



FEBRUARY
2023

Nigeria's 2023 Election: Democratic Development and Political Fragmentation



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This study has been carried out within the partnership between the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) and IFRA-Nigeria.

ISBN: 979-10-373-0672-2

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Cover: Campaign posters, Lagos, May 7, 2022

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How to quote this publication:

Sa'eed Husaini, "Nigeria's 2023 Election: Democratic Development and Political Fragmentation", *Notes de l'Ifri*, Ifri, February 2023.

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Abstract

Nigerians will, barring last minute changes, go to the polls on February 25 to elect a new president and members of the National Assembly. This marks the 7th in an unbroken sequence of presidential elections held since the country's return to democracy in 1999. With President Muhammadu Buhari unable to compete in the election having served two full terms, the unpopular ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party will face a formidable challenge, not only from its traditional rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), but also from an unprecedented "third party" challenger – a previously marginal but now surging Labour Party.

This paper analyzes Nigeria's 2023 election not only in the context of this unique partisan configuration but also considering the wider set of factors that will, in all probability, influence the organization and the outcome of the election. These factors include the preparedness of the Independent National Electoral Commission and especially its capacity to properly deploy its newly acquired biometric and result transmission technologies. In addition, the analysis explores the ways in which the voting process and result will also reflect the limitations and risks imposed by Nigeria's current climate of chronic insecurity, resulting from active armed militia and criminal groups operating across nearly all regions, but particularly in the Northeast, Southeast, and South-South. Insecurity has likewise coincided with rising elite polarization and the breakdown of the "zoning" consensus ahead of the election, elevating the importance of identitarian political rhetoric in the campaigns. While insecurity appears likely to contribute to the trend of declining voter turnouts observed in previous elections, the apparent increase in political interest, particularly among young voters, as reflected in the spike in the collection of voters cards ahead of the election might mark a countervailing trend.

Against this backdrop, the paper also considers the major parties, candidates, their political projects as well as their target constituencies. It finds that the parties articulated moderately divergent emphases while remaining largely consonant on the contentious economic questions of the period. It also considers possible elections scenarios that may result from the varying institutional and political characteristics of the main parties. Ultimately, it finds that the 2023 poll will represent the continued evolution of Nigerian electoral institutions and political participation in a context of lingering social division and insecurity.

Résumé

Sauf en cas de changement de dernière minute, les Nigériens se rendront aux urnes le 25 février pour élire un nouveau président et l'Assemblée nationale. Il s'agit de la septième élection présidentielle organisée depuis le retour du pays à la démocratie en 1999. Le président Muhammadu Buhari ayant effectué ses deux mandats et n'étant donc plus en mesure de se représenter, l'impopulaire parti au pouvoir, le All Progressives Congress (APC), sera défié non seulement par son rival traditionnel, le People's Democratic Party (PDP), mais aussi par le Labour Party, en pleine expansion.

Cette note analyse le contexte politique de cette édition électorale nigérienne. Elle s'intéresse non seulement à cette configuration partisane unique, mais elle analyse aussi un ensemble plus large de facteurs qui, selon toute probabilité, influenceront l'organisation et le résultat de l'élection. Ces facteurs comprennent l'état de préparation de la Commission électorale nationale indépendante et notamment sa capacité à déployer correctement ses nouvelles technologies biométriques et de transmission des résultats. Ensuite, le papier explore comment l'actuel climat d'insécurité provoqué par les milices armées et groupes criminels opérant dans presque toutes les régions, particulièrement dans le Nord-Est, le Sud-Est et le Sud-Sud, peuvent affecter le processus et le résultat du vote. L'insécurité coïncide également avec la polarisation croissante des élites et la rupture de l'accord de « zonage » en amont des élections ayant renforcé la dimension identitaire de la campagne électorale. D'une part, l'insécurité pourrait contribuer à une baisse de la participation électorale comparée au scrutin précédent. D'autre part, l'augmentation apparente de l'intérêt politique, en particulier chez les jeunes électeurs, comme le montre le pic de collecte des cartes électorales avant l'élection, pourrait marquer une tendance inverse.

Cette note dresse un tableau des principaux partis, des candidats et de leurs programmes politiques et ainsi que des circonscriptions ciblées. Les résultats démontrent que les partis ont exprimé des points de vue modérément différents, mais qu'ils convergent dans les questions économiques. Il s'agit enfin de proposer des scénarios électoraux. L'étude défend que le scrutin de 2023 reflètera l'évolution constante des institutions électorales nigériennes et de la participation politique dans un contexte de division sociale et d'insécurité persistantes.

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Introduction

On the February 25th, 2023, citizens of Africa's largest democracy will go to the polls to elect a new president and members of the National Assembly.¹ This will be followed by sub-national elections, on March 15th, to elect governors and state house of assembly members in Nigeria's 36 states. Having now served two terms in office, Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, appears intent on respecting constitutional term limits and handing over power to a successor. This points to the fact that respect for the two terms maximum imposed by law has been increasingly institutionalized since Nigeria's return to democracy. Indeed, Buhari has repeatedly promised to leave credible elections as his legacy before exiting the scene.² The polls will also mark the seventh in an unbroken sequence of general elections held since the country's transition from military rule in 1999 – representing a continuation of the longest span of time during which Nigerians have maintained the right to elect a civilian president. The sheer persistence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, in a post-independence history repeatedly punctuated by coup d'état, is laudable.

However, the elections will also take place under the shadow of considerable social and economic instability. There is the heightened possibility that a chronic security crisis and a severely contracted economy will either pose substantial stumbling blocks to the success of polling in various parts of the country or overshadow the electoral contest altogether for millions of beleaguered and internally displaced Nigerians. Moreover, the heightened polarization of the country on ethnic and religious lines, intensified by the identarian political rhetoric deployed by the leading candidates does not bode well for national stability or social cohesion before or after the election.

Likewise, the combined effect of a growing, increasingly frustrated youth voting population, coupled with the fact that the two leading parties have put forward septuagenarians as presidential flag bearers, will contribute to stoking already combustible generational tensions. Indeed, growing disenchantment with both the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), have contributed to generating significant interest, across urban youth and

1. Population numbers are disputed in Nigeria. However, the World Bank estimates that Nigeria has a population of over 200 million people, nearly doubling the population of Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation. See the World Bank's comparative population estimates for African nations, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org>.

2. B. Majeed, "Again, Buhari Promises Transparent Elections in 2023", *Premium Times*, October 1, 2022, available at: www.premiumtimesng.com.

international media circuits, around the possibility that an upstart Labour Party (LP) led by the relatively younger Peter Obi could stage a surprising electoral upset.³

Cumulatively, these factors represent the promise and the perils of Nigeria's 2023 election, which this paper seeks to examine. The paper begins by setting the initial context of Nigeria's ongoing democratic dispensation, identifying the central trends that have not only shaped electoral politics before and during the Buhari administration, but will likely also influence the character of the 2023 election. Following this, the paper profiles the main candidates and political parties that have dominated election discourse ahead of the polls. The third section considers the key campaign messages that the candidates have put forward, assessing the extent to which the candidates represent alternatives to the present governing arrangement. Finally, the conclusion offers a summation of the preceding discourse and considers wider questions the 2023 elections pose.

3. "Peter Obi, a Man Who Carries His Own Suitcases, Could Be Nigeria's Next President", *The Economist*, October 10, 2023, available at: <https://www.economist.com>.

