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RESEARCH REPORT



CHANGING OF THE GUARD

A View at the Trends and Terrain Determining the 2023
Nigerian General Elections

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INTRODUCTION

Nigerians will go to the polls in February and March 2023 to vote candidates into 1,489 elective positions – with three more governorship elections in November 2023 – from the presidency to the state house of assembly. The president, and governors in 18 of the 28 states holding ballots, are term-limited which will see a significant transition in governance. Most of this cadre of leaders were elected into office in 2015, as part of the ‘APC Sak’, a phrase referring to the Buhari support that ushered in the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and led to the end of sixteen years under the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP).

Nigerian politics is dominated more by personalities than party ideologies, especially governors, former heads of state and erstwhile politicians that have been able to control structures in their states. This is why politicians can cross-carpet with no immediate consequence at the polls or to their standing. The national chair and secretary of the APC were members of the opposition PDP within the last decade,¹ while two of the frontrunners² for the forthcoming presidential elections, the PDP’s Atiku and New Nigerian People’s Party (NNPP)’s Kwankwaso contested the presidential primaries of the APC in 2015. Peter Obi, the Labour Party (LP) nominee, was the vice-presidential candidate and running mate to Atiku on the PDP platform in 2019 and was elected as governor of Anambra on the platform of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) in 2010.

However, the 2023 elections will be determined by more than just the politicians and their current party allegiances. Insecurity remains a prevalent issue across the country, with every geopolitical zone being affected by one insecurity issue. From bandits, kidnappers and terrorists in the north to secessionists, state-sponsored criminal activities by party thugs and cultists in the south – and recurrent clashes precipitated by the “resource curse” across the Niger Delta – no part of the country is immune from what appears to be a deepening descent into instability in the country. The economy has suffered from two recessions since 2015, due mainly to the spill-over effects of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the Russian-Ukraine war on oil prices and the agricultural sector. Defenders of the current administration will no doubt point to the administration’s successes and claim better socio-economic indices of development under their watch than under previous governments. But what is clear, and perhaps above this partisan divide, is that the country is not where most citizens expect, and the challenge will be the next set of leaders of federal and state executive branches of government and legislatures the next set of political leaders to find a way to keep the country together and united.

1. The Cable Nigeria: <https://www.thecable.ng/full-list-how-pdp-alumni-became-landlords-in-apc>

2. African Arguments: <https://africanarguments.org/2022/08/old-faces-new-hopes-meet-the-candidates-in-nigerias-2023-elections/>



The capacity and ability of the candidates put up for federal and state elections to public political offices, including the character issue, will be sorely tested as a major issue in the run-up to and after the next elections. A key part of the coming elections is how to handle the sensitive religious and cultural fault lines that threaten to cause a seismic shift and political realignment in the country. After two terms of a northern Muslim in Muhammadu Buhari, many politicians led agitations for the presidency to return to the south in accordance with an unwritten convention on alternating the post. Yet, these concerns were quashed by the individual ambitions of two of the country's more established and financially well-endowed politicians: Atiku Abubakar, a former vice-president, was able to secure the presidential nomination of the PDP, despite also being a northern Muslim like the incumbent president; and Bola Tinubu, a former governor of and senator from Lagos state, emerged as the APC nominee despite being a Muslim like the incumbent president. In order to follow up with expected political calculations in the Muslim-dominated north, Tinubu selected a Muslim running mate ensuring a ticket incongruous with the sensitive religious climate in the country.

In addition to the aforementioned religious and cultural factors, the 2023 elections will likely be the first to feel the significant impact of a third major increase in the country's registered voter population. Whereas in previous elections increase in the registered voter population did not typically translate into a higher voter turnout, as was the case in 2019. In fact, the per centage of voter turn-out dropped with every successive election since the 2003 electoral cycle. Despite this trend, there is cause for optimism that it will be reversed in the 2023 elections. This is because significant campaigns have been launched to encourage younger voters to register and get their permanent voter card (PVC) in order to become more active stakeholders in the electoral process. Another reason is increased faith in the electoral process following the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation Software (BVAS) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Results Viewing Portal (IREV). The development led to an increase in the number of youths registered to vote – the electoral body estimates 40% of newly registered voters are students³ – making it the strata with the highest number of potential voters.

In looking at the 2023 elections, it is important to look at critical trends we can identify from past elections and assess their salience, alongside other salient factors, in affecting and influencing the outcomes of the 2023 elections.

3. The Cable Nigeria: <https://www.thecable.ng/40-percent-of-newly-registered-voters-are-students-says-inec>



STATE OF PLAY

The deepening of Nigeria's democracy is more evident when reviewing the data and trends of presidential elections. While the categorisation of these trends is likely to change in the aftermath of the 2023 elections, it is worth looking at established patterns across previous elections.

ZONAL VOTING CONSIDERATIONS

GeoPolitical Zone		States	Registered Voters (2023)	Registered Voters (2019)	% increase
NORTH	North Central	6 (+ FCT)	15,363,731	13,366,070	13.00
	North East	6	12,542,429	11,289,293	9.99
	North West	7	22,255,562	20,158,100	9.42
SOUTH	South East	5	10,907,606	10,057,130	7.80
	South West	6	17,958,966	16,292,212	9.28
	South South	6	14,440,714	12,841,279	11.08
National		36 (+FCT)	93,469,008	84,004,084	10.13
			9,464,924 (reg. voter increase from 2019)		

Fig 1- INEC Registration Figures as at October 2022

The data above⁴ reflects information released by INEC at the conclusion of the continuous voter registration (CVR) exercise. Despite that, the data provides some clues concerning the state of play in the forthcoming elections.

The voting power of the north has been well defined – it has 19 of the country's 36 states, and has an estimated 51 million of the 96 million registered voters in the country. But, and especially when unpacked at zonal level, there is more nuanced information in play. For example, the voting weight often ascribed to the entire monolithic north can be traced to the size and voting power in the North West. In 2019, that zone provided an estimated six million more votes than the next largest zone, South West. For context, the margin between the top two candidates in that election was roughly three million votes. The South West and South South had a strong number of registered voters, whilst the sit-at-home declaration declared by IPOB, that affected voter registration⁵, can be cited as a major reason why the

4. Infomedia NG: <https://infomediang.com/geopolitical-zone-with-highest-voting-strength-nigeria/>

5. Vanguard Nigeria: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/ipobs-initial-order-disfranchised-us/>



South East did not post significantly higher numbers.

Ahead of 2023, an interesting number to track is the number of newly registered voters. This biggest ‘mover’, in this regard, is the North Central zone, which may lead to it playing a more influential role in the outcome. Likewise, the margin of registered voters between the North East and South East, two zones with well-documented security challenges, has reduced. Both posted the lowest number of newly registered voters, but there appears to be a more concerted effort to buck the trend in the South East zone, perhaps due to the presence of a strong candidate from the zone on the presidential ballot.

SOUTH EAST AND SOUTH SOUTH: THE LAST STAND OF THE PDP

Despite the smaller population size of these zones, they have reliably backed the PDP in each of the last five presidential elections. All five states in the South East and six states in the South South have backed PDP presidential aspirants.

		1999	2003	2011	2015	2019
South East	Abia	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South South	Akwa Ibom	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South East	Anambra	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South South	Bayelsa	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South South	Cross River	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South East	Delta	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South East	Ebonyi	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South South	Edo	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South East	Enugu	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
-	FCT	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South East	Imo	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
North Central	Plateau	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
South South	Rivers	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP
North East	Taraba	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP

Fig 2- States that have consistently voted the PDP presidential nominee



This statistic might support agitations from some governors, notably Nyesom Wike of Rivers state, for improved equity in the PDP's internal governance structure. Despite consistently supporting PDP candidates, both zones have only produced one successful part of the PDP presidential ticket – Goodluck Jonathan (Bayelsa), as vice-president from 2007 to 2010, and then president from 2010 to 2015. The only other representatives from the zone, on any of the PDP's presidential tickets since 1999 were vice-presidential nominees; Peter Obi (Anambra) in 2019 and Ifeanyi Okowa (Delta) in 2023.

