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IN FOCUS

Nigeria elections: Ruling party wins; What is ahead?

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COMMENTARY

Nigeria elections: Ruling party wins; What is ahead?

Insurgency, ransom kidnappings and frequent bandit attacks are plaguing the instability in the country. In addition, the economic crisis amid rising inflation, unemployment, poverty and corruption are multiplying the existing issues. All the above issues will be at stake for the new government.

Anu Maria Joseph



Image source: Al Jazeera

On 2 March, Independent National Election Commission (INEC) declared the ruling party All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate, Bola Tinubu, the new President of Nigeria. Tinubu won the elections by securing 37 per cent of votes against his main rival People's Democratic Party's Atiku Abubakar and Labour party's Peter Obi who scored 29 per cent and 25 per cent of votes respectively. After his victory, Tinubu addressed the media: "I take this opportunity to appeal to my fellow contestants to let us team up together. It is the only nation we have. It is one country and we must build it together." Meanwhile, Peter Obi, opposition candidate from the Labour party criticised the election results claiming that voters were robbed at the polling station and pledged to challenge the results. He said at a news conference: "We won the election and we will prove it to Nigerians."

The same day, the head of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki congratulated Tinubu urging all parties to "uphold peace and the rule of law." Further he added: "Any post-election dispute or grievance (should) be pursued through the

judicial system, as provided for by the law." Following the announcement of the results, the US State Department stated: "This competitive election represents a new period for Nigerian politics and democracy." The UK Prime Minister congratulated the new President Bola Tinubu saying: "I look forward to working together to grow our security and trade ties, opening up opportunities for businesses and creating prosperity in both our countries."

Who were the major actors?

The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) have dominated Nigerian politics since the end of military rule in 1999. Nearly, 87.2 million people are eligible to vote this year, among which 59 million people are aged between 18 and 35. The head of INEC (Independent National Election Commission) described the year as an "election of young people." To win the elections, candidates need to secure majority votes and a quarter of ballots cast in 25 of the 36 states along with Abuja. There are 18 candidates contesting for the elections. The ruling APC's Bola Tinubu, the PDP's Atiku Abubakar and the Labour Party's Peter Obi are the three frontrunners.

Peter Obi, a businessman-turned-politician, belonging to Igbo ethnic group, is the candidate for Labour Party. He is the former governor of Anambra state where his home base is. He emerged as an unexpectedly powerful figure with wide support from the youth, hoping to end the

two-party system that has dominated Nigeria since 1999.

Atiku Abubakar, who had most of his career in politics, a former civil servant and vice-president under Olusegun Obasanjo and a prominent businessman is running for the main opposition People's Democratic Party. He has based his campaign on the legacies of Obasanjo's term including successful reforms in telecommunications, pensions and banking sectors. However, he has been accused of corruption and cronyism which he denies.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, known as a political godfather in the south-west region, runs for the ruling All Progressives Congress Party. He has promised a "renewed hope" taking up the slogan 'Emi Lokan,' which means "it's my turn [to be president]" throughout his campaign.

What were the major issues alongside the elections?

First, protests amid inefficiency of the INEC. Voting processes were disrupted in multiple polling stations after logistical delays and malfunctioning of the voting machines. This is the first time the country is using an electronic voting system for the national elections. The opposition parties described the elections "inconclusive", demanding for a rerun alleging lack of transparency with the new electronic system. On the sidelines of the elections, protests broke out in major towns denouncing the Inec, alleging votes have been stolen. The European Union observer mission has pointed out lack of transparency and operational failures in the elections. In addition, complaints were reported by many voters that the electoral officials refused to upload the results.

Second, multiple instances of violence. Violence was reported in multiple polling stations disrupting the election process. The head of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Mahmood Yakubu said that armed men attacked few

polling stations in Southern state of Delta; Criminal gangs attacked voting locations in Katsina; Islamist insurgents in Borno state opened fire and injured electoral officers. In Lagos, a group of men, holding bottles and machetes attacked polling stations injuring many.

Third, lack of trust in candidates. Previously, Nigerian elections were marred by credible reports of politicians rigging the polls and causing violence. Similar instances have raised concerns. A member of the House of Representatives was arrested with USD 500,000 with a list of people he was supposed to pay. While Abubakar is expected to unite the fractured PDP, accusations of financial impropriety and cronyism denounce his candidacy. Suspected hidden wealth of Obi and his lack of popularity in the Muslim-dominated north is a matter of popular trust. Tinubu had faced allegations of corruption, money laundering, fraud and tax evasion alongside opponents within his own party.

What does Tinubu's win mean?

Elections in Nigeria were an achievement to democracy in Africa, when authoritarian governments are gaining momentum elsewhere in the continent. However, voter turnout of the elections is the lowest of two decades reaching 28 per cent. Besides, the INEC's poor performance has created a loss of confidence in the results. The Oxford Economics Africa stated: "Mr Tinubu's narrow victory is bittersweet, as his historically low support in the polls could lead some to question his legitimacy as president." A West Africa analyst Mucahid Durmaz says that Tinubu's narrow victory against the opponent "highlights the fractious nature of Nigerian politics and the continued importance of regional identities with ethnic and religious undertones."