Box 1: Historical Context of the Fourth Republic

The formal declaration of Nigeria's independence from Britain on October 1, 1960, came amidst an atmosphere of widespread optimism. Emerging from the shadow of colonial domination, the future of democratic self-government for Africa's most populous nation appeared to hold enormous promise. Indeed, the early years of Nigeria's First Republic (1960-1966) saw the growth of state infrastructure and the increased provision of critical social amenities, leading to an expansion of literacy and moderately improving standards of living. Yet, the period also saw the intensification of ethno-regional rivalries that, while nurtured in the colonial period, were further stoked by the political parties that gained parliamentary representation after independence. Colonial rule had bequeathed Nigeria with a "tripodal" (Mustapha 2006) federal structure, premised on the geographical separation and political empowerment of Nigeria's three largest ethno-linguistic groups: the Hausa, which held the majority in the Northern region, the Yoruba, demographically dominant in the Western Region, and the Igbo, holding the majority in the Eastern Region.

Competition between the nominal political leaders of these groups, coupled with growing disenchantment with the slow pace of development and the public anger over corruption among political representatives culminated in a military-led coup d'état in 1966 that was to be the first of many. Amid rising ethno-regional tensions within the population and military echelon, a secessionist movement led primarily by Igbo military officers emerged in the Eastern Region, declaring independence for the new Republic of Biafra in 1967. The decision by the Nigerian military leaders to suppress, rather than recognize, the new republic led to the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War (1960-1970).

The post-war period not only saw oil export revenues gain a central position in the Nigerian political economy, but also witnessed the break-up of the regionally based federal system with the successive establishment of new states – which now number 36 – and a new Federal Capital Territory. Nigeria also underwent a succession of military coups between 1975 and 1999, interspersed by two periods: 1979-1983 and 1992-1993, known respectively as the Second and Third Republics – during which electoral democracy was again attempted at the national level, only to be cut short. The exceptionally brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha, which witnessed an intensification of state repression and Nigeria's transformation into a global pariah state, ended with Abacha's sudden demise in 1998. The mounting pressure of decades of pro-democracy activism as well as the wider international context of liberalization culminated in Nigeria's return to electoral democracy in 1999 with the inauguration of its fourth constitutional republic.

Factors that Will Shape the 2023 Election

The 2023 election will be shaped by longstanding politico-economic trends that preceded the Buhari administration, as well as specific dynamics that have been newly generated or particularly intensified in the last eight years. These include improvements in – and the increasing technological sophistication of – electoral administration; insecurity; the politics of zoning and elite consensus; and popular disenchantment with electoral politics. The sections that follow address these issues in turn.

Evolving Electoral Administration

An important trend that has shaped Nigerian elections in the Fourth Republic has been the evolution of Nigeria's electoral administration body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The first three presidential elections of the Fourth Republic (1999, 2003, 2007) came to be renowned for various forms of fraud and electoral manipulation, including violence, political assassinations, and outright ballot snatchings. In particular, the 2007 general elections, in which the then ruling PDP earned over 70 percent of the total votes cast, earned widespread disrepute among academics and observers, prompting scholars to note that “the sordid manipulation and outrageous maladministration [...] made a travesty of the voting”.⁴ Omotola put it more starkly, concluding that: “the April 2007 general elections seem the most flawed in the electoral history of Nigeria”.⁵ Indeed, Musa Yar'Adua, the President elected in the 2007 contest, was forced to acknowledge in his inauguration speech that the elections that brought him to power had been imperfect.⁶

Against this backdrop, the 2011 elections seemed to mark a decisive turning point. The polls were widely (though not universally)⁷ praised as credible and commended by local and international observers.

4. R. T. Suberu, “Nigeria's Muddled Elections”, *Journal of Democracy*, 2007; 18(4):95-110.

5. J. S. Omotola. “Garrison' Democracy in Nigeria: The 2007 General Elections and The Prospects of Democratic Consolidation”, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, April 2009, 1;47(2):194-220.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Protests in opposition constituencies in various states spilled over into significant post-election violence. Most affected was Kaduna state, where 1000 people were reportedly killed. H. Angerbrandt, “Deadly Elections: Post-Election Violence in Nigeria”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, March 2018, 56(1):143-67.

The Commonwealth Observer Group, for instance, in its interim report observed that, “the April 2011 elections marked a genuine celebration of democracy in Africa’s most populous country... Previously held notions that Nigeria can only hold flawed elections are now being discarded and this country can now shake off that stigma and redeem its image”.⁸ A series of factors account for this apparent change of direction. The appointment as INEC chair of Attahiru Jega, a widely respected former president of the national union of University employees, was an initial development that restored a measure of public legitimacy to the electoral umpire.⁹ This was further bolstered in INEC’s declaration that it would scrap the previous and widely condemned voter database to register Nigerian voters afresh, only this time with newly acquired biometric technology.¹⁰ While the election was not devoid of logistical challenges, it clearly represented an improvement in Nigerian electoral practice.

The subsequent general election in 2015, which featured Nigeria’s first ever opposition victory at the presidential level, only appeared to deepen the trend of INEC’s improving public legitimacy and increased embrace of technology. Stewarded once again by Attahiru Jega, the commission’s pre-election preparations featured a cleaned-up voter database, with the previous register of 73.5 million voters reduced to 67.4 million based on the institution’s uncovering of duplicate, fictitious or deceased individuals on the voter register.¹¹ INEC likewise introduced electronic card readers at polling units, allowing only registered voters to cast a ballot, and removing the possibility that vote numbers could be locally padded. The historical concession of PDP President Goodluck Jonathan to Muhammadu Buhari and the APC, and the decline in the degree of election petitions that commonly trail Nigerian polls also added to the growing public confidence in Nigeria’s electoral institutions.¹²

Electoral management in recent polls has had a less straightforward record. The outcome of the 2019 presidential election was celebrated by some local civil society groups and INEC continued to improve on its biometric data capturing system, increasing the voter register to 84 million.¹³ However, some international observer groups questioned the integrity of the voter registration process. The European Union Election Observation Mission for instance, stated in its report that the collection of

8. This information is taken from Commonwealth Observer Group, “2011 Nigerian Elections Interim Statement”, April 18, 2011, available at: <https://aceproject.org>.

9. S.O. Akhaine, “Nigeria’s 2011 Elections: The ‘Crippled Giant’ Learns to Walk?”, *African Affairs*, October 1, 2011; 110(441):649-55.

10. *Ibid.*

11. O. Owen, Z. Usman, “Briefing: Why Goodluck Jonathan Lost the Nigerian Presidential Election of 2015”, *African Affairs*, July 2015, 1;114(456):455-71.

12. H. Onapajo, “Nigeria’s 2015 General Elections: The Saliency of Electoral Reforms”, *The Round Table*, September 2015, 3;104(5):573-84.

