



NEWS Quick Updates

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INEC's Postponement of the February 16 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria: Costs, Controversies, and Certainties

BACKGROUND



- Nigeria has a current population of 198 million people (2018 estimated figure by the National Population Commission) and a total number of 84,004,084 registered voters (*Independent National Electoral Commission*)
- According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the 2019 general elections will be held in 119,973 polling units across the 36 States including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Nigeria with a total number of 116 domestic observer groups and 28 foreign observer groups accredited by INEC to monitor/observe the conduct of the elections (*Independent National Electoral Commission*)
- Based on antecedent, postponement of scheduled elections in Nigeria has become a recurring practice since 2011. In 2011, the National Assembly election was postponed on the day of elections from April 2 to April 9th, due to late arrival of result sheets. Similarly, in 2015, the Presidential elections scheduled for February 14 was rescheduled to March 28, 2015, while the Governorship and State Assembly elections scheduled for February 28, 2015 was extended to April 11, 2015. The official reasons for the shift was linked to security challenges (Boko Haram insurgency) in the North-East Region of Nigeria.

INCIDENT PROFILE

Less than six hours to the commencement of the February 16, 2019 Presidential election in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Chairman, Professor Yakubu Mahmoud issued a public statement on the postponement of the elections earlier scheduled for February 16 and March 2, 2019 for the National (Presidential and National Assembly) and the State elections (Governorship and State Assembly) respectively.

The Commission had cited logistical challenges including the distribution of electoral materials (ballot papers and result sheets) and incidents of arson at three State offices of INEC in Isiala Ngwa-South Local Government Area (LGA) of Abia State, Qu'an Pan LGA of Plateau State and Awka town in Anambra State as justifications for the extension. The fire incidents resulted in the damage of several permanent voters card (PVC), ballot boxes, voters' register, voting cubicles, 4,695 Smart Card Readers (SCR) and generating sets (INEC), amongst others.

The new date scheduled for the Presidential and National Assembly elections is February 23, 2019 with the State Governorship, State Assembly and the FCT Area Council elections to be held March 9, 2019.



COST & RISK ANALYSIS:

The unanticipated postponement of the Presidential election by INEC provoked widespread criticisms and public resentment as the Commission was accused of incompetence and ill-prepared to successfully conduct the elections across the country. In addition, the integrity of INEC was questioned by the political parties especially the All Progressives Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party as both parties have accused the leadership of the Commission of colluding with the opposing party to manipulate the outcomes of the elections. Beyond the public backlash, INEC has held three conferences to sensitize and explain to all stakeholders its justification and preparedness of the Commission to the reschedule elections of February 23, 2019. An emerging threat to the election is the widespread propaganda on social media insinuating ethnic bias of INEC and its Resident Commissioners of corruption and partisanship that heightens tensions and reduces public confidence on the credibility of the Commission to conduct free and fair elections across the States. Additional threats emerge from organized demonstrations against the Resident Commissioners in Akwa Ibom State and Rivers States accused of compromising the neutrality of the Commission in the States. The existing tensions have been exacerbated by the reported killings of the State APC Chairmen in Benue State¹ and Imo State². Voter apathy remains a significant concern in the face of the rising uncertainty of security during the polls. The INEC Chair has in the press conferences clarified and refuted allegations relating to the credibility of its Commissioners as well as the security of its sensitive materials but that has not discouraged growing public disenchantment on the likely outcome of the Presidential elections of February 23, 2019.

Additional security concerns arises from the demonstrations of the members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) who protested at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday, February 20, 2019 demanding the release of their leader, Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky who has been in custody of the Federal Government since 2015³. As reflected in WANEP Policy brief of January 2019, his continued detention could precipitate violent actions by the members of IMN to disrupt the peaceful conduct of the election in North Central and North West regions of the country especially on the backdrop of past violent protests and casualties from the group in 2018⁴.

Amid the uncertainty generated by the postponement, public perception of INEC's inadequate election planning may negatively affect Nigeria's election scheduling rating in the eyes of the international community⁵ as inconsistent.

