

2011 NIGERIA ELECTIONS: TRENDS, THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Nigeria presidential, gubernatorial and legislative elections will be a critical point in the country's march towards consolidating democracy. The election is seen as a test of the Nigerian polity to adhere to constitutionalism and manage political transition from one democratically-elected government to another without resorting to violent and unconstitutional means.

This Policy Brief draws attention to emerging trends, and issues that threaten/heighten sectarian and political violence especially in high risk communities across the country.

It is argued that Nigeria possesses a very strong conflict carrying capacity given the diversity and sheer numeric strength of its population and the resilience of the country to absorb and contain localised and communal violence without seriously destabilising the nation. Notwithstanding, deeply embedded structural violence and persistent communal armed

conflicts have perpetuated poverty and undermined efforts to improve public service delivery and human security in Nigeria. Most often than not, election does not seem to bring the needed change to transform violence-generating structures and apparatus of the country, and therefore end up being a source of conflict rather than a bridging factor.

The 2011 election holds a promise of greater participation, transparency and credibility in view of recent developments taking place in both the political and judicial spheres. On the one hand, internal squabbles for the flagbearership within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) threaten to create a splinter group that will put up a serious challenge to the PDP establishment. It is widely speculated that the splinter group will produce for the first time a serious contender against the PDP for the presidency.

On the other hand, the government of President Jonathan Goodluck has demonstrated, to a greater extent than his predecessors, the

political will to ensuring the independence of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). The appointment process of the current chairperson of INEC was painstaking and open to public scrutiny thereby restoring public trust and confidence in the electoral system. In addition, the approved budget for INEC was a groundbreaking amount of 89 billion naira (equivalent of USD60 million dollars) to undertake a fool-proof voter registration which has been the bane of credible elections in Nigeria.

At the judicial front, the over-turning of the results of the gubernatorial election in Ekiti State against the incumbent governor after over three years of court battling sends a strong signal that accession to power through fraudulent elections can be overturned by a court ruling. Similarly, on November 27 2010, Justices of the Federal Appeal Court, Ibadan declared the candidate of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Rauf Aregbesola, winner of the 2007 governorship election in Osun State thereby ending three and half years of PDP "illegal" regime in the state. These decisions are indicators of a significant change, though not seismic, yet very fundamental to the promotion of the rule of law and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. It holds a huge potential to prevent post-election



Professor Attahiru Jega – INEC Chairman
Source - www.csmonitor.com

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region including Cameroon and Chad. Our focus was initially the Mano River Basin countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. We have since expanded to cover the entire West Africa sub-region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

violence as losing candidate will be encouraged to recourse to the court, and other non-violence means, in resolving electoral disputes. In spite of these modest changes taking place, observers of Nigerian politics are sceptical as to whether credible and transparent elections can ever be organised in Nigeria, a country awash with stereotypes most often reinforced by the political class. Experience shows that elections in Nigeria are characterised by armed confrontations, communal and identity-based violence, disenfranchisement and allegations of electoral fraud. The electoral periods are often used by armed groups to carry out subversive actions for greater attention and publicity to their cause or demands. Concerns regarding electoral violence and heightened insecurity seems legitimate in view of the twin bombings on Independence Day (1 October 2010), the rampage of Boko Haram (meaning Western education is forbidden), the kidnapping incidents which is assuming an epidemic proportion and the intensity of the skirmishes in the Niger Delta amidst the political uncertainties as to whether the elections will take on ethno-religious and regional dimensions. Though the political wrangling and intra-party struggle for power might augur well for the democratisation process, there could be a back-lash to the peace and stability of the country if the struggle within PDP becomes an ethno-religious competition between the Muslim-dominated north and the Christian-dominated south.

