b and c of the 1999 Federal Republic Constitution as amended. These provisions portend the following imperatives:

- i. Nigeria as a sovereign polity upholds the principles of liberal democracy.
- ii. The active participation of the Nigeria people in the affairs of the government and trends of the political process is fundamental for the advancement of liberal democracy.
- iii. An election is also essential for the expression of the popular sovereignty of the Nigerian people.

Accordingly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was entrusted with the responsibility to design, print and issue PVCs to the registered and prospective eligible voters for the forth-coming elections in 2015. In this regard, the Commission in January 2014 informed the Nation of its operational plan to distribute PVCs to the 36 states of the federation within a framework of phases as shown in the table below.

Table: 2. Phases of Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) across the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory.

Phase of Distribution	States	Geo-Political Zone	Period of Commencement of Distribution
First Phase	Benue and Kogi	North-Central	May 2014
	Taraba and Gombe	North-East	
	Kebbi and Zamfara	North-West	
	Abia and Enugu	South-East	
	Akwa-Ibom and Bayelsa	South-South	
Second phase	Yobe and Bauchi	North- East	
	Jigawa and Sokoto	North-West	
	FCT Abuja and Kwara	North-Central	
	Anambra and Ebonyi	South-East	
	Ondo and Oyo	South-West	
	Delta and Cross River	South-South	
Third	Adamawa and Borno	North-East	November 2014
	Kaduna, Kastsina,	North-West	

phase	Kano	
	Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger	North-Central
	Imo	South-East
	Lagos and Ogun	South-West
	Edo and Rivers	South-South

Source: Adapted from Vanguard, February 11, 2015, p. 49 and Tell Magazine February 9, 2015, p.26.

NB: *It is important to note that Ekiti and Osun States were excluded from the phases of distribution. The PVCs for the two states had been distributed ahead of the gubernatorial elections held on 21st June and 9th August 2014 respectively. Subsequently, there was an extension for PVC distribution in Borno because of the challenge of Boko Haram onslaught. Also, the extension of PVCs distribution in Niger, Kaduna, Katsina and nine (9) local government areas in Lagos state due to logistic challenges of INEC. The four states and the selected local government areas were later grouped under Phase four (4) of distribution.*

It was expected that by the end of 2014, Nigeria's election management body would have recorded over 70% rate of PVCs distribution to the 34 states and the FCT with the exception of the three states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa under Boko Haram insurgency. However, this expectation was constrained by factors that lent credence to INCE's organizational and logistic inadequacies.

1. Absence of Intense Civic Enlightenment and Advocacy.

In this vein, INEC, failed to establish intense public enlightenment and advocacy on the distribution of PVCs. Many Nigerians were not aware of the INEC operational plan for the distribution which was an indictment on the capacity of INEC's mechanism for civic enlightenment and electoral advocacy.

2. Haphazard Distribution of PVCs.

In this regard, there were situations where thousands of PVCs meant for a particular state or states were absurdly found in another state or other states. For instance, hundreds of PVCs meant for Akwa Ibom State were sent to Ogun State and PVCs containing the biometric data of Edo indigenes were found in Osun State pointing to the organizational failure of INEC .

3. Theft of PVCs

The theft of thousands of PVCs at the INEC offices in some states of the federation illuminated lack of internal mechanism for the safety of the card technology. In Delta, three INEC personnel were arrested by security agents for their complicity in the theft of PVCs. In Rivers State, the Resident Electoral Commissioner, Mrs Gesila Khan before the March Presidential and National Assembly election, expressed dismay over the ugly incident that led to the stealing of 14,000 Permanent Voter Cards by hoodlums at the INEC local

government collection center.

