

# PRE-ELECTION REPORT OF THE 2023 NIGERIAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS

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## **Introduction**

Nigeria got her political independence from Britain in 1960 and became a Republic. The country was under military rule from 1966 until the modern wind of democracy compelled the military out in 1999. The country is currently operating a Federal System of government where power is shared between the central government, 36 federating states and 774 peripherally located local governments councils. The country practices a presidential system of government where the Executive President relates with a bicameral legislature referred to as the National Assembly made up of a 109 member Senate and 360 member House of Representatives at the central level and a complex judiciary. The governors preside over their states in conjunction with a unicameral legislature which provides oversight and play roles in governance. The country is still dependent on oil and gas for revenues which also defines yearly budgets. The fluctuations in the oil revenues leads to fluctuations in the use of budgets for the provision of welfare and development.

Since 1999, Nigeria has organized six national elections consistently. On February 25, 2023, Nigerians will turn out to their polling units to elect the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) who will preside over the affairs of the country for four years. They will also elect members of the National Assembly. The contestants for the positions of either the House of Representatives or the Senate, will be new contestants who haven't occupied any political office in the country in the past; new contestants from State Houses of Assembly and serving Senate members hoping to retain their seats. Others will include serving members of the House of representatives hoping to transit to Senate and Governors who are ending their terms and who hope to transit to the Senate.

The 2023 national elections will be another test of resilience in the country's democratic journey. This report explains the developments that have taken place with potential of shaping the February 25, 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections as well as the Governorship and the State Houses of Assembly elections coming up on March 11, 2023. Attention is drawn to the state of the economy, the politics of the transition, major drivers of the elections, the key actors in the electoral process, including the presidential candidates, their pedigrees and what they stand for regarding the development of the country. The role of the election management body (INEC), political elites, citizens and the government are discussed. Some predictions of the elections are made. It is suggested that Nigeria requires a clean and non-controversial election in order to build on promises of good governance and development.

## Developments that have shaped the 2023 National Elections

The forthcoming national elections have been shaped by several political and economic developments in the country. We will draw attention to the following factors and events that have directly and indirectly impacted on the electoral processes and eventually, the elections.

The *anti-SAR<sup>1</sup> movement* which started in September/October 2020 as a protest against the police and other security forces for unleashing oppression and suppression of citizens' rights, became a full-scale protest against the state across the country against economic hardship and maladministration. Government buildings were destroyed by citizens while ransacking for food and other valuables. Many people were killed by state security agents in many states of the federation, prominently in Lekki Lagos State<sup>2</sup>. These protests demonstrated the power of young people and other citizens to make a change. The energies from these protests across the country were channeled into active participation in political party activities<sup>3</sup> and the registration of voter's campaign in the country<sup>4</sup>.

*Regime performance.* The various classes of citizens have been dissatisfied with the performance of the government of President Buhari's regime where poverty, unemployment, inflation, exchange rates and debt profile amongst others, rose very high. As the country is voting in the next two weeks, the health of economy of the country remains with an unemployment rate of 33.3% and it is projected to rise to 37% this year.<sup>5</sup> The inflation is 21.34%<sup>6</sup>. The public debt stock stood at US\$101.91 billion in Q3 2022 and it is expected to grow this year<sup>7</sup>. The GDP is 3% and it is expected to decelerate to 2.7% this year<sup>8</sup>. The CBN naira swap policy is estimated to lead to a decline of the first quarter 2023 GDP by 5%<sup>9</sup>. In 2022, the country's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.534 making the country to occupy the 163<sup>rd</sup> position in the world. This implies that it has a weak capacity to guarantee a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living of the citizens<sup>10</sup>. The import of this information is that the present regime has been unable to improve the performance of the economy.

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<sup>1</sup> SAR means Special Anti-Robbery Squad was a notorious unit of the Nigerian Police with a long record of abuse on Nigerian citizens such as illegal "stop and searches", illegal arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, sexual harassment of women and brutalising of young male Nigerians.

<sup>2</sup> The number of the people killed is still being disputed but the figure is about 51 civilians, 11 policemen and 7 soldiers according to "Nigeria protests: President Buhari says 69 killed in unrest". BBC. 23 October 2020

<sup>3</sup> The youth form the bulk of the supporters of the LP presidential candidate, Mr Peter Obi.

<sup>4</sup> This campaign was carried out by YIAGA-Africa (a youth-oriented NGO). The youth massively registered as voters across the nation.

