

INCUMBENCY FACTOR AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: A FIELD STUDY OF THE 2015 ANAMBRA STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

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Abstract

The study examines the role of incumbency factor in the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election. The basic objective is to ascertain the influence of the incumbent on the outcome of the election. In doing this, the study adopted a survey research design wherein a sample was selected from the population of eligible partisan and non-partisan voters of Anambra State and studied and findings generalized. Two statistical hypotheses were employed. The first proposes that, 'incumbency has great influence on the outcome of the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election'. The second noted thus; 'incumbency factor hindered the alternation of power between APGA candidates and other political parties' candidates in the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election'. Structured questionnaire was used to generate data. Simple percentage (%) tabulation table and chi-square (X^2) instrument were used in the analysis of result. However, the study discovered that the incumbent exerts serious levels of influence on the outcome of the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election. These were evident in the incumbent unlimited access to state fund, the incumbent responsible for the appointment of the Electoral Officer, constitution of Election Tribunal by the incumbent and provision of security for the election. In the light of this, the study recommends thus; a single tenor for all elective offices and that the electoral laws be amended to discourage the involvement of the executive and legislature in the process of appointing the electoral officers, and the constitution of the Election Tribunals should be done by the National Judiciary Council.

Keywords: Alternation of power, Election tribunals, Incumbency factor, Parliamentary elections and House of Assembly.

Introduction

The role of incumbency factor in a democratic process currently appears to be gaining relevance in the political discourse. The essence of democracy is appreciated in the expression of majority will during elections. But with the emergence of democracy in Africa in the 1990s, it has been marred with sterned election related crises. Factors such as godfatherism, vote buying (in market democracy), monetization of the electoral process have been adduced as causative factors with little or no attention given to the influence of

incumbency factor. In this regard, understanding the relevance of incumbency factor would be best captured in the role of the incumbent in the electoral process.

It should not pose any difficulty to a discerning mind to deduce that Nigeria's fledgling democracy is beset by a plethora of bottlenecks at the heart of which is the negative use of power and poor distribution of democracy dividends. The negative use of power of incumbency is yet another bottleneck. Literally, the incumbency factor refers to the unrestricted access that the current holder of a political office has to state machineries and resources which he can deploy to his advantage and against his opponents. This has reared its ugly head in all the elections conducted in the country since the return to democracy in 1999 and subsequent general state House of Assembly elections in Anambra state in 2015.

Following the charged political climate in Anambra State, it has become very easy to spot a new style of politicking among politicians which has gone beyond strategizing to rig or to lobby the Presidency or INEC to presenting credible candidates whom each of the parties believe will win votes for them. It is no longer a question of hiding behind one godfather somewhere or a question of 'we formed this political party' or 'when did you join', which has always been considered before candidates are chosen. Even when the godfathers are still part of the picture, it is no longer enough to hide behind the strength of their bank accounts or the force of their endorsements.

After the transitional elections of 1999, Nigeria has witnessed other general elections conducted, respectively in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. At the heart of the issues surrounding these elections appears a strong intervening variable namely the abusive use of the incumbency factor by those already in power to block the alternation of power between the ruling party and the opposition. This phenomenon constitutes a serious threat to the process of democratic consolidation.

Elections in Nigeria since the wake of the recent democratization in Africa have continued to attract the attention of the international community and a legion of scholars (Onu and Momoh, 2005; Adejumobi, 2007; Alumona, 2007; Anifowose and Babawale, 2003; Suberu, 2007). It is easily deciphered from the literature and the reports of the international election monitoring groups that there is a real challenge on how to position Nigerian elections for effective democratization. At the heart of the challenge lies the ability to structure the electoral process to allow power to alternate between the ruling party and the opposition peacefully.

After the transitional elections of 1999, Nigeria has witnessed other general elections conducted, respectively in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. At the heart of the issues surrounding these elections appears a strong intervening variable namely the abusive use of the incumbency factor by those already in 'power to block the alternation of power between the ruling party and the opposition. This phenomenon constitutes a serious threat to the process of democratic consolidation. Previous electoral studies focused attention on a variety of other issues such as the Independent national electoral

commission and Electoral governance and administration (Chukwu, 2007; Ajayi, 2006), the security forces and the conduct of the elections (Ajax, 2006). Godfatherism and electoral politics (Ayoade, 2008), the nature and character of the dominant political parties (Ikejiani-Clark, 2008) and the electoral processes (Amucheazi, 2008), the problem of the abuse of power of incumbency seems not to have been captured explicitly by the literature.

There is a good link between the abuse of incumbency factor, and the problem of democratic consolidation. There is need to study the budding incumbency factor that is taking root now in Anambra State, based on this, the basic concern of this study is to examine the role of the power of incumbency in Anambra State's 2015 electoral politics with a view to pointing out the threats its abuse holds for democratic consolidation, stability, and wellbeing of Anambra State. It is in line with the above thought that the question is posed what would account for the continuous dominance of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in Anambra State House of Assembly since 2007 till date? Thus, this study sets out to interrogate the role of incumbency factor in the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly election.

