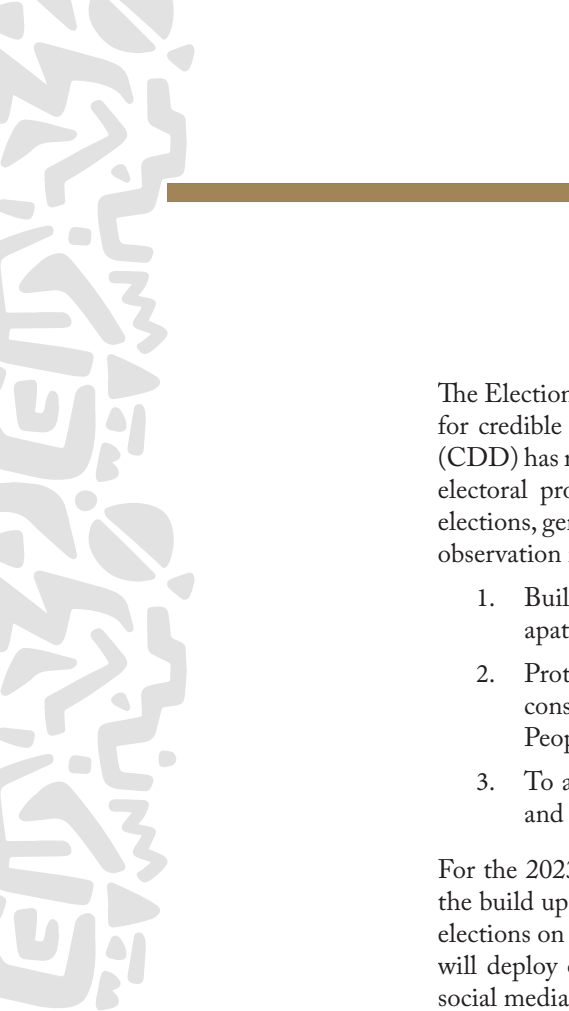




# ELECTION ANALYSIS CENTRE LAUNCH BRIEF

23 FEBRUARY 2023





The Election Analysis Centre (EAC) is a response to the groundswell of citizens demands for credible elections. Through the EAC, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) has regularly convened experts to brainstorm and interrogate key issues in Nigeria's electoral process. Since 2015, the EAC has observed elections general and off cycle elections, generating a number of valuable reports on key aspects of Nigerian elections. Its observation is driven by three main objectives:

1. Build confidence in the electoral process as a sure strategy to cope with voter apathy and lack of enthusiasm among the electorate.
2. Protect the civil and political rights of the electorate as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution and continental charters such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.
3. To assess the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and to support improvement in the electoral processes and systems.

For the 2023 general elections the EAC will keep a close watch on the key processes in the build up to, during and after the elections. For the presidential and national assembly elections on 25 February 2023 and the gubernatorial and State House of Assembly, CDD will deploy over 4,000 trained and accredited observers, data clerks, fact-checkers and social media monitors.

The EAC works in terms with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities. The observers in each of the 36 states plus the FCT will be supervised by state coordinators. Using ICT tools, observers send data to data clerks stationed at the EAC in Abuja. Data clerks double check entries from the field and present the raw data to the team of analysts. A technical drafting group supports the analysts and communications team to draft statements and newsletters and to develop knowledge products which are circulated to election stakeholders and citizens across the country. This ensure that our observation of the 2023 general elections is systematic, with a uniform data collection template used across the country further support consistency.

On election day itself the EAC will provide preliminary updates on the opening of polls, accreditation of voters, voting and compliance with Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) guidelines. It will similarly provide updates of the sorting and counting of ballots following the conclusion of polling day. With the innovations in the Electoral Act 2022, including the provision which mandates the pasting of the polling unit results, the EAC will provide results updates by tracking the real time appearance of the snapped polling units results on the INEC Result Viewing portal. After the declaration of results of the elections by INEC, the EAC will issue a final statement on its findings. This statement, along with periodic updates as the elections unfold, will be widely disseminated across social and traditional media platforms for the information of election stakeholders and the public. However it is important to note that it will make no pronouncement on the outcome of the election until INEC announces the final vote tallies and declares a winner.

