

2023 General Elections

Challenges and Threats to Consolidating Democracy



Corporate
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Participation
Africa



2023 General Elections

- Challenges and Threats to Consolidating Democracy

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ACRONYMS

APC	All Progressives Congress
BVAS	Bimodal Voter Accreditation System
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria
CVR	Continuous Voters Registrations
DSS	Department of State Services
ESN	Eastern Security Network
EPM	Election and Party Monitoring
GNU	Government of National Unity
ICCES	Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission
IREV	INEC Result Viewing Portal
LP	Labour Party
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NFIU	Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit
NNPP	New Nigeria Peoples Party
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PO	Presiding Officer
PWDs	People With Disabilities
PMS	Premium Motor Spirit
REC	Resident Electoral Commissioner
SCR	Smart Card Reader

PREFACE

2023 General Elections - Challenges and Threats to Consolidating Democracy, captures the changing electioneering landscape in Nigeria as the nation marches towards the 2023 general elections.

The report begins with a brief portrait of Nigeria's shaky democratic journey from independence in 1960 strewn with military coups and countercoups through to 1999 when civilian rule was restored. It also x-rays the challenges of previous elections in Nigeria, each of which was associated with electoral malpractices and violence. The report details how the march towards the 2023 general election is overshadowed by a sense of apathy among some Nigerians, and a sense of hope by others who are optimistic of a new dawn.

It notes how misgovernance has eroded the sense of inclusivity that democracy is supposed to promote among Nigerians, and engendered a growing sense of despair in the society, and uprisings across the country, especially in the North East where the Boko Haram insurgency began, and in the South East where separatist tensions continue to run high. Other threats to peaceful elections have also sprung up and include kidnappings and attacks on the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) facilities.

Examining the challenges that may impede a credible election, the report interrogates various concerns, including *logistical and administrative difficulties, the spread of misinformation and fake news, vote-buying, fraud, manipulation and voter suppression*, and the *likelihood of electoral violence prior to and on election day* as critical issues to look out for as the election approaches.

The report evaluates measures taken so far by President Muhammadu Buhari's administration to guarantee free, fair and credible elections with specific focus on the Electoral Act of 2022, signed into law on February 25, 2022.

Additionally, it assesses the actions taken by INEC to assure the public of its role as an unbiased umpire in conducting elections, including the adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) as a replacement for the previously used Smart Card Reader (SCR), and the successful voter registration exercise that enrolled 9.5 million new voters, shooting the total number of voters in the country to 93.5 million.

The report proposes stakeholder collaboration as a means to prevent potential disruptions of peaceful elections. The report recommends engaging with critical entities such as security operatives to address the activities of violent groups and individuals, and utilizing technology to monitor essential election infrastructure. It concludes that credible elections are achievable, and places the responsibility for this on a wide range of actors, including citizens, the government, election management bodies, security agencies, media, the international community, and Nigeria's development partners.

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

As events continue to unfold ahead of Nigeria's general elections, one thing is clear, the country's forthcoming poll is set to become a seminal moment in its history. The elections will not only serve as a crucial test of Nigeria's ability to consolidate its fragile democracy but one that also evaluates the country's effort to overcome numerous challenges and threats that have plagued previous polls.

The history of democracy in Nigeria is a complex one, marked by periodic incursions of the military into the political landscape. The country's First Republic, established in 1963, was short-lived, as it was overthrown by a military coup in 1966. This was followed by a countercoup and series of military coups that, except for brief breaks in 1979, 1983, and the failed transition programme of 1989 to 1993, lasted until 1999 when the country transitioned to democratic rule under the civilian government of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Since regaining its democracy in 1999, Nigeria has held several general elections, including the 2003, 2007, and 2011, elections, each of which was associated with electoral malpractices and violence. The 2015 presidential elections however marked a milestone as it was the first time a successful and peaceful transition from one political party to another took place in Nigeria thus signposting the maturity of Nigeria's electoral and democratic processes. Following this, the 2019 elections despite notable improvements over previous elections were nevertheless marred by widespread violence, intimidation, and voter suppression, leading to renewed concerns about the integrity of the electoral process¹.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, as Nigeria prepares for its 2023 general election, there is a sense of optimism that this election cycle may be a departure from the past. Aside from the fact that the election will be conducted on the framework of a reviewed and largely progressive electoral legislation,

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/10/nigeria-widespread-violence-ushers-presidents-new-term>

some technological advancements made by INEC, the country's electoral management body, have generated excitement about the potential for a fair and credible electoral process. However, these advancements alone do not guarantee a successful election considering the current social and economic conditions as well as the prevailing condition of insecurity.

By and large, the 2023 election is important not just for Nigeria as a country, but also for the sake of the continent, Africa, which has seen democracy fail in quick succession from one country to another. Between 2010 and the present, at least 40 coups and attempted coups have taken place in Africa, with half of them taking place in West Africa and nothing less than six successful ones occurring in the past three years alone². Nigeria is Africa's largest democracy. At 93.5 million, Nigeria's voter register is 16.7 million larger than the cumulative voter registers of the other 14 countries in West Africa which is no more than 76.7 million³. Therefore, if the 2023 general election succeeds, it can make Nigeria a symbol of hope and a worthy example for others to emulate.

An unsuccessful and violence-ridden election, on the other hand, risks undermining the progress the country has made since 1999 when it returned to democratic rule, thereby boosting the forces of division and instability⁴. Hence, the need for INEC, security agencies, media, civil society organizations and relevant stakeholders to dispatch their duties within the ambit of law while ensuring that political parties, candidates and their supporters play by the rules as set out in the 1999 constitution, Electoral Act 2022 and other ancillary guidelines.

In the light of the aforementioned, this publication proceeds to spotlight challenges and threats to the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 election in order to assist all stakeholders with facts and prescient analysis to guide them in the discharge of their respective responsibilities during and after the elections.

