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**INCUMBENCY AND OPPORTUNITY: FORECASTING TRENDS IN
NIGERIA'S 2015 ELECTIONS**

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This working paper attempts to apply research on 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.

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¹ Author contacts oliver.owen@qeh.ox.ac.uk and zainab.usman@qeh.ox.ac.uk Our thanks to Dr Raufu Mustapha and participants at our 2014 ODID workshop for comments on work in progress, to the organisers of the Oxford African History and Politics seminar for allowing us to present, and to the Royal African Society's African Arguments and the publishers of Premium Times for publication of early versions, as well as to their readers for input and comments, and to Nic Cheeseman for comments on this paper.

This working paper is an attempt to examine likely outcomes of Nigeria's 2015 elections by reference to the structural advantages conferred by incumbency, as established by recent studies across the African continent and globally. The reasons why incumbent office-holders tend to win elections very often in consolidating democracies are not hard to find: weak institutions, preferential access to state resources, financial and otherwise, control over law-making and law-enforcement, and the weak economic base for opposition politics outside the state system are all contributing reasons. Nigeria makes an interesting and challenging case study to test these theories, for two reasons. One is that it is an executive system of government, where powers are concentrated in the very highest political offices, combined with command over an oil-backed central state budget which is only weakly restrained by other institutional checks and balances.² The other is that it is also a Federal polity (albeit one with an unstable and dynamic relationship between centre and component states) and therefore, control of the 36 constituent states are a very important determinant of the ability to win or retain power at the national level. In determining the path to control of the Nigerian state, we are therefore dealing with the complex relationship between 36 powerful elected state-level executives and a national Presidency. Therefore, what transpires in elections will also be a test case for the relative strength of incumbency at the Federal level versus that of States, whose autonomous powers, though constitutionally and financially constrained, have been seen to be growing since the 1999 return to electoral rule.

However, despite its challenges and complexities we argue that this approach is the most valid way of analysing potential electoral outcomes for a number of reasons. Firstly, because existing analyses of Nigerian electoral trends are in the main highly subjective, conjectural and instinctive and, being mainly qualitative, do not offer much scope for comparison or for assembling an aggregate but granular picture. Secondly, because other quantitative methods require data which cannot be relied upon – both population figures and registered voter numbers (especially historically) in Nigeria are known to be flawed in varying ways. Existing opinion polling is in its infancy and lacks historical depth for comparison, and all available sources suffer from readily apparent methodological weaknesses which render them unreliable.³ Thirdly, because examining the power of incumbency encompasses both the ability to mobilise voters *and* the ability to manipulate the electoral environment (and sometimes also to influence administrative procedures and outcomes), so an analysis of this type retains validity whether elections are heavily rigged or 'free and fair'. And lastly, the power of incumbency is well attested-to in Nigeria, both by political analysis and popular discourse. Examples range from the 'positive' – the appropriation, misuse or preferential disposal of

² See Maier (2002) and Osaghae (1998) for fuller expositions of this oil-fed political economy and its structuring effects on political behaviour.

³ One strong potential flaw in polling data in Nigeria is the guardedness with which many people communicate sensitive views to those they consider may be connected with official power; so that it is far from clear than responses to polls are always indicative of respondents' genuine personal views.

state assets (public finances, transport, air time on state-owned broadcasters) to the benefit of the incumbent, to the ‘negative’ – use of state power to deter or hamper opponents, such as orchestrating security agents to refuse permits for opposition rallies, or to create a security climate which would deter opposition turnout. They also encompass the ‘tactic’ – ploys which both fulfil roles expected of an incumbent government and also asymmetrically influence the electoral playing field (such as when a state governor who is seeking re-election houses and supports electoral officials, a common practice when their own allowances are late or not paid in full.)⁴

The first question is to what measurable extent does incumbency make a difference? 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 and Young, 2007; Cheeseman, 2010). 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 (*ibid*: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 institutionalisation 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 mobilisation 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