4. Absence of Effective System of Inventory of PVCs at State and Local government Distribution Centers

Observation further indicated that there were absence of inventory and stock-keeping of the distributed Permanent Voters Cards in some states across the federation. For instance, it was common to see heaps of thousands of PVCs on top of each other spilling at unsecured INEC offices particularly at the local government areas. This unpleasant situation often led to the misplacement and loss of the PVCs of prospective voters

5. Artificial Scarcity of the PVCs.

It was also alleged that some INEC staff or personnel connived with some unscrupulous politicians to divert PVCs meant for particular Local Government Areas in some states for the purpose of counterfeiting the card technology. This criminal development created artificial scarcity of the voter cards to the anxiety and disillusionment of the Nigeria electorate. For instance, a commissioner in Enugu state and candidate for the Federal House of Representatives was caught by the Officers of the Nigerian Army for having in his possession thousands of PVCs during the March 28th elections. Ironically, the culprit was elected as a member of the National Assembly representing a federal constituency in Enugu State! This ugly development was equally not uncommon in other parts of the Country.

6. Lopsided Distribution and Unavailability of PVCs.

The INEC distribution of PVCs was lopsided in the geo-political zones and states of the federation. This view was corroborated by Okhueleigbe (2015, p.21) when he stated that most states had achieved 70 percent collection of PVCs with the Northern states among the highest. Whereas Zamafara and Jigawa states recorded 93 percent distribution, Gombe had 95 percent, Katsina 92 percent, Kaduna and Akwa-Ibom 91 percent, Ondo state and Osun states 71 percent and state like Ogun state recorded 59 percent, Edo state 64 percent, Bayelsa and Ebonyi 66 percent. Borno 68 percent and Federal Capital Territory 61 percent.

The high rate of PVCs distribution and collection in the Northern states in spite of the spate of violence in some areas undoubtedly elicited serious concern on the independence and sincerity of the INEC and its leadership. For instance, Borno state under insurgency achieved 68% distribution and collection of PVCs before the postponement of 14th February elections.

Perhaps, the low rate of PVCs distribution in most of the Southern states particularly in the East and South can be attributed to the unavailability of the card technology for these areas which consequently led to the disenfranchisement of millions of the eligible voters from the two geo-political zones of Southern Nigeria. In this vein, the former acting INEC Chairman, Mrs Amina Zakari lent credence to this fact and revealed that the structural deficiency and tardiness of the Commission with regard to the production and distribution of the PVCs. The Acting Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Mrs. Amina Zakari said that the

commission would soon begin a national wide audit of permanent voter cards (PVCs) because about 10 million PVCs out of 68 million produced had not been collected and about 400,000 cards were yet to be delivered by the PVC vendors.(Alli 2015, p.4).

At this point, it is pertinent to examine critically the organizational irregularities that restrained millions of enthusiastic Nigerian voters from participating in the historic-intensely contested Presidential and National Assembly Elections of 28th March 2015.

The Challenges that Bedeviled the Process of PVCs Collection

As earlier indicated, the independent National Electoral Commission is entrusted with the duty to issue PVCs to the Nigerian electorate. Thus, the INEC guidelines for Permanent Voter Card distribution (2014, p.2) explicitly defined the conditions and designated places for the collection of PVCs:

A person is eligible to collect PVC if he or she

- a. has registered before
- b. is in the register of voters displayed
- c. has temporary voter card (TVC)
- d. has lost his /her TVC but his or her identity can be confirmed.
- e. is physically present at the collection center.

Where to collect PVC

- i. PVC distribution will be at the polling unit.
- ii. Those who are unable to collect their PVCs during the specified period shall, therefore collect theirs from the INEC office in the Local Government Area.

However, millions of Nigerian eligible voters could not collect their PVCs on the basis of the following impediments.

1. Poor enlightenment and advocacy network on the essence of PVCs collection, conditions of collection and designated places for collection particularly at the rural areas.
2. Many Nigerian electors who voted in the previous elections and possessed their Temporary Voter Cards (PVCs) could not find their names on the Voters' Register displayed by INEC.
3. The PVCs were not issued at the polling units (as stipulated by INEC Guidelines for PVC distribution) but rather at the INEC Local Government offices and undisclosed places as seen in most states across the federation which frustrated the efforts to locate designated areas for PVCs collection.
4. At the Local government INEC offices, many Nigerian voters queued for hours to collect their PVCs under excruciating climatic conditions. The sight of over-crowded voters waiting to collect PVCs often fighting further discouraged many voters from collecting their PVCs.