Still, hopeful Nigerians say Tinubu's win points to a positive turn in the country's economic sector as he has promised to build on former President Buhari's public infrastructure programme to create jobs and reduce corporate tax to attract new investments. He has pledged a new surveillance system to avoid crude oil theft and attract new investors; boosting oil production and domestic refining through joint ventures was one of his campaign agenda.

What is at stake for the new government?

First, the biggest issue to address is the rampant insecurity. Frequent attacks by gunmen and ransom kidnappings were the issues that previous governments failed to address. According to SBM Intelligence, a Nigerian risk consultancy agency, more than 3,400 people were abducted for ransom across the country between July 2021 and June 2022; and another 564 were killed in violence during the abductions. Besides, bandits attacks, violence instigated by the separatist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and increasing Boko Haram insurgency will be at stake for the new government.

Second, the elections are taking place at the backdrop of economic instability. Currently, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics records an inflation rate of 21.8 per cent, the highest in two decades. Though an oil-rich nation, in 2022, oil production in the country fell to its lowest in 30 years. Nearly 64 per cent of the population is under the poverty line. Besides, debt management of Nigeria recorded a public debt of nearly USD 101 billion. In addition, youth unemployment is nearly 42 per cent, indicating that more than half of the youth between 15 and 24 are unemployed. Further, the shortage of local naira currency, following the currency redesign in February has caused public anxiety.

In sum, insurgency, ransom kidnappings and frequent bandit attacks are plaguing the instability in the country. In addition, the economic crisis amid rising inflation, unemployment, poverty and corruption are multiplying the existing issues. All the above issues will be at stake for the new government

AFRICA IN BRIEF

14 February-28 February

By Anu Maria Joseph and Apoorva Sudhakar

TUNISIA

President's remarks on migrants criticised

On 22 February, Tunisian President Kais Saied called for “emergency measures” against irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Rights groups have criticised his remarks that the influx of migrants was aimed at changing the country’s demography as racist. The Reuters news agency quoted him: “The undeclared goal of the successive waves of illegal immigration is to consider Tunisia a purely African country that has no affiliation to the Arab and Islamic nations.” A spokesperson for the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights described Saied’s remarks: “A racist approach just like the campaigns in Europe...the presidential campaign aims to create an imaginary enemy for Tunisians to distract them from their basic problems.” (“[Tunisia leader's remarks against migrants criticised](#),” *BBC*, 22 February 2023)

LIBYA

At least 73 migrants presumed dead after a shipwreck

On 15 February, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said that at least 73 migrants were presumed dead after a shipwreck at the Libyan coast. So far 11 bodies were recovered by the Libyan Red Crescent and police. The ship was carrying migrants to Europe through the route that IOM described as “the world's deadliest migratory sea crossing.” According to IOM, more than 130 people have died this year alone while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea through the route. (“[More than 70 migrants feared dead after shipwreck](#),” *BBC*, 15 February 2023)

Guterres calls for political will to address a stalemate

On 17 February, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: “Overcoming the current political impasse in Libya can unleash much-needed progress in tackling myriad crises there.” Guterres, while attending the session by the High-level Committee on Libya, said the solution lies in the “political will to break the protracted political stalemate.” Guterres added that the “absence of elections worsens economic insecurity, heightens political instability, risks renewed conflict, and raises the spectre of partition.” (“[Guterres in Africa: End political stalemate in Libya now, UN chief urges leaders](#),” *UN News*, 17 February 2023)

SOMALIA

At least 10 people killed in al-Shabab attack

On 22 February, BBC reported that at least 10 people were killed in an attack in Somali’s capital Mogadishu. The authorities said that al-Shabab is responsible for the siege at a building occupied by pro-government militia. Security forces said that they have killed four members of al-Shabab group. Despite significant gains by Somalia’s military backed by the African Union and the US forces, the militant group continues to carry out frequent attacks. (“[Ten killed as Somali forces end siege in Mogadishu](#),” *BBC*, 22 February 2023)

ETHIOPIA

Three dissenting clerics reinstated in Oromia

On 15 February, the Orthodox Church said it had reached an agreement with three clerics in the Oromia region declared themselves archbishops after accusing the main church of bias against Oromos. The

agreement reinstated the clerics, promised funds, resources to the churches in Oromia, and emphasised the need to train more Afaan Oromo-speaking priests. ([“Ethiopian Orthodox Church reaches deal with three rogue bishops,”](#) *Al Jazeera*, 16 February 2023)

KENYA

President orders the army to join security operation amid increasing bandits attack