Review of Related Literature

The resurgence of democracy in Africa, which began in the 1990s, has been followed by a great number of election-related conflicts and much violence. The African Electoral Violence Database (AEVD) created by Scott Straus and Charlie Taylor shows that approximately 60 per cent of elections held in Africa between 1990 and 2008 exhibited various forms and levels of violence. Given this, the researchers reasonably argued that there is certainly an indication that "this form of political violence is likely to persist – at least in the short term" in many contemporary African states (Straus 2017: 15). Similarly, it has been argued in other scholarly circles that elections have become another major contributing factor to the outbreak of civil wars in modern Africa (Bekoe 2010, Lamin, 2017). This has made African states natural case studies for research on electoral violence – its nature, forms, causes and consequences. It is against this backdrop that in 2008 Paul Collier and Pedro Vicente conducted experimental research on electoral violence in the Nigerian 2007 presidential elections whose results seemed to advance a theory that violence is "systematically associated with the weakest party", employed as an effective means to influence votes in their favour during elections. Hence, they argue that "voter intimidation may be a strategy of the weak analogous to terrorism" (Collier and Vicente 2008: 1).

The history of elections in Nigeria at the presidential level has shown that incumbent presidents have what it takes to win re-election. For instance, Tafawa Balewa was the head of government in 1960 and got re-elected 1964, Shehu Shagari became the first executive president 1979 and got re-elected 1983, same as Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 and 2003. The incumbency advantage has been playing a pivotal role in presidential elections in Nigeria and that was what gave the former Chairman of the People Democratic Party (PDP), Vincent Ogbulafor in 2014 the impetus to predict that the PDP ruling federal government will rule Nigeria for sixty years. He was relying on the power of incumbency which presumably can allow the PDP to be in power for sixty years. The PDP federal government

has been in power since 1999 after the installation of democratic governance not until the electoral victory of Mohammed Buhari which marked the first time an opposition candidate beat an incumbent president since independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 (Kay and Onu, 2015).

Until the appearance in the literature of Collier and Vicente's study, the general belief was that committing violence around election periods was a characteristic strategy of incumbents to fraudulently perpetuate their parties' hold on power (Chaturvedi 2005; Mehler 2007). Therefore, Collier and Vicente's major postulation (the link between the weakest party and electoral violence) has become a source of debate on election-related research forums. For example, at the joint European Commission and United Nations Development Programme workshop called "Elections, Violence and Conflict Prevention" held in Barcelona in June 2011, this theoretical position generated an intense debate among the participants. Many vehemently rejected the idea of associating the weakest party with employing electoral violence as way to rig votes. They instead suggested that the incumbent usually possesses a greater capacity, in terms of resources and motivation, to use violence during the electoral process. This study is motivated by the above debate regarding who actually perpetrates violence as a means to rig elections. Given that Collier and Vicente's argument is based on findings from the 2003, 2007 and 2015 Nigerian general elections.

Incumbency factor has remained a daunting challenge to the polity. Gordon and Landa (2009: 12) define incumbency advantage as "the electoral margin a candidate enjoys on account of her status as an incumbent running for re-election". Evidence has shown that incumbent office holders have electoral advantage over non-incumbents (Mayhew, 2008; Gordon and Landa, 2009; Nwanegbo & Alumona, 2011). This has been found to be true in the presidential elections in Nigeria. After the military handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1979, Shehu Shagari who won the election under the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) conducted a civilian to civilian transition in 1983. The election was massively rigged in favour of the incumbent president. According to Abe (2008: 45) "during the federal elections of 1983, violence was promoted to an unimaginable level where states sponsored thugs, arsonist and assassins unrestrainedly unleashed terror and fear on both opponents and voters alike". The presidential election in 1983 was won by the incumbent government through a massive rigging and violence which led to the seizure of government by the military (Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011). The electoral empire and state agents were parts of the state institutions used by the incumbent to get re-elected in the presidential election in 1983. In the words of Awopeju (2011: 7), "in 1983 general elections, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which was to serve as an umpire in the electoral process connived with the ruling party National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to perpetrate election rigging techniques".

Constitutional government was restored in Nigeria in 1999 after the military seized power in 1983. Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as the civilian president under the party flagship of the PDP. After the tenure of his first term in office, he organized a civilian to civilian transition in 2003. The outcome of the election favoured the incumbent president. The incumbency factor played a crucial role in the re-election of Obasanjo. The election

was rigged just like the previous elections. The Human Right Watch (HRW) labelled the 2003 elections as an „object failure“ (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The European Union election observers described the elections as “far short of basic regulation and international standards for democratic elections” (Awopeju, 2011). The incumbency advantage is taken very seriously in Nigeria. However, recent studies emanating from scholars have established also incumbent disadvantages in some emerging economies (Macdonald, 2014).