5. The cynical attitudinal disposition of INEC officials at the PVCs collection centers was another defective factor that militated against the effort of many eligible voters to collect their PVCs.
6. The omission of millions of names on the INEC displayed Voters' Register was also attributed to the technical failure of the INEC's ICT unit in Abuja. This is because the electronic process adopted by the ICT to delete 11 million voters involved in multiple registration and 580,000 voters without finger prints on their record may perhaps technically lead to the removal of eligible names from the INEC Voters' Register.
7. Inadequate logistic arrangements for eligible voters who lost their TVCs and prospective voters who just attained the voting age. Hence, many young prospective voters (who just attained the voting age) could not obtain their PVCs because of widespread irregularities that marred the entire process of PVCs collection.
8. Absence of effective organizational mechanism to enfranchise a proportional percentage of eligible voters among the 3.3 million internally displaced persons (IDP) spread across states of the North.
9. The wide distance between PVCs collection centers and residential areas of eligible voters was also an obvious constraint. Thus, apathetic Nigerians often found it extremely difficult to trek or drive hundreds of kilometers to obtain their PVCs.
10. The short time frame provided by the INEC was another obvious impediment to the collection of PVCs. Though, there had been extension of dates for the collection of the card (before and after the postponement of the elections) but the constraining and difficult modalities established for the collection of the PVCs called for early preparation and adequate time.

Furthermore, beyond INEC's limitations other factors or variables equally contributed to the non-collection of PVCs as expressed below:

- i. The failure of state governments and State Independent Electoral Commission to intensify public sensitization and advocacy on the essence of PVCs collection within the urban and interior areas.
- ii. Some state governments equally failed to provide enabling avenues (such as public holidays) to persuade their eligible state electors to collect their PVCs.
- iii. The circulation of fake PVCs was another impeding factor. There were instances that cloned or counterfeited PVCs were in circulation which made many Nigerians to feel disillusioned with the electoral system.
- iv. In most states, there were an absence of effective network of synergy between the relevant institutions and stakeholders in raising the consciousness and enthusiasm of the voters to collect their PVCs.
- v. Some Nigerians had lost confidence in governance and the system of electioneering and therefore declined to obtain their PVCs.

- vi. Security concerns with regards to Boko Haram insurgency in the North-Eastern states was another factor that militated against the involvement of Nigeria voters in the PVC collection exercise.

It is therefore instructive to state that institutional and organizational failures, cynical attitudinal tendencies and apathy were constraining factors that trailed the distribution and collection of the PVCs.

Table: 3. The Number of PVCs Collected From the 36 States and FCT in the Six Geo-Political Zones as of 24th March 2015.

NORTH CENTRAL		NORTH EAST	
State	PVCs Collected	State	PVCs Collected
Benue	1,607,800	Adamawa	1,381,571
Kogi	926,013	Bauchi	1,967,081
Kwara	889,067	Borno	1,407,777
Nasarawa	1,048,053	Gombe	1,070,725
Niger	1,682,058	Tarba	1,270,889
Plateau	1,508,585	Yobe	824,401
FCT , Abuja	569,109	Sub Total	7,922,444
Sub Total	8,230,685		
NORTH-WEST		SOUTH-SOUTH	
State	PVCs Collected	State	PVCs Collected
Jigawa	1,757,658	Akwa-Ibom	1,587,566
Kaduna	3,174,519	Bayelsa	548,585
Kano	4,112,039	Cross River	983,968
Katsina	2,620,096	Delta	1,939,952
Kebbi	1,372,630	Edo	1,230,566
Sokoto	1,527,004	Rivers	2,127,837
Zamfara	1,435,452	Sub Total	8,418,474
Sub Total	15,999,398		
SOUTH-WEST		SOUTH-EAST	
State	PVCs Collected	State	PVCs Collected
Ekiti	522,107	Abia	1,183,127
Ogun	1,125,657	Anambra	1,658,967
Ondo	1,118,479	Ebonyi	848,392
Osun	1,033,229	Enugu	1,223,606
Oyo	1,639,967	Imo	1,707,499
Lagos	3,799,274	Sub Total	6,621,591
Sub Total	9,238,713		

Source: Adapted from www.inecnigeria.org and structured into geo-political zones.