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46783600>

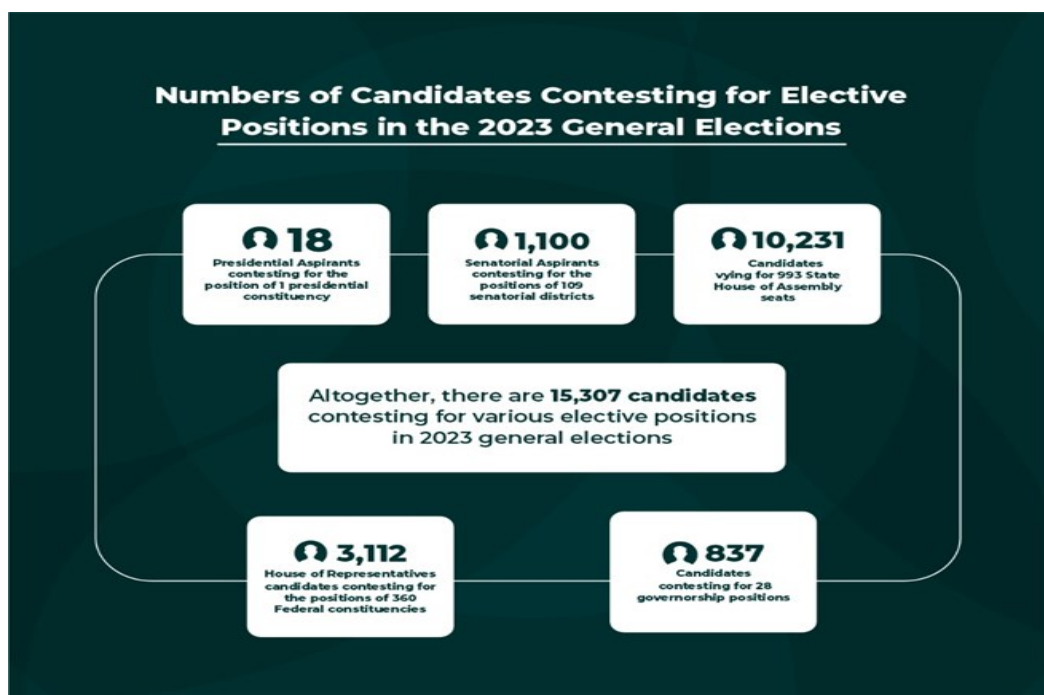
³ <https://www.icirnigeria.org/nigeria-has-16-7-million-voters-more-than-rest-of-west-africa-inec/>

⁴ <https://institute.global/policy/democracy-under-threat-why-security-risks-nigerias-2023-elections-must-not-be-overlooked>

Nigeria's 2023 Election Arena

In line with the timetable released by INEC, Presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria will take place on Saturday, 25th February 2023 while Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections will take place on Saturday, 11th March 2023 in 28 states of the federation except for Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi, Ondo and Osun States where off-cycle elections already took place⁵. Only Houses of Assembly elections would hold in these eight states.

Eighteen (18) registered political parties have been given a clean bill of health to participate and field candidates for different elective posts in the elections. Consequently, a total of 18 presidential, 1,100 Senatorial and 3,112 House of Representatives candidates are contesting the elections covering one Presidential constituency, 109 Senatorial Districts and 360 Federal Constituencies⁶. For the state elections, there are 837 candidates running for 28 governorships and 10,231 candidates vying for 993 assembly seats⁷.



⁵ <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/TIMETABLE-FOR-2023-GENERAL-ELECTION.pdf>

⁶ <https://guardian.ng/news/2023-inec-publishes-final-list-of-candidates/>

⁷ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/10/2023-inec-unveils-full-list-of-guber-state-assembly-candidates/>

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Electoral Act, 2022, and the Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022, constitute the legal framework for the conduct of the 2023 general elections.

Signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari on 25th February 2022, the Electoral Act, 2022, provides a robust legal framework for the conduct of the polls with new provisions that seek to guarantee the financial independence of INEC and early release of funds; promote the early conduct of primaries and submission of candidates list; empower aspirants to institute action for false information; grant legal backing for electronic voting and transmission of result; provides for the extension of time frame for publication of election notice; espouse inclusivity for the visually impaired, special need and vulnerable voters; mandates INEC to maintain a Central Electronic Voters Database; redefine over voting, and provide for early commencement and longer period of campaign⁸.

Similarly, the “Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022” released by INEC in June 2022 provides for matters of elections and their conduct, accreditation, and voting procedure during elections, among others⁹.

The 2023 general election has been preceded by an extensive voter registration exercise. Within months of the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) drive, an additional 9.5 million new voters were registered bringing the total number of registered voters in the country to 93.5 million. Notably, 37 million of these voters, which is 39.66% of the total voters’ register, are young persons between the ages 18-34 years, showing the crucial role the youth demography is likely to play in deciding the fate of candidates in the elections.¹⁰

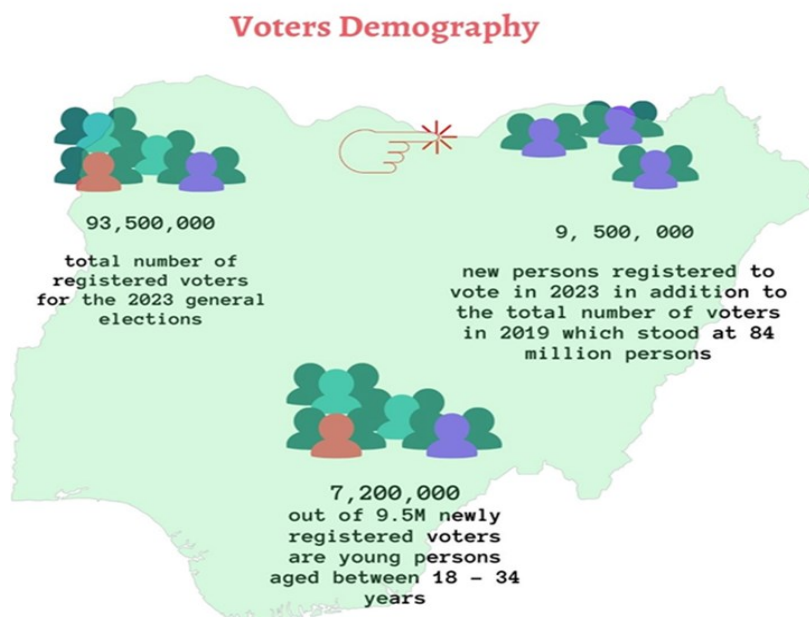
Furthermore, there has been an expansion of voter access to polling units which was stuck at roughly 119,974 for 25 years. In 2021, the number of polling units increased by 41% to 176,846 - a 56, 872 increase from 2019.

⁸ <https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Electoral-Act-2022.pdf>

⁹ https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/REGULATIONS-AND-GUIDELINES-FOR-THE-CONDUCT-OF-ELECTIONS-2022_updttd.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.thecable.ng/breaking-93-4m-persons-eligible-to-vote-says-inec/amp>

Similarly, the 2023 general election will involve the nationwide deployment of over one million permanent and temporary/adhoc electoral staff and massive quantities of materials twice within a period of two weeks from INEC's state offices to 774 local government areas, 8,809 electoral Wards and 176,846 polling units across the length and breadth of the country.



Accordingly, over 100,000 vehicles and about 4,200 boats accompanied by naval gunboats will be deployed for the elections. INEC also plans to track the movement of all vehicles and boats electronically and in real-time to ensure that election personnel and materials are not hijacked or diverted¹¹.