⁴ As candidly narrated by former Cross River State governor Donald Duke in a newspaper interview in July 2010: “When the Resident Electoral Commissioner comes before the elections are conducted- of course when he comes to the state, usually, he has no accommodation; monies have not been released for the running or conduct of the elections and all that because we always start late. He pays a courtesy call on the governor (...) After the courtesy call, the Resident Electoral Commissioner now moves in for a one-on-one with the governor and says, “Your Excellency, since I came, I’ve been staying in this hotel, there is no accommodation for me and even my vehicle is broken down and the last Commissioner didn’t leave the vehicle, so if you could help me settle down quickly;” and the governor says, ‘Chief of Staff, where is the Chief of Staff here?’ And the Chief of Staff appears. Governor says: ‘Please ensure that the REC is accommodated–put him in the Presidential lodge, allot two cars to him, I give you seven days to get this done. Then the relationship has started.” <http://saharareporters.com/2010/07/18/must-read-how-governors-rig-elections-donald-duke-guardian> accessed 10th January 2015.

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 (p.142). 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 constitutionally permitted terms. In the 2015 elections in Nigeria, this dynamic does not apply because Goodluck Jonathan is running for a second term⁵. 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 (see Joseph, 1987) is replicated at the state-level given the relative political, fiscal and administrative autonomy of state

⁵ Questions have been raised over Jonathan’s eligibility to run for another term from 2015, given that he served out the remainder of his late predecessor, Umaru Yar’adua’s term as President from 2010 to 2011, before his election in 2011. Some observers initially argued that the term from 2011 was effectively his second, rather than first, casting a shadow on his eligibility to run again for office. Section 137(1) of the Nigerian Constitution states that a person shall not be qualified for election to the office of President if he has been elected to such office at any two previous elections. Although Jonathan has been ‘elected’ only once, the constitution stipulates two terms of four years each for a president and governor. If the president contests and wins in 2015 and spends another four years in office he will be spending a total of nine years in office altogether, as against two terms of four years each envisaged under the constitution. There is presently an ongoing court case challenging Jonathan’s eligibility to contest in 2015 on these grounds, although the publicity over this issue has quietened down.

governors in their respective domains.⁶ 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. The ways in which a party's state level control determines its national-level strength are revealed further in this paper.

THE RATIONALE

Here, we attempt some projections about 2015's elections by generating conclusions from 2011's results, turnouts and voter numbers. Our central assumption is that since 1999, the parties which have controlled Nigeria's 36 state Governorships have been able to strongly influence the result of Presidential elections in each state. In order to win the Presidency in 2015, the successful party will have to control the majority of Nigeria's 36 state Governorships. In 2015's elections half of the State Governors will have completed their maximum two terms, so state-level elections are likely to be extremely competitive across the country. Of the 28 governorship elections taking place, 18 states (or two-third) will be 'open-seat' races. 10 of these 18 states have 40.9 percent of all registered voters.

In 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan won the election with 22,495,187 total votes across the country, winning not only states where the PDP ruled, but also all states in the South-West apart from Osun, thanks to an electoral pact between the PDP and the ACN which ran most South-Western states. Although President Jonathan did not win in 12 Northern states (including nine which returned PDP Governors but where a majority voted for Muhammadu Buhari of the CPC for President), he was able to get over the 25 percent of votes threshold in all but four (all Northern) states; of which only two were PDP. This indicates that local voter appeal can be an important modifier of the power of incumbency.

But in 2015, the landscape appears very different. As control of the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) are key to how national elections are won, we must first examine the state-level elections. In 2011, one of the authors analysed gubernatorial election results, and the following interesting findings emerged⁷:

⁶ Not least in terms of voter mobilisation, which is conducted via the parties at state levels, and equally in terms of financial resources, as around half of Nigeria's public revenues are spent through the 36 state governments.

⁷ This analysis was published on the Nigeria Elections Coalition website: <http://www.nigeriaelections.org>

