**THE POWER OF INCUMBENCY IN NIGERIAN ELECTIONS**

**EZEAJUGHU MARY C. (PhD)**

**Department of Political Science**

**Faculty of Social Sciences**

**Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, Nigeria**

**Email-** **marychukwuagozieezeajughu@gmail.com**

**ABSTRACT**

*This working paper tries to apply studies on the benefits of incumbent status in elections in democracies that are solidifying to Nigeria's presidential and gubernatorial elections in March and April 2015. The Federal system in Nigeria, which has directly elected executives in charge of considerable state resources and powers both at the national level and in each of the 36 component States, offers a scenario where the interaction of incumbency powers is complicated but unquestionably crucial. With the use of analysis based on the 2011 elections, which were comparable in many keyways, we try to map the expected patterns resulting from these elements. This enables us to conduct an analysis that can subsequently be compared with real results, allowing us to assess the validity of this thesis and the significance of our findings in relation to other factors that influence election outcomes. The article demonstrated "the link between incumbency factor, internal party democracy, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria" by providing strong evidence. The paper is especially important for those involved in Nigeria's democratic process because it will make them more aware, stop them from abusing their positions of power, and make sure they follow the principles of internal party democracy, which will help Nigeria's democracy grow and consolidate more quickly.*

**Keywords:** **Incumbency, internal party democracy, election, democratic consolidation, Nigeria.**

**INTRODUCTION**

The benefits of being in office fluctuate. The incumbency advantage, according to Cox and Katz (1996), consists of both direct and indirect impacts. The benefits of being an incumbent, such as resources and constituency initiatives, are the only direct consequence. The potential to prevent a strong opponent or contender in future elections is one of the indirect impacts. According to Cox and Katz (1996), the extraordinary growth in incumbency benefits is the result of an increase in the quality effects. While most of the research on the incumbency advantage has focused on the years after 1960, prior studies have shown indications of the phenomenon in earlier times (Gerald and Gross 1984). Recent research has shown that the benefits of being in office longer may fluctuate with time (Carson 2015). To support this argument, Jacobson (2015) convincingly showed that today's congressmen are less disadvantaged than their predecessors between 1960 and 2010. He asserts that incumbents running for office today have no more advantages than those running in the 1950s. This, he said, is a result of politics becoming more nationalised. In consolidating democracies, there are a number of factors that contribute to incumbent officeholders frequently winning elections, including weak institutions, preferential access to state resources, both financial and non-financial, control over law-making and law enforcement, and a weak economic foundation for opposition politics outside the state system are all supporting factors. For two reasons, Nigeria presents an intriguing and difficult case study to test these hypotheses. One is that it has an executive form of government, where authority is concentrated in the top political positions and control over a central state budget supported by oil is paired with relatively slender institutional checks and balances. The other is that it is a federal polity as well (although one with an unstable and dynamic connection between the centre and component states), making control of the 36 constituent states a crucial factor in determining one's capacity to gain or hold onto power on a national scale. We are therefore dealing with the intricate interaction between 36 strong elected state-level executives and a national Presidency when figuring out the way to control of the Nigerian state. Although States' autonomy has been perceived to be expanding since the restoration to electoral rule in 1999, what happens in elections will also serve as a test case for the relative strength of incumbency at the Federal level compared to that of States.

Yet, the lack of attention paid to how sub-national political actors, institutions, and processes affect the impact of incumbency on elections is a significant vacuum in the literature on incumbency and elections in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead, the relative powers of the opposition and ruling parties in presidential elections have received most attention. The power of the current President and the national governing party in Nigeria is primarily determined by the state governors and, by extension, state-level ruling- and opposition-party institutions. As will be shown in our analysis, given the relative political, fiscal, and administrative autonomy of state governors in their respective domains, the significance of incumbency at the federal level and the advantages it confers through the control of private and public economic and coercive resources, patronage networks, using a record of performance, and voter mobilisation capacity (see Joseph, 1987) are replicated at the state level. The former president Olusegun Obasanjo's plea to state governors in 2003 to back his candidature for re-election for a second term shows that state control has always been crucial to electoral politics in Nigeria.