This is why Obi's subsequent move to the Labour Party (LP) and his presidential campaign is expected to play a spoiler role in the zones due to the level of support he might receive. Perhaps tellingly, the PDP nominated Delta State Governor Ifeanyi Okowa as Atiku's running mate perhaps in an effort to limit Obi's ability to bank on and secure the kinship support. Further complicating the zones for the PDP is that fact that the governors of Ebonyi⁶ and Cross River⁷ have defected to the ruling APC, and might be in a strong position to influence the performance of the party in their respective states.

THE BUHARI WALL

The long period of the PDP's control of federal power at Aso Rock (1999 – 2015) could easily create the illusion that the PDP has always been able to win elections in all states. Yet, three states have consistently never voted for the PDP nominee for president – Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. While Sokoto State (Wammako in 2007, and Tambuwal after defecting from the APC ahead of the 2019 elections), and Zamfara State (Shinkafi in 2007 and Matawalle, who benefited from APC members being disqualified from the 2019 elections over contentious party primaries⁸) have each elected two PDP Governors since 1999, Yobe State has remained consistent in rejecting PDP candidates at both presidential and governorship elections.

6. Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/426591-why-i-dumped-pdp-for-apc-umahi.html>

7. Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/462760-cross-river-governor-ben-ayade-dumps-pdp-joins-apc.html>

8. Vanguard Nigeria: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/10/court-nullifies-apc-primary-election-in-yobe/>



		1999	2003	2011	2015	2019
North East	Bauchi	PDP	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North East	Gombe	PDP	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North West	Jigawa	PDP	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North West	Kano	PDP	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North West	Katsina	PDP	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North West	Sokoto	AD	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North East	Yobe	AD	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC
North West	Zamfara	AD	ANPP	CPC	APC	APC

Fig 3- States that have backed Muhammadu Buhari since he started contesting in 2003

The other five states in Figure 3 can really be termed the pillars of the Buhari movement. Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano and his home state of Katsina voted for Obasanjo in 1999 but have backed Buhari since his first bid in 2003. This is where there might be some concern for the APC as Buhari’s personal popularity has not always translated down the ballot. Despite winning the presidential vote in these states, all five have returned a PDP governor at some point during this period. Buhari’s eventual victory in 2015 was the first election where Katsina returned an APC governor, no doubt boosted by the momentum of his candidacy. It is why an interesting point to consider will be the current state of play in these five states. The governors of Jigawa, Kano and Katsina are term-limited with tight races expected in all. The incumbent in Gombe might be expected to retain the state for the APC, but the incumbent in Bauchi is for the PDP and will fancy his chances especially given his party’s presidential nominee is from the zone.

FROM RED TO BLUE: THE FLIPPED STATES

A lot has been mentioned about the Buhari bounce of 2015, but a key space to study is the role that the party’s coalition made in flipping some states in that election. Of the 11 states in this category, Buhari flipped two of them in 2011 – Kaduna and Niger – while Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) won Osun. The remaining eight are key as these represent the states that the APC flipped between 2011 and 2015.



		1999	2003	2011	2015	2019
North East	Borno	PDP	ANPP	PDP	APC	APC
South West	Ekiti	AD	PDP	PDP	PDP	APC
North Central	Nasarawa	PDP	PDP	PDP	PDP	APC
North West	Kaduna	PDP	PDP	CPC	APC	APC
North West	Kebbi	PDP	ANPP	PDP	APC	APC
North Central	Kogi	PDP	PDP	PDP	APC	APC
North Central	Kwara	PDP	PDP	PDP	APC	APC
South West	Lagos	AD	PDP	PDP	APC	APC
North Central	Niger	PDP	PDP	CPC	APC	APC
South West	Ogun	AD	PDP	PDP	APC	APC
South West	Osun	AD	PDP	ACN	APC	APC

Fig 4- States that have moved to backing Buhari over the course of this campaigns

During his victorious bid in 2011, Jonathan won the votes in Benue, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo and Oyo states. But Buhari beat him in these states during their rematch in 2015, and they were key in his eventual victory. Kwara, Ogun and Oyo both had incumbent governors seeking re-election, albeit Abdulfattah Ahmed of Kwara having moved from the PDP. Benue and Kebbi represent states where strong governorship candidates rode on Buhari's momentum to flip the state, a trend that Kogi and Ondo repeated in 2016 during the off-cycle elections. Lagos, the stronghold of the predecessor ACN, retained the governorship for the APC, while Osun had an incumbent governor able to deliver.

Ahead of the 2023 elections, most of these states have been firmly entrenched in the APC's column. The party will have incumbents seeking re-election in Borno, Nasarawa, Lagos and Ogun. In Nasarawa, as well as in Ekiti – where the party retained the governorship during an off-cycle election in 2022 – the party will be able to rely on a strong incumbent [Nasarawa] and a newly elected governor [Ekiti] to stave off losing states they only regain in 2019. Kogi might be competitive, as parties jostle to prepare the groundwork for an election in November to succeed a term-limited governor, while Kwara has seen some in-fighting⁹ within the APC between the governor and a minister from the state.

However, the brightest chance for the PDP to flip a state back towards its column is in Osun, a state that elected a PDP governor during the 2022 off-cycle governorship election in 2022. Regaining control of the state, after 12 years of successive APC

9. The Guardian Nigeria: <https://guardian.ng/politics/division-in-o-to-ge-camp-as-abdulrazak-seeks-renewal-of-mandate-governor/>



governors, will provide some momentum for the PDP in the South West, and also offer the party the best chance to regain a state it last won in 2003.

RETURN TO RED?

		1999	2003	2011	2015	2019
North East	Adamawa	PDP	PDP	CPC	APC	PDP
North Central	Benue	PDP	PDP	PDP	APC	PDP
South West	Ondo	AD	PDP	PDP	APC	PDP
South West	Oyo	AD	PDP	CPC	APC	PDP

Fig 5- States that moved from backing Buhari to Atiku in the 2019 campaigns

The last four states – see Figure 5 – are those that Buhari carried in 2015, but lost in 2019. The reason why this fact is important is because he lost them to Atiku, who is still the PDP flagbearer. The PDP subsequently won the governorships in Adamawa and Oyo, while retaining Benue, following Samuel Ortom’s return to the party ahead of the 2019 elections. These four states are by no means guarantees for the PDP this time round – Tinubu and the APC are expected to be quite strong in the South West and a strong governorship candidate for the APC could play a role in galvanising votes against Atiku. Yet, these four states should represent the anchor of the PDP’s bid to regain power in 2023, and for that reason it should be worrying that two of its three governors on this list belong to the ‘Integrity Group’¹⁰, made up of the five governors of Abia, Benue, Enugu, Oyo and Rivers, that are currently at odds with the party.

10. The Cable: <https://www.thecable.ng/pdp-g5-governors-form-integrity-group-insist-on-ayus-removal>



WHAT WILL SHAPE THE 2023 ELECTIONS?

One of the serious issues currently threatening the unity and security of the country is the division of the country along ethno-religious fault lines. Despite over six decades of existence, the divisive narrative and rhetoric that marked election campaigns in the First Republic (1960 – 1966), when the parties were largely along regional lines, still exist today. Sentiments are largely fuelled by stereotypes and reductionist fears about being dominated by other ethnic groups around the country. Identity politics, anchored on mutual distrust and fear of domination among the country's majority and minority ethnic groups remains a key factor in shaping how politicians are able to appeal to voters across the country.

Nigeria's history has lent itself to a very sensitive political structure. The principle of 'federal character' is to ensure that all groups are represented and feel accommodated in the country. This often comes at odds with the argument for meritocracy, where proponents argue that the best hands should be selected even if they are from a single part of the country. But the challenge becomes working to ensure that no part of the country feels marginalised regardless of who governs. The Buhari administration's failure to vigorously address and reverse several policy decisions that give the appearance of partiality to a particular ethnic group has fuelled the perception and encouraged the belief that his government only works for those who are represented along its corridors. This has led many Nigerians to assume that the likelihood of controlling and gaining access to state power at the federal levels in the country is tied to ensuring that one of their own is in a position to manage and disburse state patronage under his administration. This has manifested itself in three main areas – ethnicity, religion and questions about whether it is time for a new generation of political leaders.