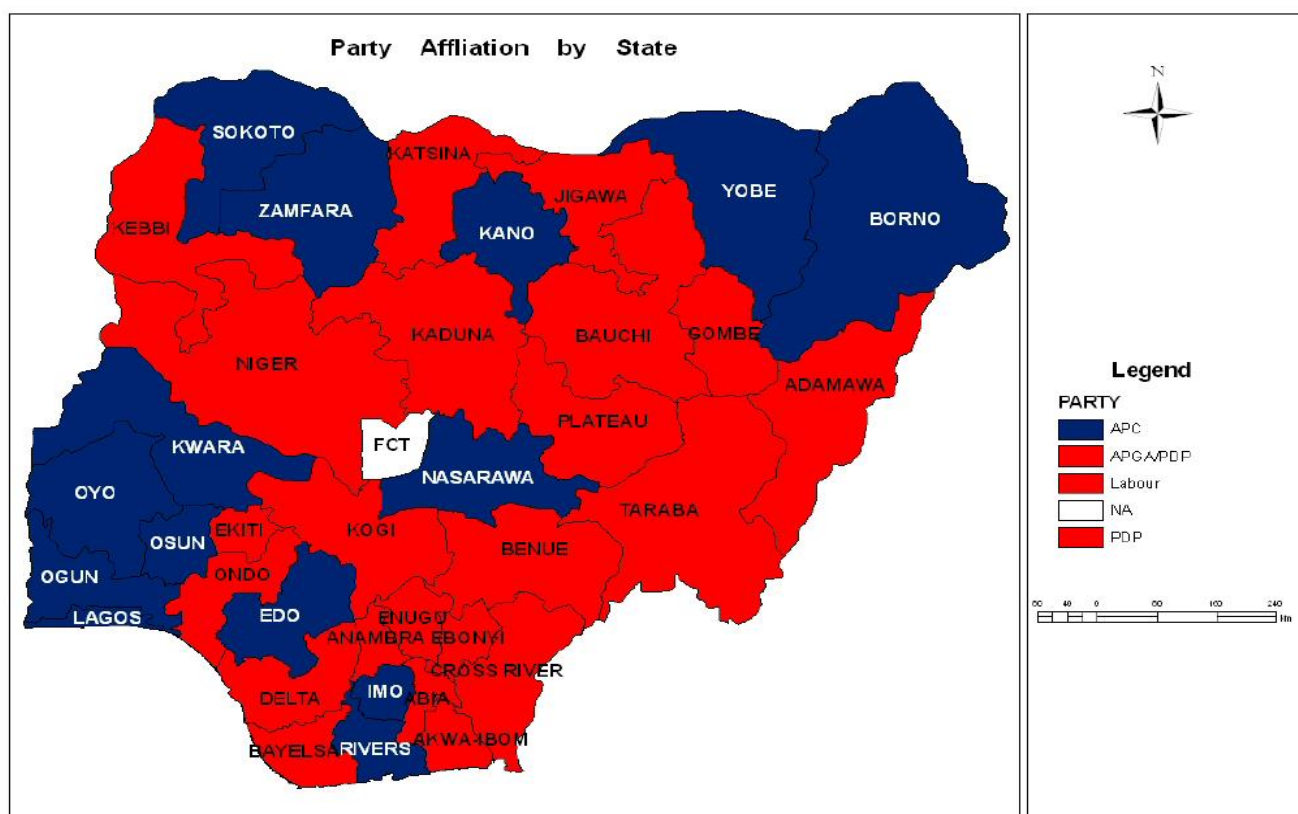
- First, Nigeria's elections conform to a rule of thumb, as propounded by Cheeseman (2010) and others about elections in Africa and more widely: When incumbents run for re-election, they win over 85 percent of the time and typically with over 60 percent of the vote – in 2011, 17 of Nigeria's 20 then-incumbent State Governors got re-elected – exactly 85 percent, with an average winning vote of 69 percent.
- The second indication – though based on a small sample - was that this margin of victory was similar whether the winning Governor was from the national ruling PDP or another party, suggesting that state-level incumbency might be more important than being part of a national ruling party.
- Thirdly, any candidate contesting for a 'vacant' Governorship is more likely to win, and by a larger margin, if they are from the same party as the previous incumbent (see calculations below).

As well as pointing to the importance of incumbency, and the role of constitutional mechanisms such as term limits in maintaining democracy, these results also offer a way to predicting possible outcomes of 2015's polls. In what follows, we explore what the figures may tell us.

