

IFES Nigeria Post-Election Survey

July-August 2015

Executive Summary

Public Perceptions of Election Integrity and Assessments of Nigerian Democracy

The political mood in Nigeria is extremely upbeat following the peaceful conduct of the general elections held in March 2015. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) post-election survey conducted in July-August 2015 shows an overwhelming majority of Nigerians (84%) expressing positive views regarding the integrity of elections, including a full 61 percent majority judging the presidential election to be “completely free and fair.” Nearly three quarters of Nigerians also believe the 2015 elections were better than the 2011 elections in terms of both electoral integrity and level of organization.

Positive assessments of election integrity are high throughout Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones and Lagos, where a majority in each of these regions believe the 2015 presidential elections were completely or somewhat free and fair. Assessments of election integrity are somewhat lower in the South East (65%) and South South (59%) regions than other regions, since these regions are strongholds of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the party of outgoing President Goodluck Jonathan. Similarly, the assessment of election integrity is lower among PDP supporters (64%) than All Progressives Congress (APC) supporters (95%) – the party of the newly-elected Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. It is encouraging, however, that even among supporters of the “losing” party in these elections, nearly two-thirds endorse the integrity of these elections and a plurality of 35 percent judge these elections as “completely free and fair” rather than just “somewhat free and fair.”

Favorable views of the election process also translate into much improved perceptions of democracy in Nigeria: satisfaction with democracy more than doubled from pre- to post-election levels with a 56 percent majority expressing satisfaction with the way democracy works in Nigeria, up by 30 percentage points in the pre-election phase (26%). Similarly, while only 23 percent of respondents in the pre-election phase believed Nigeria is a full democracy or a democracy with minor problems, 51 percent now believe Nigeria is a full democracy (18%) or a democracy with minor problems (33%), marking a net increase of 28 percentage points.

Despite positive assessments of election integrity, survey results suggest vote buying was prevalent during the 2015 elections: over a quarter of Nigerians (26%) admitted to accepting money or a gift in return for their vote. This is noteworthy, since the incidence of vote buying might be even higher than what respondents may be willing to admit in an opinion survey of this type. There are no statistically significant differences in vote buying behavior by gender: both men and women report engaging in vote buying at similar rates. By age groups, respondents 55 or older are slightly less likely to report selling their vote in the election than younger Nigerians. By region, North East (39%) and Lagos (37%) respondents are much more likely to report having accepted money or gifts in exchange for their vote than respondents in North West (21%), South South (20%) and South West (17%). By party affiliation, more APC supporters (28%) than PDP supporters (22%) admit to engaging in selling their vote during the 2015 election.

Election Day Experiences and Satisfaction with Polling Procedures

Nigerians are largely satisfied with their Election Day experience with an overwhelming majority of voters (83%) assessing their overall voting experience to be good (44%) or very good (39%), 14 percent assessing it as fair and only 3 percent saying it was poor. At least eight in 10 Nigerians express satisfaction with different aspects of the election process in their polling units, including the competence and impartiality of polling staff, vote counting and announcing of results, performance of the police and security officials, availability of voting equipment and ballots, and ease of access to polling units. The one electoral aspect that stood out where voters expressed lower satisfaction levels (65%) is “the length of time it takes to get accredited and vote.”

Indeed, in the Nigerian 2015 elections, voters had to queue twice on Election Day during different time frames, first for the accreditation process and then for the voting process. The accreditation process was designed to be separate from the voting process and it is where voters’ registration status is verified before they are able to cast a ballot. Survey data suggests that waiting in line to get accredited and vote was very time consuming: just under a majority of voters (47%) waited between one to two hours, while 12 percent had to wait for three hours or more to get accredited. A plurality of 40 percent were able to get accredited in half an hour or less. Waiting in line to vote was lengthier: a majority (54%) waited between one to two hours and 21 percent waited for three hours or more to be able to vote. Less than a quarter of voters (24%) were able to vote in half an hour or less of waiting time.

In 2012, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) began rolling out Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) to eligible Nigerian voters. These cards contain biometric data, including fingerprints, photographs and other details, and are designed to be used in conjunction with hand-held electronic card readers through which voters have to get accredited on Election Day before being able to vote. These PVCs aimed to significantly reduce voter fraud, which is believed to have marred previous elections in Nigeria.

The IFES post-election survey thus included several questions to evaluate how eligible voters felt about the adoption of PVCs for the first time in Nigerian elections. When asked if the adoption of PVCs has helped improve election integrity, did not make a difference, or made it worse, respondents express positive views with over three quarters (76%) believing PVCs helped improve the integrity of elections, and only 18 percent believing it did not make a difference. The share of those believing PVCs worsened election integrity is negligible. Similarly, when asked if adoption of PVCs helped protect against fraud, a full 72 percent agree. Nevertheless, over three quarters of Nigerians (76%) also believe PVCs prevented certain registered voters from being able to vote. This marks a clear trade-off with the use of PVCs, since while PVCs may have significantly reduced electoral fraud, they may also have created obstacles for certain eligible voters from being able to vote. In fact, the main reason given for not voting by 29 percent of non-voters is related to problems with the PVC or failing to collect their PVC.

Knowledge and Perceptions of the Independent National Electoral Commission

Awareness and confidence in the INEC improved dramatically between pre-election and post-election levels, reflecting positive public perceptions regarding the conduct of the election and increased trust in the Nigerian election management body. Spontaneous awareness of the INEC increased from 71 percent in December 2014 to 87 percent in July 2015, marking a substantial increase by 16 percentage points. Awareness of INEC is high across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones and Lagos as well. This is not surprising given the large scale voter

education campaign carried out by INEC in the months preceding the 2015 elections, which reached a full 71 percent of voting age citizens across the country. During the same time frame, confidence in the INEC also registered a sharp increase by 16 percentage points, moving from 68 percent in pre-election levels to an overwhelming 85 percent after the elections.

Public satisfaction with the INEC's performance extends across a number of performance criteria and attributes, including its professionalism in organizing the 2015 elections (90%); being transparent and informing the public about its activities (84%); being competent in managing the voter registration process and managing the electronic card readers (81%); and performing its duties with honesty and integrity (78%). It is noteworthy that the INEC is assessed slightly lower (76%) in terms of its efficiency of distributing PVCs and its independence from political influence (72%).

The IFES post-election survey in Nigeria was conducted between July 26 and August 7, 2015. The survey is nationally representative of Nigeria's 36 states and Abuja for a total sample size of 2,616 respondents (adults 18 years or older) with a margin of error of ± 1.92 .