In addition to these developments, the 2023 general elections will be technologically driven to avoid human errors and ensure the accuracy of results. To achieve this, notable improvements over previous elections have taken place. For authentication and verification, the BVAS has replaced the Smart Card Reader while the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) has been introduced in compliance with Sections 50, 60 and 64 of the Electoral Act,

¹¹<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/571543-inec-to-use-100000-vehicles-4200-boats-for-2023-elections-signs-mou-with-transport-unions.html>

2022, which makes electronic transmission of results mandatory. Over 200,000 BVAS are to be deployed during the elections¹².

The planned use of new technologies in the 2023 general elections signposts the extent of the progress made since 2015 when the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and electronic card readers with fingerprint scanners were first introduced¹³. According to data from the “ICT in Elections Database” – a project of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)- Nigeria has substantially implemented the use of technology across all stages of its election management – except for E-voting which has not been implemented at all¹⁴.

- ***High-Stakes Elections***

The 2023 election is going to be the seventh consecutive election in Nigeria since the restoration of civil rule and the first since 2007 where the incumbent will not be on the ballot. Furthermore, the election would be the first time in Nigeria’s modern democratic era that there will not be a former military ruler on the presidential ballot.

Given the current political climate, the 2023 election might be the first time a runoff is required to determine the winner of the presidential elections if a clear winner does not emerge in the first round. While previous presidential elections were a two-horse race affair, the 2023 presidential election is shaping up to become a four-horse race with the prospect of a clear winner not emerging in the first round.

This projection draws life from recent nationwide surveys conducted by ANAP Foundation and NOI Polls¹⁵ which identified the four leading presidential candidates as Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Rabiul Kwankwaso

¹² <https://www.thecable.ng/inec-200000-bvas-will-be-deployed-for-2023-elections>

¹³ <https://www.ifes.org/news/nigerias-election-commission-introduces-new-technologies-and-processes-2015-vote>

¹⁴ <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/elections/2023-elections-a-breakdown-of-benefits-and-concerns-for-inecs-technology-strategy/>

¹⁵ <http://www.anapfoundation.com/press-releases/peter-obi-consolidates-lead-in-a-fragmented-presidential-race>

of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP).

The table below reflects the final list of presidential candidates as published by INEC.

NO	CANDIDATE NAME	PARTY
1.	Imumolen Christopher	Accord Party (AP)
2.	Al-Mustapha Hamza	Action Alliance (AA)
3.	Sowore Omoyele	African Action Congress (AAC)
4.	Kachikwu Dumebi	Action Democratic Party (ADP)
5.	Sani Yabagi Yusuf	Action Democratic Party (ADP)
6.	Tinubu Bola Ahmed	All Progressives Congress (APC)
7.	Umeadi Peter Nnanna	All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)
8.	Ojei Princess Chichi	Allied People's Movement (APM)

NO	CANDIDATE NAME	PARTY
9.	Nnamdi Charles Osita	Action People's Party (APP)
10.	Adenuga Sunday Oluwafemi	Boot Party (BP)
11.	Obi Peter Gregory	Labour Party (LP)
12.	Musa Rabiw Kwankwaso	New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP)
13.	Osakwe Felix Johnson	National Rescue Movement (NRM)
14.	Abubakar Atiku	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
15.	Abiola Latifu Kolawole	Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)
16.	Adebayo Adewole Ebenezer	Social Democratic Party (SDP)
17.	Ado-Ibrahim Abdumalik	Young Progressives Party (YPP)
18.	Nwanyanwu Daniel Daberechukwu	Zenith Labour Party

Table Source: INEC¹⁶

According to Section 134 (2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), a presidential candidate can only be deemed elected if they secure not only the highest number of votes cast at the election but also

¹⁶ <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Final-List-of-Candidates-for-National-Elections-1.pdf>

a quarter of the votes cast in two-thirds of all the states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory. In a gubernatorial election, the candidate must secure the highest number of votes cast and a quarter of the votes cast in two-thirds of all the local government areas of the state. However, if no candidate secures the highest number of votes and the mandatory threshold, the Constitution says there must be a second election within a period of 21 days between the candidate with the highest votes and the candidate with the spread, but not necessarily the second-highest votes scored¹⁷.

Neither INEC nor security operatives, media and political parties have any experience with a runoff election and how to deal with the likely fallouts which can include disputed outcomes, riots and violence. Apart from the likely cross-border impact of Nigeria's descent into an orgy of post-election violence, it is vital that democracy survives in Nigeria because of the influence the country wields in a region facing democratic backsliding¹⁸.

Between 2010 and the present, at least 40 coups and attempted coups have taken place on the continent, with half of them taking place in West Africa and nothing less than six successful ones occurring in the past three years alone¹⁹. Nigeria is the biggest economy as well as the largest population and democracy in Africa. The failure of democracy in Nigeria can lead to the consolidation of the rising illiberal trend.

- ***The Socioeconomic Context***

The 2023 general elections will take place in an environment of mass discontent, fear and concern for the future. Presently, the country is beset by a failing economy, shrinking civic space and egregious violations by security forces and political leaders, intense polarization and national division, insecurity, separatist agitations in its eastern region, and growing dissatisfaction in the institutions of democracy.

¹⁷<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/09/27/inec-in-2023-clear-winners-must-score-highest-votes-in-poll-25-percent-of-votes-in-two-thirds-of-36-states/>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46783600>

¹⁹ <https://theconversation.com/why-west-africa-has-had-so-many-coups-and-how-to-prevent-more-176577>

Few days to the election, the country is almost grinding to a halt due to fuel scarcity and price increases, and disruptions to financial transactions and trade by a decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to redesign old naira notes and implement a cashless policy²⁰.

Economically, the promise of democracy has not been kept as far as the majority of the populace is concerned. According to the National Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2022 of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), about 133 million Nigerians representing about 63% are living in poverty²¹. Unemployment rate is rising with around 40% of the country's youth population estimated to be without jobs²².

In addition, very few people have access to public education, healthcare and social security. Resentment against the depressing socioeconomic situation is at an all-time high. In addition, worsening security challenges and lack of opportunities are making many, especially the country's youthful population, lose hope in the country. This has led to one of the largest exoduses of skilled professionals, including, bankers, lecturers, lawyers, engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, and tech experts, since the end of the civil war, as they emigrate abroad²³.

Politically, Nigeria's leadership has continued to drop the ball when it comes to probity, accountability and integrity. Corruption remains high as the scramble for political power is more associated with the pursuit of self-aggrandizement than service to the nation²⁴. This has created popular resentment while undermining faith in the institutions of democracy. According to an opinion poll conducted by Afrobarometer²⁵, more than three-fourths (77%) of Nigerians say they are not satisfied with the way democracy works in the country – an increase in dissatisfaction by 20% since 2017.

