EVENTS 2011: The Political Equation Changed

Contributed by Victor Ugborgu
Sunday, 15 January 2012

2011 recorded several political events that redefined the political equation of the country and future political activities

The year 2011 was no doubt, a distinguishing year in the history of Nigeria. The year recorded several political events that redefined the political equation of the country and future political activities. These events included the general election, inauguration of various state governments and activities of the current government. The 2011 election which took practically the entire month of April was commended by several local and international groups. The chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group called the election, “a genuine celebration of democracy in Africa’s most populous country.” The general election was one event that President Goodluck Jonathan promised to deliver when he assumed the office on May 5, 2010, following the demise of Umaru Musa Yar’Adua. He had promised a free and fair election, which the local and international press attested to. The election brought a new era into the country’s political history. For the first time, a citizen from Ijaw ethnic nationality in the minority region of South-South geopolitical zone of the country became the president after a successful election. After the death of Yar’Adua, politicians in the North had insisted that the zoning arrangement should be obeyed to the letter. In the build up to the January 9, 2011, People’s Democratic Party, PDP, convention, the zoning controversy had raged. Four prominent politicians: Ibrahim Babangida, former military president; Atiku Abubakar, former vice-president, Bukola Saraki, former governor of Kwara State and now a senator; Aliyu Gusau, former national security adviser, were part of the pro-zoning orchestra. They also wanted to vie for the PDP presidential ticket but later entered into a pact to produce Atiku as a consensus candidate to contest against Jonathan. Atiku emerged from the group to contest against Jonathan but lost the race for the PDP ticket eventually to Jonathan who polled 2,736 votes to his 805 votes. President Jonathan won the election as people came out massively to vote for him even in the South Western parts of the country controlled by the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN. He polled 22,495,187 votes, representing 59.66 percent. Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, scored 12, 215, 853 votes, representing 32.4 percent. Nuhu Ribadu of ACN got 2,079,151, representing 5.51 percent, while Ibrahim Shekarau of the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP, polled 917, 012, representing 2.43 percent. Jonathan won in 23 states, 16 out of the 17 in the south and seven in the north. He met constitutional requirement of winning 25 percent or more votes in 32 states and the Federal Capital Territory, FCT. Buhari won in 12 states in the north, had 25 percent in 16 states in the region. Ribadu won only in Osun State and had 25 percent or more votes in just four out of seven states in the South-West, while Shekarau neither won nor polled 25 percent votes in any state including Kano, his state of origin, where he was also governor for eight years. But the post-election violence that erupted in some states in the North nearly rubbished the election. Many lives were lost and property worth billions of naira damaged. About 11 National Youth Service Corps, NYSC, members were killed in Bauchi State in the wake of the violence. The Bauchi State police command confirmed the death of 11 youth corps members in the post-presidential election violence that engulfed parts of the north. The corps members were killed in different locations such as Giade, Itas-Gadau, Katagum and Alkaleri local government areas while participating in the conduct of the presidential election as electoral officers. An unspecified number of female members of the NYSC were either raped or molested by irate youths in Gadau village. There was also pre and post-election violence in Akwa Ibom State which consumed no fewer than 19 people. The President later set up the Pre and Post Election Violence Commission of Inquiry on May 11, 2011, to look into the cause of the pre-election violence that occurred in Akwa Ibom. In Imo State, against all odds, Rochas Okorocha of the All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA, won the governorship election after the election was repeated on May 6, 2011, in Ngor/Okpala, Mbaitolu, Oguta and Orji ward in Owerri North. Ikedi Ohakim, then governor and the PDP governorship candidate was tipped to carry the day, but he was roundly defeated by Okorocha. Like the Nigerian situation, the emergence of Okorocha changed the Imo State political equation which hitherto was on zoning formula. In the Senate, David Mark was re-elected president, while Ike Ekweremadu retained his position as deputy senate president. Other officials were also elected based on the existing zoning principle among the six geopolitical zones. While the Senate retained its zoning formula, it was a different kettle of fish in the House of Representatives. Aminu Tambuwal from Sokoto State and Emeka Ihedioha, representing Aboh Mbaise/Ngor-Okpala Federal Constituency in Imo State, emerged speaker and deputy speaker, respectively. Their election on June 6, 2011, created an upset for the zoning formula of the PDP and punctured the delicate balancing of key offices among the six geopolitical zones in the country. The result was that the vice-president and the speaker emerged from the same North-West geopolitical zone. But Tambuwal and Ihedioha and other recalcitrant PDP members argued that it was not the business of the party to appoint principal officers, rather it was that of elected members of the House. In Bayelsa State, the PDP governorship primaries became controversial following the exclusion of Timipre Sylva, the incumbent governor. What started as a rumour that the PDP had concluded arrangements to remove the governor from office by ensuring that he did not participate in the party’s governorship primaries finally became a reality on November 13, when the PDP National Working Committee, NWC, disqualified him. Others disqualified with him were Timi Alaibe, former managing director, Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, Godknows Igali and Ben Bruce. The disqualification of Sylva led to a chain of events before the governor finally rushed to court to stop the PDP from conducting the primaries scheduled for November 19. The exercise eventually held despite a court injunction. The federal government also deployed troops and mobile policemen to the state. Consequently, supporters of Sylva fled the state for fear of arrest while a good number remained indoors to avoid being brutalised by the soldiers. On December 3, the Kogi State governorship election was held with Ibrahim Wada of the PDP elected as governor. Audu Ababakar, former governor and the ACN candidate, lost. But women drawn from the 21 local government areas insisted that the outcome of December 3

was not reflective of the wish and aspiration of the people. They claimed that Abubakar won the election. The year also witnessed the impeachment of many principal officers in some state houses of assembly and nullification of the election of some members of the legislative houses in the states. Abdullahi Yusuf, speaker, Kano State House of Assembly, was removed on December 20, over allegations of incompetence and fanning the embers of disunity among members of the House. Garba Salau from Kiru local government was elected speaker after scoring 22 votes to defeat two other contestants, Ibrahim Abba and Kabiru Al-Hassan. Six months after their election into the National Assembly, the tenure of two senators and eight members of the CPC from Katsina State was truncated. The affected senators were Abdu Umar Yandoma and Ahmad Sani Stores. To replace them are Sadiq Yar’Ardua and Hadi Sirika. Members of the House of Assembly affected were Murtala Isa, Muntari Dandutse, Musa Salisu, Aminu Ashiru, Umar Katsayal, Muhammad Tukur, Tasi’u Doguro and Abdul Dankama. The Supreme Court nullified their elections on the ground that they were not validly nominated to contest the April 16, National Assembly election. The Court of Appeal sitting in Abuja, also on December 16, ruled that Margery Chuba-Okadigbo, wife of Chuba Okadigbo, former senate president, and not Alphonsus Igbeke was the legitimate candidate of the PDP for the Anambra North senatorial seat in the April 16 election. The appellate court ordered the Senate to inaugurate Chuba-Okadigbo to occupy the seat which has been vacant in the past six months due to various legal actions. Igbeke was alleged to have forged the documents that helped him win the court case to occupy the seat.