13. *Ibid.*

voter cards appeared “implausibly high” in some states, also noting that “the voter register includes deceased persons” (EUEOM 2019). The elections were also followed by a legal challenge launched by the PDP flag bearer, Atiku Abubakar, mirrored by numerous legal battles on the state-level.¹⁴

State-level elections since 2019 have likewise featured both questionable logistical failures and legal disputes and the increased integration of technology into electoral administration. The latter has included the introduction of a new Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) that features a fingerprint scan and facial recognition technology. INEC has also developed an online platform where polling unit results are uploaded and can be viewed in real time.¹⁵ Yet, election results have remained contentious at the state level – with various governorship polls having been overturned by courts. The newly introduced technology has itself been the source of dispute, with the defeated APC candidate in the 2022 Osun Governorship Election alleging that the PDP shored up votes in the same polling units where the BVAS happened to not have been in use.¹⁶

Given this backdrop, what can we reasonably expect from INEC with respect to how it will likely administer the 2023 elections? There have already been complaints from certain segments of civil society about the ongoing voter registration process. For instance, the Abuja based Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), a research NGO that closely monitors West African elections, has expressed concerns over alleged instances of duplicate names and underage voters appearing on the voter register.¹⁷ Going even further, the Community Life Project/ReclaimNaija, an NGO that works in collaboration with religious leaders has raised fears that some citizens may be “deliberately denied access to their PVCs based on ethnic or partisan considerations”.¹⁸ Such concerns, if they prove to be founded, could question the credibility of the polls long before the election itself.

However, the electoral umpire's recent decision to extend the deadline for voters to pick up new identification cards may provide an opportunity to avoid this outcome.¹⁹ Expectations are also heightened that INEC, aided by the recently passed Electoral Act 2022, which grants the commission legal

14. H. Onapajo, “The Tragedy of The Umpire: The Electoral Management Body and Nigeria's 2019 General Elections”, *The Round Table*, July 2020, 3:109(4):368-76.

15. “What INEC's BVAS Means And How to Minimise Its Failure During Elections’ *Daily Trust*, April 27, 2022, available at: <https://dailytrust.com>.

16. “Osun Governorship Election Tribunal: BVAS Not Used in 749 Polling Units – Witness”, *Premium Times*, November 23, 2022, available at: www.premiumtimesng.com.

17. “CDD Demands Sanctions Over Multiple, Underage Voters’ Registration”, *Daily Trust*, November 19, 2022, available at: <https://dailytrust.com>.

18. “POLLS: IPAC, Group Disagree Over INEC's Readiness”, *Vanguard*, January 11, 2023, available at: www.vanguardngr.com.

19. “Young Nigerians Flock to Get Voting Cards for February Election”, *Aljazeera*, January 17, 2023, available at: www.aljazeera.com.

backing to use its BVAS technology, will be able to deliver a credible vote tally on election day. Along with the dynamics of electoral administration, the election outcome will also be influenced by the wider context of socio-political conflict and fragmentation.

Conflict and Social Cleavage

Nigeria's prevailing context of insecurity is a central issue that will affect the organization of the 2023 general elections. In 2022, over 10,000 people were killed in various forms of armed conflict, including inter-communal, jihadist, and criminally instigated violence.²⁰ In addition to the more established threats posed by the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria and oil militancy in the Niger-Delta, the holding of polls in numerous constituencies around Nigeria will be affected by a wider range of threats to public safety that have intensified since 2015.

These include the rise, particularly in Northwest and Northcentral Nigeria, of violent bandit groups, often associated with pastoral communities. The activities of such groups have increasingly intensified since 2012, leading to a rise in cattle rustling and kidnapping, as well as contributing to farmer-herder conflicts.²¹ Banditry will likely affect electoral dynamics in the worst hit areas of the country by attacking political party campaigners and by posing a direct threat to the lives of voters and electoral officials on election day. In addition, long-standing conflicts between farming and herding communities, which the rise of bandit groups has exacerbated, will also have an impact on electoral politics by deepening the animosity between livelihood groups, thereby increasing the salience of election campaign discourses that appeal to this cleavage. Politicians in areas affected by these conflicts have frequently rallied support through stereotyping members of the opposing community.²² This dynamic is particularly intense in North-central/middle-belt states where the farmer-herder cleavage overlaps with religious and ethnic divisions – as most pastoralists are thought to be Muslim and Fulani while farming communities tend to be Christian and ethnically heterogenous.

Pastoralist migration has also played an increasingly prominent role in identitarian discourse and political contestation in Nigeria's southern states. For instance, rural and peri-urban contexts in the southwestern region have seen an increase in such incidents as well as high-profile

20. "Countdown Begins to Nigeria's Crucial 2023 Election", *International Crisis Group*, December 23, 2022, available at: www.crisisgroup.org.

21. Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), "Multiple Nodes, Common Causes: National Stocktake of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria", March 2022, available at: www.africaportal.org.

22. A. Higazi, Y. Zahbia, "From Cooperation to Contention, Political Unsettlement, and Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts in Nigeria", *Accord, Conciliation Resources*, 2017, available at: www.politicalsettlements.org.

attacks by bandits or terrorist groups often associated in public and media discourse with pastoralist communities. This has in turn fueled a rise in Yoruba nationalist agitations and the emergence of an “Oduduwa Republic” movement, led by the separatist agitator, Sunday Adeniyi Adeyemo, known as “Sunday Igboho”.

South-eastern states have also witnessed the emergence of armed groups affiliated to or advancing a similar cause as the longer-running Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) movement.²³ This has coincided with rising demands for a referendum to decide on the possible secession of areas that fell within the short-lived Republic of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970). In addition to organizing street protests and calling for election boycotts, Biafra separatist groups have also frequently staged large-scale sit-at-home protests, forcing residents of states in Southeast Nigeria to remain at home on designated days under threat of violence.²⁴ Armed groups claiming affiliation with separatist movements have also attacked several INEC facilities in the region, as well as undertaken the political assassination of state security officials and local politicians. Ongoing attacks by such groups are likely to affect the electoral process as much through posing a direct threat to the process of organizing and participating in the elections as through depressing voter turnout in affected areas.²⁵

Elite Fragmentation

The proliferation of armed groups and the rise of separatist movements has coincided with declining social cohesion and a breakdown of elite consensus around the “zoning” norm of ethno-religious power sharing that has slowly emerged across Nigeria’s political elite since the 1980s.²⁶ Recent poles such as Africa Polling Institute’s (API’s) social cohesion index have noted that intergroup cohesion, previously below the global average of 50 percent, fell to under 39.6 percent in 2022.²⁷ Civil society watch groups

23. Since Nigeria’s return to democracy, demands for the secession of the areas that were part of the historic Republic of Biafra have ebbed and flowed. This dynamic took a new turn in 2012 with the emergence of IPOB, a group led by now incarcerated British-Nigerian separatist activist, Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB has reinvigorated the residual separatist agitations, earning more wider public sympathy than previous such groups. See O. Ibeanu, N. Orji and C.K. Iwuamadi, *Biafra Separatism: Causes, Consequences and Remedies*, Enugu: Institute for Innovations in Development, 2016.

24. U. Chinagorom, “How IPOB’s Sit-at-Home Order Is Destroying Businesses in Nigeria’s South-East”, *Premium Times*, May 17, 2022, available at: www.premiumtimesng.com.

25. C. Mom, “How Constant Attacks on INEC Offices in South-East May Induce Voter Apathy”, *The Cable*, January 28, 2023, available at: www.thecable.ng.