²⁰<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/578569-naira-redesign-cbn-cant-continue-to-snob-nigerians.html>

²¹ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/11/133m-nigerians-multidimensionally-poor-nbs/>

²² <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/40-of-nigerian-youths-jobless-angry-restless-adesina/>

²³ <https://guardian.ng/life/on-the-other-side-of-japa/>

²⁴ <https://guardian.ng/opinion/nigerias-worsening-corruption-index/>

²⁵<https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/preference-for-democracy-remains-high-in-nigeria-but-dissatisfaction-with-its-quality-is-growing/>

At the same time, the state has become increasingly incapable of guaranteeing the security of lives and properties of citizens as well as the defense of the sovereignty of the country. Insecurity continues to grow with enormous human and material consequences. The decade-long Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast has not abated despite government's assurances. Now, other incidents of insecurity in the form of banditry and herders/farmers clashes as well as kidnapping continue to occur in several parts of the country thereby posing challenges to inter-state travel of persons and goods.

Likewise, in the South East, agitation for the Sovereign State of Biafra has led to frequent attacks on security operatives, INEC's facilities and personnel.

Without a doubt, the nefarious activities of "Unknown Gunmen" and weekly restriction of movements by separatists and mischievous elements in all five states of the country's southeast region as well as banditry, kidnapping, Boko Haram, Ansaru, and ISWAP operations across the North can pose significant risks to the conduct of the 2023 general elections.

As election day approaches, there appears to be no clear plan in place by either the Federal Government or the Governors of conflict-prone states to guarantee smooth election process. Furthermore, the widespread displacement of people and destruction of communities resulting from these complex security issues risks disenfranchising eligible voters.

Securing the Votes: Threats to a Credible 2023 Election

As the 2023 general elections approach, there are serious concerns about the possibility of a credible poll. Despite the improved efforts of INEC and assurance by security agencies, a number of outstanding challenges remain. Some of these include:

i) **Logistical and Administrative Hiccups**

Nigeria's elections have always involved a huge number of personnel administering the vote. This continues to be the case despite the plan to deploy technology in the 2023 general elections. According to INEC's plan, about 1.4 million election personnel need to be transported by road and water along with the distribution of materials to locations, some of which are so remote that they can only be accessed by bush paths and waterways²⁶.

Yet it is disheartening that while road vehicles are the predominant mode of transportation and account for 80 per cent of goods traffic in Nigeria, only 20 per cent of the road network in the country is paved²⁷. In addition, there is currently a scarcity of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) across the length and breadth of the country. This scarcity which started months ago has led to an astronomical increase in the pump price of fuel products thereby causing severe disruption of movement of persons and goods in many cities and rural areas²⁸.

Likewise, there is also a cash shortage caused by the ill-thought decision of the CBN to redesign three of Nigeria's high-value notes just a few days away from a crucial general election²⁹.

²⁶ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/571543-inec-to-use-100000-vehicles-4200-boats-for-2023-elections-signs-mou-with-transport-unions.html>

²⁷ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/556316-key-issues-that-will-shape-nigerias-2023-elections-report.html>

²⁸ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/577603-nigerians-groan-as-fuel-scarcity-bites-harder.html>

²⁹ <https://dailytrust.com/just-in-emeifile-finally-meets-reps-over-new-naira-notes-crisis/>

No doubt, these shortcomings have heightened the risks to the 2023 general elections³⁰ with concerns being raised by stakeholders that the situation can cause societal unrest, disrupt INEC's election day logistical plans and cause delays in the distribution of election materials and the movement of personnel thereby resulting in accreditation and voting starting behind schedule³¹. It can also adversely affect the operations of election observers and monitors, security agencies and the media.

ii) Spread of Misinformation and Fake News

So far, the electoral campaign has polarized society leading to deliberate disinformation, misinformation, character assassination, insult and threats deployed on traditional and social media by political parties, candidates and their supporters. On social media in particular, supporters of major presidential candidates have engaged in extensive mudslinging, caricaturing of rival candidates, deliberate spread of falsehood etc. that suggest an elevated risk of violence before and on election day.

Already, Nigeria's Department of State Services (DSS) has noted that the spread of fake news and hate speeches on social media poses the biggest threat to the 2023 general elections³². Fake news, incitement and deliberate disinformation are some examples of the reckless use of the media by political parties, candidates and their supporters that can adversely impact voters' participation in the elections. As previous elections show, if voters are afraid that they could be attacked for their preference by supporters of rival candidates, they may as well stay at home.

iii) Hurdles in PVC Collection

Despite the poor national and economic outlook, the forthcoming general election is characterized by a heightened optimism among citizens who are encouraged by INEC's technological advancements, the presidential candidates on the election turf, and generally hopeful for a promising new era.

³⁰ <https://guardian.ng/news/cash-squeeze-intensifies-stalls-business-transactions/>

³¹ <https://guardian.ng/news/2023-inec-worries-over-fuel-scarcity-meets-nnpc/>

³² <https://guardian.ng/news/social-media-fake-news-biggest-threats-to-2023-election-dss/>

According to a recent survey by SBM Intelligence, a remarkable 79% of registered voters successfully obtained their PVCs as of December 22, 2022, reflecting high voters' interest in the elections³³. INEC began the PVC collection process on December 12, 2022, with a deadline of January 22, 2023, but extended it to February 5, 2023, due to high collection rates³⁴.

While INEC deserves commendation for its commitment to ensuring the participation of eligible voters in the elections, quite a number of citizens have reported difficulties in collecting their cards. The survey by SBM Intelligence also established that 24% of respondents encountered violent experiences during the PVC collection process, with a majority of the incidents classified as verbal abuse³⁵. In some cases, citizens have complained about inadequate INEC personnel coordinating the distribution of cards, demands for bribes by electoral staff, and missing PVCs despite being listed on the voters' register³⁶.

To maintain the integrity of the election and avoid political disillusionment among citizens, it is crucial for INEC to address these challenges and ensure that all eligible voters receive their PVCs. This will help to preserve the quality of the election by preventing disenfranchised voters from expressing their dissatisfaction in ways that may negatively impact the election.

iv) Vote-Buying, Fraud, Manipulation and Voter Suppression

Already the forthcoming election is looking set to be a “money game” rather than a “numbers game”. This is due to the extent politicians and political parties are prepared to spend to woo voters. So bad was the spending in May 2022 during primaries of political parties that there was a dollar scarcity³⁷. Apart from the impact of such reckless spending on the economy resulting in inflation, there is a risk that illicit financial flows will find their way into election spending.

