

What next for Nigeria?

An analysis of the 2023 elections and their outcome

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1. Introduction

By Caleb Adegbola

With over 90 million registered voters, Nigeria boasts the largest electorate in Africa, a population that is predicted to grow rapidly in the near future. The stability of the West African superpower holds prime importance for the whole region, both economically and as part of the fight against terrorism.

The outcome of the election has been highly anticipated as Nigeria approaches a critical point in its democratic journey. In recent times the country has been facing severe security challenges, with kidnappings on the rise. Boko Haram remains a threat to national security and agro-pastoral conflicts continue in the northern regions of the country. Since the election Peter Obi (Labour Party), Atiku Abubakar (People's Democratic Party) and President-elect Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (All Progressives Congress) have all claimed to be the rightful winner and President of Nigeria. They have all gone further to engage in legal action in one form or the other, partly owing to a series of technological and voter irregularities. The patience of both Obi and Atiku and their respective parties, whilst challenging the result, portrays faith in Nigeria's judiciary and its ability to avoid corruption. Supporters have abstained from civil unrest and expressed their discontent with peaceful protests rather than acts of violence, like those seen on election day.

Nigeria's February elections posed a serious test to the delicate intricacies of Nigeria's demographic, unearthing the strong religious, tribal and regional divides which see the electorate swept by identity politics. Many also observed the democratic process, watching closely to see if the election will evince corruption in some way or form.

This report looks into some of the key trends and highlights related to the election as it unfolded and the potential impact on Nigeria, as the nation looks to move forward with Tinubu as its sixth democratically elected president. Factors such as youth involvement, international reactions, and identity politics are discussed, amongst others.

2. Youth involvement in the electoral process

By Noah Trowbridge

Nigeria is a demographically young country. In 2020, almost half of its population was aged under 19. Regularly described as a [demographic "time bomb"](#), its population is set to double by 2050, reaching almost 410 million. Of the 93,469,008 eligible voters registered on the country's electoral rolls, almost 40% are aged between 18 and 34, while 35% are aged between 35 and 49.

For the potential of Nigeria's youth to be translated into concrete political power, it must be integrated into the electoral process and Nigerian politics. However, this prospect often comes up against the valuing – among 58% of populations surveyed by [Afrobarometer](#) – of the wisdom of older generations over the innovation brought by young people, as well as a disinterest in politics that is higher among 18-34 year-olds than among those over 35. However, young voters seem to have mobilised more for the 2023 elections.

2.1. Youth involvement in electoral organisation and campaigning

On the one hand, young people were particularly involved in the organisation and the smooth running of the elections. This integration is fundamental, as it strengthens young people's confidence in Nigeria's democratic institutions. What's more, the new generation can enrich the electoral organisation with its technical know-how, particularly when it comes to assisting with the transition to digital voter authentication technologies. In the case of Nigeria, these factors are all the more important given that voter confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is at its [lowest level](#) since 2005. However, INEC has taken steps to involve young people in the organisation of the elections. In particular, it has teamed up with the [National Youth Service Corps](#) (NYSC) to recruit young workers to help update the electoral roll and manage polling stations. Participation in this initiative is now a prerequisite for joining the Nigerian civil service. Beyond the framework of INEC, the youth mobilised to guarantee the fluidity and transparency of the ballot by documenting the entire electoral process on social networks and ensuring the [smooth running of the vote count](#).

On the other hand, the youth also influenced the presidential campaign itself. The bipolarity of Nigerian politics, symbolised by the planned face-off between candidates Bola Tinubu (All Progressives Congress, APC) and Atiku Abubakar (People's Democratic Party, PDP), has been shaken in the run-up to the 2023 election by the rise of Peter Obi's Labour Party (LP). A 61-year-old former PDP member and billionaire businessman, his profile is not radically different from that of a traditional presidential candidate. Yet he was the most successful of the three candidates in harnessing the enthusiasm of a youthful population demanding changes in the