<sup>5</sup> National Bureau for Statistics, 2022 and Nigerian Economic summit Group macroeconomic Outlook report "Nigeria in Transition: Recipes for Shared Prosperity" 2022

<sup>6</sup> National Bureau for statistics 2023, <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>

<sup>7</sup> Nigerian Domestic & Foreign Debt - National Bureau of Statistics <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng>

<sup>8</sup> Oladeinde Olawoyin , "World Bank lowers Nigeria's economic growth projection" January 11, 2023,

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/575038-world-bank-lowers-nigerias-economic-growth-projection.html>

<sup>9</sup> Channels TV, Naira Swap Policy May Affect Q1 2023 GDP By 5% - Rewane, <https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/10/naira-swap-policy-may-affect-q1-2023-gdp-by-5-rewane-edited/>

<sup>10</sup> Nigeria's ranking in UN Human Development unchanged in ...<https://businessday.ng>

For instance, the Nigerian National Bureau for Statistics in its 2022 report announced that Nigeria is Multidimensionally poor implying that 63% of persons living within Nigeria (133 million people) are poor in various dimensions including all possible deprivations. It showed that 65% of the poor (86 million people) live in the North, while 35% (nearly 47 million) live in the South<sup>11</sup>. The inability of governments at the different levels in the country to address poverty led to many overt protests organized against government officials and politicians even during campaigns rallies in communities they visited in the country. Although poverty is not an overt campaign issue, its presence will to a large extent, influence the voting turnout, patterns and outcomes across the country.

The *practice of grand corruption* in Nigeria is phenomenal as no day passes in the country without newspaper reportage of stolen funds from state treasury or the diversion of funds meant for public welfare. This is done in connivance with state officials, banks, private sectors within and outside the country. Some of the prominent examples are (1) the Maina N195 billion Pension Scam (2) Kerosene subsidy scam (3) Esai Dangabar Police Pension Fund Fraud (4) Stella Oduah's N255 million armoured car scandal, (5) Missing N20 billion Naira oil money, (6) \$15million private jet/arms scandal, (7) Abba Morro Immigration Scandal, (8) Malabu \$1.1m Oil scandal and (9) the Farouk Lawan, House of Representatives member, \$620,000 bribe taking out of a \$3million bribe while his committee investigated the fuel subsidy scam scandal amongst many others<sup>12</sup>. The total number of cases in various courts in the country shows that there are 1854 cases of cybercrime/fraud, 1118 case for fraud, illegal dealing in oil products – 256, and money laundering with 199 cases<sup>13</sup>. One of President Buhari regime's cardinal programme is the fight against corruption. Clearly this phenomenon hasn't been tackled. Indeed, it believed that the problems lingered because "the oversight power of the legislature was not judiciously exercised... and there are cover-ups and lack of political will to bring a lot of the cases to closure"<sup>14</sup>. The inability of the regime and political party in power to deal with this national problem, will to a large extent, affect the party's outing in the forthcoming elections.

The *management of diversity* has been another area which the regime has scored low. The skewed distribution of top and sensitive political positions in the country has been to his ethnic and religious groups to the exclusion of other sections of the country. These positions are given on the basis of patronage, nepotism and purchase and sales. People get recruited into the Nigerian public sector through the use of nepotism, bribery, or both. In additions, the regime did not attempt to build an inclusive administration by integrating actors from other political parties. This point has been made

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<sup>11</sup> The National Bureau of Statistics launched the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Survey which she conducted with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). (see NBS, "Nigeria launches its most extensive national measure of multidimensional poverty" Press Release, 17 November 2022 – Abuja, <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78>)

<sup>12</sup> Joshua Olufemi, Richard Akinwumi et.al "Top 10 Corruption Scandals Nigeria's National Assembly Hasn't Resolved April 26, 2015 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/182111-top-10-corruption-scandals-nigerias-national-assembly-hasnt-resolved.html?tztc=1>

<sup>13</sup> "Find Information on Corruption Cases in Nigeria" <https://corruptioncases.ng/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/182111-top-10-corruption-scandals-nigerias-national-assembly-hasnt-resolved.html?tztc=1>

severally by opponents of the regime drawing the attention of the electorate that such a group of people are not fit to hold political offices any longer. This may likely affect the credibility of the ruling party and therefore its ability to return to power.