Table 4: The Statistics of Registered Voters, PVCs Collected and PVCs Not Collected From The 36 States and FCT As Expressed by The Geo-Political Zones.

NORTH CENTRAL GEO-POLITICAL ZONE				
State	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
Benue	2,015,452	1,607,800	407,652	20.22633
Kogi	1,350,883	926,013	424,870	31.45128
Kwara	1,142,267	889,067	253,200	22.16645
Nasarawa	1,242,667	1,048,053	194,614	16.06335
Niger	2,014,317	1,682,058	332,259	16.49487
Plateau	2,001,825	1,508,585	493,240	24.63952
FCT, Abuja	881,472	569,109	312,363	36.45753
Sub Total	10,648,883	8,230,685	2,418,198	21.611

Source: Culled from table 1 and table 3.

NORTH EAST GEO-POLITICAL ZONE				
State	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
Adamawa	1,559,012	1,381,571	177,441	11.38163
Bauchi	2,054,125	1,967,081	87,044	4.237522
Borno	1,934,079	1,407,777	526,302	27.21202
Gombe	1,120,023	1,070,725	49,298	4.401517
Taraba	1,340,652	1,270,889	69,763	5.203662
Yobe	1,099,970	824,401	275,569	25.05241
Sub Total	9,107,861	7,922,444	1,185,417	13.01532

Source: Culled from table 1 and table 3.

NORTH WEST GEO-POLITICAL ZONE				
State	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
Jigawa	1,831,276	1,757,658	73,618	4.02
Kaduna	3,407,222	3,174,519	232,703	6.83
Kano	4,975,701	4,112,039	863,662	17.36
Katsina	2,827,943	2,620,096	207,847	7.35
Kebbi	1,470,648	1,372,630	98,018	6.66
Sokoto	1,611,929	1,527,004	84,925	5.27
Zamfara	1,495,717	1,435,452	60,265	4.03
Sub Total	17,620,436	15,999,398	1,621,038	9.12

Source: Culled from table 1 and table 3.

SOUTH-SOUTH GEO-POLITICAL ZONE				
State	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
Akwa Ibom	1,680,759	1,587,566	93,193	5.54
Bayelsa	610,373	548,585	61,788	10.12
Cross River	1,175,623	983,968	191,655	16.30
Delta	2,275,264	1,939,952	335,312	14.74
Edo	1,779,738	1,230,566	549,172	30.86
Rivers	2,537,590	2,127,837	409,753	16.15
Sub Total	10,059,347	8,418,474	1,640,873	16.31

Source: Culled from table 1 and table 3.

SOUTH WEST GEO-POLITICAL ZONE				
State	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
Ekiti	732,021	522,107	209,914	28.68
Ogun	1,829,534	1,125,657	703,877	38.47
Ondo	1,524,655	1,118,479	406,176	26.64
Osun	1,407,107	1,033,229	373,878	26.57
Oyo	2,415,566	1,639,967	775,599	32.11
Lagos	5,905,852	3,799,274	2,106,578	35.67
Sub Total	13,814,735	9,238,713	4,576,022	33.12

Source: Culled from table 1 and table 3.

SOUTH EAST GEO-POLITICAL ZONE				
State	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
Abia	1,396,162	1,183,127	213,035	15.26
Anambra	1,963,173	1,658,967	304,206	15.50
Ebonyi	1,074,273	848,392	225,881	20.88
Enugu	1,429,221	1,223,606	205,615	14.39
Imo	1,803,030	1,707,499	95,531	5.30
Sub Total	7,665,859	6,621,591	1,044,268	13.62

Source: Culled from table 1 and table 3.

Table 5: The Total Number of Registered Voters, PVCs Collected and PVCs not Collected by Geopolitical Zones.