With the foregoing, individuals in political power in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic, like their counterparts during the First, Second, and Third Republics that never materialised, have abused the incumbency advantage in their methods of rule. This has given them a significant advantage over their rivals and competitors. They clearly do this by taking over the operations and organisational structures of their parties, which has resulted in a pitifully low level of internal party democracy. Jacobson's (2015) claim, however, is supported by the fact that incumbency advantage has fluctuated over Nigeria's political history.

**INCUMBENCY AND NIGERIAN POLITICS**

Current developments in Nigeria seem to be favouring performance politics over the formerly dominant effect of the incumbency factor in predicting political outcomes, notably election triumphs (Ezeani 2011, Alfa, 2011). Effective opposition, legitimate elections, an excessive dependence on godfatherism, an authoritarian style of governance, and a rise in political consciousness among the populace are some of the underlying causes that signal the end of incumbency's prominent role in Nigerian politics. (Bola, 2011).

It flopped in the states of Oyo and Ogun. The centre could not hold as things broke down even though Ogun Governor Adebayo Alao Akala and his men were able to defeat senator Teslim Folarin in the primary elections. Rashidi Ladoja, a former governor who had a similar fate, departed the party with his supporters. Adesina, (2009). (2009). The political wind that swept through the whole Southwest was unexpected by the PDP, which failed to handle their victory in the region, according to Chukwu (2011) in his analysis of the 2011 elections and the influence of incumbents. As a result of the party's numerous problems, the falconer was unable to hear the falcon, which caused the party to disintegrate and the centre to collapse. After the political earthquake that swept the region from its long time occupant, Alliance for Democracy (AD), the PDP took control of five states in the zone (Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti, Osun, and Ondo) in 2007. Nevertheless, the PDP was unable to maintain control of the same state until the end of the four-year term. Nassarawa State was another state where the validity of incumbency was questioned. Aliyu Akwe Doma was defeated by the opposition CPC candidate Umar Tanko Alkmakura in the 2011 governor's race because of witch hunts against alleged political foes, an egoistic stance, an inability to be reached, bad judgement, etc. He was believed to have been too sluggish in moving forward and to have ignored the condition of workers, maybe hoping to succeed only based on incumbency advantage. It did not, however, turn out well for him. When the public's political awareness has increased, they voted him out (National Accord, 2011).

**INCUMBENCY FACTOR, INTERNAL PARTY DEMOCRACY AND POLITICS OF THE ABORTED THIRD REPUBLIC**

Ibrahim Babangida allegedly started a number of initiatives after he took office in 1985 with the goal of restoring civil rule to the nation (Diamond, 1991). In May 1989, he removed the prohibition on politics, but the government later said it was unhappy with the way politicians had formed parties because, according to him, the parties were innately unable to display national character, which prevented them from being registered. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention were founded by Babangida (NRC). The current administration even wrote these parties' constitutions and supplied the initial funding for their activities (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991). The Babangida administration orchestrated the transition programme independently and with flagrant violations of power. According to Keller (1991), who captures this development, under Babangida "the state attempts to co-opt corporate groups or eliminate them where state corporatism exists...it allows popular political expression, but only in accordance with guidelines established by the oligarchic state class...Rather than encouraging populist democracy to reign free, the state carefully limits and controls popular political and economic mobilisation." The presidential election was held on June 12, 1993, with Chief MKO Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tofa serving as the presidential flag bearers of the SDP and NRC, respectively, following a number of political figures' proscriptions due to suspected irregularities in the conduct of their party primaries. Babangida, however, declared the election to be invalid while Nigerians awaited the results.