The 2007 presidential elections witnessed the democratic transition from one civil government to another. According to Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011: 11) “the 2007 election marked the first time when a third consecutive presidential election took place and the first time when one elected leader succeeded another in the history of Nigeria’s election”. The 2006 Electoral Act provided the framework for the 2007 general election. However, there were some shortcomings of the Electoral Act. Although, the Electoral Act was far better than that of the 2002 Electoral Art. The ball was set rolling for the 2007 presidential election, one unique aspect of the election was that for the first time in the political history of Nigeria, a democratically elected government that served for two terms, organized and conducted an election that transferred power to an incoming civilian elected government without the interference of the military. Just like the previous elections, UmaruYar’ adau of the PDP won the presidential election that was held on April 21, 2007.

The election was marred by irregularity and major international observers condemned the irregularities in the election process. The level of rigging in the 2007 elections by the state institutions such as the military, the police and the electoral empire outstripped that of 2003 and 2004 elections Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011). The HRW berated the federal government for the irregularities in the elections Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011). President Umaru Yar’Adua was sworn into office on May 29, 2007, as the second president in the new political dispensation and he acknowledged the flaws in the election that brought him to power and he promised to up a panel to review the entire electoral process. According to him, “our election experiences represent an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Accordingly, I will set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process with a view to ensuring that we raise the quality and standard of our general elections, and thereby deepen our democracy” (Anjov and Nguemo, 2012).

Presidential elections in Nigeria have always been manipulated by the incumbents in their favour. Jacobson stated that “Incumbents are so consistently successful at winning elections, and everyone involved in politics knows it” Jacobson (1997). The manipulation of the electoral process by the incumbents in their favour has been classified into three categories by Mozaffer and Schedler (2002). These consist of rulemaking, rule application and rule adjudication. According to Nwanegbo and Alumona (2011) the manipulation of electoral process by the incumbents:

can manifest in a wide range of activities that sustains the electoral process such as: enactment of electoral law and the constitution, appointment of electoral management body, appointment of election tribunals and the conduct of the elections. The manipulation of the electoral process can also come in various forms

such as: appointment of corrupt and or compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of the election tribunals to protect stolen mandates use of state resources to bankroll election campaigns use of state security forces and apparatuses to intimidate opposition parties, denial of access to state owned media houses

Defeating incumbents in the Nigerian context were unthinkable because sitting presidents have the power to use the state machinery to induce and coerce all electoral institutions. Macdonald (2014: 45) declares that "the predominant characterization of African politics as "neopatrimonial" and "semi-authoritarian" implies that incumbents are in a strong position to systematically manipulate the political process to their own advantage". Incumbency factor and distribution of democracy dividend refers to the interplay of forces through which an incumbent leader or party attempts to influence and manipulate the constitutional and institutional framework that guides the electoral process thereby creating an unequal playing for the contestants in the electoral competition (Nwanegbo, and Alumona, in Alfa (2011). Accordingly, the incumbency factor implies the unrestricted access that the current holder of a political office has to state machineries and resources which he can deploy to his advantage and against his opponents. (Olusola-Obasa, 2011). Explaining the source of this incumbency advantage has been one of the most active topics in the study of American politics over the past quarter century. The dominant explanation is that the incumbency advantage is caused by the ability of members of congress to provide constituency service (Fiorina, 1977). Members of congress, the argument goes, provide local public goods to their constituents and thereby shore up support for themselves. Indeed, Levitt and Snyder cited in Alfa (1997) and Fiorina and Fiorina and Rivers (1989) find evidence that incumbents who provide more pork-barrel spending or have greater district presences are more successful in their re-election contests. Recently, Cox and Katz (2002) suggested that redistricting also plays an important role in explaining the electoral success of incumbents. However, later set of empirical findings show that other variables exist (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2002).

In the case of Nigeria, elected representatives are, more often than not, self-centered and do not have to embark on service delivery to win re-election. This is a function of the fact that, being in government, they have the advantage of using state resources and this scenario is helped by pervasive poverty among the citizenry who rarely take the consequence of their electoral actions into cognizance (Bola, 2011). Accordingly, Ugwu (2002) in Nwanegbo and Alumona, (2011) rightly observed, the manipulation of the electoral process by incumbents in power can take place at the three level of electoral governance. These are at the levels of rulemaking, rule application, rule adjudication. The manipulation can manifest in a wide range of activities that sustains the electoral process such as: enactment of electoral law and the constitution, appointment of electoral management body, appointment of election tribunals and the conduct of the elections. The manipulation of the electoral process can also come in various forms, such as: appointment of corrupt and or compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of the election tribunal to protect stolen mandates, use of state

resources to bankroll election campaigns, use of state, security forces and apparatuses to intimidate opposition parties, denial of access to state owned media houses etc. It is imperative to recall that during Obasanjo's second tenure in office-2003 to 2007, he strove to retain power by lobbying the National Assembly to amend the constitution to smuggle in the third term clause but the inability to get 2/3 majority of the senators circumscribed the ambition. The opposition of the vice president, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar to the 3rd term plot pitched him on a collision course with the president who ensured that the principle of "deregistration" was used to frustrate him out of the ruling people's Democratic party. It is also not news to Nigerians and keen followers of Nigeria's political trends that the role of the former chairman of INEC professor Maurice Iwu in the infamous 2007 elections is a reflection of the abysmal influence of incumbency factor on the electoral process because president Obasanjo did not mince words to tag the election a do or die affair (Egwemi, 2008).

