

# **ELECTORATE PERCEPTION OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

**BY**

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## **Introduction**

Periodic elections and popular participation in politics, either as voters or political contenders, are pivotal and characteristics of democratic societies. They ensure political change and continuity in government and governance. But elections in democratic societies are beyond mere political ritualistic process responsible for smooth political change or transition from one democratic government to another; they, most importantly, serve as yardstick for measuring the popularity of a political party, and the electorate's perception of good governance. Elections are yardsticks for assessing and passing the judgment of the people on their degree of satisfaction and conviction, as to whether, a political party has delivered the dividends of democracy to the people, while in power or can when it comes to power. Understandably, there are various actors and stakeholders in the electoral process. These comprised the election management bodies-the Independent Electoral Commission, (INEC) and the State Independent Electoral Commissions, the political parties and contestants, the media, the judiciary, the security agencies, the legislature, accredited observers and more importantly, the electorate. The electorate are the kingmakers, they are the ones entitled to vote in an election. The best preparation of every other stakeholders devoid of the

electorate otherwise called the voters, makes the whole process a nullity. Indeed, without the electorate, there will be no voting, counting, collation, announcement of results and the declaration of a winner. The electorate choose who will govern the people at different levels.

Generally, while it is without doubt that the behavior of the electorates on ‘election day’ is to a large extent traditionally influenced by the party manifestoes, ideology of the contesting political parties and even the campaign promises, the candidates, however, in the modern African party politics, particularly in Nigeria, where political parties do not have clear cut manifestoes and ideologies, but only promises, there is currently a growing trend of the electorate voting for a political party based on their perception of its capability to deliver the dividends of good governance to the people<sup>1</sup>.

However, at no time in Nigeria’s political history, is the stage more set for the electorate to decide the outcome of elections in the country than in the forthcoming 2019 general elections. In fact, the All Progressives Congress’s (APC) electoral triumph in the 2015, did not only end the People’s Democratic Party’s (PDP) acclaimed sixteen years domination of Nigeria’s politics and governance; but most significantly, it gave Nigerians the priceless opportunity to experience governance from the other side of the coin, that is, under the opposition party on the promise of ‘change’. Therefore, based on their comparative assessment of the

quality of life, cost of living, economic development and security situation; and the level of socio-political stability of Nigeria under the two political parties, the Nigerian electorates are now better poised to ascertain which of these political parties' best served the cause of good governance in the country.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the electorates' perception of good governance and the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. It maintains that, the Nigerian electorates' assessment of the performance of the Nigeria's dominant political parties from 1999-2018; and the resultant conviction of the Nigerian electorates of the party that has observably toed the path of good governance, people-centric policies and programmes, and sustainable economic development measures better than the other, stands the best chance of winning the vote of the Nigerian electorates in the 2019 general elections.

### **Who are the Electorates?**

From historical perspective, the development of electoral franchise in Nigeria can be directly traced to the elective principle embedded in the Sir Hugh Clifford's Constitution of 1922.<sup>3</sup> However, at this stage of Nigeria's political development, franchise, which according to Akamere, ... 'is the right to vote and to be voted for in an election'<sup>4</sup>, was not the prerogative of all Nigerians. Thus, it was only enjoyed by Nigerians during the period based on their location, age, sex, and economic status.

In the course of time, the impetus given to regional government by the Sir Arthur Richards Constitution in 1946, created the enabling environment for franchise to be extended to Nigerians in the North<sup>5</sup>; but still, it retained its restrictive posture- enfranchising only male adults in the regions. Hence, it was not until the advent of the Nigerian Presidential Constitution of 1979, that electoral franchise was extended to all male and female adults (18 years and above) residing in Nigeria at least during the time of the registration of voters for that given election.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, in 1999, universal electoral franchise was concretely consolidated in Nigeria as the undeniable right of all Nigerians, and not as the exclusive privilege of a target section of Nigeria's population. The Constitution declares that,

*Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government... derives all its power and authority... The participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this constitution.*<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, in the light of this extant constitutional provision in Nigeria, one may ask the question: who are the Nigerian electorate? Put simply, the Nigerian electorate are all qualified (adults) Nigerians, duly registered during the voter's registration exercise and armed with their Permanent Voters Card (PVC); which is the symbol of their franchise. Consequently, it could be said that the Nigerian

electorate are the holders of sovereignty in Nigeria; and responsible for transferring sovereign power to, or denying it from representatives of political parties vying for public offices in the nation. In other words, the electorate are arguably the beautiful brides in the electoral process. In Nigeria, for one to be among the elite guard called electorate, one must satisfy five conditions as espoused in Section 12 (1) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended). The Act expressly stated that, a person shall be qualified to be registered as a voter if such a person:

(a) is a citizen of Nigeria,

(b) has attained the age of 18 years,

(c) is ordinarily resident, works in, originates from the Local Government Area Council, or Ward, covered by the registration centre;

(d) presents himself to the Registration Officer of the Commission for registration as a voter; and

(e) is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote under any law, rule or registration in force in Nigeria<sup>8</sup>.

There is a reason as to why not everybody is qualified to be part of the electorate. The age limit of 18 years and above is to ensure that only people who are mature enough to make informed choices at elections are entrusted with that vital

responsibility. This is because the wrong choice of leaders at elections will impact negatively on the quality of governance. That is why underage voters are not allowed. The point to note is that the participation of the electorate is the lifeblood of democracy.

### **On Good Governance.**

There is global interest in good governance. As a result of this, there are divergent views and definitions of good governance<sup>9</sup>. For our purpose, the World Bank's definition is apt; good governance is 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources'<sup>10</sup>. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, has shown that good governance has eight major characteristics: The characteristics, in no particular order of importance are: 1. It is participatory, 2. Rule of law. 3. Transparency. 4. Responsiveness. 5. Consensus oriented. 6. Equity and inclusiveness. 7. Effectiveness and efficiency. 8. Accountability<sup>11</sup>. Figure 1 below is representative of our point of departure.



Various bodies and organs such as the International Development Association(IDA), the Asian Development Bank (AsDB), the United Nations Development Programme<sup>12</sup>, (UNDP), are all in agreement in itemizing the basic traits of good governan. According to Madhav (2007) quoted in Dunu(2013), good governance has much to do with the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated withreference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down<sup>13</sup>. While the universal perception of good governance are enduring, there are

however local flavours that may drive the electorate in their choice in Election Day. This is particularly so because perception of good governance may be moderated by the level of overall development of a country and the level of national integration.

### **The Electorate and their Perception of Good Governance**

In 1960, Nigeria began her independent political odyssey in search of good governance. Good leadership in a nation, is critical for her continuous survival and economic development. But no sooner had Nigeria's quest for stable nationhood started when the polity began experiencing political storm that almost wrecked the ship of state. Since the return to democracy in 1999, concerted efforts have been made by successive administrations to instill good governance to no avail even though it is a major necessity in order to regulate human interactions, eliminate conflict, and foster national development.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a ... *government exists to initiate and execute policies for the general wellbeing of all citizens...*<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt that good governance in Nigeria and elsewhere entails leadership prioritizing the needs and interests of its citizenry, and that of the nation. However, for this to be achieved, government needs to be transparent and accountable; which can best be guaranteed by the active participation of the people in the process of governance.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, across the globe ,good governance is equated with the degree of government's willingness and readiness to respond promptly to meet the need of, and to ensure the welfare and security of its followers. In India, Dasgupta conceives good governance as government's ability to provide jobs and to nip corruption in the bud.<sup>17</sup>Indeed, as notedby Otoighile, et.al.