**INCUMBENCY INFLUENCE/ADVANTAGE THESIS AND DISTRIBUTION OF DEMOCRACY DIVIDEND**

According to Nwanegbo and Alumona, cited in Alfa, this refers to the interaction of forces through which an incumbent leader or party tries to influence and manipulate the constitutional and institutional framework that governs the electoral process, creating an uneven playing field for the candidates in the electoral competition ( 2011). As previously mentioned, the incumbency factor indicates that the incumbent occupant of a political office must have free access to state machinery and resources, which he may use to his benefit and against his opponents (Olusola Obasa, 2011).

For the last 25 years, one of the most active areas of research in the study of American politics has been identifying the causes of this incumbency advantage. The most widely accepted theory contends that members of Congress' capacity to serve their constituents accounts for the incumbency advantage (e.g., Fiorina 1977). Alternately, Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987). According to the theory, congressmen provide their voters with local public goods to increase support for themselves. Levitt and Snyder, who were quoted in Alfa (1997) and Fiorina and Fiorina and Rivers (1989), do in fact find evidence that incumbents who spend more money from pork barrel or are more visible in their districts do better in their re-election campaigns. Redistricting may now also be a key factor in determining the electoral success of incumbents, according to Cox and Katz (2002). Yet, a later set of empirical results demonstrates the existence of other factors (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2002).

In the case of Nigeria, elected officials frequently have a self-centred attitude and are not required to start delivering services in order to gain re-election. This is a result of the fact that they like utilising state resources since they are in office, and this situation is aided by widespread poverty among the populace, who rarely consider the effects of their voting decisions (Bola, 2011)

**THE INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE AND NIGERIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: WHAT IS AN INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE?**

Incumbency advantage, according to Gordon and Landa, is "the electoral advantage a candidate receives as a result of her standing as an incumbent candidate seeking re-election" (Gordon and Landa, 2009). Research suggests that incumbent officials have an electoral edge over challengers (Gordon and Landa, 2009; Mayhew, 2008; Nwanegbo and Alumona, 2011). This was confirmed during the Nigerian presidential elections. After the military's 1979 transfer of power to a democratically elected administration, Shehu Shagari, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) candidate who won the election, carried out a civilian-to-civilian transition in 1983. The current president was heavily favoured in the rigged election. "Violence was elevated to an inconceivable height during the federal elections of 1983," claims Abe (2008), "where governments backed thugs, arsonists, and assassins unrestrainedly poured dread and panic on both opponents and voters alike." The 1983 presidential election was rigged heavily in favour of the existing administration, and as a result, the military took control of the country (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). Parts of the state institutions employed by the incumbent to win re-election in the 1983 presidential election included the electoral empire and state agents. According to Awopeju, "the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), which was supposed to act as the election's arbitrator collaborated with the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to use election manipulation methods (Awopeju, 2011). When the military overthrew the government in 1983, Nigeria's constitutional government was reinstated in 1999. Olusegun Obasanjo was chosen to serve as the civilian president by the PDP. In 2003, following the conclusion of his first term, he coordinated a civilian-to-civilian transfer. The incumbent president was favoured to win the election. The incumbency factor was very important in Obasanjo's re-election. The election was manipulated in the same way as the ones before it. The 2003 elections were deemed a "abject failure" by Human Right Watch (HRW) (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The elections fell "far short of fundamental regulations and international requirements for democratic elections," according to the European Union election monitors (Awopeju, 2011). In Nigeria, the advantage of being in office is highly valued. Nonetheless, recent academic studies have also shown existing disadvantages in several rising economies (Macdonald, 2014). For additional analysis of this (Uppal, 2009). The democratic shift from one form of civil administration to another was visible during the 2007 presidential elections. Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011) state that "the 2007 election represented the first time in the history of Nigeria's elections that a third straight presidential election took place and that one elected leader replaced another.