Incumbents in Nigeria are also notorious for unleashing terror on real, perceived or imaginary enemies. This brutalization of opposition parties' supporters during elections are well documented (Chukwu, 2007). Against the backdrop of abysmal wielding of incumbency influence on government and party operations in Nigeria, Anyaoku (2010) bemoaned that "to ascribe undue influence, especially self-serving influence to the parliamentary group of the party in the selection of candidates would seriously undermine the democratic process".

We talk of "incumbency factor" in an election in which one of the competitors is the occupant of the position being contested. Otherwise, an election in which an incumbent is not involved is referred to as an "open seat" election. The literature on elections in Africa suggests that incumbents consistently retain a marginal advantage over the opposition in elections. Specifically, incumbents continue to win elections 85 percent of the time they contest them (Posner & Young, 2017; Cheeseman, 2018). While this trend is more apparent in Africa, Maltz (2007:134) in his analysis of elections in electoral authoritarian regimes worldwide between 1992 and 2006, finds that while incumbents retained power in 93 percent of the elections that they contested, their successors won just 52 percent of the time, indicating that this is a global phenomenon. In sub-Saharan Africa, this is increasingly evident because electoral contests have become the dominant means of political change, rather than coups or other violent transitions. As Posner and Young (2017:127) argue, the tendency of African executives to seek to ensure their victory during elections, or where they have exhausted their term limits, to change the constitutional rules to allow them to seek another term, is indicative of greater institutionalization of democracy. The increasing legitimacy of formal constitutional rules to political actors makes incumbency important to retaining power, given the advantages it confers – through the control of economic and coercive resources, access to patronage networks, using record of performance and voter mobilization capacity – to elections and their outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa.

Significantly, the degree to which incumbency matters for the conduct and outcomes of elections is largely determined by the nature of the elections; whether a political office holder is running for an election for a new term, or whether, having exhausted their constitutionally permitted terms, the current office holder would have to give way for a

successor. Cheeseman (2010) describes these two situations as 'incumbent' and 'open-seat' elections. Based on a study of African politics holding multiparty elections from 1990 to 2009, he suggests that incumbent elections are likely to lead to a victory for the ruling party. In open-seat elections, the opposition parties are four times more likely to win, while the vote share of ruling parties dropped on average by 12 percent when they had to put up a new candidate. Even when incumbent parties won, their margin of victory fell by 10 percent in open-seat polls. Over this time-frame, the share of elections won by the ruling party in incumbent and open-seat polls remains virtually unchanged at 64 percent and 50 percent, respectively (Cheeseman, 2010: 142). As is observable in such recent electoral upsets for ruling parties in Kenya (2002) and Ghana (2008), opposition parties emerged victorious in presidential elections which were open-seat, where incumbents had exhausted their constitutional permitted terms. In the 2015 elections in Nigeria, this dynamic does not apply because Goodluck Jonathan is running for a second term. However, 2015's presidential elections are similar to the open-seat polls Cheeseman describes in one important respect. He argues that the ending of a long-term incumbent's tenure tends to stimulate succession struggles which create splits in ruling parties.

In Nigeria's case, Goodluck Jonathan's attempt to contest against the grain of the PDP's arrangement to 'zone' (rotate) candidacy for top offices between regions of the country has had a similar effect, encouraging defections and contributing to the building of the APC opposition, which makes 2015's polls a more open and competitive prospect. Beyond this though, a critical gap in the literature on incumbency and elections in sub-Saharan Africa is the limited focus on how sub-national political actors, institutions and processes determine the influence of incumbency on elections. The overwhelming focus rather, is on the relative strengths of opposition and ruling parties in presidential elections. In Nigeria, largely as a consequence of its federal structure, state governors and by implication, state-level ruling- and opposition-party structures are critical to determining the strength of the incumbent President and the national ruling party. As will be demonstrated in our analysis, the national-level importance of incumbency and the advantages it confers through the control of private and public economic and coercive resources, patronage networks, using record of performance and voter mobilisational capacity (Joseph, 1987) is replicated at the state-level given the relative political, fiscal and administrative autonomy of state governors in their respective domains. The appeal made by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003 to state governors to support his re-election bid for a second term indicates that the control of states has been key to electoral politics in Nigeria for some time. The massive deployment of federal resources to ensure the victory of the national ruling PDP during the state-level elections in the erstwhile APC opposition-controlled Ekiti state in the South-West in June 2014 is also indicative of the extent to which control of state political power determines national level political strength. Recent experience in Nigeria indicate that performance politics seem to be taking precedent over the hitherto overarching influence of incumbency factor in determining political events and especially electoral victories (Ezeani 2011, Alfa, 2011).

