

# The Nigerian Election report

A comprehensive analysis of the main candidates

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## Introduction

On February 25th, Nigerians took to the polls in what is a watershed election for the African powerhouse, where the outcome of voting will shape Nigeria's future for generations to come. The elections come following eight years of the current President, Muhammadu Buhari's All Progressives Congress (APC) rule in the country, during which the nation has seen economic stagnation - undergoing two recessions - as well as a catastrophic deterioration of West Africa's regional security climate. Further to this, countless allegations of human rights abuses have been made of the Buhari government, as highlighted by the #ENDSARS movement. In the build-up to the election, Nigeria's political system has recently seen the first serious challenge to the APC-PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) political monopoly where [Peter Obi](#), the Labour Party (LP) candidate, has mounted a serious challenge against [Atiku Abubakar](#), the PDP nominee, and [Bola Tinubu](#) of the APC.

Despite a [history of last-minute cancellations](#) – Nigerians will have voted to elect their new president. Nigeria has suffered multiple economic recessions under current president Muhammadu Buhari and is fraught with regional divisions; security issues; kidnappings; high unemployment; and energy, [cash](#), and fuel shortages. [7 in 10 Nigerians](#) still believe in democratic forms of government, but levels of dissatisfaction with the political status quo are extremely high. According to [Afrobarometer](#), 89% of Nigerians feel that the country is going in the wrong direction and only 21% are satisfied with how their democracy is currently working. The future of Africa's largest democracy is at stake in this election, and this has fuelled the rise of a new candidate and increased young voter registration.

Since its transition back to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has followed an unwritten alternative approach in presidential elections. The presidency typically oscillates between a southern Christian candidate and a northern Muslim candidate from either the All Progressives Congress (APC), or the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Current president Buhari of the APC is a Muslim from the north, so the pattern dictates that a southerner who is Christian should take office next. But this election will likely break the mould for several reasons.

The incumbent APC is running candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu. He is the former governor of Lagos, a southerner, but he is Muslim. The PDP candidate is Atiku Abubakar, a Muslim, but



from the north. Both major parties run Muslim candidates from separate regions, increasing the potential for regionally divided voting. Also of importance, both candidates are septuagenarians and multimillionaire establishment candidates with histories of political controversy.

## Security

*Leopold Maissonny*

As Nigeria holds presidential and legislative elections, insecurity threatens the smooth running of the ballot. Nigeria has been plagued with terrorism in recent years and despite the military efforts against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), [the Buhari administration has failed to stabilise the security situation](#) as violence has spread from the northeast to the rest of the country. Other [security threats in Nigeria](#) include secessionist groups in the Biafra region, criminal gangs in the northwest, clashes between farmers and herders, as well as ethnoreligious tensions.

Since the beginning of the campaign, [numerous attacks](#) have targeted the polling stations of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). As a result, [240 new polling stations did not open on the day of the election](#), and several attacks on other polling stations [disturbed the ballot](#) by intimidating voters and delaying the vote count, potentially leading to allegations of fraud from defeated candidates and thus trouble. Another key factor in voter turnout was the ability of the [2.7 million internally displaced Nigerians](#) to vote in the polling station in which they are registered, which is far from guaranteed but could have a crucial impact on the results of the elections and the potential organisation of a second round. This is all the more likely considering the [fuel distribution crisis](#) the country has been facing in the past months.

## Atiku Abubakar

*Ashley Bloedorn*

Atiku Abubakar's candidacy has come under fire due to the traditional Nigerian political conventions, whereby there has been a longstanding informal tradition where the presidency switches between North and South, as well as Christian and Muslim. For example, the current president Buhari is a Northern Muslim, therefore the next president should be a Southern Christian. Hence, controversy has arisen around [Abubakar's candidacy](#) as he is a Northern Muslim, which would break convention.



Atiku previously held the office of vice-presidency from 1999 to 2007 and is the representative for the People's Democratic Party, he is known for running for office on multiple occasions. Recent political factions in the APC have seen to favour Atiku's chances, with rumours that the recent currency redesign was largely focused on preventing vote buying, and his discord in the ruling APC party. He is the most experienced out of all the candidates, while he was in office, he was head of the government economic team which saw increased economic output signified by reduced unemployment and GDP growth.

Abubakar has run on the [platform of 4 different parties](#), and this will be his [sixth attempt](#) to acquire the office of the presidency. His hope largely lies in securing the north of the country and changing from the existing APC rule which has produced turbulent times in Nigeria.