**MANIFESTATIONS OF INCUMBENCY INFLUENCE IN NIGERIA**

Abuse of the power of incumbency is a serious cankerworm that is destroying the foundation of Nigeria's developing democracy. The polity has undergone the following developments as a result. When state chief executives frequently force their whims and caprices on party members and supporters, elite fictionalisation and the indiscriminate use of incumbency polarise the elites. For instance, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) just ordered new primaries, which is endangering the party's candidates in five states (Ezeani,2011). Promotion of blandness and opprobrium: Sycophants and political praise-singers can have a day while feeding the ego of dishonest incumbents in Nigeria due to the absence of institutionalisation of parties (Bola, 2011), even in the face of unfavourable decisions and policies. Such sycophants profit from the divide among political candidates in Kogi State and prostitution amongst them. There were allegations that the outgoing governor, Ibrahim Idris, intended to oust most PDP members in the state and replace himself with his son-in-law. Misuse of funds: There is a link between misuse of funds by incumbents and abuse of incumbency. They pool their resources to sway public opinion in favour of their own self-interests while ignoring the requirements of the public for progress. People become alienated as a result of political indifference when they become disgusted by the notorious actions of the incumbent(s) election.

**HOW PRE-ELECTION VIOLENCE CAN HELP INCUMBENTS WIN ELECTIONS**

We contend that election violence increases the likelihood of the incumbent winning through at least two mechanisms: by increasing the likelihood of boycotts by the opposition parties and (relatedly) by swaying voter turnout in the incumbent's favour. There are several justifications for orchestrated opposition boycotts of elections. 19 When they understand they have no chance of winning, several parties decide to boycott. Often, boycotts serve as an expensive warning intended to undermine the integrity of the voting process, call attention to election fraud, or express opposition to a brutal or unjust government. 20 The use of electoral violence by the government throughout the campaign season is another evidence that the election is not going to be free and fair. In some instances, a boycott can help opposition parties prevent further physical damage to their supporters while also bringing the rigging of the electoral process to the public's notice. As Emily Beaulieu explains: By [boycotting], opposition leaders want to pressure the incumbent into arranging elections that are fairer in the future. Also, a boycott could be an appealing choice to lessen harm to supporters of the opposition if the incumbent's manipulation strategy includes aspects of violent repression or if the opposition believes that the incumbent would use violence in their manipulation on Election Day.

**INCUMBENCY EFFECTS WHEN TYPE IS REVEALED IN OFFICE**

We analyse a repeated-elections model without term restrictions in this section. Our theory's main tenet is that novice PMs are more vulnerable to reputational issues than seasoned PMs. This attribute is produced by term limitations, but it also makes intuitive and rational sense more generally: voters undoubtedly learn about a prime minister throughout his time in office, both from inferences drawn from the prime minister's actions and from other sources like the media. A comprehensive analysis without term limitations is outside the purview of this work, but we still present a straightforward example of how voters' knowledge of incumbents might take the place of term restrictions here. We suppose that a PM's (permanent) type is exogenously disclosed after his second term. Our study is manageable and immediately comparable to the two-term limit setting because to this basic premise. In short, reputational issues no longer matter for a prime minister in his second or later term, and such prime ministers act just as they did in the second term of our prior model. Yet, the potential for serving more than two terms—combined with the unavoidable prospect of re-election after the second term—introduces some intricacy in the concerns about the behaviour of first-term PMs.