We are aware of two weaknesses in our methodology. One is the small size of the data sample - drawn from just one previous national election under the same administrative parameters and conditions (elections in 2007 and before were run in so different a manner and under conditions of such low credibility that they are not comparable for analytical purposes). The other is our assumptions – for 2011's data to have predictive value, a number of conditions must remain the same; whether or not they are likely to we debate in the section on 'assumptions'.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE RUN-UP TO 2015

The first thing to note is that the alignment of political forces today is very different to 2011. Whereas the PDP went into the 2011 elections controlling 27 state governments, currently it controls 21 (following the crossing of Ondo State's outgoing Governor Mikimo from Labour to PDP in late 2014) and can rely on the likely support of one more, from Anambra (APGA), making 22 total. The APC opposition meanwhile controls 14 states, as illustrated below. This is a rapidly changing dynamic however, as alliances continue to be built and reconfigured.



Secondly, 20 Governors entered 2011’s elections in the strong position of first-term incumbents looking to come back; but in 2015, only 10 of 28 Gubernatorial incumbents will be re-contesting - 7 for APC and 3 for PDP. The other 18 races will be ‘open seat’ with no incumbent, while 8 states where elections are held at different times will not be holding Governorship polls. This means that more elections will be competitive, with fewer places where an incumbent Governor can be sure to ‘deliver’ a state’s vote for their Presidential candidate. This makes results even less predictable, but as 2011 shows that even outgoing parties without an incumbent recontesting retain a marginal advantage, we can assume that states which have been run by a particular party will still be more likely to support that party’s Presidential candidate.

ASSUMPTIONS

The usefulness of 2011’s figures in predicting outcomes of 2015 rests on nine core assumptions. We note that all of these are open to debate:

1. **There will be elections before the end of President Goodluck Jonathan’s tenure:** The elections originally due to begin on 14 February have now been delayed by six weeks after the unexpected advice to do so by Nigeria’s security forces. We work on the assumption that

any attempt to delay these further – or to cancel them, as has been speculated - could lead to a major constitutional crisis and radically alter political alignments. It is possible that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) could choose not to hold elections in states where the security situation prevents it; they are legally entitled to do so, or could further delay one or possibly all of the polls by a few days for logistical reasons with the consent of all major political parties, but an overall delay or rescheduling would be a very different and much more controversial matter. Currently, three states are under State of Emergency conditions, although Yobe's successful by-elections show that elections are not necessarily impossible under such conditions. Still, if elections were not held in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, it would not alter the conditions which we note as likely leading to a Presidential run-off.

2. **INEC's commitment to running free and fair elections will remain the same**, although the electoral commission remains restricted in some aspects of capacity and control, and local-level implementation varies under the day-to-day control of the Resident Electoral Commissioners. Recent trends such as decisions not to use electronic voting machines in Ekiti and Osun elections, or shortfalls in the issue of voter cards may impact the public's perception of INEC's competence and neutrality, but overall, INEC's management of state elections has improved since its poor performance in Anambra in December 2013. However, it remains to be seen if INEC can scale up the achievement to a national exercise.
3. **Improvements made in 2011 will remain and restrict rigging to the post-collation process**: Whereas 2007's poorly-run election, in which ballot papers were not even numbered, allowed votes to be completely fabricated, registration and accreditation has since been tightened, so that the main avenues for rigging are more restricted to the use of actual voters, or at least their cards. This might mean renewed attempts to register voters fraudulently in order to increase numbers, but the only other avenue for outright rigging would be post-poll collation at local levels, which should therefore be a focus for observer groups.
4. **2015 will be an overwhelmingly two-party race between the PDP and the APC in the Presidential elections**. With the consolidation of opposition political parties, this currently seems self-evident, and the APGA and Labour parties are likely to support PDP.
5. **Presidential polls will take place before Governorship elections**: national elections for President and members of both houses of the National Assembly take place on March 28th; those for Governorships and State Houses of Assembly on 11th April. As on previous occasions, this means that incumbent governors are influential in controlling the presidential

vote.⁸ If the order were reversed, for instance due to any unforeseen delay in polls, the assumption may not hold true.