26. N. Cheeseman, E. Bertrand, S Husaini, *A Dictionary of African Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

27. “Nigeria Social Cohesion Index Remains Weak at 39.6% – New API Report”, Africa Polling Institute, October 8, 2022, available at: <https://africapolling.org>.

have also noted an increase in identitarian public discourse and a rise in incidents of disinformation based on group stereotyping.²⁸

The election also arises in a context of declining cohesion among the leaders of the dominant political parties. An early indication of this was the announcement by a forum of Nigeria's southern governors issued in June 2021 declaring that Nigeria's next president should come from the south and commit to promulgating a ban against the open grazing of cattle.²⁹ This development foreshadowed the contentious process by which the party flagbearers were selected by both the APC and PDP. Both processes resulted in fissures on identitarian lines within the two dominant parties.

The most significant disagreement within the APC emerged after party primaries in June 2022, when the party's flag bearer Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, selected Kashim Shettima, the former governor of the North-eastern state of Borno, as his running mate. The controversy around the choice arises from the fact that both candidates are Muslims. This violates the political norm – though a habit and not a law – of “zoning” held by Nigeria's political elite in *two* respects, since, under zoning, a Southern Christian candidate would ordinarily be expected to follow the two-term presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, a Northern Muslim. Tinubu's choice of running mate also infringed a second expectation of zoning – that the presidential and the vice-presidential slots be reserved for candidates of varying faith backgrounds. The “Muslim-Muslim” ticket controversy has remained a point of discord for some party leaders from Nigeria's Christian heartlands, though the APC has managed to avoid a significant wave of defections.

For the PDP, the most significant disagreement emerged during the May 2022 party primary context. The victory of Atiku Abubakar at the primaries led to the alienation of many southern governors within the PDP who had earlier joined their southern APC counterparts to call for a southern presidential candidate. Along with his statement that the PDP primaries were marred by vote-buying, the emergence of Atiku, a northern Muslim, as the PDP frontrunner also contributed to the defection to the Labour Party of Peter Obi, Atiku's former running-mate. Atiku has however insisted that his candidacy does not violate zoning, since the PDP's last presidential candidate was from the south. This has done little to maintain the cohesion of the party which since the primaries has suffered further fragmentation. The party was, following the primaries, faced with an internal rebellion led by five southern PDP governors, known as the “G5”.

28. Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), “Multiple Nodes, Common Causes: National Stocktake of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria”, *op. cit.*

29. “Southern Governors Want Power Shift, Reject 30% Share for ‘Frontier Basins’”, *The Guardian*, July 6, 2021, available at: <https://guardian.ng>.

This faction has insisted that they will withhold support for and participation in Atiku's presidential campaign unless the party's chairman Iyorchia Ayu, an Atiku ally, resigns to be replaced by a southern chairman.

The internal fissures generated by disputes over zoning have both diminished the momentum of the APC and PDP campaigns and helped lend credence to the viability of the third option presented by Peter Obi and the Labour Party. That Peter Obi remains the only southern Christian candidate on the ballot will likely contribute to identity-based electoral mobilization in Christian majority states. This has already been mirrored in the rhetoric of the other dominant candidates, with Atiku Abubakar having issued a campaign statement encouraging northerners to support him as the most popular northern candidate on the ballot.³⁰ Tinubu has likewise issued pleas for support that have been perceived as ethnically tinged.³¹ In addition, the fact that these three major candidacies fall along the division of Nigeria's majority linguistic groups – Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa – has led civil society groups to express concern over the ethnicization of electoral discourse.³²

Democratic Malaise

Along with electoral management, insecurity, and the politics of identity, the 2023 electoral contest arises in a context of voter apathy and popular disenchantment with Nigeria's current politico-economic settlement. A wider decline in living standards has also coincided with declining voter turnouts in recent elections. Recent survey data provides one source for tracking changing perceptions about popular satisfaction with Nigeria's current political regime. Afrobarometer, the respected cross-continental polling agency, has, over the past 20 years, collected responses in Nigeria to the question "Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works?". The results of these polls show that the proportions of Nigerians expressing a moderate or strong disaffection with democracy more than doubled between the first survey round in 1999 and the most recent round in 2022 (See Figure 1). This proportion of respondents has increased in recent electoral cycles – with a striking 41 percent of Nigerians expressing in 2022 that they are "not at all satisfied' with democracy".

Survey measures of disaffection have also been affirmed in various metrics of political participation in recent elections. These include the steady decline in voter turnout, which fell to 34.74 percent in the 2019

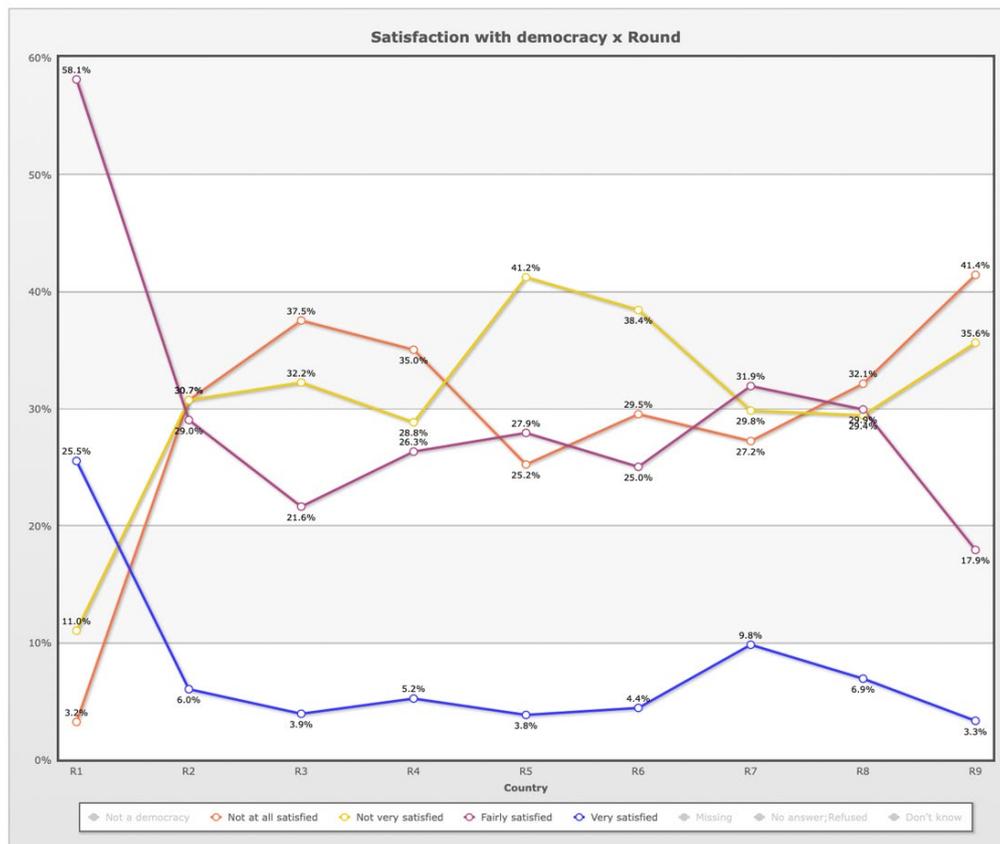
30. A. Adeleuyeye, "Northerners Need Me, Not Yoruba or Igbo candidate – Atiku", *Vanguard*, October 16, 2022, available at: www.vanguardngr.com.

31. T. Ajuwon, "Yorubas must deliver 95% of their votes to me; reject Atiku, Obi: Tinubu", *People's Gazette*, October 16, 2022, available at: <https://gazettengr.com>.