The 76-year-old businessman has been subject to allegations of corruption, largely related to an unconfirmed audio source in which a voice resembling to Atiku's orchestrates the diversion of government funds and plans to cover it up. Atiku came out to say that the voice recorded discusses "[nothing new](#)", citing an investigation which left allegations unfounded. When questioned pertaining to the publication of assets Abubakar stated that there was no legal requirement to do so but should such legislation be enacted he would be [happy to comply](#).

Questions have been raised over his ability to govern, with a comparatively quiet campaign relative to the other 2 main candidates and a significant amount of time spent abroad. He has notably spent time in Dubai, and some believe this has been due to ongoing health issues; however, his campaign spokesperson came out claiming that the time was to "[reflect and refresh](#)" stating that Abubakar's campaign was one of the first to begin, and runs on its own schedule.

Atiku has promised to rebuild the damaged Nigerian economy, with the nation experiencing the [highest levels of inflation](#) in close to 2 decades and mass cash shortages due to the attempted currency redesign. He has also pledged to deal with [rampant insecurity](#) and oil theft issues.

Atiku Abubakar believes he is the best candidate to rebuild Nigeria's economy, enhance security, and run a smaller government despite facing corruption scandals. He wants to privatise the national oil company, increase the role of the private sector in the economy, remove the gasoline subsidy, and give the 36 states more authority. With 133 million Nigerians living in poverty, governmental errors and the COVID-19 pandemic have had a significant negative impact on the country's economy. Abubakar has been promoting himself as the "candidate of the north," and the significant voter turnout in that area may work in his favour. Nonetheless, other parties have displaced the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the opposition party in several regions of the nation. Despite the difficulties, Abubakar maintains his optimism.



## Bola Ahmed Tinubu

*Amaar Lone*

Tinubu derives his political legitimacy from his time as the governor of Lagos state between 1999 and 2007, during which he is credited with transforming Lagos into the powerhouse which it is recognised today. [In an interview with Princeton's Innovations for Successful Societies](#), Tinubu highlights the state he inherited following five years of military rule under Sani Abacha. He notably identifies the lack of a waste management system, a chaotic traffic situation, an over-inflated ghost bureaucracy, an archaic and often non-existent accounting system, an unstable security condition, and a disastrous economic environment. Taking immediate action, the Tinubu administration is credited with reforming Lagos's bloated civil service and enacting a series of political reforms which transformed the state into a model of good governance.

Furthermore, Tinubu, a staunch advocate of the private sector is credited with attracting significant levels of foreign investment into the state by enacting a series of policies aimed at infrastructural and societal development. [Regarding infrastructure, Tinubu's administration continued the construction of the Lekki-Epe Expressway](#), opening up the Lekki peninsula for development and contributing to the rise of the Lekki Free Trade Zone. Additionally, the Tinubu administration rehabilitated and expanded major roads, such as the Apapa-Oshodi and Lagos-Badagry expressways and the Agege motorway, having significant positive impacts on economic productivity. [Finally, during Tinubu's tenure as governor, the Bus Rapid Transit system was implemented in Lagos](#). Socially speaking, Tinubu focused heavily on Lagos's health care system, creating and developing healthcare programs such as the Lagos State Health Management Agency and the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency, agencies which have been credited with significantly improving the dire state of Lagos's public sector healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, Tinubu's administration developed the precursors for the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund, which provided SMEs with loans and grants, helping develop local businesses and increasing employment.

In an [address to Chatham House](#) in December 2022, Bola Tinubu identified what he views as the greatest risks Nigeria is currently facing today and how to tackle the growing political, military, and economic insecurities plaguing the nation. In his address, Tinubu highlighted radical extremist violence, banditry, various forms of trafficking, the electricity problem, and economic challenges as the main hindrances holding back Nigeria's national and regional development. In his strategy for curing the nation of its ailments, Tinubu committed himself



to uphold and advancing the organic link between national security and economic development as a means of promoting national and regional peace and prosperity, adding that domestic policy must be recalibrated to pursue the aims of human security through foreign policy.

In terms of his policy proposals, Tinubu outlined the importance of building on the Buhari administration's investments in the agricultural sector by using technology and expertise to accelerate growth and development by providing the critical infrastructure (roads, rail, access to ports, and storage) necessary to achieve the commodity transformation in the agriculture chain. Tinubu also prioritised a revamp of the energy sector to tackle Nigeria's problems regarding a sustained energy supply. In his address, Tinubu pushed for the privatisation of Nigeria's power distribution, arguing that "the federal government as a regulator and operator, and a price fixer is a broken model," using the development of the telecommunications industry as a model for the privatisation of Nigeria's energy sector. Building on his economic model, Tinubu touted the private sector as a model for growth and development while promising to address the conflict between Nigeria's monetary and fiscal policies and reduce unemployment, in efforts to raise the real annual growth rate to above seven per cent as a means of doubling the Nigerian economy in the next decade. Finally, regarding his foreign policy ambitions, the APC candidate highlighted the importance of regional integration and cooperation, referencing organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, as a means of securing national security and consolidating Nigeria's domestic development.