6. **The PDP candidate will be President Goodluck Jonathan**, and the APC's candidate is General Muhamadu Buhari, making the presidential race essentially a re-run of 2011, with the Niger Delta Christian incumbent again facing the same Northern Muslim opponent, coupled with a South-Western Christian running-mate.⁹ This is a fundamental assumption, and we can question whether voting patterns would still cleave to 2011's alignments if the APC candidate was for instance from the South-West, or were a Northern Christian.¹⁰
7. **Election security management will reflect that of 2011, in which security agencies were widely acknowledged to have improved their practices:** Many new security challenges have evolved since 2011 but if the agencies can stick to their record of improvement, the environment may remain predictable. If not, or if attempted disruptions overwhelm them, the outcomes will be much less clear. 2014's elections in Ekiti and Osun saw huge security deployments and high turnouts, but were also accompanied by controversies over the disputed neutrality of parts of the security agencies prior to and during the polling period which underline concerns over their future orientation.
8. **Incumbency means the same thing everywhere.** While the powers shared by incumbent executives are constitutionally the same across all states, we acknowledge that there may be significant actual differences in the structures and extent of actually deployable power, for instance the relative strengths of party machines (especially in the APC which is a coalition of separate pre-existing parties, and for whom internal cohesion and competition has been an issue), and equally in the actual extent of material and financial resources available locally as a result of incumbency. In many races local opponents may be backed by Federal resources.¹¹
9. **That incumbency trumps other factors.** We readily acknowledge that immediate external factors (oil-price shocks, the progress of insurgency in the north-east) may contextualise electoral behaviour; and also that public opinion in Nigeria is as open to programmatic

⁸ The ordering of the elections may also create bandwagon effects seen in turnouts for the subsequent poll. For instance, if a particular party wins at the national level, its followers may turn out in greater numbers to reinforce its victory in local polls, whereas the losing party may lose momentum and see fewer followers turn out subsequently. Our thanks to Aminu Baba-Ahmed for provoking thought on this point.

⁹ In 2011, Apostolic Pastor Tunde Bakare; in 2015 Professor Yemi Osinbajo, a lawyer and senior pastor with the influential Redeemed Christian Church of God, one of the largest Pentecostal movements in Nigeria.

¹⁰ We accept the influence of identity politics in voting behaviour, but we emphatically reject the view that ethno-regional or religious identities are wholly deterministic, as personalities, issues, and conditions in the country or in specific regions of it are all equally significant determinants. Even identity politics can incorporate dynamic changes of perspective and allegiance. Equally, crude labels such as ethno-linguistic groups, or faith identities mask often significant internal divergences between age groups, or between sectarian tendencies, which are frequently locally variable and electorally significant.

¹¹ Thanks to Isa Saleh Abdallah via the Royal African Society's African arguments series for stimulating debate on this point.

politics and strong surges of popular feeling as other consolidating democracies, and this could qualify the power of incumbency and/or dilute the importance of identity politics in voting; it may be that structural models such as ours underplay publics' self-conscious deployment of tactical agency. However, in a country with high levels of material poverty and inequality, combined with an expensive-to-contest US-style executive political system, the influence of direct resource-based appeals to electorates (funded with resources derived from state office) has remained visibly strong.

THE UNKNOWN FACTORS

Turnouts are crucial but hard to predict. If a voter register is realistic, party mobilisation and levels of public interest in the candidates dictate the turnout.¹² Anambra's 2013 election, with a 25 percent voter turnout, offers a stark indicator of what happens when they are disinterested. Reports by civil society observers were that large numbers of residents stayed at home, or even sold their voter cards before election.

Such low turnouts can favour election 'riggers', as they allow lots of unused votes to be creatively redistributed, in front of a largely apathetic public which may not enthusiastically defend its mandate. And, as we have seen, incumbents have a greater ability to rig due to their control of resources and the environment.¹³ As PDP are incumbent in more states, this might at first glance seem to favour that party more, but as there are a number of states in which the party may struggle to clear the 25 percent margin, low turnouts are a big risk for PDP too. Money is hugely important in politics, but is of limited use without genuine support. Paid-for support is expensive and unreliable, while dedicated support is more consistent (and cheaper). So while incumbents may have more to spend, they may not necessarily have more to offer in mobilising voter enthusiasm.

Historically, parties' appeal to voters has been based on populist appeals to ethno-regional or faith identities, although the 1999 and 2007 elections broke a mould with three major parties (the PDP, ANPP and AD/ACN) all picking Southern Christian and later, Northern Muslim Presidential candidates respectively.

