INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian presidential election 2015 has come and gone. Thankfully, the conduct of the election was peaceful and the loser, the incumbent president accepted defeat graciously. The purpose of this article is to analyze some of the issues thrown up by the presidential election and the implications on political leadership in Africa.

Political leadership in Africa lacks feelings of patriotism and has over the years evolved into a patrimonial system aimed at recycling of elites and the use of state power and resources to consolidate political and economic powers. Politics in Africa has thus developed a new definition whereby it is construed as typical extra-legal contest for political and economic domination between elites and politicians. The redefinition of purpose perhaps best explains the noise and willingness to kill and destroy during elections in most African states in the bid towards the controlling of national power and the resources of the state.

The objective of this article is to examine the political structure of Nigeria in relation to the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the election process and the introduction of the use of biometrics in the registration of voters. The article discusses issues arising for the Presidential election including acceptance of defeat by the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, the role of Nigeria’s one time president, Olusegun Obasanjo in politics in Nigeria, and what to expect from the president-elect General Buhari now that he has been voted into office. Lessons to be learnt from the presidential election on intergenerational injustice and political leadership for African youth is also considered. The article concludes with remarks on the political future of Nigeria and the African continent in general.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF NIGERIA

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, a West-African country operates the Presidential system of Government with three distinct arms of government; the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The country is composed of 36 States, and a Capital Territory, with an elected President and a Bi-cameral Legislature. The Executive arm of Government, at the Federal level, consists of the President, the Vice-president and other members of the Federal Executive
Council, while at the State level, it is made up of the Governor, the Deputy Governor and other members of the State Executive Council. The Legislature is constituted at the Federal level of a 109-member Senate and a 360-member House of Representatives known as the National Assembly. At the State level, the Legislature is known as the House of Assembly.

The Judiciary interprets the laws and adjudicates in conflicts between citizens and between the other arms of government. It carries out these functions through the various established courts; the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the Federal High Court, the state High Courts, Magistrate Court, Area Court and Customary Court. The President, The Governor, their Deputies, as well as members of the Legislature at both Federal and State levels are elected, under the present constitution, for four years, renewable only once. Government is due to change hands on May 29th 2015. Elections are to be held in March and April 2015 to this end. Elections into the office of President, Senate and Federal House of representative have been concluded. This discourse will consider next the role played by the Nigerian electoral commission, the Independent Electoral Commission in the organization and conduct of elections.

THE ROLE OF INEC AND BIOMETRICS

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to among other things organize elections into various political offices in the country. The functions of INEC as contained in Section 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended) include; organizing, undertaking and supervising all elections to the offices of the President and Vice-President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a State, and to the membership of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the House of Assembly of each state of the federation; registering political parties in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and Act of the National Assembly; monitoring the organization and operation of the political parties. INEC is also responsible for the certification and declaration of election results.

The 2015 presidential elections was characterized by some innovations introduced by INEC to fortify the electoral system against abuse. For instance, the biometric Register of Voters was introduced as a mandatory part of the electoral process. INEC commenced the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise nationwide in 2014, with the aim of updating the biometric Register of Voters. The use of biometrics is aimed at preventing multiple registration by voters. In addition to the use of biometrics, INEC introduced the Advanced Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) software for de-duplication of voters’ consolidated data. The software enables the INEC database to retain only one instance of an individual’s data and eliminates the extras.
Another innovation introduced by INEC is the issuance of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) to all voters who have been properly captured on the biometric Register of Voters and the use of card readers to verify voters. With the new system each voter must produce his/her PVC at the polling booth where he/she intends to vote. The card readers and the PVC made verification and authentication of each voter possible prior to actual vote which is still done manually. This process make it difficult if not impossible to vote by proxy using the voter’s card belonging to another person. The new system also made it possible to ascertain the number of duly authenticated voters who voted at each polling booth.