*Good governance is integral to economic growth,  
the eradication of poverty and hunger, and  
sustainable development...<sup>18</sup>*

However, in post-independence Nigeria, politics and governance have thus far been marredby serious negations in the body polity of the nation. These contradictions have made Nigeria's quest for good governance elusive. Some of the setbacks that have hindered Nigeria's political progress are: the emergence of do-or-die politics and the commercialization of politics. This is apart from the fact that politics is not intelligent-driven and the tragedy of ethnicity, religion and vote buying.

Arguably, Nigeria's dysfunctional electoral system has paved way for Nigeria's politics and governance to be dominated by bad and morally bankrupt leaders; which Chinua Achebe argues are majorly, the trouble with Nigeria.<sup>19</sup>More so, the preponderance of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian political system has fueled political apathy and loss of confidence in governance in the country. Consequently, Election times are usually very interesting times in Nigeria...Everybody is moving

in a frenzy... and the quest for political power has become primarily a contest for economic survival.... At the detriment of nation building<sup>20</sup>

Hence, good governance and development in Nigeria have been arguably mortgaged for mere bread and butter. Thus, this raises serious concern about how Nigeria will fare in the 2019 general elections and after. However, with the triumph of the APC in the 2015 elections, and the tenure of the APC government climaxing in 2019, the Nigerian electorate have been given the much desired opportunity to experience governance from the perspectives of both political parties. And this presents a small ray of hope for good governance in Nigeria because, in the 2019 elections and beyond, the future of democracy in Nigeria now hangs on the Nigerian electorate's perception of good governance more than ever before.

### **From PDP to APC: Where Does Good Governance Lie?**

From May 29, 1999 to the early part of 2015, politics and governance in Nigeria was essentially at the behest of the PDP. The People's Democratic Party during the period dictated the tune of governance and pace of development in Nigeria. But on February 6, 2013 the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP), formed a political merger the All Progressive Congress, to challenge the PDP

political hegemony in Nigeria<sup>21</sup>. Consequently, following APC's victory in the 2015 election, the political party formed the subsisting government under President Muhammadu Buhari; which has been piloting the affairs of Nigeria. Hence, it is the case that while PDP dominated Nigeria's politics and democracy for sixteen years (16years), under the President Olusegun Obasanjo administration, President Musa Yar'Adua administration to the President Goodluck Jonathan's administration; the APC on the other hand has barely done so for four (4) years.

Thus, in some quarters, scholars, commentators and even critics considering the fact that PDP has ruled the country longer, have quickly pointed out that, it is unfair and bias to compare and judge the good governance and performance ratio of the APC with that of the PDP. However, while this objection is noted; it is however not tenable because the taste of the pudding, is in the eating. The four years are enough to judge, perceptibly, the performance or otherwise of the present administration. The point here is that, the APC government's first four year in office, especially as it pertains to its leadership style, performance, programmes, direction of state and achievements, are sufficient for Nigerians, particularly the electorate, and scholars to be able to assess the APC's good governance score card in relation to that of the PDP.

Indeed, both the PDP and the APC have had their fair share of developmental efforts and strides in office; and they have both collectively suffered

the plague of corruption, economic mismanagement, insecurity; terrorism Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram insurgence, and Herdsmen attacks, but to varying dimensions. Therefore, due to the fact that both the PDP and APC government faced similar challenges while in power and used similar if not completely the same resources to tackle them, but with differing success rate, the electorate therefore, have the data and facts with which to scrutinize their performance in office.

More so, considering the fact that both governments have reported cases of human right violations, disrespect for the rule of law and due process, social disharmony and tensions, and incidents of encroachments on the independence of the judiciary and the separation of power; none of them therefore can claim sainthood. Thus, it is only the people, particularly the electorate, who can decide which of the two political parties, when in power, toed the path of good governance and national development more closely.