ETHNICITY

In the run-up to the 2023 election primaries, governors from the south across party lines issued statements demanding that the presidential nominee alternate to the region, other than that from which the current president comes, on a North/South geographical axis. The demand naturally led to contrary opinion from northern political leaders. During the national conventions for the two major parties, the APC and PDP, in 2021, both parties selected their party chairmen from the north. Abdullahi Adamu, former governor of Nasarawa State, was selected the APC chairman; and Iyorchia Ayu, former senate president during the truncated Third Republic (1993), emerged as the PDP chairman. The assumption was that the chairman and the presidential nominee of each of the two parties [APC and PDP] would not come from the same geographical [North v South] zone. Despite this, both parties opened their conventions to candidates from across the country, likely in deference to the need to appeal to the northern bloc vote. Atiku's emergence at the PDP primary has been largely attributed to not only to the late withdrawal from the party presidential primaries by Sokoto State Governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal¹¹, but also his subsequent endorsement of the candidacy of a fellow northerner, Atiku Abubakar. This action was viewed by some commentators as a case of a northerner propping up another northerner. Likewise, it took the active intervention of members of the national working group and governors of the APC to avoid the party's national chairman from foisting Ibrahim Lawan, the current senate president from Yobe, as the party's 'consensus candidate'¹². The argument for Lawan also involved his status as a frontline politician from the North East, a zone, like the South East, that has not produced a president. However, a late surge by northern governors of the APC, in favour of the presidency returning to the south¹³, led to the eventual victory of Tinubu at the primaries and his emergence as the party's presidential candidate.

The sentiment of a rotational allocation among the major ethnic groups received a prominent endorsement by Tinubu ahead of the APC presidential nominating convention. In a now famous video¹⁴, Tinubu can be heard telling Yoruba leaders in Ogun 'E mi lo kan', a Yoruba term meaning 'It is my turn'. This was in reference to his belief that the presidency deserved to return to the south following eight years of a northern president, and that the ACN, of which he was the leader, with its stronghold in the South West was a central

11. Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/533215-pdp-convention-tambuwal-withdraws-from-race-endorses-atiku.html>

12. Vanguard: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/breaking-apc-convention-adamu-announces-lawan-as-consensus-candidate-at-nwc-meeting/>

13. Daily Trust: <https://dailytrust.com/breaking-northern-govs-reject-lawan-as-consensus-candidate-insists-power-must-shift-to-south/>

14. Trust TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB9HLCIB71M>



player in the coalition of parties that formed the APC and ensured its victory at the 2015 presidential elections. Tinubu's sentiment was also anchored on his belief that his support for northern candidates in the past warranted their support this time around. As chieftain of the defunct Action Congress (AC), he supported Atiku Abubakar's campaign in 2007, while as leader of the ACN, he was instrumental in Nuhu Ribadu's campaign for president in 2011. He was also pivotal in the formation of the APC, and in backing Buhari's bids in 2015 and 2019.

ZONE		NAME	TERM LENGTH	GOVERNMENT TYPE
North-Central	17.7 years	Yakubu Gowon	Aug 1966 - Jul 1975	Military
North-Central		Ibrahim Babangida	Aug 1985 - Aug 1993	Military
North-Central		Abdulsalam Abubakar	Jun 1998 - May 1999	Military
North West	22.2 years	Murtala Muhammad	Jul 1975 - Feb 1976	Military
North West		Shehu Shagari	Oct 1979 - Dec 1983	Civilian
North West		Muhammadu Buhari	Dec 1983 - Aug 1985	Military
North West		Sani Abacha	Nov 1993 - Jun 1998	Military
North West		Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	May 2007 - May 2010	Civilian
North West		Muhammadu Buhari	May 2015 - May 2023 (est)	Civilian
South East*	5.6 years	Nnamdi Azikiwe	Oct 1963 - Jan 1966	Civilian (President)
South East		J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi	Jan 1966 - Jul 1966	Military
South South	5.1 years	Goodluck Jonathan	May 2010 - May 2015	Civilian
South West	12 years	Olusegun Obasanjo	Feb 1976 - Oct 1979	Military
South West		Ernest Shonekan	Aug 1993 - Nov 1993	Civilian
South West		Olusegun Obasanjo	May 1999 - May 2007	Civilian
North East*	5.5 years	Tafawa Balewa	Oct 1960 - Jul 1966	Civilian (Prime Minister)

*Azikiwe was a ceremonial Head of State, while Balewa, as Prime Minister, was Head of Government

Fig 6- List of Nigerian Heads of State, their geo-political zones and their length

The outcome of the 2023 party primaries for presidential nominations, shows that, of the three front-runners, each of the major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba), has a presidential candidate. This presents a repeat of the contentious 1979 elections. But the more fractious nature of Nigeria's politics today means that some candidates are being accused of furthering sectional interests. Atiku has been accused of pushing a 'northernisation' agenda¹⁶, Obi has been tied to the secessionist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)¹⁷ and Tinubu's claims of it being his turn has led to accusations of a sense of entitlement and unfairness of the Yoruba taking another southern turn to be president.

15. Panter-Brick, K. (1979). Nigeria: The 1979 Elections. *Africa Spectrum*, 14(3), 317-335. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40173962>

16. This Day: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/10/28/the-northernisation-of-2023/>

17. Punch Nigeria: <https://punchng.com/ipob-promoters-kanu-backers-behind-peter-obi-miyetti-allah-secretary/>



Campaigns are being waged along these ethno-geographical identity lines, with the expectation that certain groups will support certain candidates regardless of issues-based considerations. An example is the fallout following the announcement in September 2022 that Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-political group, had decided to endorse Peter Obi¹⁸. In November 2022, a former leader of the group, Pa Reuben Fazoranti, led a faction of Afenifere to announce the endorsement of the candidacy Bola Tinubu for the presidential elections by their faction¹⁹. A concerning development was a sentence attributed to former presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae, at the meeting where he mentioned that “we will be here when you bring the trophy home by the grace of God”.²⁰ Such sentiments, using the metaphor of a ‘trophy to be won’, gives the impression that the presidency is a contest among teams from different ethnic groups. Another example of ethnicity playing a major role were the Arewa House Meetings, organised by several major northern groups, to speak with the frontline candidates for the presidency. During his session, PDP nominee Atiku Abubakar’s statement of northerners needing someone from the north to be president²¹ was seen as an attempt to pander exclusively to the group. Regardless of his campaign’s later attempts to clarify his position as seeking a more ‘pan-Nigerian’²² leader, identity will no doubt play a major role in determining how the north decides to vote.

RELIGION

Religion is another important contentious issue in the 2023 elections, and has played a part in a lot of permutations concerning candidate selection. Of the four ‘frontrunners’, three are Muslim – two from the north (Abubakar Atiku and Musa Kwankwaso) and one from the south (Bola Ahmed Tinubu)– while one is a Christian (Peter Obi). After two terms of a Muslim northerner, there have been concerns about the potential for setting a precedence if this is not reversed. It is why some members of the PDP sought to establish zoning principles, which were subsequently abandoned²³ to allow for the emergence of Atiku Abubakar. Likewise, despite being from the south, Tinubu’s religion played a part in the debates surrounding his running mate and the eventual furore²⁴ when he chose Kashim Shettima, a fellow Muslim, from the north. The choice of Shettima, though strong, was seen by many Christians, especially in the North as against the “convention” of a joint Muslim/Christian ticket in the country’s history of presidential elections.

18. This Day: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/09/27/adebanjo-why-afenifere-is-supporting-peter-obis-presidential-bid/>

19. Daily Trust: <https://dailytrust.com/tinubu-fasorantis-endorsement-brew-crisis-in-afenifere/>

20. Daily Post Nigeria: <https://dailypost.ng/2022/10/31/fix-economy-security-when-you-become-president-olu-falae-tells-tinubu/>

21. Channels TV: <https://www.channelstv.com/2022/10/16/2023-northerners-need-someone-from-north-not-igbo-or-yoruba-atiku/>

22. BusinessDay: <https://businessday.ng/news/article/why-north-needs-a-pan-nigerian-leader-atiku/>

23. Daily Trust: <https://dailytrust.com/breaking-pdp-abandons-zoning-throws-presidential-ticket-open-2>

24. Vanguard: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/muslim-muslim/>



Peter Obi has so far been able to leverage on this consideration – clearly emerging as the ‘most feasible’ candidate able to fulfil the unwritten expectation of alternating the presidency between region and religion.