¹² It would be interesting to test whether incumbent versus 'open seat' elections make a large difference to turnout; however turnout figures from 2011 are not accurate enough to allow us to do this, leaving it as a question for further research.

¹³ However, this only stands if 'to rig' means to alter the substantive outcome of a result. As a senior political organiser related to the author, rigging in the alternative sense of exaggerating the effect of a winning result can equally be facilitated by high turnouts and public consensus, as local publics may deliberately permit party agents to thumbprint unused ballots in order to exaggerate the effect of a win, thus increasing that constituency's potential future leverage with the winning candidate.

For most of the 2015 campaign, parties have so far made little effort to formulate policy messages, and membership structures vary from very weak to strong between parties across the country. While the PDP has struggled to convince the electorate of its ability to deliver on key issues such as poverty reduction, security or combatting corruption, the APC's positioning as a more progressive party has been watered-down by the large number of floor-crossers the party has incorporated and its tactic of negative campaigning had also alienated some potential supporters. Latterly, both parties have employed both negative campaigning and stereotyping, and messages around performance and service delivery. So it will be interesting to see to what extent both parties are willing or able to mobilise voters with policy messages rather than simply appeals to identity politics.

THE NUMBERS

The current political alignment of state government is as follows. Note that APGA and Labour Party states have tended to ally with the ruling PDP party.

- People's Democratic Party (PDP) – 21
- All Progressives Congress (APC) – 14
- All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) – 1

2011 Results Analysis¹⁴

In May 2011, gubernatorial polls took place and results were announced in 25 states, excluding the Imo (re-run) and 9 others which were not due for re-election. 20 states had one-term sitting governors running for re-election, and 5 states had vacant seats after Governors had completed two terms. Their average share of the votes looked like this:

¹⁴ The full data set can be viewed at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/8pkuojev8mkbf2x/Nigeria%20Political%20Analysis.xlsx?n=45926270>

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF STATES	AVERAGE WINNING SHARE OF VOTE
1. Sitting Governor gets second term	17	69.01%
2. Non-incumbent candidate wins	8	54.08%
2a> where opponent beats one-term sitting governor who is running for re-election	3	47.3%
2b> where candidate wins 'empty' seat where there is no first-term governor running for re-election	5	58.16%
- 2b.1> of which candidate from immediate previously ruling party wins 'empty' seat	3	62.7%
- 2b.2> of which candidate from party previously in opposition wins 'empty' seat	2	51.15%
3. Average winning share of PDP sitting Governors	15	68.22%
4. Average winning share of non-PDP sitting Governors	2	74.95%

Based on this we can see that in 2011 elections, where the PDP won on average 60 percent of the gubernatorial seats, being an incumbent party typically gives an advantage of **15 percent** (69.01 – 54.08 = 14.93 percent).

The marginal advantage of being an incumbent party contesting a 'vacant' seat – i.e. where a governor has completed two terms and is not coming back is calculated by subtracting the average vote-share of winning non-incumbents from the average vote share of those who won seats just vacated by the same party: **11.2 percent** (62.7 percent - 51.5 percent).

Some other observations are:

- If you're contesting for an 'empty' seat, you're likely to win by a larger share of the vote (62 percent) if you're from the party which was just in power than if you're from an opposition party (51 percent).

- Anyone not in power at the start of the race (whether opposition or ruling party, whether running against a sitting governor or an empty seat) typically gets a lower margin of victory (47 percent) than incumbents running for re-election (69 percent).
- The advantage of being an incumbent first-term governor running for re-election is not larger for PDP Governors. In fact, non-PDP incumbents won with average 75 percent share of the votes, whereas PDP incumbents won an average of 68 percent. It thus seems that being in power locally matters more than being allied with the national ruling party, although more research and larger samples would be needed to prove this.

2015 ELECTION PROJECTIONS

Using the trends in the 2011 elections, if other conditions remain equal, based on the current landscape, we make the following preliminary projections.