2.0. IMPLICATIONS OF ETHNO-REGIONAL POLITICS OF PDP

Many political analysts and scholar have expressed concern on how internal zoning arrangement of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has become nationalised. This is because the arrangement remains an exclusive affair of the PDP which is not shared by the other 62 registered political parties. This has called to question the strength and capacity of other political parties to effectively contest and challenge the

political dominance of the PDP especially as INEC prepares to compile the most objective and credible voters register as declared by Prof. Jega which will give impetus to the current campaign of 'one man one vote'. This implies that for the first time since the cancelled June 12, 1993 elections, Nigerian voters are given the assurance that their votes will count in the election of candidates of their choice; a clear departure from the rigging and falsification of results that marred the 2003 and 2007 elections.

The zoning formula of rotational presidency which gained prominence during the elections of 1999 that brought General Olusegun Obasanjo to power under the PDP, sought an arrangement that the party considered to be in the "national interest" to enhance political stability and development in a nascent democracy. The ruling party ceded the presidency or so it seemed to the south for eight years after which the next eight years will be rotated to the North. This was adhered to when ex-President Obasanjo handed over to late President Musa Yar'adua from the North after 8 years in power in 2007.

The death of Yar'adua in May 2010 and the swearing-in of the Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner as the President has posed a major puzzle for the zoning arrangement especially as the incumbent has declared his intention to run to complete the 8 years of the Yar'adua/Jonathan ticket of 2007. The declaration was good news to the people of the Niger Delta in the south south geo-political zones who have expressed disenchantment of being

politically marginalized in Nigeria. The militancy and the violent struggles in the region for resource control was majorly attributed to this. The threat of PDP imploding for its lack of capacity to address the crisis over the zoning arrangement has been perceived as a possibility.

With the power of incumbency on the side of President Jonathan Goodluck, the only aspirant of PDP from the south contesting against former military President Ibrahim Babangida, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, former National Security Adviser, Gen. Aliyu Gusau, Kwara State Governor, Dr. Bukola Saraki, who have all teamed up to produce a "consensus candidate" in the person of former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the realities of PDP disintegration becomes ever real. The northern candidates in this marriage of strange bed fellows are working on a formidable front in order to give President Jonathan a run for PDP ticket. General Babangida (rtd) is threatening to walk out of PDP with his followers if President Jonathan does not back down to give the zoning arrangement a chance.

The perception that whoever wins PDP's primary will be the next president of Nigeria intensifies the struggle for the flagbearership. Although the zoning agreement contradicts the 1999 constitutions which provide a level playing field for all contestants, the constitution is yet to be invoked to declare the arrangement null and void. Notwithstanding, the current internal struggle has thrown the competition wide open for contestants from other political parties as well as Nigerians to



A section of Nigeria voters
Source – www.nigeriaplus.com

vote for the candidate of their choice regardless of the PDP zoning arrangement.

3.0. CHALLENGES TO CREDIBLE AND TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS:

INEC chairperson Prof. Attahiru Jega raised fresh concern on the threat to INEC's doing "a Grade A job"¹ in the 2011 general elections, a threat he attributed to the delay by the National Assembly in amending the 2010 Electoral Act which would provide the direction for the electoral body and politicians aspiring for elective offices². The original timetable designed around January polls was declared unworkable and in fact several of the timelines are already missed. The amendment of the Electoral Act also demands re-amending Sections 76(2), 116(2), 132(2), and 178(2) of the already amended 1999 constitution, which stipulates that elections must take place between 120 and 150 days to the expiration of the incumbent's tenure on May 29, otherwise the Electoral Act will be null and void. The Federal High Court injunction halting the re-amendment of the 1999 constitution is a clog in the wheel of INEC progress. This could be further compounded as there may be risks of other lawsuit being threatened against INEC if the election date are changed without the necessary amendment of 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act. The sacking of Prof Maurice Iwu and appointment of Prof Attahiru Jega as the Chairman of INEC was widely acclaimed as a move in the right direction towards ensuring free and fair election in Nigeria. This is based on the objective process of his appointment as well as his professional and personal