Growing worries about religious imposition are evident. The Buhari administration has been accused of being nepotistic and concentrating several key administrative positions in the hands of citizens from the northern part²⁵ of the country. There are fears this will continue if another Muslim is elected. Prominent Christian politicians²⁶, and clerics²⁷, have come out to voice concern for this situation and have since started using religious gatherings to encourage supporters to register and vote. In some cases, there have been open endorsement anchored on the fears of reprisal policies if a person of the opposite religion is elected. This has heightened considerations in several states, where down-ballot nominations have been shaped by these dimensions. There are examples of Muslims in Taraba and Plateau seeking better standing within the state and the chance of assuming the governorship. Likewise, there are prevalent concerns at a Muslim-Muslim governorship ticket in Kaduna, where the incumbent ruling party jettisoned a prior religion-balanced arrangement in 2019.²⁸

Religion has always been a major filter in the Fourth Republic – from the argument over the introduction of Sharia law and instances where succession has been punctuated with the desire for a ‘like-for-like’ replacement. The latter took place in 1999 when Adamawa state Governor-elect Atiku was elevated to the vice-presidency and his Christian running mate, Boni Haruna, assumed the governorship despite being challenged by many in the state. More prominently, when Goodluck Jonathan assumed the presidency in 2010 after the death of Umaru Musa Yar’Adua, there were calls for his resignation²⁹ to ensure a Muslim northerner finished ‘the term of the North’. Another example followed Jonathan’s elevation, when then Kaduna State Governor, Namadi Sambo, was picked as vice-president. Kaduna was the former political capital of Northern Nigeria, but has since been divided between a dominant Muslim population in its north of the state, and a minority Christian population in the south of the state. This has led to ethnic and religious division, which has often been violent in nature. Sambo’s elevation to the vice-presidency meant that his deputy, Patrick Yakowa, became governor. Yakowa was the first Christian governor in the state and his death, as well as the response to it by some influential Muslim clerics³⁰ in the state, was a reminder of the impact that religion

25. Vanguard: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/05/new-coas-were-not-surprised-by-buharis-nepotism-anymore-huriwa/>

26. Vanguard: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/10/dogara-babachir-aggrrieved-apc-christian-leaders-ditch-muslim-muslim-to-agree-on-consensus-candidate/>

27. Daily Post: <https://dailypost.ng/2022/10/05/tinubu-shettima-ticket-i-wont-vote-muslim-muslim-in-2023-archbishop-onaiyekan/>

28. Punch Nigeria: <https://punchng.com/2019-el-rufai-picks-fellow-muslim-hadiza-balarabe-as-running-mate/>

29. Sahara Reporters: <https://saharareporters.com/2010/10/05/pushing-nigeria-brink-northern-political-leaders-ask-jonathan-resign>

30. Daily Post: <https://dailypost.ng/2013/01/18/yakowa-and-azazi-died-while-planning-evil-against-muslims-sheik-gumi/>



can have in a sensitive area like politics³¹. The APC's replication of this approach for its presidential ticket has also generated concern about Christian populations, with two prominent northern Christian members of the party defecting to other parties as a result.^{32 33}

A NEW GENERATION

Atiku (Vice-President), Tinubu and Kwankwaso (governors) were all elected office-holders in 1999 when the Fourth Republic started. Beyond that, both Atiku, Tinubu and Kwankwaso were active participants in the Third Republic and interestingly members of the same Social Democratic Party (SDP) – where Atiku sought the presidential nomination, Tinubu was an elected Senator and Kwankwaso was Deputy Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives. This longevity in politics is not always seen as a positive. In fact, Peter Obi, whose first term as Anambra state governor began in 2004, has gained momentum and support for being relatively isolated from the more established politicians of this cycle, particularly among younger voters.

The 2023 elections will be an important test of the enduring legacy of the October 2020 #ENDSARS protests and the unfavourable Twitter ban. During that month, many young Nigerians spoke out and marched across the country and around the world to protest the brutal tendencies and human rights abuses and violations of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force. It was a movement that reflected growing frustration with state impunity and even though the brutal repression by the state eventually quelled the protest, some believe it has had galvanized the youth to mobilize themselves for electoral political action never seen before in Nigeria's political history. It has fuelled some expectation that the Peter Obi, having received the endorsement of some key figures during the protests³⁴, might be the beneficiary of any boost in youth voter turnout.

THE BUHARI COALITION

In terms of voting patterns, the most important factor in the coming elections is the question of where the 'Buhari coalition' of around 12 million predominantly northern votes he has been able to command since 2011 will swing, given that he will not be on the ballot in 2023. Even during the 2003 polls, Buhari was able

31. Daily Trust: <https://dailytrust.com/how-gov-yakowas-death-reignites-kadunas-divisive-politics/>

32. Punch: <https://punchng.com/breaking-dogara-dumps-apc-for-pdp/>

33. Punch: <https://punchng.com/i-still-support-peter-obi-babachir-lawal/>

34. The Africa Report: <https://www.theafricareport.com/222267/nigeria-how-endsars-figures-are-transforming-into-an-obedient-army/>

35. This Day: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/07/06/few-dead-two-injured-as-bandits-attack-buharis-convoy-en-route-daura/>



to garner significant support from northern voters; flipping several states that Obasanjo carried in 1999, into states that have reliably voted for him since as referenced earlier. He subsequently built on this and his ability to reliably count on most states in the North East and northwest was a key factor in his 2015 and 2019 election victories. However, his successful candidacy is the starkest reminder of a growing domination of politics over personality. Buhari's personal appeal, due to a generally favourable perception of his austere disposition and incorruptible reputation as a military head of state between January 1985 and August 1985, is a toga that he cannot willingly drape over any other candidate. Furthermore, no other politician in his party has been able to claim the same traits, which means a new assemblage will be key to winning in 2023.

The Buhari coalition is up for grabs for several reasons. Firstly, the president's growing unpopularity has become more prominent in the North. There are several recorded incidents of his motorcade being attacked, especially in his hometown of Daura in Katsina, in response to increased banditry in the region. This would point to some discontent at policies of his administration. Secondly, Buhari's austere and largely frugal reputation is at odds with some of the frontrunners of the race – Atiku, Obi and Tinubu – who are relatively wealthy, and have maintained their immensely wealthy status since leaving elective public political offices. Thirdly, his strongholds in the northwest and North East will be significantly challenged by the other party candidates in the race. APC's vice-presidential nominee, Kashim Shettima, is a former governor from Borno in the North East, but the PDP's presidential nominee Atiku Abubakar is also from the North East and would expect to secure a significant vote share in the zone. The agitations of the South East for the presidency are well-known, but the North East is the only other zone that has not produced a president. A strong chance for 'one of their own' might be a significant pull for members of that zone. Similarly, the northwest is featured on other frontrunner platforms. Rabiu Kwankwaso, the presidential nominee of the NNPP and Datti Baba-Ahmed, the vice presidential candidate of the Labour Party, are both from the zone. Baba-Ahmed, who was a senator from Kaduna State in the North West might attract some sympathy in his state, but Kwankwaso attracts a significant following in Kano, as well as in Jigawa and Kaduna States in the zone, and among the youth. Without Buhari on the ticket, Kwankwaso might be able to count on making inroads in the North West and thereby dilute the votes of the APC in the zone.



INCREASED SPLIT BALLOTING

Despite regular reporting implying that control of a state often means that this from ‘top to bottom’, four of the six zones have a regular penchant for splitting their votes between presidential and governorship candidates. In 1999, of the 28 states that Obasanjo carried, six of them voted in governors from the defunct All People’s Party (APP) – Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kebbi, Kogi and Kwara. In 2003, Buhari was able to turn Bauchi and Katsina from the Obasanjo map, despite the incumbent governors in those states getting re-elected. The lack of detailed results from the controversial 2007 elections does not give us room to critically assess it. But the 2011 elections saw Buhari win Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Niger, Kano and Katsina despite the presence of sitting PDP governors there.