Effective opposition, credible election, excessive reliance on godfatherism, autocratic style of leadership and increased political consciousness on the part of the citizenry are

some of the underlying factors sounding a death knell to the significant role of incumbency in the political equation of Nigeria. (Bola, 2011). In Oyo and Ogun states, it backfired. Although Ogun Governor Adebayo Alao-Akala and his men succeeded in edging out senator Teslim Folarin of the primaries, the centre could still not hold as things fell apart. Former Governor RashidiLadoja, who suffered similar fate, left the party with his followers (Adesina, 2009). In his critique of 2011 polls and role of incumbency, Chukwu, (2011: 145) notes “the political wind that blew across the entire South West was unanticipated by the PDP which failed to manage their success in the zone. The party was ridden with crises to the extent that the falcon could not hear the falconer, hence things fell apart and the centre could not hold”. The PDP which was in control of five states in the zone (Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti, Osun, and Ondo) in 2007 after the political earthquake that swept the area from its traditional holder, Alliance for Democracy (AD), failed to take the same state to the end of the four-year term.

As Fadre cited in Alfa (2011) added, the reasons are that the General Election that produced the political office holders particularly the governors in the country were massively rigged. With the rulings of the judiciary at the electoral tribunal, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun were reclaimed by the Labour Party (LP) and ACN respectively. As if these were not enough, the remaining states of Ogun and Oyo fell like a pack of cards into the hands of ACN. As Bola (2011: 56) noted, “...it was the PDP that boxed itself into a corner due to their selfish interest”. Corroborating the above is Adaramodu in Alfa (2011) who asserts that the victory of ACN over PDP is liberation from underdevelopment and poverty. This explicates that the people of the region did not witness positive transformation under PDP governors. Linking the past victory of PDP to abuse of incumbency, and a corrupt electoral body, Adaramodu bluntly asserts “it was possible for the PDP to overrun the south –west in the 2007 elections because of the unscrupulous character of their then self-acclaimed leader, who succeeded in imposing governors on the southwest states through the machinery of the federal government, aided by a rapaciously devious electoral umpire.

Another state where incumbency failed to be valid was Nassarawa State. Witch-hunting of perceived political enemies, egoistic posture, inaccessibility, poor sense of judgement, etc., all combined to cause the defeat of Aliyu Akwe Doma in the 2011 gubernatorial election by the opposition CPC candidate Umar Tanko Alkmakura. He was alleged to have been too slow in his developmental stride and paid deaf ears to the plight of workers perhaps banking on the hope to triumph simply through incumbency advantage. However, it did not work out for him. The peoples’ political consciousness has been enhanced and they voted him out (*National Accord*, 2011).

As documented by Sahara Reporters, another former governor who relied on the power of incumbency to win election but got his hopes dashed was Ikedi Ohakim of Imo State. The Imo electorates, despite, postponement and cancellation of some wards voted out Ohakim due to what Sahara Reporters call “Misrule and Corruption”. (Sahara Reporters, 2011). The political feud between the former governor of Zamfara State, senator Sani Yerima and the immediate past governor, Mamuda Shinkafi rendered the incumbency influence unworkable in the state. The political squabble led senator Sani Yerima to throw his weight behind Alhaji Abdulaziz Abubakar Yari who won the election.

This indicates the earlier position that elite fractionalization negates the capacity of incumbents to win re-elections. It is instructive to note that it was not only state governors that bore the brunt of failure of incumbency factor in facilitating their successes at the polls in the 2011 elections. At the end of the April 9 and 26 National Assembly elections, a total of 73 senators lost the battle to retain their seats in the upper legislative chamber (Chukwuemeka, 2011).

Accordingly, Odoh and Samsu (2017) in a joint work "On 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria: Reasons Why Incumbent President Good luck Jonathan Lost to Buhari" observed that The Nigeria's 2015 Presidential election held on the 28th March, 2015 was the 5th quadrennial election of the Fourth Republic which defied military interruption for sixteen (16) years. Apart from being the fifth election, the election was historic and will ever remain so for its uniqueness. The votes received by General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) was the most nationally spread votes cast since Nigeria's political independence in 1960 and secondly, for the first time in Post-Independence Nigeria a Presidential Candidate (General Muhammadu Buhari, Rtd) defeated an incumbent President (Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan) in a presidential poll. This paper therefore, heavily relied on documentary evidence from books, journals, conferences, seminars as well as printing and electronic media and other related previous relevant literatures which provides an explanatory discussion on the reasons behind the defeat of Incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan by General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) at the 2015 Presidential race.

Furthermore, Olly and Usman (2015) on a collaborative work on incumbency and opportunity; forecasting trends in Nigeria's 2015 elections observed the advantages conferred by incumbency in elections in consolidating democracies to Nigeria's Presidential and Governorship polls of March and April 2015. Nigeria's Federal system, which involves directly-elected executives commanding significant state powers and resources at both national level and in the 36 constituent States, provides a case where the interplay of incumbency powers is complex yet undoubtedly of central importance. We attempt to map likely trends from these factors, using analysis based on 2011's elections which were similar in many essential respects. This allows us to make an analysis which can later be compared with actual outcomes, to test both the power of this thesis and its importance vis-à-vis other factors affecting election results.