The three former military presidents of Nigeria
IBB, Obasanjo & Buhari
Source – www.csmonitor.com

integrity and transparency right from his days as the President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Although Jega has been nationally acclaimed as a man of integrity, there has been public reservation on the composition of his Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) heading the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIEC) in thirty six states. Since 1999, Resident Electoral Commissioners have been in the centre of accusations of complicity in electoral malpractices. With the deployment of fifty (50) directors and other staff of INEC across the states in November 2009³ as well as the appointment of sixteen (16) new commissioners in September 2010 to replace those whose tenure ended in June 2010, Nigerians have expressed scepticism on the accountability and reliability of REC's to carry out the vision of the INEC chairman for free and fair elections in 2011.

Some of the new RECs have been accused of being card carrying members of the PDP while some such as Mrs Ayoka Adebayo who presided over the controversial re-run of the Ekiti State gubernatorial elections are in sharp contrast to the objectivity and integrity expected from INEC for the general elections of 2011. There have been fears of the ability of RECs to remain incorruptible and objective in face of pressures from incumbent state

governors who are desperate to retain their seats in the next gubernatorial elections. The register of 2007 was declared to be questionable with underage registration, multiple registrations⁴ etc and therefore not useable in the 2011 election. With order of new Direct Data Capture (DDC) machines by INEC, it is still unclear how effective its measures are to prevent manipulation of voters' register, registration of underage persons and failure to display the voters' register for claims and objection in accordance with the provisions of sections 20 and 21 of the Electoral Act 2006. The recent theft of some of the Direct Data Capture machines for the registration of voters for the 2011 elections at the Cargo Terminal of Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Ikeja, Lagos on the night of 6 December⁵ has introduced another dimension to the speculations that the 2011 general election will after all not be credible, free or fair.

4.0. THREATS TO PEACE AND STABILITY

j) Criminality, Militancy and Vulnerable Police:

The spate of criminal and militant activities like bomb explosions, armed robbery, jail break, kidnappings, hostage takings, assassinations, armed attacks, fundamentalist attacks is alarming. The practice has since being extended to politics. Analysis shows that the Niger Delta militancy of 2004 gained momentum following the engagement and support from State

¹ The Punch, Newspaper October 6th, 2010

² The Punch Newspaper, 12th of October, 2010

³ The Nation, November 3, 2009

⁴ The Punch Newspaper, October 12th 2010

⁵ The Punch Newspaper, December 9th 2010



Hafsat Abiola Addressing at the 16th October Women Empowerment Rally in Nigeria
Source - www.flickr.com

governors who used them as thugs to win elections in their states. Already several political kidnappings and assassinations have been reported in states such as Borno, Edo, Ekiti, Abia, Oyo, Anambra, and Benue to mention a few. The trend is gaining momentum and intensity as the 2011 election approaches. The Director-General of the State Security Service (SSS) has warned that 2011 will be bloody if politically motivated kidnapping and assassination continue unabated. "Not all kidnapping will be sponsored, as criminals will seek to help themselves to ransom payments by politicians"⁶. Politicians have been indicted severally for supporting some of the militant and criminal groups. For example the 'Boko Haram' Islamic sect has been linked to influential politicians from the north. The Police have been directly targeted in some of their attacks. Amid all these, the limited resources and capacity of the Police to address the problem of wide scale insecurity is a source of public concern.

ii). *The Independence Day Twin Bomb*

The claims and counter claims about the persons responsible for the October 1st twin bomb attack that killed about 10 persons in Abuja during the independence day celebration has a high potential of causing instability and polarizing the country. Factions of the Northern leadership has accused the President of bias and complicity after his quick announcement to exonerate the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) militant group from the attack despite an email sent through the militant's group website

that it was responsible for the attack. The President declared that a terrorist group outside Nigeria, supported by Nigerians is to be blamed for the attack. The arrest of Henry Okah and the then Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's (IBB) campaign manager Raymond Dopkesi by the State Security Service (SSS) over the issue pitched IBB against the President. Insinuations continue on the political dimension of the attack. A faction of the Northern leaders forum led by Adamu Chiroma even called for the resignation of the President in seven days or face impeachment; while others have advised the parties to observe caution as the issue can destabilize the country especially as the general elections is around the corner. It is also important to note that the bomb attack is believed to be a failed attempt on President Jonathan's life over his presidential aspiration which is disrupting PDP 'zoning' arrangement.