Tinubu has been no stranger to political scandals, particularly those regarding allegations of corruption. In particular, Tinubu has been linked to four high-profile scandals: the seizure of his money in the United States, two allegations during his time as governor of Lagos state, and most recently, a scandal regarding Alpha Beta, an accounting firm.

Firstly, in 1988, [the US Department of Justice accused Tinubu of holding proceeds from the sale of white heroin](#), with special agent Kevin Moss accusing Tinubu of working for Adegoboyega Akande. Although Tinubu was not personally charged in the case, he was required to forfeit US\$460,000 to the authorities.

As previously mentioned in a [London Politica report](#), Tinubu also faced allegations of corruption during his time as governor of Lagos State, however, he was cleared by a tribunal in 2011. Most recently, Tinubu has faced accusations regarding his role in Alpha Beta, [an accounting firm handling the computation, tracking and reconciliation of Internally Generated Revenue \(IGR\) in Lagos State](#). The presidential hopeful has been accused of using the firm to launder money and evade taxes, amongst a variety of other allegations.



As previously highlighted in London Politica's profile on the former governor, Tinubu is a Muslim from the South, an area of Nigeria which is predominantly Christian. Furthermore, Tinubu has chosen [Kashim Shettima](#), a Muslim from the north, as his running mate. In a move which has been widely criticised, due to the tradition of a [Muslim-Christian presidential ticket](#), Tinubu may risk ostracising the Christian vote in the country. The APC's single-faith ticket emphasises Tinubu's confidence in securing the Southern vote regardless of his religion, a move which may hinder his chances at electoral success. On the other hand, Tinubu, whose career has been plagued by corruption scandals, has received support from Buhari (who as a candidate ran on a strict anti-corruption platform) [during a rally in Adamawa state](#). This may help Tinubu come election day as it has the potential to mitigate concerns regarding administering a country which has a long history of corruption. However, this relationship has been [challenged in recent weeks](#), with Buhari's currency redesign policy allegedly aimed at cracking down on Tinubu's attempts at buying votes on election day.

Although there are serious challenges to Tinubu's campaign and electoral ambitions, it must be identified that Tinubu has been the frontline candidate throughout the election process, consolidating overwhelming support in various states across Nigeria. Given the national run-off system for the presidential elections, there is a chance that one of the opposition parties may thwart the APC's electoral hopes, although this remains unlikely due to the levels of support expressed for Tinubu from varying political forces in the country and his history of successfully manoeuvring across Nigeria's political landscape.





## Peter Obi

*Vitas Carosella*

Peter Obi represents the alternative to these establishment candidates. The former governor of Anambra state is the LP candidate and has been depicted by some as the [saviour of Nigeria](#). He is a southerner and a Christian, so he fits the unwritten alternation pattern, but more importantly, he has connected with the largest voting bloc in Nigeria, young people. This has made him an unexpected top candidate for the presidential election.

At 61 years old, Peter Obi is nearly a decade younger than his competitors, but his personality and approachability set him apart. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development, [personality trumps ideology](#) in Nigerian politics, and Obi has that. Although he too is a millionaire with a background in business, Obi routinely flies economy, carries his own bags, and waits in lines like every other Nigerian. He is also accessible to citizens. He has campaigned in every state and travels without a huge, armoured convoy.



His attitude and accessibility have translated into clear support from young voters, which is critical in a nation with an average age of 18. Nearly [40% of Nigerian voters are aged 18-34](#) and it is expected that the majority of these voters will vote for Obi. He also brings a unifying message at a time of chaos in a country typically divided along ethnic and religious lines. When speaking to [Sky News](#), Obi acknowledged that “the country cannot continue on this trajectory,” and stated simply he wants to save Nigeria.

Obi’s [plans](#) include a reform of the naira multiple currency exchange markets, an elimination of costly government subsidies, especially in the oil industry, and a promise to double the country’s energy capacity to 25,000 MW within two years. He also [promises](#) to solve insecurity, focusing on banditry issues and militia insurgencies, while building new energy and transport infrastructure and diversifying Nigeria’s economy taking advantage of the boom of new technologies.