- This numerical analysis indicates both the PDP and APC could each secure 17 states in Governorship elections.
- To win, a Presidential candidate needs an overall majority and at least 25 percent of the votes in two-thirds of the states (24 states). On current indications, if President Goodluck Jonathan runs as PDP candidate it is possible he may get an overall majority. However, he may not automatically get the necessary one-quarter of the vote in two-thirds of states and the FCT.
- Therefore if voting patterns are similar to 2011 a **run-off election** situation would be likely. This would be a historic first under Nigeria's present electoral system.
- However, this run-off outcome is likely to be determined by the factors including the issue of north-south 'zoning', as the APC's choice of candidate amplifies differences in regional voting trends.
- It is difficult to predict the outcome of this run-off. If it does not favour an outright win for the PDP, it may further weaken its chances at the subsequent gubernatorial level given that half of the seats are vacant.

- 2011’s results are only a useful guide to 2015 if conditions stay the same, including INEC’s conduct in voter registration and election management.
- Therefore, with high incentives for many actors to rig, it will be important for stakeholders in democratic consolidation to focus on issues such as registration and collation, which are likely to be hot in all states.

State Governorships

There are 28 gubernatorial seats up for election in 2015:

- 10 incumbents are contesting for a second term:
 - Three are in PDP-controlled states
 - Seven are in APC-controlled states.
- 18 vacant seats
 - Fourteen are in PDP-controlled states
 - Four are in APC-controlled states

CATEGORY	CURRENT NO. OF STATE GOVERNORSHIPS	PROJECTIONS OF STATE GOVERNORSHIPS TO BE WON 2015
Incumbents: Based on 85 percent assumption		
1. APC	7	6 in APC states = 6
2. PDP	3	3 in PDP states 1 in APC states = 4
Seats to be vacant: Based on winning vote share in 2011 gubernatorial elections: 60-40 percent		
APC	4	2 in APC states 6 in PDP states = 8
PDP	14	8 in PDP states 2 in APC states = 10

Assumed to be incumbent in states with no election in March 2015		
APC	3	3
PDP	4	4
APGA	1	1
TOTAL		
APC	14	17
PDP	21	18
APGA	1	1
TOTAL	36	36

Projections:

- If the rule of thumb that incumbents win 85 percent of the time with a 60 percent share of votes holds, for the 10 states with incumbents running for re-elections in the governorship elections, one likely outcome is that the APC wins 6 seats while the PDP wins 4.
- There are 18 vacant seats which will have no incumbent contesting. In 2011, the PDP won 60 percent of such seats while opposition parties (although before uniting as the APC) collectively won 40 percent. Working with this admittedly crude assumption (based on just five vacant seats contested in 2011), the PDP is therefore likely to win 10 governorship states while the APC gets 8 states.
- Therefore in states holding elections in 2015, it is likely that the PDP ends up with 14 states and the APC with 14. If these figures are added to the other states without governorship elections, the tally is:

1. PDP: 14 states + 4 non-participating states = 18
2. APC: 14 states + 3 non-participating states = 17
3. APGA = 1 non-participating state

Total 36 states

This could mean that PDP and allied parties will control 19 states, fewer than the 22 it currently does. However, these are broad generalisations and it is difficult to identify the specific states in

APC and 3 PDP states). This is likely to be enough for a simple majority.¹⁵ If however we go by the projected trends in the governorship elections as useful pointers, we end up with a different result, with both parties winning in 17 states each. The absolute numbers of voters cannot be predicted but it may be significant that the APC goes into the election controlling two states with the largest number of registered voters, Lagos (6.1 million registered voters in 2011) and Kano (5 million).¹⁶

Also remember that section 134 (1) of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution lays down *two conditions* for a victory; one is a majority of votes cast, but the other is a minimum of 25 percent of registered voters in two-thirds of Nigeria's states (i.e. 24 states). Currently, with support of Labour and APGA, the PDP controls enough states to ensure that. However, in 2011 Bauchi state did not reach the needed minimum even when controlled by PDP, delivering only 16.05 percent of the vote for the party's candidate, while Katsina, also PDP, only just scraped over the minimum with 26.1 percent. So it is reasonable to assume that if support or turnout is low in PDP-ruled northern states, not all may deliver the 25 percent minimum needed to secure a win for the party's candidate.¹⁷ In such a circumstance, the Constitution states that candidates would be forced into a second-round run-off election. Such a situation has not previously occurred under Nigeria's present electoral system.