32. "2023: CDD Demands Sanctions Over Multiple, Underage Voters' Registration", *Daily Trust*, November 19, 2022, available at: <https://dailytrust.com>.

election from an already low 43.65 percent in 2015. Turnouts in state-level off-cycle elections have been even lower, with the November 2021 Anambra state election recording an abysmally low turnout of 10.3 percent. Recent elections have also witnessed a reported rise in incidents of vote-buying observed by civil-society groups. Scholars are increasingly arguing that what is often called vote-buying is a complicated phenomenon that is not always reducible to a straightforward market exchange between political parties and voters.³³ However, the increasing prevalence of this phenomenon, coupled with decreasing turnouts, suggests that at least some voters have lost faith in the possibility of democratic accountability, and instead, now see elections in more immediate instrumental terms.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with democracy x Round



Afrobarometer Nigeria

Source: Afrobarometer Nigeria

While comprehensive accounts of the growing political dissatisfaction with democracy in Nigeria have not yet emerged, certain aspects of the Afrobarometer data suggest a plausible explanation. Though the earlier rounds of the data (after the dramatic decline in R2) display some measure of fluctuation, a clear waning in satisfaction with democracy becomes

33. P. Roelofs, "Beyond Programmatic Versus Patrimonial Politics: Contested Conceptions of Legitimate Distribution in Nigeria", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, September 2019, 57(3):415-36.; S., Husaini, *Beyond Stomach Infrastructure: Party Membership and Political Ideology in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2020.

evident in the R7 survey data collected in Nigeria in 2017. This period coincided with Nigeria's entry into a recession in 2016, propelled in part by the global oil price crash. This followed a decade-long period of "impressive" economic growth – albeit growth that was not inclusive and did not provide the basis for structural transformation.³⁴

Indeed, the period of growth saw a rise in inequality and was accompanied by declining living standards and a rise in multi-dimensional poverty.³⁵ Nigeria has since 2018 competed with India for the ignominious position of being the nation with the world's highest number of extremely poor people, with 70 million Nigerians now living below the poverty line.³⁶ As of 2022, 72 percent of Nigerians living in rural areas and 42 percent of urban Nigerians were classified as multi-dimensionally poor by Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).³⁷ The 2023 election thus arises in an immediate context of dissatisfaction with Nigeria's political-economic regime and declining living standards.

These dynamics have also coincided with the deepening of a generational political cleavage. Nigeria has one of the largest youth populations in the world, with over 65 million young people between the ages of 10-24.³⁸ Young people also represent an increasing share of the overall population, with over 40 percent of Nigerians falling under the age of fifteen.³⁹ Yet, youth population growth has not coincided with the substantial expansion of either political representation or employment opportunities – indeed, youth unemployment stood at 37 percent in 2022.⁴⁰ These factors have meant that an increasingly frustrated segment of (often urban) youth are pitted against state institutions perceived to be dominated by an aging elite. This cleavage has so far expressed itself in extra-electoral ways: it marked an initial legislative victory with the passage into law in 2018 of The Age Reduction Bill, popularly known as Not Too Young to Run bill, which reduces the age limit for running for electoral office in Nigeria.⁴¹

34. Z. Usman, "The Successes and Failures of Economic Reform in Nigeria's Post-Military Political Settlement", *African Affairs*, 2020, 119(474), pp.1-38.

35. NBS Nigeria, *Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022)*, National Bureau of Statistics of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, FCT Abuja, 2022.

36. "Nigeria Is no Longer The Poverty Capital of The World But Still Has Over 70 Million People Living in Extreme Poverty – The Highest In Africa", *Business Insider Africa*, March 10, 2022, available at: <https://africa.businessinsider.com>.

37. E. Elebeke, "133m Nigerians Multidimensionally Poor – NBS", *Vanguard*, November 17, 2022, available at: www.vanguardngr.com.

38. UNICEF, "Delivery Connectivity, Skills, and Job Opportunities to 20 Million Young Nigerians By 2030", March 4, 2022, available at: www.unicef.org.

39. This information is taken from the Index Mundi database, "Nigeria Age Structure", available at: www.indexmundi.com [accessed February 16, 2022].

40. UNICEF, "Delivery Connectivity, Skills, and Job Opportunities to 20 Million Young Nigerians By 2030", *op. cit.*

41. B. Adebayo, "#NotTooYoungToRun: Nigeria Lowers Minimum Age for Election Candidates", *CNN World*, May 31, 2018, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com>.

The same cleavage was even more forcefully demonstrated during the #EndSARS protests in October 2020, which saw crowds of largely young Nigerians take to the streets in various cities to protesting the failure of governance seen as dominated by older generations.⁴²

The 2023 election appears to present an opportunity for this cleavage to coalesce into a distinct generational voting bloc, as many young, web-savvy Nigerians appear to be backing the presidential ambition Labour Party candidate, Peter Obi.⁴³ In addition to his *relative* youth (Obi is 61), his supporters see the Obi candidacy as an opportunity to break the hegemony of the APC and the PDP.⁴⁴ The Obi campaign has also directly appealed to young people, promising to tackle youth unemployment, supporting entrepreneurship as a means of increasing Nigeria's overall domestic production (further analysis of party platforms below). The self-styled "Obidient" movement appears to re-invigorate an interest in electoral politics among young people, and may represent a countervailing dynamic to the overall trend of democratic malaise.⁴⁵

42. K. Strong, "The Rise and Suppression of #EndSARS, A Deep Dive into The Protests in Nigeria, And Where The Movement Stands Now" *Harper's Bazaar*, October 27, 2020, available at: www.harpersbazaar.com.

43. E. Obadare, "Tinubu's Challenge", Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)", January 3, 2023, available at: www.cfr.org.

44. A. Adeoye, "Peter Obi's 'Obidient' Movement Shakes Up Nigerian Presidential Race", October 18, 2022, available at: www.ft.com.

45. M. Onyibe, "Youth Bulge And Politics in Nigeria", *Vanguard*, June 21, 2022, available at: www.vanguardngr.com.

Parties, Candidates and Campaigns

The 2023 election is shaping up to be a three-horse race between the ruling APC, with Bola Tinubu as its candidate, the main opposition PDP led by Atiku Abubakar, and the upstart LP headed by Peter Obi. In Nigeria, the identities of political leaders have been thought to play a central role in campaign rhetoric and voting behavior. This is because political campaigns have often depended on the ability of candidates to appeal to an ethno-religious or patrimonial campaign strategy and rhetoric. However, recent academic scholarship on Nigerian politics has marked an increased interest in forms of campaign rhetoric and motivations for voting that exceed identitarian political cleavages.⁴⁶ Studies following the 2015 presidential elections have demonstrated that recent campaigns have featured debates over contentious policy issues, beyond appeals to identity. Roelofs⁴⁷ (2019) goes further, questioning altogether the distinction between “programmatic” appeals that may include economic rhetoric and “patrimonial” election strategies which rely on ethnic and clientelist campaigning. Instead, she argues that programmatic and patrimonial strategies are better understood as interacting in a dynamic fashion, rather than being mutually exclusive. Inspired by this debate, the forgoing analysis of the key parties and candidates assesses both the identitarian appeals and key economic issues that have been pursued by the major electoral front-runners in the 2023 election campaign.