INEC clearly bent over backwards to make the 2015 presidential elections and, indeed, the governorship as well as other elections to be conducted in 2015 showpieces of Nigeria’s conformity with global best standards. The process of acceptance of defeat by the incumbent Nigerian president and how this act helps in nation building, peace, harmony and patriotism is considered in the next section.

GOODLUCK AND ACCEPTANCE OF DEFEAT

Nigeria’s President Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat to Muhammadu Buhari in the just concluded 2015 presidential elections thus paving the way for an unprecedented peaceful transfer of power in Africa's most populous nation. The President’s timely concession statement could mark a watershed moment for the entire African Continent. He has sent a precedent and a standard for future generations of leaders not only in Nigeria but on the African continent that once you have set down rules, you must live by them even when the rules do not favour you.

Jonathan becomes is among the few African leaders to leave office through a free and fair democratic election. A previous generation of African leaders either held no elections at all or shamelessly rigged every contest. Some insisted on staying in power in explicit defiance of the ballot box. Robert Mugabe lost the first round of Zimbabwe's presidential election in 2008 but clung to office anyway, plunging his country into a bloodbath in the process. Mwai Kibaki did the same in Kenya in 2007, causing even greater loss of life.

That singular act of statesmanship by President Jonathan was all it took to prevent innocent blood from being shed and to douse the mounting tension as the different regional factions and interest groups from within the elite prepared to feud over power. A peaceful transfer of power come May 29th, 2015 will be the first time in Nigeria's history that an opposition party has democratically taken control of the governance from the ruling party. President Jonathan’s defeat marks the first time in Nigeria’s political history when a sitting president will be defeated in the presidential election. Jonathan's party, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) has governed since decades of military dictatorship ended in 1999.

This could be the beginning of a badly needed and long overdue political maturity for Nigeria’s young democracy. In Jonathan’s own words, no one’s ambition is worth the unity, stability and
progress of the country. Political instability which breeds corruption, tyranny and upheavals have
been the major vices holding back much of the African continent from attaining its full potential
ever since the end of colonization in the 1960s.

The absence of regular power transfers promotes political instability and conflict. Without the
rule of law Africa, the continent loses out on foreign investment from the outside world and also
loses valuable human capital as a result of migration of human capital to western economies.
Elections are due to hold soon in several African countries: Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Chad,
Burkina Faso and Uganda.

In Nigeria, several factors culminated to seal Jonathan’s fate. His failure to contain the uprising
of Boko Haram the homicidal fanatical militia and his inability to combat corruption were
probably chiefs among these factors.

Some analysts have commented that Jonathan’s defeat had been a long time coming. President
Jonathan apparently suffered a major blow in December 2013 when the erstwhile President,
Obasanjo, his former backer, called on him to step down. Obasanjo made headlines when he sent
a widely circulated 18-page letter to Jonathan in 2013. In the letter, Obasanjo accused Jonathan
of failing to deal with the many problems facing Nigeria - including an Islamist insurgency in the
north-east, corruption, piracy, kidnapping and oil theft.

The poor handling of the missing $20 Billion from NNPC and the failure to prosecute those
found to be involved in the subsidy scam and the reluctance to remove aviation minister after
mismanagement of funds in the industry was discovered.

Another major blow befell Jonathan and his ruling party when a powerful faction of PDP
members, including state governors and legislators defected to the newly formed opposition All
Progressives Congress (APC). The joint defection by the Governors paved the way for President
Jonathan's defeat, as they rallied support for General Buhari.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM GENERAL BUHARI NOW?

Permutations and expectations are in top gear that General Buhari will salvage the Nigerian
economy from the abyss it is free falling into. The operators of various sectors of the economy
have advised the incoming government of General Buhari to implement a blueprint for the
economy that will enhance the living standard of Nigerians. The quest for regular electricity
supply is a top priority that should be tackled by the incoming administration. Power statistics
from the Federal Ministry of Power puts the national energy generation at 3,540 Mega Watts
(mw) as at March 31, 2015 whereas the peak demand is estimated at 12,800 mw, indicating a
shortfall of about 9260mw.