The *inherited insecurity* from the previous administration indeed worsened during the eight years of the administration despite the fact that the regime came in on a campaign promise to address insecurity. In 2015, the country was known for insurgency in the north-east but today insurgents operate from all locations across the country. Currently, the country confronts bandits, kidnappers, multiple factions of insurgents and the resurgence of numerous forms of criminality. The government appears to have run out of innovative ideas of handling the general insecurity in the country. Insecurity has two potential implications for the elections. Some voters will voter on the basis of security provision like they voted for APC in 2015. Secondly, insecurity may mar the elections in some locations in the country. To show the magnitude of the challenge, CLEEN Foundation, a Nigerian non-governmental organization in its '2023 Election Security Threat Assessment', concluded that only two states, Jigawa and Kano alongside the FCT will be safe for the elections while 13 states are presently violence prone and the remaining 21 had witnessed pockets of violence in various quarters.<sup>15</sup> The violence prone states are Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Benue, Gombe, Bauchi, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba, Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Abia

The reoccurring cases of *industrial actions* by trade and labour unions in the country also shows the regime's poor capacity to handle pressing national challenges. The prominent is the strike action of the Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria, an affiliate of the Nigerian Labour Congress (ASUU) which lasted for eight months because of the refusal of the state to grant the academics their collectively bargained entitlements. The implication of this is that the frustration of the students on the regime increases the potential of massive support for opposition political parties. The ruling party may lose votes as a result this.

### **Electoral processes leading up to the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria**

The crafting of the Electoral Act was an exercise in high level politics because the level of interest of actors in the *passage of the Electoral Act 2022*. The Act introduced the use of technology in the electoral process and this was resisted by political actors who felt that this will block their chances of winning election through illegal ways. There was an attempt to kill the passage of the Act but the pressure of the Nigerian citizens prevailed. The introduction of innovations such as technology and the accreditation etc in the Act is going to be a defining feature of the 2023 elections.

Another critical development in the election cycle was the *voter registration exercise*. We believe that because of the performance of the regime and the political circumstance in the country as pointed out above, led to massive registration of the voting public. INEC was overwhelmed, but it was able manage the situation. The increase in the voting population indeed shows that the

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<sup>15</sup> Sharon Osaji, Only Kano, Jigawa, FCT safe for elections – CLEEN Foundation”, <https://punchng.com/only-kano-jigawa-fct-safe/-elections-cleen-foundation/>9th February 2023

Nigerians are more interested in elections and the quality of persons to be chosen to run national political institutions.

It is crucial to mention the role of money in the elections. The *Monetisation of inner-party electoral processes* has been possible because the sources remain largely resources pilfered from the state; donations from private sector beneficiaries of state patronage; private individuals who lend money to politicians with strong political and economic collaterals, foreign private funding which remains secretive etc. Those politicians with these resources have much influence. This came out clearly during the political party primaries. The hike in the cost of purchase of nomination forms for presidential, governorship aspirants in the APC to the tune of N100m, N50m respectively is a case in point.<sup>16</sup> The use of money in electoral processes is related to the imposition of candidates by all parties because the political godfathers with resources often use their might to impose candidates on the party and on the electorate.

The practice of using money not only influence the outcomes of primary elections but also violate the provisions of campaign finance laws as the principle of disclosure, declaration and limits are not observed. In all the parties, the laws were not observed. In the ruling party, while many contestants in the presidential primary race where bribing delegates, the major contender was buying with huge money running into millions in local and foreign currencies, the entire party machinery and the Governors who had very strong influence over delegates. Some contestants who paid for votes returned to those voters to collect their money after losing the elections.

The political party primaries produced very deep and damaging disagreements within the parties and the *weak inner-party conflict management and resolution mechanisms* further worsen the situation. In the All-Progressive Congress (APC), the division emerged after the presidential candidate Bola Tinubu produced what Nigerians now call the “Muslim-Muslim” ticket. This is a term used to describe the religious backgrounds of both the Presidential candidate and their deputies. This insensitivity has indeed led key party functionaries disinterested or deserted it for other parties.