³³ <https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/79-of-registered-voters-have-collected-pvcs-survey/>

³⁴ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/01/28/again-inec-extends-pvc-collection-deadline-to-february-5/>

³⁵ <https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/79-of-registered-voters-have-collected-pvcs-survey/>

³⁶ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/578760-special-report-few-weeks-to-elections-nigerians-go-through-harrowing-experiences-to-collect-pvcs.html>

³⁷ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/05/20/naira-weakens-to-n600-at-parallel-market-as-politicians-mop-up-dollars/>

Illicit financial flows are proceeds of corruption, theft, bribery, criminal activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling and commercial activities such as tax evasion, and trade mis-invoicing³⁸. A recent report by the Global Financial Integrity think-tank ranks Nigeria as one of the 10 largest countries for illicit financial flows in the world and estimates that about US\$15.7 billion of illicit funds go through Nigeria's banking system annually³⁹. Now as the campaign intensifies, there are many indicators that not only are politicians spending above campaign expenses limit through lavish campaign rallies, and adverts on billboards, radio and television but candidates and political parties are also engaged in voters' inducement through vote-buying, cash gifts, sharing of food items and others.

Section 88 of the Electoral Act, 2022 sets limits for campaign expenses of political parties and candidates whilst Section 89 (3) mandates political parties to submit their election expenses to INEC in an audited return within six months after the election. However, historically, election campaign expenditure limits have always been observed in breach by political parties.

For instance, whereas according to news reports and investigation, nearly all the political parties that participated in the 2019 general elections have not filed their financial reports as required by law, INEC through tracking and monitoring established that some of the parties like the APC and PDP spent at least three times more than what the law permitted⁴⁰.

Yet there is no evidence that the Election and Party Monitoring (EPM), the arm of INEC responsible for monitoring the finance of political parties, has taken any concrete step to sanction any of these erring political parties to serve as deterrence. Without sanction, the impression is created that political parties and candidates can violate the electoral law with impunity.

³⁸ <https://icpc.gov.ng/special-projects/illicit-financial-flows-iffs/>

³⁹ https://www.cbn.gov.ng/out/2015/ccd/illicit_financial_flows.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/556940-campaign-finance-inec-fails-to-sanction-apc-pdp-others-for-violating-nigerias-laws.html>

As the 2023 general elections draw nearer, there is a need for INEC to be prepared to enforce the provisions of the electoral law in order to safeguard the election's integrity.

Sections 88 (9), 89 (4), and 89 (7) of the Electoral Act, 2022, stipulate different sanctions for various offences relating to the contravention of financial reporting timeline, political parties that incur election expenses beyond the limit set and candidates that knowingly act in contravention of the Act. Some of the punishments include payment of a fine, imprisonment or both.

In the case of any political party that incurs election expenses beyond the limit set in Section 89 (2), Section 89 (7) stipulates conviction to a maximum fine of N1, 000, 000 and forfeiture to the Commission, of the amount the expenses exceed the limit set by the commission.

While urging INEC to enforce these provisions, it should be noted that the above-cited sanctions are a slap on the wrist compared to the gravity of the offence. In the real sense, offences such as overshooting of campaign expenditure limits ought not to be treated with kid gloves or as minor misdemeanours.

Instead, the act of political parties exceeding set spending limits should be considered a severe electoral offence, deserving of harsher penalties such as disqualification of the political party and candidate from the election. This is because when a political party spends beyond campaign limits, they alter the level playing ground set by the electoral law for free and fair elections, jeopardize the integrity of the elections while placing other political parties and candidates at a disadvantage. Therefore, such an offence is an assault on the key pillar of fairness on which any credible election should stand.

Those who commit this kind of offence ought not to be allowed to enjoy the benefits of their crime - something which the punitive sections of the Electoral Act, 2022, do not strongly establish.

This becomes even more unfair when the fact is considered that INEC, relying on Section 225 (A) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), disqualified a total of 74 political parties after the 2019 general elections for failing to win any seats⁴¹.

It goes without saying that if INEC can be so hard on political parties who are unable to win seats at elections, the principles of equity and fairness demand that it should be equally strict with political parties and desperate politicians who change the goalpost in the middle of the game. Meanwhile, electoral inducement does not stop with voters, it extends to election management officials, security agents and the media.

There are multiple allegations in previous elections of politicians commandeering INEC officials, and security officials to do their bidding by engaging in vote-rigging or looking away while their thugs are compromising the elections. The electoral manipulation market is a “sellers and buyers’ market”. If there is no one willing to be compromised, politicians and political parties will have no one to bribe or induce.

However, due to poverty and the “get-rich-quick syndrome”, there is no lack of people ready to manipulate any foolproof system so far as there is someone ready to pay for their troubles⁴². Hence, despite the deployment of technology for the 2023 general elections, it would be catastrophic for INEC to operate with a mindset that the electoral system is tamper-proof.

This much has been proven by the fallout of the July 16, 2022, gubernatorial election in Osun State wherein the Election Petition Tribunal annulled the results of the election as announced by INEC after finding out incidents of over-voting in some polling units, despite the use of BVAS⁴³. Therefore, INEC should prepare for the possibility

⁴¹ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/inecs-deregistration-of-74-political-parties/>

⁴² <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/10/02/unresolved-issues-ahead-of-2023-general-election/>

⁴³ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-west/578183-updated-osun-tribunal-sacks-adeleke-declares-oyetola-governor.html>

that desperate politicians will not stop trying to manipulate the polls including bypassing or hacking the BVAS and IREV by deploying appropriate countermeasures to safeguard the integrity of the electoral system.

Together with this, INEC needs to take additional measures to curb vote buying and inducement. Unless urgent steps are taken to protect the integrity of the elections, not only is the 2023 general election going to suffer from an absence of a level playing ground for all political parties and candidates, but voters' freedom to make informed choices will also become compromised with the implication that the electoral outcome will not reflect the desire of the electorate.

v) Alleged Partisanship of INEC Officials

Despite the deployment of technology, no election can succeed where the election management body or its officials are compromised. So far, concerns by a coalition of civil society organizations that some of the newly appointed INEC Resident Electoral Commissioners (REC) are partisan, politically aligned or previously indicted for corruption have not been addressed⁴⁴. This revelation came about when President Muhammadu Buhari nominated 19 RECs following the expiration of the tenure of the outgoing RECs in 19 states. Of the 19 nominated RECs, 14 were new appointments, while five were reappointed.

The new nominees included: Pauline Onyeka Ugochi (Imo); Muhammad Lawal Bashir (Sokoto); Prof. Ayobami Salami (Oyo); Zango Abdu (Katsina); Queen Elizabeth Agwu (Ebonyi); Agundu Tersoo (Benue), Yomere Oritsemlebi (Delta); Prof. Yahaya Ibrahim, (Kaduna); Dr. Nura Ali (Kano); Agu Uchenna Sylvia (Enugu); Ahmed Garki (FCT); Hudu Yunusa (Bauchi); Prof. Uzochukwu Chijioke, (Anambra); and Mohammed Nura (Yobe). The reappointed nominees included: Ibrahim Abdullahi (Adamawa); Obo Effanga (Cross River); Umar Ibrahim (Taraba); Agboke Olaleke (Ogun); and Prof. Samuel Egwu (Kogi).