The likelihood of this continuing is high for several reasons. Firstly, the unfortunate nature of Nigeria’s ethno-religious politics means that candidates in down-ballot races are likely to identify closely with other party presidential candidates if they are more relatable to their voters, even to the detriment of their own party’s flagbearer. This is an acknowledgment of the important role that ethnicity and religion play in Nigerian politics. Secondly, the longevity of the current democratic era since 1999 means that there is a high likelihood for political realignment among an emerging crop of leaders. This means that hitherto personal fiefdoms are now less tied to a single person and more open. As a result, these different actors are likely to start being more prominent in establishing their influence at state level – an example being the recent Osun state elections, where the opposition of the former governor, Rauf Aregbesola, to the re-election bid of an incumbent Governor from his party APC was cited as a reason for his party’s governor losing re-election.³⁶ Thirdly, the hotly contested primaries in the two major parties witnessed a number of strong candidates who sought the tickets of other, smaller, parties to enhance their chance of victory. This could, in theory, eat into the strongholds or expected votes of certain parties. During the 2022 off-cycle Ekiti governorship elections, former Governor Segun Oni left the PDP and ran as the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate and emerged second – behind the victorious APC nominee but significantly ahead of the eventual PDP candidate. Examples in the forthcoming 2023 elections include John James Akpan Udo-Edehe, a former minister in a PDP government and former acting APC National Secretary, who has emerged as the

36. Guardian Nigeria: <https://guardian.ng/news/aregbesola-oyetolas-feud-aided-my-victory-says-adeleke/>



Akwa Ibom State governorship candidate of the NNPP. Another is Magnus Abe, a former PDP and APC senator, who is the nominee of the SDP for Rivers state governor. Other candidates from the LP for governor, such as the nominees of Abia (Alex Otti - formerly APC), Lagos (Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour – formerly PDP) and Benue (Herman Hembe – formerly APC) are also expected to perform strongly in these elections and lead to potentially narrow pathways to victory for the two major parties.

Ultimately, the biggest beneficiary of split ballots in the past has been Buhari, who was able to win states despite opposition party governors winning. A major example is that provided by seven of the eight states that Buhari carried in 2011, which despite having sitting PDP governors, ended up electing APC governors in 2015. The outlier, Gombe, would do so in 2019, albeit with Adamawa going back to the PDP. The question, ahead of 2023, is if any of the frontline candidates will be strong enough to either outperform their governorship candidates in opposition states, or provide enough momentum to help their candidates flip the states entirely.

VOTER TRADING

The possibility of an increase in cases of voter trading is significant. Many Nigerians are struggling with a stalled economy and record high inflation leaving them in a position to trade their vote for economic incentives provided by politicians or political parties. In addition to significant inflation, many Nigerians have suffered a loss of income due to economic and environmental factors. In 2022, heavy flooding had a substantial impact across Nigeria, and affected 27 of the country's 36 states. It resulted in the destruction of 200,000 homes and displacement of 1.3 million people³⁷. The flooding affected acres of farmland, leaving farmers without an income for this growing season.

The flooding aside, other parts of the country are struggling with the impact of economic policies, border closures and recessions. The combination of economic and environmental setbacks has resulted in a heightened need for additional income, creating a situation for politicians or political parties to leverage their access to funds to trade money for votes. While this is not a new occurrence in Nigerian politics, it is likely that the country's current socioeconomic conditions will make this even more amplified. This trend has already played a role in off-cycle governorship elections, with 41 cases recorded in six local government areas during

37. WEFForum: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/10/nigeria-flood-rain-climate>



the June 2022 Ekiti state Governorship Elections³⁸.

Political candidates and parties may seek to secure (re)election by taking advantage of the economic hardships being experienced by the Nigerian people. Additionally, non-affiliated groups may take advantage of this reality by engaging in voter trading on behalf of their preferred party. But the recent policy of the Central Bank to change the design of the national currency³⁹ and impose limits on cash withdrawal⁴⁰ may have some impacts here. The ability to reduce such incidents will make or mar the credibility of the conduct, and outcome, of the elections.

INFORMATION DISORDER

Instances of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation have always existed in the Nigerian electoral space, but are expected to impact the 2023 elections at a higher rate than in previous years. The difference between the three often stems from intentionality and the degree of falsehood. Misinformation is when falsehood is unintentionally spread, disinformation is when falsehood is intentionally spread within a concerted campaign to do harm to the intended target, while malinformation is when facts are exaggerated and used for ulterior motives. Collectively known as examples of ‘Information Disorder’, but also more popularly known as ‘Fake News’, it has assumed a more influential role in Nigeria’s political landscape. This has often been tied to increased ‘democratisation’ in the information space, largely due to increased access to internet access and the ease at which online platforms and social media accounts can be created to spread such campaigns.

Different reports peg Nigeria’s internet and mobile penetration rates at different levels – a 2021 report⁴¹ estimated that 50% of the country’s population uses the internet, with 90% having access to mobile phones. Using an estimated population of 208.8 million, the projection was that 104.4 million Nigerians were internet users and that the number of internet users increased by 19 million (22%) between 2020 and 2021 alone. Interestingly, it also estimates that only 15.8% of Nigerians are on social media – an estimated 33 million people – albeit acknowledging that this number had increased by six million users (22%) between 2020 and 2021. According to a 2022 report⁴² by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), only 12.1% of the country has meaningful internet connectivity, with this being further broken down to 6.6% in the rural population and 16.4% in the urban population.

38. Vanguard Nigeria: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/just-in-ekiti-election-41-vote-buying-cases-recorded-in-six-lgas-cdd/>

39. The Cable Nigeria: <https://www.thecable.ng/naira-redesign-cbn-launches-countdown-clock-on-its-website>

40. Vanguard Nigeria: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/12/cbn-raises-cash-withdrawal-limits/>

41. Digital 2021 Nigeria Report: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-nigeria>

42. Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) 2022 report: https://a4ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Nigeria-Case-Study_FINAL.pdf



The above data represents the population subset that can be affected by active online misinformation and disinformation campaigns. However, such campaigns are also very active offline. In a report⁴³ titled ‘Nigeria’s Fake News Ecosystem: An Overview’, Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development, Idayat Hassan, touches on the history of the phenomena in Nigeria, even tracing the popular moniker ‘Okokon Dems’ given to fake news peddlers in the South east. The report also establishes how offline and online news is becoming even more interwoven, and resulting in online information disorder transitioning into offline impact.

Within the context of the elections, there is also the concern about which institutions are specifically targeted. The election management body, INEC, as well as different political parties, security agencies and even civil society organisations, will be increasingly targeted by groups seeking to delegitimise the elections and the outcome. For example, a fake press statement claiming that INEC was investigating the APC nominee, Bola Tinubu, was widely circulated and required active fact-checking and disclaimers⁴⁴ to address. The fake statement utilised a forged version of the INEC spokesperson’s signature and was first shared on social media, before major media outlets⁴⁵ picked up the news due to poor fact-checking and the rush to break news first. Another example came in the June 2022 Ekiti Governorship election, when reports claimed that a prominent governorship candidate had withdrawn and endorsed another candidate on the eve of the polls⁴⁶.

Leading up to the election, it is almost expected that there will be targeted campaigns against opposition political candidates and parties. Yet, this is also likely to affect important election information, such as reports concerning the voting process, potential postponements, collection of voter cards and security information. Such accounts are often followed when there is a lot of social media engagement, which can often stem from bot accounts programmed to do so. This technology is being massively utilised in the coming elections, with the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) claiming that 80% of the social media followers of frontline candidates Atiku, Tinubu and Obi are actually bots⁴⁷. Such accounts can be weaponised to repost and retweet information that is favourable to their candidate, or the ulterior motives of their sponsors, and criticise and attack news that is not favourable – whether it is factual or not. A potential problem could arise when election results are released, if some accounts decide to share numbers that are favourable to their candidate and use the claim of being rigged out to spur

43. Africa Portal (for CDD): <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/nigerias-fake-news-ecosystem-overview/>

44. Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/565041-2023-inec-denies-investigating-tinubu-says-circulated-statement-fake.html>

45. The Nation: <https://thenationonlineng.net/arise-tv-apologises-to-tinubu-over-fake-report/>

46. FactCheck Hub: <https://factcheckhub.com/false-claim-circulates-that-segun-oni-withdrew-from-ekiti-governorship-poll/>

47. Blueprint News: <https://www.blueprint.ng/2023-80-of-tinubu-obi-atikus-social-media-followers-robots-cjid/>



post-election violence and clashes. It is why a major factor of the election will be the ability of media institutions, government agencies, political parties and civil society organisations to devote time and resources to ensure that information is properly fact-checked before statements are released, or news is even responded to.