In the light of the foregoing trends and opportunities, the Policy Brief envisages three scenarios that could possibly play out in 2011.

5.0. SCENARIOS

i) *Best Case Scenario (Plausible)*

INEC is transparent in compiling a credible voters' register, vetted and validated by the electorate. Violence free elections are conducted and a smooth civilian to civilian transition occurs. Political parties field credible candidates who contest in free and fair elections wherein the verdict is accepted by all. The people elect a unanimously accepted presidential candidate irrespective of political party/geo political zone of origin and the nation's democracy is consolidated and Nigerians look forward to good governance and development.

ii) *Worst Case Scenario (Very Plausible)*

As a result of time and logistical issues, a poor registration process disenfranchises many potential voters' couple with electoral violence by desperate party and sectional followers, saboteurs and thugs disrupt the whole exercise rendering its credibility in complete jeopardy. Accusations and counter accusations from different political divides render the process totally illegitimate and unacceptable among the comity of nations; the various political actors head to the judiciary asking for the cancelations of the polls; the "winner" is sworn in amidst these allegations and few months down the line, the judiciary annuls the polls on the basis of overwhelming evidence and call for a re-run of the presidential and other affected elections

iii) *Realistic Case Scenario (Very Plausible)*

The electoral act and relevant sections of the constitution amended are operationalized. INEC commits itself to ensure a credible voter registration, verification, polling, collating, counting and declaration of winners. President Jonathan emerge as PDP flag bearer amid several controversies, Northern elite decamp from PDP and present a consensus candidate on another platform; polls hold; electoral malpractices and violence is well curtailed. No single presidential candidate wins the required number of states. A run-off is organised; wherein trade-offs are made and the incumbent President emerges as the winner and call for government of national unity (GNU) in the interest of the nation. The North through a different political party re-strategizes and re-aligns with the south easterners to take over power in 2015.

⁶ A DFID Consultancy Report, "Election 'Hot Spot' Analysis: A study of election-related violence ahead of the 2011 elections in Nigeria" by Sam Unom and Jide Ojo

6.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to avert the worst case scenario, the following are recommended

- **The National Assembly** should conclude the process of amending the 1999 constitution especially sections 76(2), 116(2), 132(2), and 178(2) to enable INEC fully operationalise its mandate towards ensuring a credible 2011 elections
- **INEC** should continue to assure the electorates of its independence and ability to conduct a free and fair election through its actions. Independence of the Electoral Commission must not be compromised. It should be allowed to carry out its constitutional mandate without any form of external or internal influence.
- **The contending candidates/political parties** should hold joint-public programmes calling for a non ethnic and identity based politics as well as a violence-free election in its primaries and general elections. The need for internal party democracy and the credibility of the general election should form the bedrock of all political parties' campaigns and manifestoes
- **Security** must be boasted in the build up to the elections to ensure that the prevailing issues of bomb explosions, armed robbery, jail break, kidnappings, hostage takings, assassinations, armed attacks, and sectarian violence does not in any way mar the

electoral process. The electorates need to be assured of their safety and the safety of the electoral materials during and after the elections