Moreover, Okoye, Egboh and Chukwuemeka (2012) in a study on Changing Perspectives of Nigeria Political Development: From militarism to incumbency and godfatherism opined that Nigeria is one of the neo colonial and developing nations of the third world. The military ruled Nigeria between 1966 to 1979 and 1984 to 1999. Military dominance in Nigeria politics has in no small measure impacted negatively on the political development of Nigeria. Therefore, political development of Nigeria has been going at a snail speed not only due to frequent military incursion in government but also due to many other impediments which include ethnicity, incumbency politics, tenure elongation, godfatherism and poor political orientation. The paper which is descriptive and persuasive examined all these factors critically and recommended among other things that National Assembly should pass a law to make elective office a single tenure. The economy of Nigeria should be organized to make it more productive and also to devise a vision of society

within which each person can reasonably perceive that equity and social justice are firmly on the national agenda. To eradicate ethnic politics in Nigeria efforts should be made towards equitable distribution of social, political and economic gains of the polity. Finally, efforts should be made to enforce the section of the constitution that dwelt on the formation of political parties that are devoid of ethnicity.

Awojobi (2016) in a shrewd study on Electoral Verdicts: Incumbent President Defeated for Reelection in Nigeria is of the view that the history of elections in Nigeria at the presidential level has shown that incumbent presidents always have a political advantage over their challengers. However, history was made when the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan was defeated by the main opposition candidate, Mohammed Buhari in the 2015 presidential elections. In this article, I examine the determining factors in the political discourse that were responsible for the defeat of the incumbent president. Contrary to the insinuation in some quarters that the incumbent president was defeated due to ethnic gang up and the compromised of the electoral empire. I find from the political discourse that the high level of insecurity in the Northeast, institutionalized corruption in the incumbent president's administration, united opposition alliance and the mismanagement of the Nigerian economy were the salient factors responsible for the defeat of an incumbent president in Nigeria.

Alumona and Nwanegbo (2011) on "Incumbency Factor and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria' Fourth Republic" stated that the impact of the abuse of the power of incumbency on the democratic project in Nigeria. It details contemporary events issues and developments in electoral and party politics that threatens the alternation of power between the ruling party and the opposition. Its central argument is that the character of the abuse of incumbency and its manifestations are the greatest impediments to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. While the phenomenon of political godfatherism has been allowed to dominate the political scene, the electorate has been denied the right of the value of his vote in the market democracy. This was due in large part to the ill structured pattern of electoral governance and the wrong conceptualization of the notion and essence of power by members of the political class. It is the conclusion of the study that genuine reform of the electoral institution and a national re-orientation programme holds the key to solving this crisis in the electoral politics of Nigeria.

Of all these divergent perceptions on the incumbency factor, it is carefully observed that little attention was devoted to the question of the impact of incumbency factor on the democratic process. It is in this regard therefore, that this study is tasked with the responsibility of interrogating the role of the incumbency factor in the democratic process and this is the gap the study seeks to fill by examining the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This work situated on the elite theory as propounded by Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) they were the pioneer social scientists who propounded the elite theory of power. Pareto, who made popular the concept of elite said, 'so let us make a class of people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity and to that class

give the name of elite' Pareto (1902). Elite is composed of those persons who are recognized outstanding and are considered the leaders in a given field of competence. This class of elite is further sub-divided into: (i) a governing elite; and (ii) a non-governing elite. The 'governing elite' comprises of individuals who directly play some considerable part in government. They wear labels appropriate to the particular political offices, namely, ministers, legislators, president, secretaries and so on. The 'non-governing elite' are those people not connected with the governmental activities. Pareto takes existence of ruling class for granted and concentrated on the 'circulation of elite'. He was basically concerned with the consequences of 'open' and 'closed' elites. He argued that a closed aristocracy inevitably decays, producing cleavage and dissension within its own ranks. When it happens new elites emerge from other classes to give leadership to revolutionary change.

Gaetano Mosca, an Italian jurist and political theorist, expounded the familiar thesis that all human societies were always and everywhere ruled by a controlling social class and thus these are always divided between rulers and ruled. He contended that, whatever the form of government, power would be in the hands of a minority who formed the ruling class. Explaining the contentious historical division between the ruling class and the class that is ruled, Mosca explained the rule of minority over the majority by the fact that it is organized and is usually composed of superior individuals.

The political elite theorists identify the political elites in any society as a group of minority that possesses the requisite qualities to occupy social and political space. This is the ruling class that performs all political functions, monopolies power and enjoys the advantages of political offices. These political elites or ruling class are often motivated by their irresistible urge for power to govern and control the majority which constitutes the masses. Thus, behind the political elite theory, power is the primary urge or focus. They employ all kinds of methods or strategies including their economic strength or power, particularly money as an instrument of influence to play upon the sentiments of the majority and find their way to political power. The use of money to buy the electioneering process is a by-product of the political elite struggle to control the masses in legitimizing their recruitment process. The elite do all they can to consolidate political power and maintain their political positions.