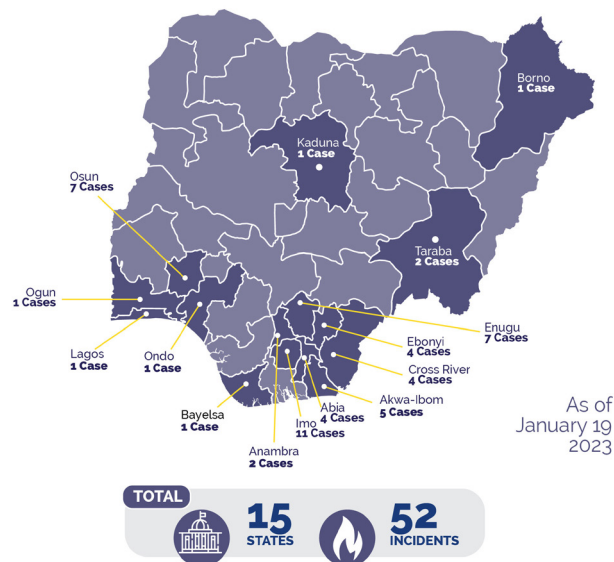
CAPACITY OF THE ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODY

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has organised the elections that ushered in Nigeria's fourth republic and every other federal and state elections since 1999. But issues that have been raised regarding INEC's performance over the last two decades include the extent of the body's independence, the credibility of declared election results, and irregularities in the registration process. These issues have caused frequent contestation of election results by candidates, as well as political parties. The contestation is, however, to be expected, given the geographic, political, religious, and ethnic diversities in Nigeria and their exploitation by politicians to win elections. Nevertheless, the victory of some candidates contesting INEC results in courts and election tribunals, lend support to the need to evaluate the capacity of the Nigeria's electoral body. Despite acknowledged progress under the past two INEC chairs – Attahiru Jega (2010 – 2015) and Mahmoud Yakubu (2015 – present) – there are still areas for growth and the need to consolidate on such progress. While the new Electoral Act, 2022 addresses some well-identified previous issues, such as the commission's ability to review the declaration of a result made under duress and INEC's ability to determine the mode of transmission of results, it is still possible that the elections will be affected by injunctions and conflicting judgments, as has been the case in the past.

All these regular irregularities aside, the 2023 elections present a challenge to INEC. With widespread insurgency, communal clashes, flooding, banditry and kidnapping, the 2023 elections may be the most complex ever organised. Insecurity is capable of disrupting elections as was the case in 2015 when the general elections were controversially delayed by six weeks on security grounds. Given the current state of the country, it is necessary to know how INEC intends to surmount the insecurity challenge.



INEC Offices Attacks 2019 - 2023



Source: INEC, Punch Nigeria

Fig 7- List of attacks against INEC facilities as at 19 January 2023

While INEC has underlined efforts to relocate polling units from insecurity hotspots, more needs to be done to assure the constituents and INEC staff of their safety.⁴⁸ In a move to improve voter access, the electoral body also added 56,872 new polling units for a total of 176,846 units. Though some of these units were converted from pre-existing voting points, it remains a significant addition, adds to the security risks and increases the already heavy logistical burden. Previous elections have been delayed and the security situation in the country does not provide much optimism that the relevant agencies will be as effective in averting a similar outcome.

Furthermore, the commission is buried in litigation cases, with the INEC chair stating the crippling effect of 600 litigation cases⁴⁹ filed against the electoral body by political parties, on issues relating to the primaries and nomination of candidates ahead of the 2023 general election. Such processes will no doubt lead to considerable manpower and time devoted on addressing these issues when the commission should be focusing on the elections which as ever promise to

48. CDD West Africa: <https://cddwestafrica.org/nigerias-presidential-polls-a-swot-analysis/>

49. Vanguard: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/11/over-600-cases-in-court-over-nomination-of-candidates-inec/>



be highly contested, with post-election litigation an inevitable reality. Finally, any litigation that brings the technology used in the election into disrepute may lead to doubts about the fairness of the process.

INSECURITY

Until as recently as 2018, insecurity and instability in Nigeria seemed to be specific to Nigeria's North East. But the security challenges of recent years have dramatically overturned this assumption. Since 2017, with IPOB's rising notoriety, communal clashes between farmers and herdsmen, banditry, the Lekki toll gate incident, and the rapidly expanding kidnap economy, regions, which were once famed for their relative peace and exemption from violence and instability, have now become arenas for violence and instability. This phenomenon is not without consequences for the 2023 elections.

The APC administration has not been decisively successful in ridding the country of insurgents after a period of eight years. Given that the growing challenge of insecurity has been a primary point of dissatisfaction for Nigeria, this could potentially cast aspersions on the APC presidential candidate in the 2023 elections. There are arguments that continuation of APC in the presidency could lead to continuous insecurity. While one may consider that this will invariably play in favour of other candidates like Peter Obi, there are unsubstantiated, and likely false rumours linking him with IPOB, a movement controversially designated as a terrorist group by the Nigerian government in 2017. Without proper political education, these considerations, however unfounded, could affect the legitimacy of appeal of a candidate.

Insecurity may also impact turnout as queues at polling units may be targeted by non-state actors. This eventuality will be more likely in violence prone areas, where voters may feel unsafe and decide against voting. There are also concerns around parties abusing this information to surreptitiously carry out incidents of political violence under the expectation of violence.



PREDICTIONS FOR 2023

This report does not make any forecast on who will win any elections in 2023. However, there is analysis that clearly shows expected outcomes that will play a part in future elections beyond the current cycle.

UNCERTAIN POLLING DATA AFFECTING GENERAL PREDICTIONS

Every political party, polling company and pundit is likely to develop a methodology that aims to predict where the election will be won and how it will be won. Already several polls⁵⁰ have put the LP nominee, Peter Obi, in the lead, but the sample size and area of polling could be strong factors that amplify how strong he really is. Furthermore, the difficulty in accurately polling Nigerians across the urban and rural divide remains an issue in getting accurate analyses via polling. Alternatively, assumptions are being made concerning states and groups that have previously been firmly in the camp of previous parties – the strong number of young and first-time voters means that this election is unlikely to follow previous trends, if they turn out to vote. The lack of an incumbent president, marked disillusionment in the candidates of the major parties that has led to a strong third force, improved INEC processes and the increased electoral campaign period means that there is a lot to consider going into the elections. It is why in the lead up to the elections, there will be pictures and videos showing mass marches, statistics showing incredible numbers and predictions that realistically have no bearing or basis. Yet, it is likely that the realignment drawn after this election might not prove to be as set in stone because of a growing pivot from party and ideology to personalities.

PERSONALITIES OVER PARTY IN THE POLITICAL SPACE

Three of the four frontrunners began this year as members of the PDP. Three of the four frontrunners were members of the APC at the start of Buhari's presidential term in 2015. The trend points to the currently diminishing

50. Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/571717-again-poll-projects-peter-obi-to-win-2023-election.html>



influence that parties have in Nigerian politics. Although there is currently no constitutional provision for independent candidacies, successful politicians have since been able to strengthen their personal influence in order to achieve political viability and prominence.

On one hand, the candidacies of Peter Obi and Rabiu Kwankwaso are based on relatively new following that inspired their supporters to back their movements. ‘Obidients’⁵¹ and ‘Kwankwassiya’⁵² are tags readily adopted by their followers and their mass appeal cannot be understated. Neither Obi nor Kwankwaso have massive financial war chests, especially when compared to the APC and PDP candidates. However, they have been able to tap into a strong undercurrent of frustration with the current administration and more established political candidates. On the other hand, established politicians such as Atiku Abubakar and Bola Tinubu rely on a network of acolytes, proteges and allies who have been involved in their long political journeys, as well as significant financial backing.