- **The PDP** should desist from its present campaign which suggests that the country is divided along ethnic and geo political lines. The continued polarization of the polity along ethnic divide is increasing, and does not augur well for the democratic rule and the transition process
- **The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** should continue to monitor the electoral process in Nigeria and provide the needed support to ensure a peaceful and credible transition
- **International Community** especially UN, AU and Commonwealth must not shy away from its responsibility of providing technical support to INEC as well as oversight functions to ensure a smooth transitional process in Nigeria.
- **The media** should intensify its effort to draw more attention to issues in the political process by objectively reporting key happenings and focusing attention on the critical issues affecting peace, stability and unity of Nigeria.
- **Civil society organizations (CSOs)** should work more closely in monitoring the electoral process. Systems like WANEP-Nigeria's early warning mechanism for monitoring and responding to violent related activities at the pre/ during and post elections stages should be supported. While more CSOs should intensify their efforts on sensitization at the community level and especially among women and other disillusioned groups on the importance of exercising their franchise and voting credible candidates.
- Support should be given to CSOs to set up a body of **Eminent Nigerians** (comprising of traditional rulers, religious leaders

and other stakeholders) who should use their good offices to intervene in electoral disputes. This group should be provided with early warning reports from the ECOWAS Early Warning System (ECOWARN) as well as the WANEP Nigeria early warning system in order to respond accordingly

CONCLUSION

As the most populous black nation in Africa, the stability and prosperity of Nigeria will have huge repercussions in the region. The Nigerian elections and the transition process are indeed vital for the sustenance of democratic rule in the region. However, the build up to the transition process is a cause for concern to WANEP and other CSOs in Nigeria and beyond. Political intolerance, identity based politics as well as lack of internal party democracy is evident in the run up to the elections. Though the present socio-political context in which the transition is happening presents serious threats to peace and security in the country, it can still be mitigated if the political class put the interest of the nation above their parochial interests. There is an urgent need for critical stakeholders to work together to ensure that the 2011 elections is free, fair and violence free. We believe that if the various stakeholders take steps to implementing the aforementioned recommendations, the realisation of the best case scenario will be possible and Nigerians will be the vanguard for democratic rule in West Africa.



Flag of Nigeria

Source – commonwealth.com



The Inspector General of Police

Source – usafricaonline.com

INEC Timetable For 2011 Elections (Source: <http://www.enoughisenoughnigeria.com>)

In a statement issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission on 23rd November, 2010 – and signed by Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega (OFR) – the following timetable was announced for Nigeria's 2011 elections:

1. **Issuance of Notice of Election:** 23rd November, 2010
2. **Conduct of Party Primaries:** 26th November, 2010-15th January, 2011
3. **Campaign by Political Parties in Public:** From 1st December, 2010
4. **Collection of Form CF001 (affidavit/personal particulars of candidates) and Form CF002 (party's list of candidates) for all elections:** 15th – 22nd December, 2010
5. **Registration of Voters:** 15th – 29th January, 2011
6. **Display of Register of Voters for Claims and Objections:** 3rd-8th February, 2011
7. **Last day for submission of Forms CF001 and CF002 at the National Headquarters of the Commission for all Elections:** 31st January, 2011
8. **Publication of Personal Particulars of Candidates. (CF001) for all Elections:** 6th February, 2011
9. **Collection of Nomination Forms:** 7th – 10th February, 2011
10. **Last day for withdrawal by candidate(s)/replacement of withdrawn candidate(s) by Political Parties for all Elections:** 14th February, 2011
11. **Publication of Personal Particulars (CF001) of Substitute Candidate(s) for all Elections:** 21st February, 2011
12. **Last day for the submission of Nomination forms by Political Parties for all Elections:** 21st February, 2011
13. **Publication of official Register of voters for the elections:** 2nd March, 2011
14. **Publication of List of Nominated Candidates for all Elections:** 2nd-16th March, 2011
15. **Publication of Notice of Poll for all Elections:** 18th March, 2011
16. **Submission of Names of Party Agents for all Elections to the Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECS):** 25th March, 2011
17. **Last Day/Time for Campaigns:** National Assembly Elections (1st April, 2011); Presidential Election (8th April, 2011); Governorship/State Assembly Elections (15th April, 2011)
18. **Date(s) of Election(s):** National Assembly Elections (2nd April, 2011); Presidential Election (9th April, 2011); Governorship/State Assembly Elections: (16th April, 2011)

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