⁴⁴<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/550831-csos-fault-appointment-of-new-inec-recs-over-alleged-corruption-partisanship.html>

According to the Coalition, the appointment of at least four of the nominees has grave implications for the credibility, independence and capacity of INEC to deliver credible, transparent, inclusive and conclusive elections. For example, the REC nominee from Sokoto State, Muhammad Bashir, was a governorship aspirant under the APC in the 2015 elections cycle.

Also, Sylvia Agu, the nominee for Enugu State, is believed to be the younger sister of the APC Deputy National Chairman for the South-east. Likewise, the nominee for Imo State, Pauline Onyeka, who is a former Head of ICT at INEC, gained notoriety for alleged corruption and connivance with politicians to undermine elections in 2015.

In the same vein, Queen-Elizabeth Agwu, a former Accountant-General in Ebonyi State, was suspended allegedly on the grounds of incompetence and corruption in 2016⁴⁵.

Section 156(1)(a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, prohibits the appointment of any person who is a member of a political party as a member of INEC. Also going by the combined effect of Section 156 (1)(a) and Third Schedule, Part 1, Item F, paragraph 14 (1), these individuals ought to be constitutionally prohibited from any appointment as members of INEC.

Despite these concerns, the National Assembly confirmed the appointments of the nominees, thus raising concern about how their alleged partisanship and history could compromise the integrity of the 2023 general elections.

vi) Unresolved Inclusivity Issues

While progress has been made over the years, inclusivity challenges continue to dog Nigeria's elections. For instance, the 2023 elections have seen a further drop in the number of female candidates for elective posts. Only one female candidate is contesting for the position of President, from 18 political parties billed to partake in the election.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

For the governorship elections, only 25 of the 419 candidates are women, while 92 of 1,101 candidates for the Senatorial elections are women, amounting to only eight per cent. Similarly for the House of Representatives, 286 of 3,107 are women, while for the State Houses of Assembly, only 1,046 out of 10,225 candidates are women, amounting to 10% of the total figure⁴⁶.

Likewise, youth candidacy for the 2023 general elections has dropped by 6% compared to the 2019 general elections. This is despite the successful “NotTooYoungToRun” campaign aimed at amending the constitution to lower the age of candidacy so that young people, being the largest social demography, could aspire for political power.

As against 34% recorded in the 2019 elections, youth candidacy for the 2023 general elections stands at 28.6%. Likewise, youth candidacy for the House of Representatives plunged from 27.4% in 2019 to 21.6% in 2023. Similarly, youth candidacy for State Houses of Assembly also dropped from 41.8% in 2019 to 35.6%% in 2023. Also, female candidates represented only 11% of the total number of youth candidates, while persons with disabilities only had a 0.2% representation⁴⁷.

However, when it comes to other minority and at-risk groups, most especially Persons With Disabilities (PWDs), their standing in the electoral process is much worse. For instance, despite the copious provisions in the Electoral Act, 2022 for the inclusivity of PWDs, the final list of candidates for the 2023 general elections published by INEC reveals that only 12 candidates are persons with disabilities. Aside from this, voters with physical and other forms of challenges still face great difficulties when it comes to participating in the electoral process even though they form a significant part of the population⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ <https://businessday.ng/politics/article/2023-how-drop-in-female-candidates-slows-gender-inclusion-in-politics/>

⁴⁷ <https://punchng.com/youth-candidacy-drops-6-for-2023-elections-yiaga/>

⁴⁸ <https://guardian.ng/news/2023-we-dont-want-to-be-left-behind-30m-pwds-tell-inec-candidates/>

One in every eight Nigerian lives with at least one form of disability, amounting to about 25 million PWDs in Nigeria⁴⁹. Some of the challenges faced by them are inaccessible locations for voters' registration and voting exercise, the high cost of nomination forms of political parties which ultimately excludes them from participation, and low reportage from media agencies that focus more on the big names among political candidates.

Also, the attitudes of some ad-hoc staff to PWDs during the elections betray inadequate training before deployment. We must also note the low-level capturing of the PWD data in Form EC40H⁵⁰. Meanwhile, Section 54 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2022, prescribes that a voter with visual impairment or other forms of disability who is otherwise unable to distinguish symbols or who suffers from any other physical disability may be accompanied into the polling unit by a person chosen by him or her and that person shall, after informing the Presiding Officer (PO) of the disability, be permitted to accompany the voter into the voting compartment and assist the voter to make his or her mark in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the Commission.

Furthermore, Section 54(2) of the Act prescribes that the Commission shall take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with disabilities, special needs and vulnerable persons are assisted at the polling place by the provision of suitable means of communication, such as Braille, large-embossed print, electronic devices, sign language interpretation, or off-site voting in appropriate cases⁵¹. It is important that these provisions are judiciously implemented to ensure PWDs vote on election day with minimal difficulties.

There is also the issue of the disenfranchisement of Nigerians in the diaspora even though they are actively engaged in the country's electoral discourse and contribute significantly to the country's economy.

⁴⁹ <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/governance/over-25-million-nigerians-excluded-due-to-disability/>

⁵⁰ <https://guardian.ng/news/2023-we-dont-want-to-be-left-behind-30m-pwds-tell-inec-candidates/>

⁵¹ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/567438-2023-at-dubawas-space-nigerians-advocate-more-inclusion-for-pwds.html>

Nigerians in the diaspora contribute an estimated at N24.3billion per year to the country in remittance, amounting to 6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁵²

This situation is not only unfair but also breeds helplessness and frustration in Nigerian diasporans who may feel disconnected from the political process in their home country even though they are an important part of the country and have a role in shaping its future.

To resolve this, the National Assembly would have to review relevant sections of the country's Constitution to allow citizens living abroad to participate in elections even as INEC develops relevant structures to aid e-voting.

vii) Electoral Violence Prior to and on Election Day

With the general elections approaching, there has been an increase in violent attacks on INEC facilities raising concerns about the safety of electoral officials, and the feasibility of holding elections across the country. At least, nothing less than 53 attacks on INEC facilities have taken place between February 2019 and December 2022⁵³.

Similar attacks have taken place in January 2023 and even as citizens count days to the elections, there is no indication of any abatement. Some of these attacks have already disrupted voters' registration and campaign activities while hindering the distribution of PVC in some parts of the country thereby affecting the principles of free and fair elections.

Worse still, recent arson attacks on INEC facilities in states such as Osun, Ogun, Imo, Anambra, and Enugu suggest that many eligible voters have already become disenfranchised due to these unfortunate happenings.

⁵² <https://leadership.ng/nigerians-in-diaspora-can-no-longer-be-denied-the-right-to-vote/>

⁵³ <https://dailytrust.com/inec-53-attacks-recorded-on-our-facilities/>

For instance, in the wake of arsonist attacks on the INEC office in Abeokuta, Ogun State, 65, 900 uncollected Permanent Voters Cards, eight electricity generating sets, and 904 ballot boxes, among other materials were destroyed⁵⁴.