These two types of candidates are likely to become legacies of the election cycle for several reasons. Firstly, more politicians are amassing experience in campaigning and serving in elected office. The revolving door between the national legislature and state governorships has only increased and is likely to happen more in the future. This means that there will be an increasing number of contests between politicians seeking to maintain strongholds in their states, and those who are able to rely on relationships with establishment political structures and officials. Secondly, recent developments show that there is little to no scrutiny over past political leanings by the electorate. While Buhari was able to leverage on his consistency in opposition before winning the presidency in 2015, Tinubu is no longer in a position to claim the relative convenience of running against the current administration. Likewise, the support that politicians have received since changing parties has not waned – a strong coterie of the Kano state delegation to the National Assembly has since moved to Kwankwaso’s NNPP, while several politicians have moved to third parties to actualise their ambitions and achieve their dreams. The election results will show if these politicians were strong enough to survive outside of their ‘originating’ parties, but there does appear to be a strong history of politicians doing so. A case in point is Buhari himself, who moved from the All Nigeria’s People’s Party (ANPP) to form the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)

51. Deutsche Welle: <https://www.dw.com/en/peter-obi-obidient-movement-ignites-nigerias-youth/a-63375362>

52. Daily Trust: <https://dailytrust.com/kwankwassiya-movement-is-a-cult-kwankwaso>



before joining the APC – his influence was enough to move his votes across all three parties. Another example, albeit not in play during the current election cycle, is the incumbent Edo state Governor, Godwin Obaseki, who was able to gain a second term despite defecting from the ruling APC, to the opposition PDP, over an ongoing rift⁵³ with his predecessor, reported godfather and then party chair.

Results in Kano, and other areas where strong governorship candidates have moved parties, will show if this analysis holds. Understandably, there are cases where strong parties have been able to produce candidates who have won simply by virtue of receiving the ticket of their party. But in states where aggrieved personalities have left parties and ended up becoming prominent politicians on other platforms, there is a strong likelihood that this will lead to collaborations with opposing party politicians to ensure mutual success. Several state governorship primaries have led to defections from the major parties, owing to accusations of being schemed out, often for zoning reasons. In most of these states, these schisms present a fairly balanced race since most of these former allies were instrumental in their former party structures. Lastly, there are examples of candidates using ethnic and religious sentiments to support their bids. Candidates in the mostly Muslim north have used pictures of Atiku or Kwankwaso, regardless of their political parties, while some candidates have taken to using pictures of Obi in the mostly Christian south. As a result, there is a strong chance that this might lead to more tight races and challenges over winning the vote.

LIKELIHOOD OF A ‘SECOND ELECTION’ TO DETERMINE THE WINNER OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Previous election challenges concerned the likelihood of rigging or reallocation of votes. This year, there is the slim possibility of a legal challenge around the viability of a candidate winning the election outright according to constitutional provisions. In order to accommodate the different groups that make up Nigeria, provisions have been put in the position to ensure that successful candidates at national and state levels are able to command the support of the entire country

53. Guardian Nigeria: <https://guardian.ng/news/why-i-quit-apc-by-obaseki/>



and their states, respectively.

Section 134 (2) of the Nigerian Constitution covers the procedure for an election to the office of president where there are more than two candidates for the election. The two requirements are that the candidate has the majority of votes cast at the election and that the candidate has not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the states in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The requirements are similar at the state level, except that states are replaced with local government areas.

The impact of this requirement means that parties cannot afford to be simply regional or zonal based – achieving victory is only possible with a significant spread of votes. This influenced the merger of three different parties to form the ruling APC ahead of the 2015 polls. Each of these parties was fairly strong in different zones, with the ACN controlling most states in the South West, the ANPP rivalling the PDP in the North East and the CPC relying on flagbearer Buhari’s ‘northern wall’. Most analyses points to a contested election and, with the three major ethnic groups represented among the frontrunners, the likelihood of candidates failing to hit the 25% threshold on the first ballot is higher than it has been at any point in the Fourth Republic. This may also happen in governorship races, where most primaries have seen established parties rely on candidates from stronghold senatorial zones over unrepresented areas. However, it is not necessarily the case that this will lead to a second election at the national level.

The four major frontrunners, and their running mates, come from five of the six geopolitical zones. The South West is represented solely by the APC presidential nominee, Bola Tinubu (Lagos). Whilst the North West is represented by the NNPP presidential nominee, Rabiu Kwankwaso (Kano) and the LP vice-presidential nominee, Datti Baba-Ahmed (Kaduna), the North East is represented by the PDP presidential nominee, Atiku Abubakar (Adamawa) and the APC vice-presidential nominee, Kashim Shettima (Borno). The South East is represented by the LP Presidential nominee, Peter Obi (Anambra) and South South by the vice-presidential nominees of the



PDP, Ifeanyi Okowa (Delta) and NNPP, Isaac Idahosa (Edo). This leaves the North Central as the only zone devoid of a ‘favourite son’ to root for.

Despite this fact, the established strength of some parties will also play a role in either offsetting these expected advantages. Tinubu’s APC has historically been able to count on strong support in the northwest, while Atiku’s PDP has had a similar strength in the South East and south-south – both candidates not coming from these zones is not expected to significantly change the party’s fortunes in these areas. Another reason is that the presidential election is contested on the same day as the national assembly elections. This means that representatives, seeking to ensure their success, might inadvertently strengthen the candidate at the top of the ballot in more contentious states. The biggest impact of the different candidates on the election slate is likely to be the reduction in historically dramatic electoral margins, such as in 2011 when Jonathan received 99.6% of the vote in Bayelsa state or in 2015 when Buhari received 94.4% of the vote in Borno and could impinge on candidates’ abilities to meet the 25% threshold.

Ultimately, the biggest reason for any second election is the likelihood of disrupted elections due to ongoing security concerns across the country. The possibility of elections in certain areas being called off will lead to an argument on the validity of any declaration if a significant part of the electorate is unintentionally disenfranchised as a result of such concerns and considerations. INEC facilities have been repeatedly attacked⁵⁴ and such incidents could impact staff morale, voter confidence and general faith in the electoral process. The outcome could see re-runs carried out in select areas.

54. Punch Newspaper: <https://punchng.com/attacks-on-inec-facilities-threaten-2023-poll-group/>



PARTY SPREADS IMPACTING OUTCOMES AND POTENTIAL SPLIT GOVERNMENT

Party	Abbr	President	Senate	House	Governor	SHOA	TOTAL
Accord	A	1	32	80	15	257	385
Action Alliance	AA	1	45	115	28	642	831
African Action Congress	AAC	1	8	12	15	156	192
African Democratic Congress	ADC	1	108	331	28	904	1372
Action Democratic Party	ADP	1	39	106	28	858	1032
All Progressives Congress	APC	1	108	348	28	993	1478
Action Peoples Party	APP	1	49	112	25	327	514
All Progressives Grand Alliance	APGA	1	44	126	18	374	563
Allied Peoples Movement	APM	1	39	103	23	346	512
Boot Party	BP	1	13	23	16	172	225
Labour Party	LP	1	80	221	27	770	1099
New Nigeria Peoples Party	NNPP	1	108	356	24	987	1476
National Rescue Movement	NRM	1	84	159	26	527	797
Peoples Democratic Party	PDP	1	109	359	28	986	1483
Peoples Redemption Party	PRP	1	45	157	21	459	683
Social Democratic Party	SDP	1	98	287	28	863	1277
Young Progressive Party	YPP	1	38	93	22	301	455
Zenith Labour Party	ZLP	1	54	119	19	303	496

Fig 8- List of registered political parties and the number of their candidates in elections

There are 1,489 positions being contested for across February and March 2023 elections, with three more governorship elections taking place near the end of the year (Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi). As the table above shows, PDP is fielding 1,483 candidates – running in all but five races. APC is next with 1,478, but the NNPP is a strong third place with 1,476 candidates. The scale of the challenge for Obi is clear with the African Democratic Congress (ADC) (1,372) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) (1,277) fielding more candidates than LP (1,099). This does not necessarily translate into definite wins for the first five parties, but it does lend some support since the presidential nominees will be able to bank on the presence of down ballot candidates competing in the elections. In 109 senatorial zones, LP is fielding in 80 – which is roughly the size of ten states (Each state has 3 senators, and 29 would come from nine states and two-thirds in another). These are states where Obi would need to devote added resources to upset this disadvantage. Conversely, NNPP's



impressive showing means that Kwankwaso will definitely have candidates across the country campaigning. This leads to an important reminder – the ballots still show parties, not names.