Geo-Political Zones	Registered Voters	PVCs collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected.
North Central	10,648,883	8,230,685	2,418,198	22.71
North East	9,107,861	7,922,444	1,185,417	13.02
North West	17,620,436	15,999,398	1,621,038	9.20
South South	10,059,347	8,418,474	1,640,873	16.31

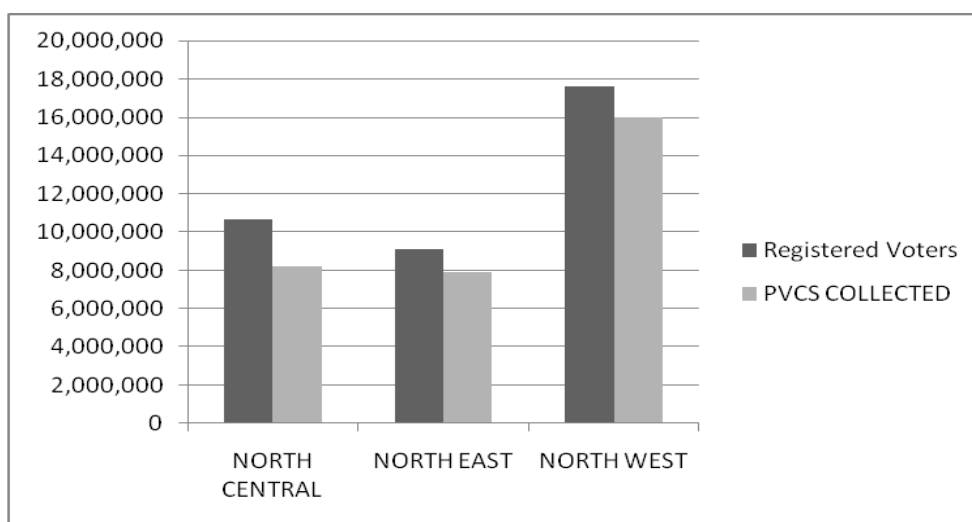
South West	13,814,735	9,238,713	4,576,022	33.12
South East	7,665,859	6,621,591	1,044,268	13.62
Total	68,917,121	56,431,305	12,485,816	18.12

Source: Author’s compilation.

Table 6: Comparison of PVCs Collection between the Geo-Political Zones in the North

Zones	Registered Voters	PVCs collected	PVCs NOT collected	% PVCs Not collected
North Central	10,648,883	8,230,685	2,418,198	22.71
North East	9,107,861	7,922,444	1,185,417	13.01
North West	17,620,436	15,999,398	1,621,038	9.20
Total	37,377,180	32,152,527	5,224,653	13.98

Source: Author’s compilation.

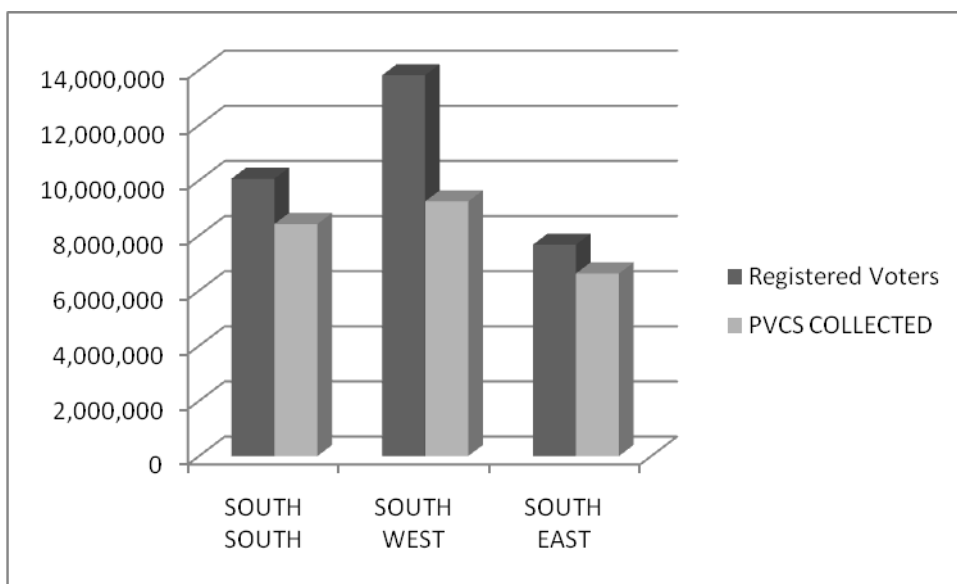


Source: Author’s design.