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## **NIGERIA'S 2023 ELECTIONS**

With polls for Nigeria's seventh election since the return to democracy set to open in less than two days, and more than 93 million Nigerians registered to vote, there is renewed focus on the presidential candidates and their possible paths to victory. It remains a closely contested race with four candidates – Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Peter Obi of the Labour Party and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) – likely to have a significant say in the outcome which, at this stage, remains difficult to predict. However, the Election Analysis Centre (EAC) has identified five key issues that are likely to shape the 2023 election. These 'five I's' are identity, insecurity, institutions, information disorder and inter and intra party squabbles.

### ***Identity***


Nigeria's political system, both at the federal and state levels, is characterised by prebendal patronage where political actors capture state power and often use the same to advance the well-being of their ethnic or religious groups. A consequence of this is that state resources are unevenly distributed to the advantage of majority groups, thereby making political representation and access to power highly competitive in the country. In addressing these concerns, the political elite, across party lines, have adopted approaches such as power rotation and zoning to improve the inclusivity of minority groups. However these zoning and power rotation rules were eventually jettisoned by the PDP's decision to throw open its ticket which was eventually clinched by a northern Muslim, following eight years of the presidency being held by another northern Muslim.

Despite many Nigerians holding a multitude of identities the overarching reliance on ethnicity, religion and regionalism by political parties has historically accounted for electoral violence and attendant insecurity. The three leading presidential candidates Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the APC, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP and Peter Obi of the Labour Party are from the Yoruba, Fulani and Igbo ethnic groups respectively. Candidates are expected to perform better than their opponents in their 'home' geo-political zones, while opposition party members may face repression from state and non-state actors in these areas. Religion may also be a prominent determinant of the outcome of the 2023 elections. The APC's decision to run a Muslim-Muslim ticket has heightened religious tensions in the country. Conventionally leading parties have sought to balance their presidential tickets to ensure that both major faiths are represented and there are concerns about what impact a single ticket victory would have for faith relations in the country.

### ***Insecurity***

Nigerians will go to the polls in 2023 amidst a host of security challenges. All six geopolitical zones of the country are confronted by insecurity, which has led to the deployment of the Nigerian military across the federation. Northern states are engulfed in long-standing violence with extremist jihadist groups, criminal bandit gangs, and other non-stated armed groups who are engaged in deadly attacks against local communities. In the south, civil unrest continues against the backdrop of ongoing violence between farmers and herders and secessionist agitators. Over half of the 36 states experienced an increase in the number of conflict events in 2022, as compared with 2021, according to data from the Nigeria Election Violence Tracker a partnership between the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). The situation is further complicated by fuel and currency scarcity which is increasing economic hardships on the more than 130 million Nigerians classified as multidimensionally poor.

The insecurity challenges have the potential to impact on the quality of the forthcoming elections.



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It could even determine whether elections will hold all across the country given the threat they pose to the security of voters, electoral materials, and poll officials across the more than 176,000 polling units. Targeted attacks on Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices and staff have been on the rise in the last year. The Nigerian Election Violence Tracker recorded at least 134 incidents involving INEC offices and staff between 2019 and 2022. Among these events are lootings, arson attacks, shootings, as well as abductions and assassinations of electoral officers. Attacks in 2022 and 2023 have predominantly targeted INEC facilities clustered in the southeast, which has been home to over two-thirds of the total events recorded since the start of 2021.

The Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security has raised alarm that insurgency across the country could undermine the conduct of the 2023 general elections, with states and regions already weakened by state fragility becoming flash points. With the sizeable numbers of armed-non state actors with access to small arms and light weapons in the country and the way the campaign has entrenched ethno-religious divisions and diminished popular trust in key institutions to deliver a credible election outcome, the risks of violence following the results remains real.

## ***Institutions***

The success of any electoral process is dependent on the credibility, transparency and efficiency of stakeholders that manage, regulate, and secure the process. Saddled with the responsibility of establishing the rules of play and conducting the 2023 elections, INEC is a central election stakeholder and has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring the holding of safe, credible and on-time elections. The introduction of the 2022 Electoral Act supports the use of technology such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), a facial recognition system aiding voter accreditation, and the INEC result viewing portal have boosted confidence in the system. But recent off-cycle gubernatorial polls have raised valid concerns about their application that INEC should seek to address ahead of the 25 February.