**WHY THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN WAS DEFEATED**

The writer disagrees with some who claim that the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) had been corrupted and that ethnic gang-up was to blame for Goodluck Jonathan's fall as Nigeria's incumbent president. Because the governing party (PDP) has failed to significantly advance Nigeria for sixteen years, voters’ clamour for change rather than really choosing to remove the current president. For information about this (Awojobi et al., 2014; Awojobi, 2014). Voters in Nigeria have become more intelligent because of the democratisation and consolidation processes, which have given them the incentive to select candidates they believe would rule them effectively. And the recent presidential elections showed this to be the case. Throughout Nigerian political history, the issue of incumbent advantage has been eliminated for the first time. According to certain research, Nigerians have not received the benefits of democracy from the PDP-led federal government, and this has contributed to the incumbent president's downfall. There is no empirical conclusion that explains how the incumbent president was overthrown. Nonetheless, political research and conversation have demonstrated that several reasons contributed to the incumbent president's loss. What qualities, then, contributed to the disadvantage of incumbent status? The four persuasive arguments in the political discourse that led to Goodluck Jonathan's fall as president are listed below.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper's primary goal is to analyse the key political discourse elements that led to the incumbent president of Nigeria being ousted. It is difficult to unseat an incumbent president in Africa, but in the case of Nigeria, this article supported the third hypothesis, according to which people favour the challenger over the incumbent, particularly when the latter is failing to live up to voters' expectations. According to the political discourse, voter preference for the challenger over the incumbent was caused by insecurity, corruption, a powerful opposition, and a weak economy. This essay has demonstrated that an incumbent president may be re-elected if people think favourably of him or her, and that the party with the most state-level governors and National Assembly legislators has a chance of becoming the next president. The dynamics of power play in the 2011 elections also demonstrate that the phenomena of incumbency as a factor in political issue resolution is not permanent. The results of the elections are proof that Nigerians are becoming more politically aware. As a result, performance politics continue to be the most reliable path to political victory in subsequent elections, and incumbency has its drawbacks. This will strengthen the foundation of democratic principles and eventually hasten the process of consolidating democracy in Nigeria. It is common for incumbents to want to stay in power longer than what is permitted under the constitution and to ignore their party's internal rules. They come up with a variety of antidemocratic schemes to advance their own selfish goals. They include taking control of the party structure, orchestrating the rise and fall of the party leadership, organising a re-registration operation to deregister opponents, and reaching consensus.

Those who take on leadership roles in Nigeria should avoid exploiting their incumbency advantage to maintain a strong democratic consolidation. In order to hasten the consolidation of true democracy in Nigeria, they should be prepared to step down from office at the end of the constitutionally permitted term, establish an even playing field for all contenders, refrain from meddling in the internal party affairs of political parties, and most importantly, uphold the principles of internal party democracy.

**REFERENCES**

Adesina, S.O. (2009) “The myths surrounding ethnic politics in Nigeria” Journal of Politics, 2(4) 34-40 Anyanwu, T.O. (2003) “Gunmen in politics “Journal of Social Policy (2) 2. 23- 24, May

Ake, C (1992) The Feasibility of democracy in Africa, Olbacan CREDU, Alfa, P.I. ‘Political parties and democratic consolidation in Nigeria (2007-2011) Journal of Policy and Development Studies 5(2) 149-160

Banks, J.S and Sundaram, R.K (1998) Optimal Retention in Agency Problems. Journal of Economic Theory 82 (2) 293-323.

Besley, T (2006) Principal Agent? The Political Economy of Good Government. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Birch, S (2011) Electoral Malpractice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bola, D A. (2011) “Social Policy: A bag on the path” Nigerian Management Review, 5(2) 13-18

Bueno de, M and Lander, D (2008) The Equilibrium Theory of Clarity Responsibility. University of Chicago Mimeo.

Cain, B, Ferejohn, J and Fiorina, M (1987) The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence. Cambridge, MA: Havard University Press.

Carson, J et al (eds) (2015) Assessing the Rise and Development of the Incumbency Advantage in Congress: Paper presented at the congress and History Conference held at Vanderbilt University, May 22-23.

Chukwu, D.O. (2007) “The myths of electoral law in Nigeria” African Development Review, August, 3(2) 5-6

Chukwuemeka E.O. (2008) “A pathological review of military democracy in Nigeria” Journal of Policy and Development Studies May. 2(1) 5-7