Table7: Comparison of PVCs collection between the Geo-Political Zones in the South.

Zones	Registered Voters	PVCs Collected	PVCs Not collected	% PVCs Not collected
South South	10,059,347	8,418,474	1,640,873	16.31
South West	13,814,735	9,238,713	4,576,022	33.12
South East	7,665,859	6,621,591	1,044,268	13.62
Total	31,539,941	24,278,778	7,261,163	23.02

Source: Author’s compilation



Source: Author’s design.

The statistics and graphical analysis of the histograms showed that 37,377,108 representing the total number of the registered voters of the three geo-political zones in the North. Furthermore, 32.1million registered voters collected their PVCs and 5.2 million PVCs were not collected. Therefore, the North had 90% rate of PVCs collection before the 28th March Presidential and National Assembly elections. Subsequently, 31,539,941 represent the total number of the eligible voters in the three geo-political zones of the South. Hence, 24.2 million electors collected their PVCs and 7.2 million PVCs were not collected which indicated a 40% rate of PVCs collection. It is therefore instructive to note that over 12 million Nigeria voters were disenfranchised by the administrative and institutional lapses of INEC. Impliedly, the lopsided distribution and collection of PVCs between the North and South had causal effects on 2015 Presidential and National Assembly elections, particularly between the Presidential candidates of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP and All Progressives Congress, APC. The presidential candidate of APC secured 15,424, 921 votes (53.96%) to defeat the incumbent presidential candidate of PDP who polled 12,853,162(44.96%). In addition, the APC presidential candidate recorded overwhelming victory in the 16 states of the North with the exception of Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau states (won by PDP presidential candidate). In the south, the APC Presidential candidate also won five states in the West except Ekiti state (won by PDP).On the Other hand, the PDP Presidential Candidate won overwhelmingly in the states of South -South and South-East geo-political zones, three states in the North and the FCT.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The millions of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) that were not collected and hundreds of thousands that were yet to be delivered by the Chinese contractors ostensibly indicated the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct credible and transparent 2015 elections. The institutional failure that excruciatingly disenfranchised many enthusiastic Nigerians from a democratic process (election) that accords relevance to their plights and expectations. The widespread failure of the Smart Card Readers (SCRs), particularly in the Southern states, and the under-aged voting in some Northern states (as widely reported, pictured and shown in the media) during the 28th March Presidential and National Assembly, were not only events of national embarrassment but strip the leadership of INEC of its integrity, sincerity and impartiality to advance electoral democracy in Nigeria.

However, in the face of the provocation and structural deficiencies of INEC, Nigerians trooped out in their thousands from various parts of the country to exercise their franchise. The fortunate Nigerians with their PVCs were however not deterred nor frustrated by the failure of our electoral system. They persevered, waited all the night and in some occasions assisted the INEC officials with improvised electric light and other logistics in ensuring the security of their votes. The Nigerian people who upheld the values of electoral democracy but were massively excluded from the process. Isiguzo (2015, p.8) noted that it was not the framed readiness of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC that saved the day. The patience of Nigerians and the latitude they granted their public institutions saw the election through. INEC was not ready as usual.

Pertinently, the failure of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and widespread irregularities that bedeviled the March election would have plunged the fragile Nigeria -federation into unprecedented chaos.....

- i. Had the North witnessed massive rate of non-collection of PVCs and monumental failure of SCRs as were prevalent in the South during the Presidential and National Assembly elections.
- ii. Had the former President Goodluck Jonathan declined to accept defeat in an already intense situation exacerbated by INEC's technical and logistic inadequacies? For instance, the finger-print of the former President and his wife were rejected by INEC SCRs - a national embarrassment!