The President of the FRN joined the campaigns of his party very late and the Vice President did not join the campaign even once. This has been read by observers as a non-support to the party presidential candidates. Bola Tinubu suspects sabotage of his campaign as a result of the currency change and incessant shortages of petroleum products. The strong accusation by a strong member of the party, Governor El-Rufai of Kaduna State that some individuals within the Presidency whose preferred candidates did not win the primary elections further buttresses the point made by the Presidential candidate. The response by the Presidency that it hasn't supported any candidate in the elections should be read as no support for the APC which is the President party. This will likely affect the voting pattern and outcome.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.channelstv.com/2022/04/20/just-in-presidential-aspirants-to-pay-n100m-for-nomination-forms-apc/>

The outcome of the presidential primary elections in the major opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) led to a division in the house. The G5 Governors of Rivers, Benue, Oyo, Enugu, Abia led by Governor Wike of River State. Mr. Nyesom Wike lost the presidential elections to the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar and this became a source of disagreement. Three weeks ago, the leader of the G-5 withdrew permission initially granted the presidential candidate of his party to use a venue for the presidential campaign in his state is a demonstration of the carry-over of the disagreements that started after the presidential primary election. The disagreement and inability of the Party to resolve it will affect the outcome of the party's election in those state.

The *campaigns* are being marked by accusations of past handling of public offices and blame-games amongst political contestants. The PDP presidential candidate is being accused of selling public property to his cronies while he was in government in 1999-2007. The APC candidate is accused of appropriating the property of Lagos State when he was the Governor and involved in drug trafficking in the USA in which the US authorities had filed charges against him leading to forfeiture of drug monies. The political party campaigns have taken women along as members of campaign teams. However, there are few discussions amongst the political contestants about the gender and inclusivity issues in their electioneering campaigns.

The *electoral management body* Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has put in place legal, administrative and communication framework required for the conduct of the elections. All the necessary mandatory functions or acquisition, testing, deployment, recruitment and strategizing are being carried out in order to ensure that the elections hold. The Commission is being challenged by the destruction of its offices in states of the country, its staff are harassed and, in some cases, killed. Some politicians who are not comfortable with the stance of the Commission on the introduction of the technology threaten covertly to change the key officials of the Commission, but civil society has stood firm against such hidden moves. Nigerians hope that the body will however maintain its integrity by organizing a free, fair and credible elections.

The *security sector agencies* have supported all the phases of the electoral sector. It is hoped that this support and especially the neutrality should be upscaled in order to provide a level playing ground for all contestants. The freeness and fairness of the election will, to a large extent, be dependent on the security agencies.

The *Nigerian civil society* has played significant roles in the electoral and political processes since the beginning of the political transition. They monitored the National Assembly and the Presidency and pressurised them to fast track the passage of the Electorate Act 2022 as well as its assent. The Nigerian Election Situation Room, a coalition of civil society organisations have also monitored the political campaigns by political parties. They have engaged in extensive political education especially on every aspect of the Electoral Act. This has been the preoccupation of an NGO called YIAGA-Africa on TV and radio. Both domestic and foreign Observer Missions have been on ground partially or fully to monitor political developments leading to the elections. Some few ones need mention: the African Union, the European Union Missions, ECOWAS, National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI).

## **The Presidential candidates**

There are 69 registered political parties in the country, but only 18 of them are fielding candidates to contest the number one seat in the country. The reason for the shortfall could be as a result of the strengthen arising from finances and due to some unrevealed alliances between the bigger parties and the smaller parties. Out of these parties that have fielded candidates, the top five are the PDP, APC, LP, NNPP, PRP/AAC. Who are these candidates and their known ideological persuasions?

The Presidential candidate of the *People's Democratic Party* is Atiku Abubakar, a 77 years old former officer of the Nigeria Custom. He is a businessman and a politician. He was the Vice President of the FRN in 1999 to 2007 under the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo. The political party and the flag bearer are of the strong ideological thought that the market should be the driver of development. He is committed to privatisation of public sector work, enterprises and assets. The political party support base is national and since he is from Northern Nigeria, he may likely get votes from North, middle-belt a substantial number of votes from the East where his deputy, Mr. Ifeanyi Yakowa, the current Governor of Delta State is from. Being a business tycoon, he has a network of domestic and foreign investments and has made numerous foreign trips during the campaign to consult international partners and governments to support his presidential ambition. His foreign policy stance is likely to be pro-West with periodic recourse to China in particular.

(b) The name of the presidential candidate of the *All Progressive Congress* (APC) in the 2023 elections is Mr. Bola Ahmed Adekunle Tinubu and he is said to be 71 years old. He is a trained accountant and a politician. He served as the executive governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007 and as a Senator of the FRN representing Lagos West from in the Third Republic. After the annulment of the June 12 1993 elections, he became a strong member of the National Democratic Coalition which fought for the return of the mandate to the winner of the June 12<sup>th</sup> election and eventually for the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999.