### **The 2019 General Elections and the Nigerian Electorate Perception of Good Governance**

Ideally speaking, good governance in Nigeria since 1960 has thus far proven to be a political illusion. However, from the electorate perspective, based on their comparative assessment of the PDP and APC performance while in office, and the utility value derived from their respective administration, in terms of quality of

life, standard of living, and cost of living, they now have the responsibility to decide which one of them better promoted good governance in Nigeria. Hence, as far as the answer to the debate raised in this paper, concerning where good governance lies in Nigeria, is concerned; the electorate are the umpire, who can best put this controversial issue to rest.

Hence, in the modern Nigerian political system, where electoral malpractices are rife; and have currently evolved into a new form of vote trading and buying, the electorate, in the 2019 elections, have the national obligation to resist all forms of political temptations, especially from corrupt politicians for the sake of Nigeria's democracy and the future of the Nigerians. Furthermore, since the people are crucial stakeholders in governance, and the means and end of development, the Nigerian electorates in 2019 ,have the duty not only to choose leaders to rule the country for the next four years through their vote; but to clearly demonstrate through their vote, their perception of which of the two Nigeria's dominant political parties, while in power, best served the interest of the Nigerian people.

In other words, the 2019 general elections, unlike previous elections, will be more about the people's (electorates') perception of governance than the political parties. It is about how the people understand the elements of good governance. And the extent to which either of the PDP, that prides itself as the largest political party in Africa; and the APC, the self-acclaimed agents of 'change', have been able

to satisfy the yearning of Nigerians. This is the verdict the electorate must make known to all Nigerians, the international community, and other independent observers.

In the final analysis, it must be emphasized that the civic responsibility of the Nigerian electorate in 2019 goes beyond exercising their franchise; it boils down to salvaging Nigeria's political economy from the plague of bad leaders in sheep clothing. Hence, they must fearlessly express their perception of the major parties, in relation to their good governance performance record in office, with their thumb. Thus, as major stakeholders in Nigeria's politics and governance, the fate and future of democracy and good governance in the nation now lies in the hands of the electorate. Therefore, in the 2019 election, the electorate cannot afford to fail themselves, democracy and good governance, and the next generation of Nigerians.

## **Conclusion**

In less than two weeks, precisely 16 February and 2 March 2019, tens of millions of citizens will vote in what could be some of the country's most fiercely fought contest yet. Expectedly, the electorate perception of good governance in Nigeria may be a desideratum in the final outcome of the 2019 general elections. The discussion in this paper flows from the fact that across the streets of Nigeria, especially at Newspaper stands and salons across the federation, Nigerians observably, have virtually organized themselves into debating societies of some sort. They are constantly seen and heard fiercely contesting ideas about which leadership is the best, people-centric and development oriented between the PDP government and the APC government.

We insist that, while the PDP and APC government have respectively had their own fair share of pluses and minuses in their respective administration of the country; it is the electorate perception of good governance that ultimately matters. The electorate will determine how effective this administration has performed in the area of security of lives and properties. The electorate will issue a score card if the administration has been able to rein in the truculent issues of Boko Haram intransigence, farmers /herders' imbroglio, secessionists' agitations in the southeast as epitomized by the Indigenous People of Biafra and the toned –down militancy in the Niger Delta. Again, the 2019 elections will be judged by how the

electorate viewed governance so far from the binoculars of the economy. For, as Edward Tufle remarked in his seminal work, **Political Control of the Economy**, ‘when you think economics, think elections, when you think elections, think economics’<sup>22</sup>. The point is, the electorates are governed by the prospect of a good life because ‘voters are not fools’<sup>23</sup>. It is expected that the electorate will demonstrate their conviction, and support for the political party, they believe, has best promoted democracy and advancement of their economic potentials. Again, while it is conceded that corruption perception remain a major bane of the nation’s development, the electorate may also be guided by recent pronouncements of International organizations such Transparency International and the general disposition of the current regime to anti-graft war. In 2019 and beyond, the Nigerian electorate assessment and perception of good governance will continue to guide and sustain Nigeria’s quest for political and economic development.

**THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!**

## Endnotes

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