All Progressives Congress

As the governing party counting the President and most state governors and National Assembly members within its fold, the APC appears to be the frontrunner in the coming election. The party was founded in 2013, following a merger of regionally dominant political parties: the Southwestern Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); the northern Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and the All-Nigerian People’s Party (ANPP); and factions of the PDP and the South-eastern dominant All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The APC scored a historic victory at the presidential level

46. A. Thurston, “The Politics of Technocracy in Fourth Republic Nigeria”, *African Studies Review*, 2018, 61(1), pp.215-238; A.C. LeVan, *Contemporary Nigerian politics: Competition in a Time of Transition and Terror*, Cambridge University Press, 2019; 46. Z. Usman, “The Successes and Failures of Economic Reform in Nigeria’s Post-Military Political Settlement”, *op. cit.*

47. P. Roelofs, “Beyond Programmatic Versus Patrimonial Politics: Contested Conceptions of Legitimate Distribution in Nigeria”, *op. cit.*

in 2015, with the opposition APC candidate Muhammadu Buhari gaining 53.96 percent of the vote over the 44.96 percent scored by the PDP incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan.

Since then, the APC has maintained power at the Presidential level, as well as a majority of National Assembly members and state governors. The party has presided over a period of economic and security crisis, leading to an outpouring of public disaffection with governance outcomes. Indeed, recent polling data found that 89 percent of Nigerians felt the country was headed in the wrong direction.⁴⁸ Despite this context, the APC is still considered the electoral frontrunner due to its incumbency, the strength of its national political machine and the qualities of its frontrunning candidate.

Following a contested primary, the APC chose Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a senior ruling party leader and former Lagos state governor to be its presidential candidate. Tinubu's strongest support base is thought to be the predominately Yoruba Southwest, where the APC controls four out of six governorship seats.⁴⁹ Widely seen as the political "Godfather" of Lagos state, Tinubu is thought to possess an immense personal fortune which has already put one president in office, having bank-rolled Buhari's successful 2015 campaign. Tinubu has attempted to strike a delicate balance between avoiding criticizing the Buhari administration and articulating his own approach to governance.

Tinubu's running mate, Kashim Shettima, is a current Senator as well as the former governor of Borno state. Shettima was considered popular during his time as Borno state governor and was not only elected to a second term but also shaped the emergence of his successor, Babagana Zulum. It is, as such, thought that his presence on the APC ticket will increase the party's vote share in the Northeast, which is also the home region of the main opposition presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar (PDP). The APC campaign will also benefit from the party's dominance in the Northwest, where it holds six out of seven governorship seats. However, as earlier noted, the Tinubu/Shettima ticket has been the source of some controversy within and outside the APC given the fact that both candidates are Muslim, going against zoning. APC is expected to perform worse in Christian majority states in the Southeast, South-south, and Northcentral because of its "Muslim-Muslim" ticket.

In addition to identitarian appeals, the APC campaign has emphasized several policy areas in which it hopes to distinguish itself from its competitors. The Tinubu/Shettima campaign manifesto, for instance, proposes to suspend limits on public spending "during this protracted

48. NOI Polls, "Summary of Results: Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey in Nigeria, 2022", *Afrobarometer*, 2022, available at: www.afrobarometer.org.

49. E. Obadare, "Tinubu's Challenge", Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)", *op. cit.*

moment of global economic turmoil”, to pursue import substitution to encourage the growth of a domestic manufacturing sector, and to resurrect “commodity boards to establish minimum prices for strategic crops”.⁵⁰ The document also promises to expand recruitment into Nigeria’s armed forces as a measure to stem the tide of insecurity, as well as to expand the existing social welfare programs of the current regimes. Interestingly, the document proposes a policy previously repudiated by the APC: to “phase out” the much-debated fuel subsidy policy, which has long been a bone of contention between governing parties and Nigerian Civic Groups and Labour Unions.⁵¹ Overall, the document emphasizes an expanded role for the state, and deeper partnership with the private sector – i.e., a strong emphasis on public private partnerships – as pillars of its vision for driving development. Thus, while maintaining the overall direction of the economic reform emphasizing continued liberalization and creating an enabling environment for business, the Tinubu campaign does appear to lean in a more economically populist direction than do the LP and the PDP.

Box 2: Nigerian Election Rules

Given its presidential system and bicameral legislature, Nigerian voters elect both a president and single-member districts of a National Assembly (lower house) and Senate (upper house). This structure is mirrored at the state level, where voters directly elect both the executive – the state governors – and legislators in State Houses of Assembly. The federal system also includes a third tier of government, the Local Government Administration (LGA), whose chairmen are directly elected by voters. At the national level, constitutional rules require that, to be elected president, a candidate must gain the most votes and win over 25% of the vote in $\frac{2}{3}$ of Nigeria’s 36 states and Federal Capital Territory. A second-round election will be held if no candidate is able to meet this threshold. This federalized electoral structure aims to provide multiple avenues for democratic participation and to ensure that election into the presidential office requires coalition building across Nigeria’s multiple geo-political zones.

50. All Progressive’s Congress, *Renewed Hope 2023*, retrieved from: <https://tinubu.ng>.

51. *Ibid.* Despite being Africa’s largest crude oil producer, Nigeria imports refined petroleum products as local refineries lack the capacity to meet domestic demand. The Federal government, which oversees the importation, has since the 1970s sold these products below the world market price, as a form of a “social contract” with the citizenry, who otherwise derive few tangible benefits from the country’s oil production. However, since Nigeria’s return to democracy, successive governments have reduced or attempted to entirely eliminate the subsidy, sparking significant episodes of social protest led by Nigerian Labour Unions. See: C. Houeland, “The Social Contract and Industrial Citizenship: Nigerian Trade Unions’ Role in The Recurring Fuel Subsidy Protests”, *Africa*, 2022, 92(5), pp.860-879.

People's Democratic Party

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), the former ruling party, is the APC's main opponent, with 13 states governorships under its flag and a significant minority of seats in both chambers of the National Assembly. The PDP emerged as a coalition of powerful former political officeholders and retired military officers during Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1998-1999. The party then governed Nigeria at the Federal level for 16 years until its defeat in 2015. While the PDP oversaw a period of economic growth amid a favorable global oil price, the party was also associated with high-handedness, election fraud, and a permissive attitude towards corruption. Since the formation of the APC in 2013, the PDP has suffered serial defections and struggled to maintain its cohesion at the federal level. The party is nonetheless considered the APC's main challenger in the 2023 election, due to its control of elective positions across the country, as well as the vast experience and wealth of the PDP's flagbearer, former vice-president (1999-2007) and four-time-presidential-aspirant, Atiku Abubakar.

The PDP chose Atiku as its presidential candidate, following an acrimonious primary that resulted both in a major rift in the party and the exit of Peter Obi, initially one of the contenders in the PDP primary. After the primaries, Rivers State Governor Nyesome Wike and four other PDP governors from Benue, Oyo, Enugu, and Abia states, formed an oppositional block (the "G5") within the PDP, calling for the resignation of the party's chairman, a key Atiku ally. As a result, the PDP is currently divided in the regions which have historically formed its core base: namely the Southeast, South-South, and Northcentral. As his running mate, Atiku picked Ifeanyi Okowa, the current governor of Delta State, ostensibly to shore up the former's support in the South-South. Despite this and some residual support for Atiku among some former governors and power brokers in the renegade PDP states, the party's internal rift means that Atiku is largely relying on his appeal in northern states, which host a larger number of registered voters than their southern counterparts, to construct a regional block of support.