Already faced with a gargantuan logistical operation, those charged with managing the elections across the country are further challenged by the prevailing insecurity and the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) efforts to push a cashless policy. INEC and its supporting agencies rely heavily on cash to deploy more than a million field staff and to ensure the safe delivery of election day materials. Local printing of materials and other sub-contracted services have already been affected by the cash shortages. INEC will also find it extremely difficult to effectively deploy logistics and staff to remote locations. It normally pays transporters and provide resources for more than a million ad-hoc staff in the 8,809 political wards in cash. Security operations, which also rely heavily on cash for their operation, may also be affected and this could impact on the ability of INEC to hold polls in states across the federation in a safe and secure setting. Even if these resources do arrive in time many security agents and even ad hoc election staff, facing challenges brought about by Naira and fuel scarcity and wider economic hardship, will be more susceptible to being bribed or manipulated.

The all-important role of securing the electoral process necessitates an efficient, neutral, and apolitical security infrastructure. However, in previous elections cycles, security agencies have been implicated in partisan enforcement. The police's reputation for brutality and citizen intimidation has led to increasing distrust and suspicion from citizens with the 2020 #ENDSARS protests the most visible manifestation of this. The judiciary is another integral institution in the electoral framework given that it will handle significant amounts of pre and post electoral litigation. It too can be politically compromised.



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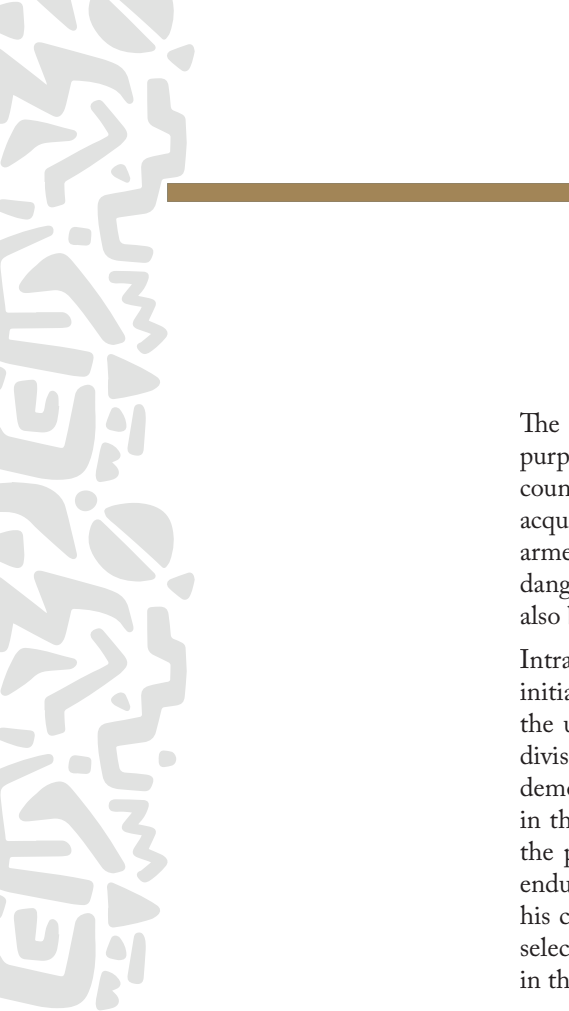
## **Information disorder**

Whilst social media has opened avenues for citizens to engage more robustly with their prospective representatives the volume of misinformation - the sharing of falsehoods without knowing they are false - and disinformation - which implies a deliberate intent to mislead - circulating online can also lead to citizen actions based on incorrect information. Tactics used by social media influencers, who are often paid to promote a particular political agenda, include hashtag manipulation, the use of automated or controlled networks, deliberate mistranslation, false impersonation, and manipulated audio and video material. More than in previous polls digital misinformation and disinformation on social media is shaping the coverage of the campaigns of mainstream media, with online influencers having an outsized role in setting the agenda. Information that begins as a rumour on WhatsApp or through Twitter can be picked up by media houses or shared by influential community figures creating a litany of indirect users alongside those with direct access. Pre-existing cleavages, identity politics and the insecure political and ethno-religious landscape of the Nigeria' democratic system further engenders the spread of disinformation with the risk that it can even impact on national cohesion.