The huge budgetary allocation expended on logistics by domestic and International observers in preparation for the February 16, 2019 election including the deployment of hundreds of observers to different (remote) areas across States may likely create funders fatigue as well as discourage the full participation of some organizations in monitoring the elections, which in effect can dampen voters perception on the transparency of the

¹ Punch Newspapers, February 18, 2019

² Punch Newspapers, February 20, 2019

³ BBC, Nigerian Election 2019: Shiite Group Protest as Nigeria Foreign Ministry Meet with International Community

⁴ WANEP WARN Policy Brief, Nigeria: Ahead of Nigeria's 2019 General Elections; Dynamics, Vulnerability and Resilience. January 2019

⁵ <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/DCS/article/viewFile/25022/25625>



electoral processes. According to the Director-General of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), Mr Muda Yusuf, the estimated financial loss from the election delay on the Nigerian economy was pegged at over \$1.5 billion dollars⁶

As observer groups are faced with the dilemma of either reducing the number of delegates for redeployment or incurring additional operational cost, the urgent need to readjust finances around the new election timetable becomes imperative as commitments are renewed towards ensuring the consolidation of Nigeria's democratic process. Despite discussions and blame games by political parties, the international community including heads of International Observer Missions in Nigeria pledged their continued support to the redeployment of observers on the new scheduled date, while also urging INEC to adhere to the set dates for the general elections⁷. The Commission's adherence to the stipulated date will contribute to the credibility of the process and further enhance electorate confidence in the electoral umpire.

MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS

- Following the deferral in elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) retrieved all sensitive electoral materials for safe keeping at the Central Bank Nigeria for distribution on a latter date with Smart Card Readers returned to INEC for reconfiguration⁸.
- Heads of International Observation missions including erstwhile President of Liberia, ECOWAS, African Union, Commonwealth, WANEP and other CSOs issued statements urging INEC to provide regular updates and information to the public on its revised timelines to enhance confidence and trust in the process⁹.
- The certification of vehicles by the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) ahead of the Presidential election is commendable as a follow up to the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between INEC and Road Transport Unions for efficient delivery and retrieval of INEC personnel and materials across States before, during and post-election¹⁰.
- The socio-economic implication of mass movement of voters who have travelled to their various States to cast their votes prior to the postponement of the elections has been ameliorated with the announcement by the Independent Marketers Association of Nigeria who directed its members to reduce petroleum pump price

⁶ <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/postponement-of-presidential-elections-could-cost-nigeria-billions-19353401>

⁷ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/313380-uk-us-speak-on-postponement-of-nigeria-general-elections.html>

⁸ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/313458-election-postponement-inec-retrieves-already-distributed-sensitive-materials-across-nigeria.html>

⁹ <https://punchng.com/adhere-strictly-to-new-date-eu-ecowas-election-observers-others-task-inec/>

<https://punchng.com/frsc-okays-415-vehicles-for-inec-materials-workers/>

¹⁰ <https://punchng.com/frsc-okays-415-vehicles-for-inec-materials-workers/>



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from N145 per liter to N140 in order to reduce the cost of commercial transport for voters¹¹

- The leadership of the INEC has maintained constant sensitization of the stakeholders and Nigerians through its press conferences that clarifies the ongoing efforts by the Commission to ensure free and fair elections on February 23, 2019.
- The recent meeting of security agencies with the President is geared towards strategic security efforts towards preventing or mitigating possible threats to the peaceful conduct of the polls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To forestall occurrences that could disrupt the commencement of a transparent and credible electoral cycle at stipulated dates, INEC should enhance its contingency/management plans including effective collaboration with security agencies to prevent adverse actions that could sabotage its efforts in ensuring peaceful elections on February 23, 2019.
- The documentation of lessons learnt and international best practices from Election Management Bodies (EMBs) across West Africa by INEC is crucial and should be replicated where necessary as part of pre-emptive measures aimed at ensuring better programming in subsequent elections. This upholds the credibility of elections and enhances electorate confidence in the electoral umpire.
- Political leaders should remain circumspect in their utterances and demonstrate confidences on the capacity of INEC and security agencies to ensure credible and peaceful elections across the Country.

¹¹ Punch Newspapers, February 18, 2019