He is a protagonist of market-based reforms who have called for the discipline of labour and trade unions and the removal of fuel subsidies particularly on petroleum products. The party will likely get votes in some states in the West and Lagos, his home base and some part of the North. Many observers believe that the contest is between him and the PDP presidential candidate. But his age and health are putting him at a disadvantage in the process. His foreign policy preference will be pro-West if he eventually wins the elections.

(c) The candidate of the *Labour Party*, Mr Peter Gregory Obi is a 62 years old Nigerian businessman and politician. He was a governor of Anambra State from March to November 2006, February 2007 to May 2007, and June 2007 to March 2014. He defected from the PDP where he contested for the presidential candidate of the party to the Labour party because he felt that the PDP was not democratic enough to allow him have a fair contest. The Labour party is a progressive and pro-labour and a welfarist political organization committed to improving the welfare of Nigerian people and liberating them from oppression and various form of deprivations. However, the presidential

candidate believes in the market as a driver of development, an antithetical ideology from that of the labour party. He is populist because he promised to be committed to a more disciplined and efficient state with low cost of administration. It is not clear how he will marry the demands of the labour movement who are the creators of the LP with his market-oriented ideology. He is also going to be pro-western in his foreign relations if he comes into power. His support base is the youth in urban areas and most importantly, the students and the unemployed youth.

(d) The Presidential candidate of the *New Nigeria Peoples Party* (NNPP), Alhaji Rabiu Musa Kwankoso is 64 years old. He served as a Governor of Kano State from 1999-2003 and 2011 to 2015 and a Minister of Defence of the FRN from 2003 to 2007 under the administration of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo. He was elected into the Senate in 2015. He has therefore straddled between the PDP and the APC. He is currently the national leader of the New Nigeria Peoples Party. The party support base is in Kano and the North-western part of the country where the ideology of the pro-poor and pro-peasants gave him the support he got from the urban and rural poor of northern Nigeria.

(e) The *Peoples Redemption Party* is being represented by a 60 years old male, Mr. Abiola Latifu Kolawole, the son of the late Chief MKO Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the June 12 1993 presidential elections. He has worked as a Manager, Concord Airlines and Manager, Summit Oil, an oil company in Nigeria. He schooled in Nigeria and the United States. The philosophy of the PRP is liberation of the poor and the downtrodden.

(f) The 52 years old *African Action Congress* (AAC) is Mr Sowore Omoyele Stephen. He started his activism from the student's union in the University. He is a human rights activist and the founder of the online news agency popularly called Sahara Reporters which is based in New York and committed to fighting corruption and oppressive government policies in Nigeria. He formed the AAC to enable him run for the president in the 2023 general elections. Sowore has been arrested several times by the state security agencies for his activism either calling for a "revolution now" or taking part in student demonstrations against government's attempted collection of IMF loan for oil pipeline. He is populist in nature and believes in state intervention. His support base is amongst students and youth and more in the South West.

The other political parties are either weak in organization, finance and operations. Some have openly aligned with bigger parties and therefore support them in their presidential or gubernatorial ambitions. Others maintain some level of independence and continue to work as opposition parties. Those parties with no representation at any level of government are banned by the electoral management body using the instrumentality of the law. They are often found functioning under the Inter-party Advisory Committee (IPAC) of Nigeria.

### **The Political Left in the Political Equation**

The Left hasn't demonstrated enough unity and therefore strength to serve an alternative to the ruling elites currently operating the state apparatus. Because of this, some cadres of the Left were invited to form the All Progressive Congress which was a coalition of few political parties in 2014 to

contest the 2015 elections. After the elections, some members of the Left were given strategic positions at different levels in the President Buhari's regime. Few made significant contributions while others were marginalized in the political processes at the federal state and state levels.

The formation of the Labour Party by the Nigeria Labour Congress was thought to be a rallying point for the broad Left who would appropriate it and compete for power, but this hasn't happened. Instead, bourgeois politicians who lose out from other parties have often appropriated the platform and use it to contest for political offices at different levels. Indeed, some politicians have secured elective positions on the platform and later abandon it. We acknowledge the efforts of some members of the left who have formed parties as individuals or as groups and have drawn significant attention to national issues. At the moment, the Left is tangentially present in the 2023 political contest as their presence is scarcely seen in many states of the federation. There were hopes that some mergers between a faction of the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP) and the AAC led by Sowore will be a factor in the elections but they have low presence in the 2023 political calculations. The Left can make a difference once the challenge of unity is sorted out.