In terms of its messaging, the PDP campaign among all the others has placed the most emphasis on expanding the role of the private sector in the economy. The party's manifesto, for instance, identifies "private sector leadership in mobilizing resources; breaking governments monopoly in key sectors; and leveraging the market in determining prices" as the key pillars of its economic agenda. The document also proposes to "privatize all infrastructure delivery institutions including the four refineries", and to work "towards achieving the lowest corporate income tax rate in Africa, to make Nigeria one of the most attractive destinations for foreign direct

investment”.⁵² Expectedly, the campaign also proposes to end the fuel subsidy within 100 days of Atiku taking office.⁵³ While the state would still retain a substantial role in the economy – particularly in the areas of social provisioning – the campaign makes clear its desire to shift the current balance of politico-economic power away from the state and towards the private sector – with an emphasis on international investment. These proposals, moreover, are built on Atiku’s experience, since he was a central participant in the process of privatizing public enterprises which was intensified under the Obasanjo administration (1999-2007).⁵⁴ In broad terms, then, it would appear that the PDP’s proposals set the party apart from its competitors in degree if not in kind.

Labour Party

Following his exit from the PDP after the primaries, Peter Obi was adopted as the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, subsequently choosing Kaduna state senator Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed as his running mate. While the LP was re-established in 2002 (there had been previous Labour Party’s in earlier republics), it has languished at the electoral margins, having only won one governorship election and a handful of parliamentary seats since. In addition, though the LP was established by leaders of Nigeria’s major umbrella trade unions, the Nigerian Labour Congress, it has neither historically gained widespread support among Nigerian trade unionists, nor has it typically fielded trade unionists as its candidates. Analysts argue that the LP was founded to dissipate pressure from unionists who desired working-class political representation, rather than to organize working-class constituents into a distinct political block.⁵⁵ The (uncontested) victory of Peter Obi as the LP candidate, after his having stood for the PDP presidential ticket, fits into a long-standing trend, whereby the LP has acted as a second-choice option for candidates who lose out in the APC or PDP party primaries.

Given the LP’s weakness, the Peter Obi campaign has relied more on the candidate’s pre-existing base and direct appeals to new supporters. The Obi candidacy is partially buoyed by the desire, most audible in Igbo-majority Southeast but supported in other regions, that Nigeria elects an Igbo president given that the two other majority ethnic groups have held presidencies. This argument has often been framed by supporters of Obi

52. People’s Democratic Party, “A Covenant with Nigerians: Atiku Abubakar & Ifeanyi Okowa”, 2023, available at: www.atiku.org.

53. BusinessDay, “Atiku Plans to End Petrol Subsidy in First 100 Days”, December 20, 2022, available at: <https://businessday.ng>.

54. A. Thurston, “The Politics of Technocracy in Fourth Republic Nigeria”, *African Studies Review*, 2018, 61(1), pp.215-238.

55. B. Beckman, & L. Salihu, “The Failure of Nigeria’s Labour Party” in Beckman, Björn, Sakhela Buhlungu, and Lloyd Sachikonye, *Trade unions and party politics: Labour movements in Africa*, HSRC Press, 2010, pp. 59-84.

as a demand for “justice and fairness” in a context where ethnic-power sharing has been considered a norm of political behavior among the party elite. Along with this, the Peter Obi coalition is banking on the support of frustrated young urban voters whom the campaign has reached through an intensive social media-based campaign that has appealed to the candidate’s relative youth and perceived competence. As the only Christian among the three major contenders, the Obi campaign will also likely derive some support in Christian majority electoral constituencies, particularly in Northcentral Nigeria.

The Obi/Datti campaign has also sought to define itself in reference to specific policy areas. A central slogan of the campaign has been its promise to shift the Nigerian economy “from consumption to production”. The campaign’s manifesto and public statements have, like those of the other party’s, also emphasized a desire to remove Nigeria’s fuel subsidy,⁵⁶ and to strengthen state-private partnerships across economic sectors. Interestingly given that the campaign is running on a Labour Party platform, the manifesto makes virtually no distinct appeals to the Labour movement, beyond a promise to “Submit an Executive Bill to the National Assembly for a consolidated Occupational Health and Safety Act to revamp and improve on the 2012 Labour, Safety, Health, and Welfare (LSHW) Bill”. This seems to affirm the observations of analysts and scholars who point out that the relationship between the Labour Movement and the Obi/Datti campaign is one of convenience rather than ideological alignment. Interestingly, the campaign in its discussions about addressing insecurity has allowed more room for negotiation with non-state armed groups than do the other parties.⁵⁷ Overall, then, the LP manifesto aims at striking a balance between the APC and PDP positions.

Table 1: Economic Emphases of Major Campaigns

	APC - Tinubu	PDP - Atiku	LP - Obi
Currency Liberalization	Plan to eliminate Multiple Exchange Rate	Plan to eliminate Multiple Exchange Rate	Plan to eliminate Multiple Exchange Rate
Petrol Subsidy	Phase out Subsidy	Remove Subsidy within 100 days	Eliminate Subsidy

56. O. Okonkwo, “Confusion as Peter Obi Wants Fuel Subsidy Removed but NLC Does Not”, *Nairametrics*, January 2023, available at: <https://nairametrics.com>.

57. C. Olisah, “Peter Obi Explains How He Will Handle Agitators, Tackle Security Challenges if Elected President”, *Nairametrics*, January 2023, available at: <https://nairametrics.com>.

Private Sector Development	Strengthen Collaboration between government and Domestic Private Sector	Intensify privatization (including sale of public refineries) and encourage international investment	Strengthen Domestic Production through incentives and enabling environment
State's Role in Development	Expand state's role in social service provisioning and public private enterprise.	Maintain strong regulatory state while reducing state's role in enterprise.	Reduce federal budget and trim down civil service.

Smaller Parties

In addition to the three main parties, the election is contested by 15 other parties. Among these, a newly formed New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and its candidate Rabiun Kwankwaso, a former governor of the most populous northern state, Kano and a former defense minister under Obasanjo era, stands the best chance of gaining a significant vote share. While an outright victory for the NNPP is inconceivable, Kwankwaso's popularity in Kano, a state with 5 million registered voters, will mean that he will likely secure a choice bargaining position, allowing him to trade his support base for a key position in one of the bigger parties, in the event of a contested election.⁵⁸

Numerous smaller opposition parties exist aside from the LP and NNPP, but only a handful has a viable prospect of gaining power at the local or state – not to speak of national – level. Of these, the APGA is currently the most successful, having defeated both the APC and the PDP to attain a governorship polling victory with the election of former Central Bank Governor Chukwuma Soludo in the South-eastern state of Anambra. Also in Anambra, the Young Progressive Party (YPP) successfully elected Ifeanyi Ubah to the Nigerian Senate in the 2019 elections. The African Action Congress (AAC), the People's Redemption Party (PRP), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) are among the parties, which currently lack electoral representation but may be able to capture some local-level seats in key constituencies.