Recently, Obi gave an [hour-long speech](#) at Chatham House in London, where he touched on the alarming state of the nation and highlighted the need for “competent leadership with character, commitment and compassion to build a better Nigeria”. He committed himself to use “merit to assemble an effective government of national unity,” and to shift the economic emphasis from consumption to production via an agrarian revolution and export-oriented industrialization. However, Obi realises none of this can happen without first unifying the people and fighting endemic corruption, which is why he said his first commitment is securing Nigeria. His record shows when given the chance he can accomplish his goals. As governor of Anambra state, he [effectively ended corrupt money-based politics](#) and managed to push the state towards the UNDP development goals. He developed a reputation for being stingy, but he claims that moniker does not bother him because he invested in education, cut unnecessary government spending, and managed to save for the future.

Despite leading in many of the major polls, Obi will need things to break his way to win the election. Africa-focused strategic advisory firm [Africa Matters Limited](#) predicts that Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the incumbent APC will likely win the presidential election. This is more based on incumbent party power, a deep war chest, and the fact that the party holds key gubernatorial positions, rather than Tinubu’s policy ideas.

However, Peter Obi does have a real possibility of winning this election. His chances hinge greatly on two elements. Most importantly, Obi will need his young base to show up and vote in his favour. If [polling](#) is any indication, Obi will also need some portion of the undecided voter group to cast their ballots for him. Without these two voter blocs showing up for him, it is unlikely that Obi will ride the wave of enthusiasm to actual victory.

Obi could get help from a fourth candidate, Rabiun Kwankwaso. The former governor of Kwano state has a major influence in highly populous northern Nigeria and could pull votes from the other Muslim candidates. This could open the door for Obi to take the presidency. However, much of this relies on a voting system that is fragile. Despite [new measures](#) being



taken to insure free and fair elections, voting selling and violence at the polls are not uncommon in Nigeria. Low voter turnout, voter suppression and vote selling will all favour the incumbent party, not Obi.

The most likely outcome is Nigeria's first-ever run-off election, with two potential scenarios. The first scenario is that Obi is one of the two run-off candidates. If this is the case, the head of the Labour Party will have to quickly mobilise his young voting bloc again, while also seeking votes from other sources, such as the populous northern states where he does not enjoy traditional support. In a direct run-off between Obi and Tinubu, it is likely Tinubu would win because of his party's strong presence throughout the country. However, in a race against Atiku Abubakar, an Obi victory is conceivable. The other scenario of course is that Obi does not reach the vote threshold to be one of the run-off candidates, but is instead put in the position of kingmaker. Obi, who boasts broad support amongst the young population, could tip the voting scales by endorsing one of the other two candidates. This would naturally involve negotiations and concessions and could even allow for Obi to push one of the candidates towards policies more in-line with his own. It is likely that whomever Obi chooses to endorse in this scenario, his voter bloc would follow suit, giving said candidate a landslide victory.

Nigeria's presidential election has seen a third-party candidate truly challenge the establishment for the first time. Polling suggests that the race is tighter than anticipated and will hinge on the turnout of young and undecided voters. As crises hit Nigeria, the very real prospect of a presidential election run-off looms. Expect tensions to flare as the country contemplates continuity or a new direction.

## Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, the world's attention is set on Nigeria, as its population heads to the polls. What may have been a somewhat predictable election a few months back, when London Politica first launched its Nigeria Election Watch series, has grown into an extremely complex puzzle to solve.

President Buhari's APC could have strolled to a relatively comfortable victory, considering the party's weight in recent Nigerian politics, Tinubu's track record of effective local governance and his strong financial position ahead of the presidential campaign. However, the Naira redesign fiasco has effectively created a civil war within the APC, revealing cracks in Tinubu's claim to the presidency, just weeks to the election day. In any other circumstance, this would have opened the way for a major turnaround in favour of the PDP. Yet Abubakar's failure to muster full opposition support throughout the campaign, means this opportunity may have ultimately slipped from his hands. After all, the tumultuous build-up to the election has benefited the third man in Nigeria's bipolar political system. Obi's campaign has built up



significant momentum among Nigerian youths in recent weeks, which is highly promising in one of the world's youngest democracies.

The question for the candidates chasing Nigeria's mammoth parties is whether they can convert campaigning momentum into votes. This is far from being achieved. As this report has highlighted, intimidation tactics, voter buyouts, fuel shortages and economic pressure on the poorest populations are just a handful of the tactics and circumstances that may influence the final outcome of yesterday's election. Yet the sense of hope in democracy across the country prevails, as the country stands at a blurry crossroads.



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