On the method of research, the area of this study is located in Anambra State. Anambra State is a state in the South Eastern Nigeria. Its boundaries are formed by Delta State to the West, Imo State to the South, Enugu State to the East and Kogi State to the North. The origin of the name is derived from the Anambra River which is a tributary of the famous river Niger. The indigenous ethnic group in Anambra State are the Igbo (98% of the population) and a small population of Igala (2%) who live in the Western part of the state. Anambra state has twenty-one local government areas with over Ninety-Five urban and rural communities. Anambra State has a population figure of 5,527,800 (five million, five hundred and twenty-seven thousand, eight hundred) (National population Commission, NPC, 2016).

The finite population size of Anambra State is 5,527,800 (five million, five hundred and twenty-seven thousand, eight hundred) people which is the figure of Anambra State population strength. It was generated from the 21st March, 2016 general census held in

Nigeria. For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified three local government areas which were randomly selected wherein the target population of the study will be selected from. These are; Idemili North Local Government Area, Onitsha South and Orumba North Local Government.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: OBSERVED FREQUENCY FOR THE INCUMBENT AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE OUTCOME OF THE 2015 ANAMBRA STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY ELECTION

ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	UD	TOTAL
The incumbent executive governor makes the appointment of State Electoral Officers that conduct state elections including State House of Assembly elections.	250	100	30	20	0	400
The incumbent governor is responsible for providing security for the State House of Assembly election since the elections of the Governor and members of the Assembly are held on different dates in Anambra State	270	100	10	20	0	400
The governor that provides logistics and finance to the INEC officials for the conduct of the election?	190	110	80	15	5	400
The convivial relationship between the incumbent governor and the president has an influence on the outcome of 2015 election	280	100	10	10	0	400
The incumbent governor is very responsible and does not attached personal feeling to the electoral processes.	20	10	100	270	0	400
There is a level playing ground made available for all the contestants irrespective of party affiliation.	5	10	100	280	0	400
Grand Total	1015	430	330	615	5	2400

Source: Field Study, 2020

The above table shows how the incumbent governor influences the outcome of the 2015 Anambra State House Assembly Election. In item 1 of the above table, 87.5 % of the respondents indicated that the appointment of State electoral officers which is done by the incumbent governor variably makes the body responsible for the conduct of election to be at the mercy of the incumbent. Whereas 12.5% disagree with this. By implication, this means that the appointment of the electoral body done by the incumbent avails the incumbent governor ample opportunity of influence of the electoral process. The loss of independence due to appointment of the state electoral officer by the governor makes him a tool in the hands of the incumbent governor. Hence a servant must always be subservient and loyal to his master.

More so, the table shows that 92.5% % of the respondents affirmatively consented that the incumbent governor is saddled with the responsibility of providing security for the state Assembly election and as well for the electoral officials. And 7.5% disagree with this. This implies that one of the measures through which the incumbent exerted influence on the outcome of the state House of Assembly Election in 2015 was through provision of security. In doing this, the security personnel may have definite instruction to protect the interest of their Boss who makes the payment.

Item 3 of table 6 above indicated that 75% of the respondent agreed that it is incumbent on the governor to make provision for logistics and finance the Electoral body (INEC) for the conduct of the 2015 State House of Assembly Election. Over 23% strongly disagreed with this while 1.2% were undecided. The implication of this is that the incumbent governor may perhaps influence the out of the House of Assembly Election through this means. The electoral body presumed to be independent in the discharge of its statutory duty only meant to go through being financed by the incumbent governor who course is likely to have profound interest in the election. This can only spell one thing and that is to exploit the opportunity in favour of his political party's candidates in the election.

The questionnaire item 4 shows that over 67% of the respondents disagreed with the position that the incumbent governor is responsible and does not attach personal feeling to the electoral processes. 7.5% insisted that the incumbent governor is quite responsible and does not attach personal feeling to the electoral processes. 25% respondents remained neutral. The inference that can be drawn from this is that the incumbent governor's personal interest over rides the general interest of the populace. This further implies that the interest of incumbent governor prevails over the general and consequently influence the outcome of the electoral process in favour of the incumbent's political party's candidates

On questionnaire item 5 of table 8 shows that 70% of the respondents held that there is no level playing ground made available for all the contestants by the incumbent governor. Whereas 25% aligned their position with the argument that there is a level playing ground made available for all the contestants irrespective of party affiliation. While 5% remained undecided. The implication of this, is that the incumbent governor explored the paraphernalia of his office strictly in favour of his party's candidates for the State House of Assembly election.

The table below reflects the response of the respondents on the statement; the incumbent governor uses state fund to bank roll his political party candidates' electoral campaign in the 2015 House of Assembly election. Over 87% of the respondents aligned themselves with this statement. 11.2% disagreed and while 1.3 were undecided. This however, implies that the incumbent practically exert influence on the 2015 State House of Assembly Election outcome. This is consequent upon the incumbent governor unlimited access to the State fund and as well as the state apparatus. The state media under the control of the incumbent avails the incumbent political party candidate easy access to make unlimited use of it for campaign and publicity. Hence, the influence of the election outcome becomes predictable.