The story is the same across other areas of the country where INEC facilities have continued to come under attack. If the situation remains the same as election day draws nearer, there is a sad possibility that more persons may lose their right to vote due to no fault of their own.

Besides, Nigeria recorded 52 acts of political violence across 22 states between 8 October and 9 November 2022⁵⁵. This poses a threat to the successful conduct of the elections.

As election day draws nearer, electoral violence can sharply increase. As with previous elections, the campaign period has seen politicians arming thugs for political rallies and building private armies made up mostly of young unemployed Nigerians. To begin to address this concern, security operatives need to check the flow of small arms into

Nigeria from the Sahel and Libya. According to experts, there are at least six million illicit arms in circulation in Nigeria while the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime had noted that illicit small arms and light weapons in Nigeria were about 70 per cent of the 500 million in West Africa⁵⁶.

The current Electoral Act punishes electoral threats and electoral violence. For instance, Sections 116 and 128 of the Act stipulate that anybody or group of persons disrupting a political meeting or gathering or anybody directly or indirectly, by his or herself or by another person on his or her behalf, makes use of or threatens to make use of any force, violence against any political candidates or political party commits an

⁵⁴ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/editorial/566544-editorial-2023-polls-containing-escalating-electoral-violence.html>

⁵⁵ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/564797-nigeria-records-52-acts-of-political-violence-in-one-month-nsa-monguno.html>

⁵⁶ <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/arms-proliferation-and-nigerias-security/#:~:text=Experts%20estimate%20that%20the%20number,500%20million%20in%20West%20Africa.>

offence and is liable on conviction to a fine or imprisonment or both⁵⁷. Unfortunately, nothing suggests that this has done anything to reduce electoral violence. If violence persists, this can lead to the scuttling of the elections with voters afraid to go out on election day to vote due to fear of attacks and reprisals.

viii) Rising Security Crises

Even though the general elections are just around the corner, security crises in the country show no sign of abating. Rather violence continues to spread, raising fear that armed militias and non-state actors could be incentivized by politicians to perpetrate political violence and scuttle the polls. Aside from this is the fact that given the extent of the crisis with vast areas in the North East, North Central and North West controlled by a motley of armed non-state actors, there is a possibility that the distribution lines of election personnel and materials could come under attacks thereby affecting the conduct of elections in the affected areas.

About 55, 430 people have been killed by terrorist groups and criminal gangs operating across the country between 29 May 2015 and 29, May 2022⁵⁸.

In 2021 alone, 3.2 million Nigerians were displaced from their homes, mostly from the north⁵⁹. Over the past 18 months, the situation has further escalated with nothing less than 8,948 Nigerians killed and 7,184 abducted while, as of July 2022, at least 2,455,190 persons in the country were registered as internally displaced. This is besides those displaced by floods across the country in the months of September and October 2022.

It is commendable that ahead of the 2023 elections, INEC is planning to set up voting centres for the over two million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) across the country⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ <https://guardian.ng/opinion/2023-elections-and-threat-of-violence/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>

⁵⁹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria#displacement-data>

⁶⁰ <https://punchng.com/inec-plans-voting-centres-for-two-million-idps/>

Unfortunately, given that only a few displaced people are living in government-approved camps, there is very little hope that this significant layer of the population of eligible voters would be able to exercise their franchise.

Furthermore, frequent attacks, abductions, weekly movement restrictions and other violent activities allegedly credited to separatist groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) can either prevent elections from taking place in the East or compromise the integrity of the exercise. The IPOB and the ESN are fighting to separate from Nigeria and establish a Sovereign state of Biafra. As such they are calling for a boycott of the polls even though some IPOB officials have denied it⁶¹.

Even so, INEC facilities and personnel in the South East have come under attacks from unknown gunmen in recent times⁶². This together with the weekly restriction of movements to protest the incarceration of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, could make the South East unconducive for a peaceful poll. Most certainly, many voters are likely to keep indoors for fear of attacks while election officials are likely not to show up in areas considered flashpoints or strongholds of violent gangs.

There are underreported stories of residents fleeing villages in Imo State and other volatile areas in the South East region where criminal elements are disrupting the lives of community members, and security operatives working to flush them out, are engaged in gun duels that threaten the peaceful living of villagers.

The possibility that elections may not be held in some areas in the North East, South East and parts of the North Central due to insecurity can compromise the integrity and outcome of the 2023 general elections. More than this, it can provoke a constitutional and political crisis that can threaten the survival of the democratic order.

⁶¹ <https://dailypost.ng/2022/12/05/esn-not-interested-in-2023-elections-ipob-responds-to-attacks-on-inec-offices/>

⁶² <https://humanglemedia.com/ipob-attacks-on-inec-facilities-denying-residents-of-voter-registration-opportunities/>

Corroborating the above, INEC has warned that “if the insecurity is not monitored and dealt with decisively, it could ultimately culminate in the cancellation and/or postponement of elections in sufficient constituencies to hinder declaration of elections results and precipitate a constitutional crisis”⁶³.

According to the 1999 Constitution (as amended), a presidential candidate can only be deemed elected if they secure the highest number of votes cast at the election and a quarter of the votes cast in two-thirds of all the states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory. Given the unrelenting character of insecurity and its spread across the country, there is a real possibility that it could lead to a situation where the 2023 general election is unable to meet this vital requirement for the election of a president.

Likewise, the possibility that a huge number of IDPs would be disenfranchised can affect the election’s integrity. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), there are as many as 3.1 million IDPs in Nigeria⁶⁴. This huge number can make a difference in the 2023 general elections. For example, the 2015 presidential election was won by a margin of fewer than 2.6 million votes while in 2011, it was by less than 4 million⁶⁵.

In the same vein, disenfranchisement of eligible voters due to the inability of elections to take place at polling units as a result of insecurity or due to internal displacement of persons from areas they had previously registered to vote can also form grounds for post-election disputations by aggrieved political parties and candidates.

⁶³ <https://www.thecable.ng/inec-insecurity-can-lead-to-cancellation-of-elections-but-we-wont-allow-it-happen>

⁶⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html>

⁶⁵ <https://amp.france24.com/en/20150331-military-buhari-defeats-nigeria-goodluck-jonathan-presidential-vote>

ix) Likelihood of Post-Election Violence and Disruptions in Law and Order

Another factor that can affect the integrity of the polls is the threat of allegations of rigging, fraud and manipulations leading to rejection of the outcome, protests and riots. At the moment, it is apparent that each of the leading presidential candidates is leaning towards ethnic and religious groups for support. Therefore, in the case of a disputed outcome, these candidates can incentivize their supporters to protest leading to attacks and reprisals. The unfolding situation in Osun State where violent protests⁶⁶ have taken place following the outcome of the Election Petition Tribunal is a forewarning of what is possible during and after the February 25 and March 11, 2023, general elections.