The precarious security situations across the country; the war of terror being waged by Boko
Harm and other militia groups, the volatile Niger Delta, the rash of kidnapping and armed
robberies ongoing in the southern parts of Nigeria is another area that deserves to be given
priority attention. The incoming administration is expected to wage a sustainable attack on the
issues of corruption. The government of General Buhari is equally expected to develop and implement a plan of action to address Nigeria’s unemployment which is at an ‘all time’ high. The Nigerian education and health sectors require urgent attention. Acceleration of reforms in the oil and gas sector in order to attract more investments in both the upstream and downstream segments of the sector is another area that requires urgent attention.

The incoming administration is expected to address urgently the fundamental of the high cost of doing business and low productivity. The incoming government will need to create a level playing field for all investors across all sectors with regard to import tariffs, funding opportunities, tax incentives. Massive infrastructural development, enhanced retail system, planned industrialization of the Nigerian economy are some other areas that the incoming President needs to give priority attention. The free fall of the Naira as a result of the Global Oil Crisis must also be addressed.

In addition to the priority areas mentioned above which are far from being exhaustive, General Buhari is expected to continue most of the sound economic policies initiated by previous governments, such as the agricultural transformation and the various SME development initiatives, including the sustainability of the SME intervention funds and the establishment of the Development Bank of Nigeria.

INTERGENERATIONAL INJUSTICE, POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND LESSONS FOR AFRICAN YOUTH

A society is inter generationally just when each generation contributes its fair share such that members of succeeding generations, both inside and outside its borders, will be in a position to satisfy their needs, at the same time to avoid serious harm and yet to have the opportunity to enjoy things of value. Intergenerational injustice is the antithesis of this. The concept of intergenerational justice is often used in relation to the environment and sustainability.

In the context of political leadership, everything done to frustrate the younger generation to lead: they are unprepared, not supported when they have the chance or arrogance. A genuinely inclusive society needs to ensure that its youth participate in all its affairs; that young people’s views are included in development policies and that young people develop leadership skills. In many African countries, youth have either remained marginalized or not played a role in the political process. This is largely due to institutional and policy constraints of the state and society. Cultural factors that dictate that decision making is the preserve of elders may also be part of the problem,

Most African countries have government ministries or departments with the explicit mandate of addressing youth issues, and many have national youth policies and councils pursuant to their obligations under the African Youth Charter, but a lot still needs to done in order to achieve the mandates of these bodies. African youth have been only marginally involved in civic participation, electoral participation and providing a political voice. This is partly due to lack of
quota systems in political processes and in political parties of many African countries. Accordingly, youth remain on the fringe of political parties.

In countries where there are mechanisms and policies in place for youth participation, these have not been implemented due to the vested interests of the established political elites.

Despite this unfavorable context, youth have managed to negotiate and force their way to political participation and economic success. The North African experience has provided an inspiring example about the determination of youth to fight for what they believe and bring about change.

Examples of youth social movements and initiatives across the continent which empower young people include: the “Y’en a marre” (Enough is Enough) movement in Senegal; the “Communication for Development” in Cape Verde; the “Young Acting for Change” program in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo.

In a Nigerian Youth Agenda on Political Participation was developed ahead of the 2015 election together with a Nigerian Youth Inter party Forum. The forum is primarily used by youth members across party lines to come together and deliberate on issues of common interest and challenges among other things one being expanding the frontiers for youth political participation.

People under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. In a third of countries, eligibility for the national parliament starts at 25 years or higher and it is common practice to refer to politicians as ‘young’ if they are below 35-40 years of age. Youth is not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes such as Parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administrations. The situation is even more difficult for both young women as well as women at mid-level and decision-making/leadership positions.

Leadership is rarely handed over to one, you have to seize it or take charge of it decisively. Every generation of leaders must have a clear vision for the future. While not forgetting injustices of the past we must not let this preoccupy us from forging a way forward.