Table 3: OBSERVED FREQUENCY FOR THE INCUMBENCY FACTOR AND THE ALTERNATION OF POWER BETWEEN APGA CANDIDATES AND OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES' CANDIDATES IN THE 2015 ANAMBRA STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY ELECTION

ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	UD	TOTAL
The incumbent governor use state funds to bankroll his political party candidates' electoral campaigns in the 2015 House of Assembly election	200	150	25	20	5	400
The incumbent executive is responsible for the logistics of compilation of voters' registers by INEC	20	10	100	270	0	400
The constitution of the State Electoral Tribunal is done by the Chief Judge of the State who is an appointee of the incumbent governor	190	110	80	15	5	400
The state security apparatuses worked in favour of the government political party candidates during the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly election	300	80	10	10	0	400
The opposition political parties' candidates are denied access to state owned media and campaign facilities during the election in 2015	270	100	10	20	0	400

Source: Field Study, 2020

More so, it shows responses of the respondents in the statement; the incumbent executive is responsible for the logistics of compilation of voters' register by INEC. 300 respondents accepted the postulation. This represents 75% of the total response while 10% of the respondents disagreed with it. This represents 15% of the total response. This implies that another measure through which the alternation of political power between APGA and other political parties in 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly election seems impossible is through the provision of compilation of voter's register by INEC. The incumbent makes fair provision for logistics to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INCE) to effectively compile names of eligible voters. In doing this, chances are high for the electoral body to stand influenced in the discharge of its statutory duty and this among others accounted for the outcome of the 2015 State House of Assembly Election in Anambra State.

Responding to questionnaire item 8 of table 3 above, the respondents believed that one of the means through which the incumbent influences the outcome of the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election and invariably made the alternation of political power between APGA and other political parties near impossible is the constitution of the State Electoral Tribunal done by the Chief Judge of the state who is an appointee of the incumbent governor. A total of 270 respondents representing 67.5% of the total response strongly agreed to this. 125 respondents representing 31.3% of the total response strongly disagreed with this and 5 respondents representing less than 2% of the response remained neutral. The implication of this is that the incumbent enjoys numerous interesting privileges which among others include the appointment of the State Electoral Tribunal which is the responsibility of the State Chief Judge who in turn is an appointee of the incumbent governor. This further implies that the Chief Judge of the state remains a tool in the hand of the incumbent governor who can appoint or strip him of his appointment.

Hence, he does the bidding of his Boss and ensures only the interest of the incumbent overrides every other interest in case of electoral matter as it is evident in the 2015 state House of Assembly Election in Anambra State.

As could be seen in the above table of questionnaire item 9, 380 respondents strongly agreed that the state security apparatus worked in favour of the government political party candidates during the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election. This represents 95% of the total response. 20 respondents strongly disagreed with this which represents 5% of the total response. This implies that the incumbent being in charge of the state security apparatus can ensure that their activities are guided by the interest of the incumbent governor and incumbent political party candidates that guarantee their payment. Thus, the state security agents worked to deliver the interest and political ambition of the incumbent in the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election.

The above table shows that 250 respondents affirmatively consented that the opposition political parties' candidates were denied access to state owned media and campaign facilities in the 2015 elections. This view represents over 62% of the total response. Whereas 150 respondents representing 37.5% of the total response strongly disagreed with this. Conclusively, it has been shown that the incumbent tames the popularity of the opposition candidates by shutting them off the state owned media houses and campaign facilities. This however, makes the alternation of political power between the incumbent and the opposition difficult if not impossible.

Summary and Recommendations

From the discussions so far, the study found out that, the incumbent practically exerted influence on the 2015 State House of Assembly Election outcome. This is consequent upon the incumbent governor unlimited access to the State fund and as well as the state apparatus. The state media under the control of the incumbent avails the incumbent political party candidate easy access to make unlimited use of it for campaign and publicity. Hence, the influence of the election outcome becomes predictable.

Again the study revealed that, the incumbent tames the popularity of the opposition candidates by shutting them off the state owned media houses and campaign facilities. This however, makes the alternation of political power between the incumbent and the opposition difficult if not impossible. This implies that the incumbent being in charge of the state security apparatus can ensure that their activities are guided by the interest of the incumbent governor and incumbent political party candidates that guarantee their payment. Thus, the state security agents worked to deliver the interest and political ambition of the incumbent in the 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election.

This research is clearly a modest effort that has concertedly identified the level of influence the incumbent exerts on the outcome of 2015 Anambra State House of Assembly Election. It is in this regard therefore, that this study recommends the followings: (a) That every public office that is electable should be made to be a single tenor office. This will help to reduce the undue influence of the incumbents. (b) That the Electoral Laws should be amended to ensure that no eligible contestant will remain in office and vie for the same office without first resigning from such office at least a year to the date of the election. (c)

The incumbent Executive and the legislature should not be involved in the process of constituting the Electoral body and the tribunal to help reduce their level of influence on the electoral process. It should be made the exclusive function of the National Judicial Council.

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