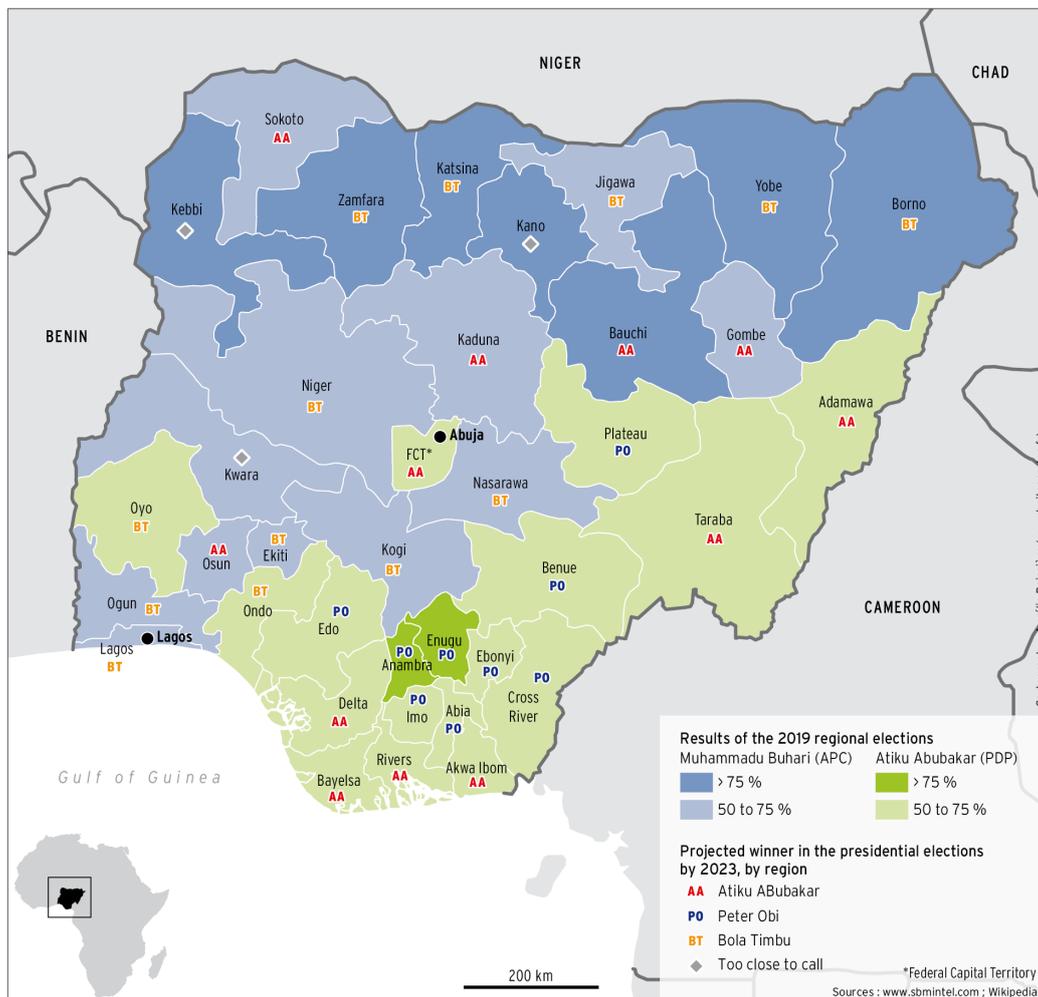
58. E. Akinkuotu, "Nigeria 2023: Can Peter Obi, Kwankwaso Spark a Presidential Runoff", *The Africa Report*, August 26, 2022, available at: www.theafricareport.com.

Election Scenarios

How might the wider political context and the electoral appeals of the main candidates affect the outcome of the presidential election? Considering the factionalization of the PDP, the fact that the LP has no base in most states, and the APC's relative cohesiveness and control of the levers of the federal government, an outright victory for Bola Tinubu, the APC candidate, appears the most likely scenario. However, a Tinubu victory will also likely be accompanied by legal disputes over the results, particularly given the novelty of the accreditation and transmission technology being deployed in the election.

Yet, the influence of third-party candidates such as Peter Obi and Kwankwaso, and the fact that both major parties have fallen afoul of zoning, has seen analysts increasingly moot a second scenario: one in which no candidate can secure the minimum constitutional requirement to be elected (plurality of votes in $\frac{2}{3}$ of the states) thereby triggering a run-off election. Figure 2, which is based on analysis conducted by the Nigerian political risk analysis firm SBM, portrays an election run-off scenario, in which the PDP and APC are unable to secure the required minimums in the first round. Under this scenario, the APC wins most states controlled by ruling party state governors in the Southwest and Northwest, while the PDP splits its base in the South-east with Peter Obi but shores up its votes in parts of the Northeast and Northcentral.

Figure 2: Results of the 2019 regional elections and scenarios of the 2023 general elections



Sources : www.sbmintel.com; Wikipedia

While a run-off election would put Nigeria's Fourth Republic in unprecedented territory, it is likely that the major political factions would be able to find a mutually agreeable compromise in that event. This is made likely by the fact that the competing candidates have proven amenable to various forms of coalitional arrangements in the past. Indeed, the relationship between the major opposition and ruling parties is one characterized by substantial flux, given that the party elite are generally able to move from one party to the another without significant sanction – for example, Atiku Abubakar, the PDP presidential candidate who had Peter Obi as his running mate in the 2019 elections, was one of the founding members of the APC.⁵⁹

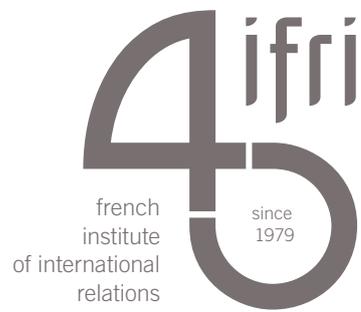
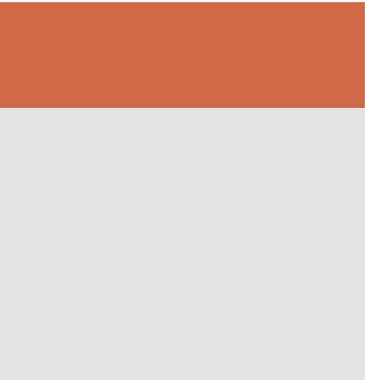
59. O. Awofeso and P. Irabor, "Party Cross-carpeting in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Cases and Causes", *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 2016, 6(3), pp.31-40.

Conclusion

The paper has assessed the key factors that have and will likely shape Nigeria's 2023 electoral contest, assessing the broader political context in which the 2023 general elections take place. Central among these factors include the prevailing context of conflict and social cleavage, increasing public confidence in electoral administration, the breakdown of elite consensus, and the current interplay of resurging youth engagement amid wider democratic disaffection. This context suggests that the election outcome will be conditioned by the threat of armed groups and INEC's deployment of new electoral technology, as much as by elite fragmentation and political mobilization among urban youth.

The examination of the key parties, candidates, and campaigns competing in the 2023 election, has also shown that the APC, PDP, and LP articulated campaign messages centered as much on their identitarian affinities as on issues of personal competence and subtle variations in economic perspective. The (perennial) breakdown of elite consensus on the norm of zoning and subtle disagreements on the pace and direction of ongoing privatization belies important agreements on continued state-private sector collaboration as well as the abandonment of the state's historically contentious management of energy prices.

While the outcome of the polls remains to be seen, the election will undoubtedly shed light on the state of changing technologies and dynamics of electoral administration amid rising insecurity in Nigeria. The election will also continue to pose important questions about the future of elite power sharing, the evolution of campaign strategy and rhetoric, and the trajectory of popular political participation in African democracies.



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