Although, this discourse acknowledged several laudable reforms initiated by the immediate past Chairman of the Commission, Prof Jega to reposition the National Electoral body, INEC for credibility and efficiency. However, every national election held is an experiment to measure or assess the plausibility of reforms initiated, identify inadequacies and recommend measures for improvement. On this premise, this study identifies the following as imperatives to advance and consolidate Nigeria's electoral democracy:

1. Accountable Electoral Governance

Electoral accountability is key to democratize our electoral process. The Nigerian electorate is the major stakeholder (after political parties and candidates) in election management and elections. In other words, the Independent National Electoral Commission should activate its internal mechanisms and collaborative networks to effectively facilitate the active participation of Nigerians in the election management system and its operational processes. Hence, INEC's Citizen Contact Center (ICCC) should be strengthened and decentralized at the level of State Independent Electoral Commission for responsive, transparent and accountable electoral governance that is people-driven.

2. Strategic Operational Plan for 2019 Election

The INEC should review its strategic operational plan on 2015 elections to identify administrative and organizational inadequacies that marred the procurement, distribution and issuance of biometric voting cards (PVCs), voter registration and other logistics for the election. This is imperative for the Commission to develop a functional template that will facilitate the emergence of the Election Project Plan of 2019.

3. Enhancing the Voting Technology

The introduction of biometric voting technology in Nigeria is novel and in credence to the global trend in electioneering across many countries of the world. Though, its short-falls in the recently concluded elections calls for accelerated effort on the part of INEC's Information Communication Technology (ICT) to upgrade their facilities and hardware machines for optimal functioning. It is also essential to establish central and decentralized INEC biometric mechanisms for the efficient administration of the operational activities of voting technology with regards to biometric voter registration, smart card reader (SCRs) etc.

4. Enhancing the Capacity of INEC Personnel and Adhoc staff.

The productivity and efficiency of an organization are assessed from the quality and competence of its personnel. It is therefore imperative for INEC to intensify the training and re-training of its personnel and adhoc staff to meet with the enormous challenges and expectations that were thrown up by the crises of biometric voting technology.

5. Voter Registration and Education

Voter registration as a continuous exercise is critical for the effective electioneering process. Therefore, the commission should establish a permanent administrative mechanism equipped with well-trained personnel to function optimally. Also, the administrative mechanism should be decentralized to the 774 local government areas. INEC should also review its blue-print on voter registration system, re-create voter registration centers to reflect demographic changes and ensure its accessibility to the electorate. These measures are essential for a comprehensive Voter register.

Subsequently, the commission should strengthen its advocacy networks and continue to synergize with channels of mass media and other relevant institutions on voter sensitization especially at the community areas.

6. A System of Procurement, Security, Distribution and Issuance of the PVCs

The INEC leadership should review its MOU with the agencies or firms that were responsible for the production of the Permanent Voter Card (PVCs) for prompt delivery of the card technology. This development shall be preceded with an efficient organizational framework for the security, distribution and issuance of the Voter ID cards across the 36 states and FCT. The INEC Inter- Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS) should be proactive. Subsequently, PVC collection centers should be accessible and its process properly coordinated for the comfort and safety of the Nigerian electorate.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Activities of the State Electoral Commission.

The Commission should activate its internal mechanism and process to monitor and evaluate the operational activities of the State Independent Electoral Commissions. Also, the Central INEC should design a template of operational procedure to regulate the activities of the state electoral bodies and appropriate sanctions on erring Resident Electoral Commissioners and personnel.

8. INEC's Emergency Response Mechanism

The Commission should also establish an internal mechanism equipped with trained personnel and logistics to develop a blue-print and operational procedure to respond to the plights of vulnerable Nigerians (internally displaced by natural disaster, communal clashes, sectarian violence and terrorism) with regard to voter education, voter registration and election.

9. Re-Orientation of the INEC Personnel

The Commission should not only concentrate on improving the technical capacity of its personnel but at the same time inculcate the values of probity, assiduousness and patriotism in relating with the voters, election observer groups, candidates and political parties. This measure shall strengthen cordiality in the relation between INEC staff and these stakeholders.

10. Collaboration from Relevant Institutions

The credibility and fairness of an election is a function of collaborative efforts. It is therefore imperative for the Presidency, National Assembly, Political Parties, the Civil Society Organizations, the Christian and Muslim Communities, Traditional Rulers Councils, the Security Agencies and International and National Election Advocacy groups not to relent in assisting the national electoral body, INEC in organizing and conducting credible elections in Nigeria.

The preparation for 2019 elections begins now!

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