Nigeria already has an established pattern of post-election violence. For instance, there was widespread violence following allegations of fraud regarding the 1999 election that ushered in the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo. It is estimated that about 80 people died.

“Similarly, at least 100 people were killed during incidents of violence triggered by federal and state elections in 2003, and over 300 people lost their lives in connection with electoral violence four years later, with pre-election violence alone claiming more than 70 lives. Again, in 2011, post-election violence led to the death of at least 800 people over three days of rioting in 12 states across northern Nigeria — the worst case so far in the country’s political history”⁶⁷.

Any post-election crisis in the prevailing situation in Nigeria can easily lead to a conflagration of immense proportion. This is because of the pre-existing ethnic and religious polarization and the anger towards the ruling elite.

⁶⁶ <https://punchng.com/apc-pdp-trade-blame-over-osun-violence/>

⁶⁷ <https://humanglemedia.com/nigerias-deadly-history-of-electoral-violence-in-five-charts/>

Depending on how long it lasts, such a situation can also lead to the collapse of state authority and incursion of the military in the guise of restoring public order and establishing a Government of National Unity (GNU) possibly made up of military officers and some politicians and civilians.

Conclusion

As earlier noted, the success of the 2023 general elections is important, not just for Nigeria, but also for the stability of Africa. Hence, the need for stakeholders' collaboration to ramp up efforts in ensuring that all identified risks and threats are nipped in the bud to guarantee the integrity of the exercise.

State actors, policymakers, and citizens have a role to play in terms of their responsible behaviour before, during and after the elections bearing in mind that the outcome of the elections will affect their collective socio-economic well-being and security. The international community must also avoid meddling but only advocate for fair electoral practices and outcomes, and impose punitive actions where these are breached.

To this end also, all political parties and candidates must instil discipline and uprightness in their members and supporters. Traditional rulers and faith-based leaders must leverage their moral standing to preach responsible citizenship while celebrities, civil society, and the creative industry must utilize their expansive platforms and mass followership to encourage positive values that appreciate peaceful electoral conduct. This is the only way to ensure credible polls and the sustenance of Nigeria's nascent democracy.

Recommendations

The main responsibility for guaranteeing credible polls come February 25 and March 11, 2023, lies on the government, election management bodies, security agencies, media, citizens, the international community, and Nigeria's development partners.

It is imperative that all stakeholders take the following urgent steps:

- (1) Utilize the days left to the elections to ramp up measures to flush out violent groups and secure villages and towns affected by insecurity.
- (2) Ensure the deployment of adequate security for smooth conduct of the general election while ensuring that this does not affect ongoing efforts to contain activities of violent groups across the country.
- (3) INEC should work with community watch-persons together with security agencies to deploy technology including drones to electronically track in real time the movement of all vehicles and boats used in conveying electoral personnel and materials to prevent their hijacking and diversion.
- (4) INEC should put in place mechanisms for swift countermeasures to prevent bypassing and hacking of the BVAS and IREV platforms. Where necessary, it should leverage international support for this purpose.
- (5) The Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) working with security agencies should identify persons of interest based on credible intelligence and ensure they are subjected to lawful surveillance during the electioneering period provided a court order authorizing such is secured.
- (6) Violence often starts with allegations of bias, hence the INEC, the police and other security agencies must maintain utmost impartiality in the course of discharging their duties.
- (7) INEC should liaise with relevant government, intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies to agree on effective measures to ensure the participation of IDPs in the election.

This can be done by developing a register which accurately maps the number, identity, status and location of displaced persons.

- (8) Monitoring and oversight institutions must apply measures to enforce observance of the peace accord by political parties and candidates.
- (9) Security operatives work together with local communities and vigilantes to safeguard environments and report unusual activities
- (10) INEC, security agencies, CBN, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) work together to curb vote buying and violation of the limits set for campaign expenses.
- (11) Security institutions should promptly arrest electoral offenders and prosecute them to serve as a deterrent to other intending lawbreakers.
- (12) Tech companies, fact-checkers and the media work together to monitor and dispel election-related fake news.
- (13) Civil society in collaboration with the media should intensify sensitization and awareness programmes aimed at empowering voters with information on peacebuilding during elections, and the latest developments as regards electioneering processes in Nigeria in order to help them make informed decisions
- (14) INEC, security agencies, media and civil society to leverage existing platforms like the “Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room” to develop robust early warning, prevention and mitigation mechanisms for the 2023 general elections.
- (15) The Federal Government, CBN, and all stakeholders concerned should resolve the lingering crises of fuel scarcity and poorly conceived monetary policies capable of negatively impacting the logistical capacities of INEC and other important parties such as election monitors.

- (16) INEC should begin work on the adoption of Electronic Voting as a panacea to voter fraud and progressively work towards mainstreaming diasporan voting into Nigeria's electoral system. This is necessary to respond to the changing dynamics of population migration which is creating a landscape of Nigerian citizens resident abroad yet active in the political life of their country.
- (17) INEC must ensure the implementation of Section 54 (1) and (2) of the Electoral Act which prescribes measures to ensure the participation of PWDs. This includes providing separate lines at the polling unit, allowing for priority voting, the provision of magnifying glasses for the visually impaired and adequate staffing at polling units, and making available sign language interpreters for the deaf and the speech impaired community.

About CAPPA

Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA) is a Pan- African non-governmental organisation that works to advance human rights, challenge corporate abuse of natural resources and build community power for inclusive development and participatory governance.

CAPPA works with African communities to build partnerships with them towards taking collective social actions for the promotion and defense of the rights of peoples. It challenges the abuse of natural resources, the environment and local people by corporate entities and state policies and practices.

The CAPPA team comprises dedicated staff, working with community volunteers, coalitions, and various networks. CAPPA is committed to policies and actions that would help redress the inequality crises in Nigeria and across Africa and enable a socially just and equitable human civilization on the continent of Africa.

CAPPA aims to stop and prevent unsustainable corporate practices, improve inclusive and participatory governance, and mitigate the impacts of harmful corporate and state practices on people and communities. Its mission is to nurture movements of African communities and a new generation of leaders working shoulder to shoulder to demand democratic community and natural resource governance, inclusive participation in development policies processes, end to inequalities and accountability for all forms of corporate and state abuses.

CAPPA envisions a continent whose development path is designed, modelled, and executed by Africans, respecting, and guaranteeing human rights, enabling social justice, and ensuring harmony with the environment.

CAPPA works on five thematic areas:

- Social Justice and Public Services
- Public Health
- Environment and Extractives
- Climate Change
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CAPPA has several partners in the national, regional and international space.

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