Therefore, of three possible outcomes (outright PDP win, outright APC win, or a run-off election), the most likely outcome based on our projections from current data is that **neither party would manage both factors for an outright victory** so there would need to be **an additional run-off election**.

Neither is it clear which party that situation would favour. On one hand a nationally incumbent party may retain more resources to continue mobilising, but on the other, both the voting public and important political intermediaries may perceive momentum in the opposition which galvanises support for them popularity.¹⁸

If the presidential election does not favour an outright win for the PDP, it may also further weaken the PDP's chances at the subsequent gubernatorial level given the proportion of vacant seats (18) to incumbent re-elections (10). The deciding states for the presidential election and the overall fortune of

¹⁵ However, remember that five of those Jonathan-supporting states in 2011 were ACN states voting according to a cross-party pact, and this may have dampened voter enthusiasm – despite the pact in Lagos, only 1,281,688 of the 6,108,069 registered voters actually contributed to Jonathan's win, so we must allow the possibility that greater numbers might turn out for an incumbent party's own candidate.

¹⁶ At time of publication, the Independent National Electoral Commission was still reviewing final voter register numbers for 2015, making 2011 numbers the only consistent figures available for comparison.

¹⁷ Equally, if the situation were reversed, and the APC were the likely favourite, they would also likely encounter the obverse problem, i.e. getting 25 percent minimums in areas such as the South-East where Jonathan is popular but Buhari often unpopular. The accent on the issue of minimums also has implications for election rigging tactics, as it would encourage incumbents to deter opposition turnout, either by frustrating their voter registration and voter card distribution, or by affecting the security situation in ways likely to deter them.

¹⁸ Since the publication of an earlier version of this research in Nigerian media, evidence has emerged that the PDP may now be prioritising the issue of 25 percent minimums even in states where they are likely to lose the overall Presidential vote. See <http://www.punchng.com/news/2015-jonathan-schemes-for-swest-votes/> accessed 26th January 2015.

the two parties will be those 18 vacant seats, which also happen to have 54.4 percent (40.03 million) of 2011's registered voters, including 10 of the 14 states with the largest number of registered voters, underlining just how open this race really is.

SOME CAVEATS

Incumbency advantages are very dependent on specific local factors, such as candidates, coalitions, party machinery, electorate sophistication, local issues and more; therefore it is hard to make a solid prediction on the outcomes. Importantly, the 2015 elections appear as if they will be a two-party race in all states (although this may also change if heavyweights who lose primaries in the two major parties decide to leave them). This means that the advantages of incumbency calculated from the 2011 multi-party elections may have less predictive value because the APC is a merger of three parties with varying strengths; the ACN, CPC and ANPP. This is additionally complex in states (such as Kano, Imo and Kwara) where PDP governors crossed over to the APC.

In that case, the advantage of incumbency would go way beyond 11 percent because we would need to consider what proportion of the 2011 vote for other parties in the merger (i.e. CPC and ANPP) will be scooped up by APC. Plus, in most of the states where the governor crossed over from the national ruling PDP with some or all of his supporters, the PDP still has a solid state structure.

While we are able to make some plausible projections where incumbents are re-contesting in 2015, it is difficult to do so for the 18 vacant seats because the parameters so far cannot test the strength of the merger. What we can say however is that these seats will be hotly-contested.

Since presidential elections occur at the same time as governorship elections, it is possible these projections may have little predictive value on the outcome of the presidential elections because the patterns of voting for the governorship and presidential elections are considerably different.¹⁹

Moreover, there is no clear pattern - beyond an assumed incumbency advantage - by which states vote for a presidential candidate. Several factors come into play such as the interaction of local and national coalitions, incumbency, popularity of presidential candidates, local actors governorship candidates and power brokers, relative party strength and structure, type of identity allegiances, and historical political behaviour of states.

The large number of vacant seats (18 of 28 up for election) will test the cohesion and organisation of the parties. One possibility is that the incentive for an outgoing or 'lame duck' Governor in a state

¹⁹ Five ACN states in the South-West voted PDP in the 2011 presidential elections due to a last-minute electoral pact, while nine mainly northern PDP states voted CPC in the presidential elections in 2011.

with strong presence of an opposition party to “deliver” that state to their presidential candidate is highly variable.

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