Trust is a scarce commodity in Nigeria and this fact is only being exacerbated by the volume of misleading content online. Ahead of the forthcoming polls renewed sophistication and organisation in the push of disinformation has been observed with efforts generally focused on glorifying or delegitimising political aspirants and undermining the credibility of INEC. This type of disinformation has the potential to foster insecurity, dampen citizens trust in the electoral process and even incite violence post-election. Short-staffed social media companies are largely failing to respond to, label or takedown user reports of political misinformation and disinformation on their platforms. Although the Electoral Act of 2022 prohibits the use of intemperate, abusive and slanderous languages during campaigns, online actions are rarely subject to this level of accountability and when they responses are primarily politically driven. That leaves factchecking as arguably the most effective tool for combatting this threat as it can increase analytical thinking, push back against falsehoods and reduce the volume of disinformation being created. But politicisation and political use of fact-checking is a notable trend and growing concern that could undermine trust in impartial fact-checking initiatives.

## **Inter and intra-party contestation**

In the months leading up to general elections in Nigeria, violent events involving political parties tend to increase as contestation intensifies within and between groups vying for power despite the signing of the National Peace Accords in September 2022 and February 2023. Ahead of the February 2023 elections, violence targeting political party supporters has trended upwards. In the last quarter of 2022, violence targeting political parties reached its highest point since the previous general election in early 2019. In total there have been 60 attacks recorded on political rallies, resulting in nine fatalities since the start of campaigning on 28 September.



The arming and mobilisation of non-state actors by political figures for election purposes is also a concern and could further worsen the state of insecurity in the country as post-election these groups could utilise the financial and military resources acquired to further perpetuate criminality of all forms including kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery and militant insurgency. While the insecurity they create itself portends dangers for the ability to conduct credible elections, politically sponsored violence could also be a determining factor in the outcome and acceptance of the polls.

Intra-party contestation has also been a feature of the 2023 campaign. The APC initially experienced some internal division from Christians in the party, unhappy at the unwillingness of Tinubu to balance the presidential ticket. But more substantive divisions have emerged, and spilled into the public sphere, following the CBNs demonetisation policy. Prominent APC governors have openly accused senior officials in the presidency, and tacitly the president himself, of working against the interest of the party and in favour of Atiku, a fellow Fulani and northerner. Atiku himself has endured a divided party throughout the campaigns, with the G5, refusing to support his candidacy in frustration at the PDPs failure to adhere to zoning principles in the selection of its flagbearer and party chairman. This could result in the PDP losing votes in the south-south geopolitical zone, historically a stronghold of party.

### *Our projections*

- The lack of a coherent national identity in Nigeria and the overarching reliance on ethnicity, religion and regionalism for political identity could increase the risk of electoral violence and lead to a further fracturing of the polity along these lines in the aftermath of polls.
- The insecurity being experienced across the country could undermine the conduct of the 2023 general elections, with states and regions already weakened by violence becoming flash points.
- While the insecurity itself portends dangers for the ability to conduct credible elections, with attacks on facilities and staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) having increased significantly in the last year, politically sponsored violence could also be a determining factor in the outcome and acceptance of the polls.
- The demonetisation policy pursued by the Central Bank since November 2022 is likely to increase logistical and deployment challenges for INEC and the security agencies, who rely on cash for election day operations, and could also impact on citizen participation in the polls.
- Fake results are likely to begin circulating online immediately after the closing of polls given the high levels of misinformation and disinformation observed on social media during the campaign period.

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## *Ways forward*

- To enhance Nigeria's elections we make the following requests and recommendations to key stakeholders:
- The government should ensure that key election stakeholders – in particular INEC and the security agencies – have the necessary resources at their disposal to roll out their comprehensive plans for election day operations that ensure polls take place in a safe, free and fair environment.
- Political parties ensure that their members and supporters adhere to the conditions laid out in the National Peace Accord through the voting process and after the announcement of results.
- INEC continues to communicate regularly with Nigerians about the ongoing election process and is as transparent as possible during the collation and announcement of results.
- The Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security must ensure that all security personnel on electoral duty adhere to the agreed code of conduct and rules of engagement.
- Social media companies support the work of factchecking organisations by promptly taking down digital content that promotes political disinformation or hate speech that relates to the election.
- Nigerian voters, and those in the diaspora, should critical assess information that they receive about the elections before sharing to help prevent the spread of malicious information about the elections.

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