On 14 February, Kenyan President Willam Ruto ordered the army to join a security operation against the armed groups in the northern Rift Valley region. According to the interior ministry, more than 100 civilians were killed in attacks by armed men in the past six months. Besides, the government has been facing severe criticism for inadequate response to increasing security issues in the region. ([“Kenya to deploy army as bandits kill over 100,”](#) *BBC*, 14 February 2023)

SOUTH AFRICA

Russian warship arrives in Cape Town for joint military drills

On 13 February, a Russian warship docked in Cape Town harbour as part of South Africa’s previously announced joint military drill with China and Russia. The drills are expected to run for 10 days from 17 to 27 February in the port city of Durban and Richards Bay. The South African defence ministry defended the drills after facing severe criticism for its engagement with Russia by claiming that the country has hosted similar military exercises with France, the US and other western allies previously. ([“Russian warship docks in S Africa ahead of joint drills,”](#) *BBC*, 14 February 2023)

NIGERIA

Eight police officers killed in suspected IPOB attack

On 20 February, a local police spokesperson in Anambra state said at least eight police officers had been killed in two separate attacks suspected to be

carried out by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The spokesperson said a patrol vehicle and three exhibit vehicles had been set on fire in the attack and that two attackers were arrested and three were “fatally wounded.” The attacks come days ahead of the presidential elections; an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) official said deployment to some stations may be hindered due to security challenges. ([“Suspected rebels kill 8 police officers ahead of Nigeria election,”](#) *Al Jazeera*, 21 February 2023)

Protests continue over shortage of cash

On 15 February, BBC reported that the frustrated Nigerian public have taken to the streets over the scarcity of cash following the central bank's decision to scrap old notes and replace them with new notes that are yet to reach widely. A regional newspaper reported that protesters attacked banks and destroyed ATM machines. Meanwhile, two people are feared dead after the protest turned violent. Roads were blocked with burning tyres and banks and other businesses were shut in Ibadan city following the violent protest. Country is expected to carry out presidential elections by the end of February. ([“Ex-Kenyan leader to head AU mission in Nigeria polls,”](#) *BBC*, 15 February 2023, [“Protests over cash shortage hit parts of Nigeria,”](#) *BBC*, 15 February 2023)

MALI

Three UN peacekeepers killed in central Mali blast

On 21 February, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali said at least three UN peacekeepers had been killed and five injured in an IED blast in central Mali. The development comes a day after the military government raised its objections against the European Council’s head’s remarks that the Malian state was “collapsing” as militants, largely linked to the Islamic State and al Qaeda, were

making advances into new territories. (“[Three UN peacekeepers killed by roadside bomb in Mali](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 21 February 2023)

REGIONAL

Thousands fleeing Somaliland to Ethiopia, says UN

On 22 February, the UN said that thousands of civilians fled the self-declared republic of Somaliland to Ethiopia following fighting between regional government forces and local militias. The UN’s refugee agency, the UNHRC said that more than 80,000 people have reached Ethiopia’s Doole area from Somaliland’s Las Anod district the previous month. (“[Thousands flee to Ethiopia amid Somaliland violence](#),” *BBC*, 22 February 2023)

Kigali accuses Congolese soldiers of attacking border post

On 15 February, Rwanda said 12 to 14 Congolese soldiers had crossed into the neutral zone and opened fire at a border post. Kigali termed it “an act of provocation.” However, the Democratic Republic of the Congo denied the claim; the South Kivu province governor said: “In no case did the [army] cross the neutral zone, let alone open fire in the direction of Rwanda.” The governor added: “Rwanda’s tendency to want to portray itself as a victim and stoke tensions by making false accusations reveals without any doubt its intention to attack South Kivu province, as is currently the case in the war of aggression that it is carrying out in North Kivu.” (“[Rwanda accuses DR Congo soldiers of attack on army border post](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 16 February 2023)

AU continues suspension of Israel delegate to summit

On 19 February, the African Union commission chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat said that Israel's observer status to the AU would remain suspended. Mahamat said: “The status is suspended until such time as this committee can deliberate ... and so we did not invite Israeli officials to our summit.” Previously, the removal of Israel's deputy director-general of the Africa division, during a summit, sparked criticism from Tel Aviv. (Lenin Ndebele, “[Israel still frozen out of AU observer status](#),” *News24*, 20 February 2023)

INTERNATIONAL

Human Rights Watch accuses UK accused of crimes against humanity in Chagos island

On 15 February, the UK was accused of crimes against humanity over its refusal to allow a group of islanders to return to Chagos archipelago. Human Rights Watch said that reparations should be paid to generations that were affected by the decision to depopulate the island during the colonial times. However, the UK Foreign Office stressed on its repeating "deep regret" response adding that it "categorically reject the characterization of events" as crimes against humanity. The HRW report comes as the UK is facing severe international criticism for holding on to what it calls as "British Indian Ocean Territory" though the UN's International Court of Justice ruled British occupation of the Island as illegal. (“[UK accused of crimes against humanity over Chagos](#),” *BBC*, 15 February 2023)

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About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

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