### **Predictions**

As the country prepares for the first phase of the elections on 25<sup>th</sup> February, certain predictions can be made. The *performance of INEC will improve* in the conduct of the elections generally. There will be few hitches either due to human errors or deliberate sabotage on the part of some of its staff with political motives. This may include tampering with electoral materials and equipment. We draw attention to this in order for INEC to ensure that recruitment and deployment of permanent and adhoc staff are transparent.

In the next two weeks, there will be further *political realignments and this will manifest in* defections of political party stalwarts and their supporters. Undecided voters will make up their minds on who to vote for. This will happen across parties.

*Voter turnout* may be high in less violent areas for the obvious reason that voters will not risk their lives. Previous and present level of violence as noted above will be a deterrent factor especially in the North-East, South East and parts of the North Central areas of the country.

The *voting patterns* will take the form of (a) voting on party line (b) voting of candidates and (c) presidential election results may further reinforce a deeply divided country along regional lines with the Northern part of the country voting for the PDP, the West for APC and East for LP/APGA. The ethnicity and religious factors will play prominent roles here. (d) election results from the States during the gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections may likely reflect a different trend as voters may likely vote personalities or parties.

The *acceptance of election outcomes* by political parties is key in the health of democracy. If the electoral process is transparent, we may witness few complaints and therefore few litigations instituted by aggrieved persons who might feel cheated during the elections.

## **Conclusion**

As Nigerians approach the Presidential and National Assembly Elections, it is important to draw attention to emerging challenges in order for the nations and its friends to assist in addressing them in an innovative way in order to have a free, fair and credible exercise. The first *challenge arises from the transition from the cash to a cashless economy*. If the transition is not handled creatively, it may lead to national protest by those in the low income and informal sectors who depend on the use of cash for daily transactions and livelihood and who are yet to adapt to the new technology of cash transactions. This may disrupt the elections.

Another worrisome challenge is the *targeted political violence* witnessed recently in some parts of the country and directed at offices of the Independent Electoral Body. Few days to the Presidential election INEC office in Anambra State was burnt down by arsonist and sensitive electoral materials and equipment such as Bimodal Voter Registration System (BVAS), where completely burnt. This has raised doubts whether the elections will be held when this is occurring few days to the elections. INEC has reassured Nigerians and the world that it is committed to conducting the elections and the continuous destruction of its infrastructure will not harm its preparation to conduct the elections.

The other concern that may affect the elections is the *controversy around the potential manipulation of the BVAS* in the forthcoming elections. This controversy has arisen from the judicial intervention in the Osun Governorship elections. The courts held that there was over-voting in the Governorship Election because there were discrepancies between the records on the BVAS and the results that INEC provided. The controversy has led to doubts amongst political parties, voters and observers on the sanctity of the BVAS. It is clear that politicians will always want to circumvent rules and procedures in order to win elections. The successful use of the BVAS in the elections will be dependent on the INEC Staff and to some extent, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC). Nigerians must therefore pay attention to INEC Staff using BVAS to ensure complete uploading of results or to detect deliberate refusal to upload the results. The NCC must be monitored to ensure that networks are not tampered with throughout the duration of the elections.

This election must be conducted freeing and fairly in order not to reignite calls for the balkanization of the country. The outcome of the elections must provide political stability which is required for a well-functioning economy and protection of national and foreign investments. It will be an opportunity for the Nigerian State to work towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to reverse the poverty and unemployment levels in the country. It will help improve its global position in the comity of nations.

Nigerian voters have the final decision on the set of leaders to precide over the affairs of the nation. But INEC National Communication Commission (NCC), security, political parties, observers (domestic monitor and foreign observer missions) will have to help provide the environment for this to happen. INEC should sustain its promise of not changing the dates of the elections and its commitment to conducting a free, fair and transparent elections. It must protect its sensitive electoral materials and ensure that its staff (regular and ad hoc) are carefully recruited and deployed

to achieve transparency and fairness in the elections. The security sector must play transparent and civil roles in support of the electoral process. Political parties must conduct themselves in civil ways and ensure that its members do not obstruct the electoral process. The international community must watch keenly the unfolding developments in Nigeria leading to the elections on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and support the process to succeed and advice critical stakeholders to play the political game according to the rules. We hope that the election will be a “transition with consolidation”<sup>17</sup> and West African neighbours will find it a case for emulation.

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Sandbrook “Transition without Consolidation: Democratisation in Africa” Third World Quarterly vol.17 1990.