The positions up for grabs also leads to another area to consider, the likelihood of a split government. In some federal seats, candidates might be buoyed by the momentum of their presidential nominees– especially since these are held on the same day. This might result in a politically divided national legislature that could delay legislation. The ruling party might need to work on extensive reconciliation and collaboration to govern, or potentially co-opt smaller parties. However mass defections after inauguration, where third party candidates who succeed might return to the more established parties for purported job security, is also likely.

TURNOUT PREDICTIONS

The last major area to review is the likelihood of an increased turnout amidst increased voter registration and the increased support for several candidates. INEC announced 93.5 million voters⁵⁵ for the 2023 elections in October 2022 – a roughly 11 million voter improvement on the 82.3 million voters registered for the 2019 elections. The predicted high turnout has been attributed to increased faith in INEC’s capacity to conduct the polls, strong voter registration drives and increased civic engagement. The turnout for the 2019 elections was 34.75% and it is likely that a combination of factors will result in a marginal rise, but not as substantial an increase as might be anticipated with increased voter registration and campaigning.

Firstly, established incidents of election-related violence will likely lead to a low turnout. CDD and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) have been tracking⁵⁶ election security violence since campaigns started, with a growing number of state-based militias contesting for resources with displaced groups and already established security challenges.

55. Vanguard Nigeria: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/10/inec-announces-93-5m-voters-for-2023-polls/>

56. Nigeria Election Violence Tracker: <https://acleddata.com/nigeria-election-violence-tracker/>



Nigeria Election Violence Tracker

Data available through 11 November 2022

This dashboard displays data on violent events across Nigeria starting on 1 January 2022.

Use the filters and buttons below to analyze trends in more detail. Hover over the map and bar chart to see more information about event locations and changes over time.

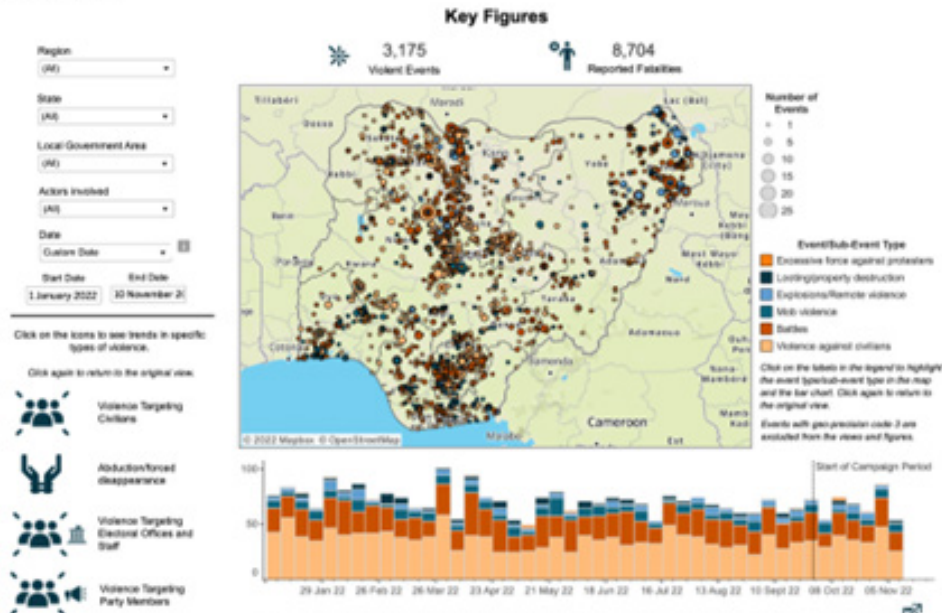


Fig – Snapshot of the CDD-ACLED Nigeria Election Violence Tracker as at 11 November 2022

The image above shows the situation as at 11 November 2022, with an increased number of events taking place in the highly populated northwest geopolitical zone, as well as a significant number in the South East and south-south. The possibility of enforced sit-at-homes by IPOB in the South East could also impact on turnout as it has done during recent gubernatorial polls. In the 2021 Anambra governorship election, the turnout⁵⁷ was a dismal 10%, with INEC blaming the low voter turnout on threats made by IPOB⁵⁸. The challenge is likely to be exacerbated if the continued detention of IPOB's leader, Nnamdi Kanu⁵⁹, continues despite being released by the Appeal Court.

Secondly, the impact of election-related technology, such as BVAS, is fairly unprecedented in this regard. Voter turnout in the recently conducted Ekiti and Osun governorship elections⁶⁰ were around 41-42%, when compared to 44.4% for Ekiti⁶¹ and 45.7% for Osun⁶² (both in 2018). A similarly slight reduction in the voter turnout is likely to be replicated nationwide. This will

57. Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/494588-analysis-anambra-2021-governorship-election-records-historic-low-voter-turnout.html>

58. Daily Post Nigeria: <https://dailypost.ng/2021/11/08/anambra-election-ipob-responsible-for-low-voter-turnout-inec/>

59. Vanguard Nigeria: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/10/why-we-dont-want-to-release-nnamdi-kanu-fg-tells-appeal-court/>

60. CDD-EAC statement: <https://cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/OSUN-2022-Post-Election-Statement-on-the-July-16-2022.pdf>

61. ThisDay: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/07/15/2018-ekiti-state-gubernatorial-election-final-result/>

62. Dataphyte: <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/osun-2022-key-election-details-as-osun-state-prepares-for-the-july-16-guber-polls/>



be shaped by the ability of relevant agencies to convince citizens that the voting process will be peaceful, especially in contested areas in the states. Rising internal displacement, the impact of the recent floods on logistic arrangements and the ability of parties to galvanise their supporters to vote will also be key shapers of turnout, that is likely to be an important factor in deciding the winner.

CONCLUSION

The forthcoming 2023 elections will be another opportunity for analysts, researchers and pundits to unpack the direction towards which Nigerian politics is evolving. It will also lead to new arrangements and alignments in the country. For example, several assumptions surrounding the PDP's grip in the South East and south-south could be undone with strong performances by other parties in the zone. Likewise, the fact that these elections will be the first without incumbent President Buhari on the ballot will play a major role in unpacking how certain states vote and if previously held assumptions are still tenable afterwards. While the presence of candidates from the major ethnic groups is expected to show the fraught and divisive nature of the country's politics, third party candidates are expected to leverage on this, as well as general disillusionment with the ruling class, to put up a stronger than expected performance in the elections. The elections could also lead to a firm consolidation of the two major political parties, or lead to a mushrooming of other parties that could grow and become even more impactful in future elections.

Alongside the demographic based factors of ethnicity, religion and even generational leanings, are more present political considerations such as voter trading, rampant information disorder and concerns around INEC's ability to do its job amidst current insecurity situations are all likely to play a part in shaping the outcome. Furthermore, whilst previous elections appeared to be marred more by violence and ballot snatching, an increasing number of incidents reported in off-cycle elections appear to show that vote trading is an increasingly influential phenomenon.

Looking ahead to 2023, the reality is that no one is certain of how the elections will turn out, or who will turn out, and polling information will, at best, inform where campaigns should focus on. What is clear is that Nigerian politics has also reached a point where personalities play a major role over parties. The possibility of a run-off election, if a candidate is not able to win the presidential election in the first ballot, is more likely than ever before. So too is a legislature that is dominated by a party that does not control the executive, at least in the initial aftermath of voting, with floor-crossing then likely to become a prominent feature of the post-2023 election political environment.

In 23 years of unbroken democratic rule, Nigeria has seen an attempt to extend term



limits fail, a president die in office and an incumbent lose re-election. Incidents like these would easily have led to the advent of coups in the past, but there has been a stronger acknowledgment of the importance of having a democratic form of government. The 2023 elections will be a continuation of that tradition and undoubtedly a shaper of what democracy means to Nigerians.



ABOUT CDD

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organisation. The purpose was to mobilise global opinion and resources for democratic development and provide an independent space to reflect critically on the challenges posed to the democratisation and development processes in West Africa.

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