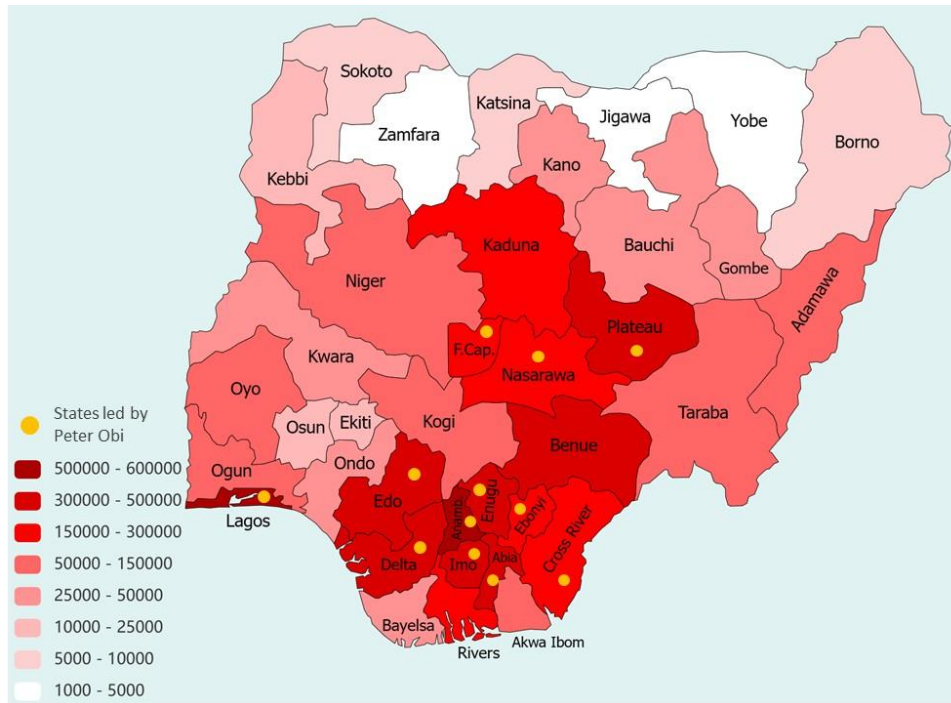
country's governance through his campaigning. Youth involvement was notably secured through an aggressive campaign on social media. This success is the fruit of the work of the LP's communications team, who have forged a community of young supporters united under the banner of "#Obidients". This hashtag is used in all partisan communications, as well as by LP candidates in parliamentary and regional elections in their campaign speeches. Peter Obi, the movement's leading figure, is referred to as "[the Rock](#)", a pseudonym that reinforces his image as an entrepreneurial businessman, persevering and solid in the face of "the structure" he is trying to bring down. The Obidients have also mobilised strongly via WhatsApp groups specific to each state, enabling them to organise rallies and raise funds. This major social media push seeks to harness the support of the former [#BringBackOurGirls \(BBOG\)](#) and [#EndSARS movements](#) which incarnated opposition to governing parties in the past decade.

2.2. Youth impact on the electoral results

Just a few weeks before the presidential election, it was almost impossible to pick a winner from among the three favourites. The LP campaign had positioned Peter Obi as the youth candidate. Theoretically, the youth vote alone would almost be enough to win the election, since 18-35 year-olds represent almost [34% of the electorate](#). Nevertheless, the Nigerian youth are not a monolithic group, and their vote could not, therefore, be taken for granted by the LP on the eve of the election. Thus, it is necessary to assess the effective influence of youth in this presidential election and the prospects for the political future of Nigerian youth.

The LP's performance in the presidential elections suggests a very significant mobilisation of youth. Given that the party garnered less than 1% of the vote in the 2019 presidential election, Peter Obi's score of 25.4% in the 2023 poll is an unprecedented success. This is all the more striking with the LP candidate managing to outperform the APC and PDP in their traditional strongholds. The most striking example is the Lagos district, won by Peter Obi (see map below) when the state seemed predestined for Bola Tinubu, former mayor of the metropolis. In this state, where the 15-35 age group accounts for 60% of the population, young people clearly mobilised against the system embodied by Bola Tinubu's APC. The same applies to the South-Eastern states, which are generally dominated by the PDP, but where the LP won by a large majority (see map below). In addition, the mobilisation of youth on social networks on election day made it possible to [film and document voting disruptions](#). These could include physical intimidation of voters, vote-buying or the dissemination of misinformation. Young people turned these fraudulent practices into symbols of the system to be overthrown: [Jennifer Efdi](#), a young voter assaulted by thugs at her polling station, thus became one of the key figures in the LP's rhetoric.

Votes for Peter Obi at the 2023 Nigerian presidential election (Source: INEC)



Although the new generation of voters mobilised massively to hoist Peter Obi to third place in the presidential election, a non-negligible proportion of the youth also pledged their support to the APC and the PDP. Thus, while the Nigerian digital space was largely occupied by the Obidients community during the campaign, election day was marked by the mobilisation of 19 Bola Tinubu's young supporters on social networks, including the "[#JagabanArmy](#)". In addition, Peter Obi had difficulty convincing young voters outside urban areas. This is particularly the case in the more rural, less developed and Muslim-majority regions of northern Nigeria (see map above), where the youth vote has come to support the traditional parties. Yet it is this same population that is [most affected by precariousness and insecurity](#) – with the deployment of Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State in West Africa Province) in the North-East of the country – and which does not benefit from such a strong mediatic exposure. The domination of the Nigerian social media landscape by the Obidients in the months leading up to the election surely contributed to the false impression of an almost total commitment of youth behind Peter Obi's candidacy. Rather, it seems that certain geographic, ethnic and religious dynamics typical of Nigerian elections have resumed their course for the 2023 ballot (see [Section 6](#)).

In short, although the youth were decisive in structuring the presidential campaign and toppling certain APC and PDP strongholds, their longer-term political influence will depend on their ability to demand greater political transparency, refrain from resorting to violence and overcome the identity-based cleavages on which Nigeria's systematic corruption feeds.

3. International reaction to the election

By Vitas Carosella

As with most pivotal elections, the outcome of the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial races in Nigeria were awaited with bated breath by the international community. The stakes of these elections were intensified given the economic recession the country has been suffering in recent years. The prospect of a legitimate third-party candidate, the end of a two-term presidency and history of violent election cycles heightened the sense of anticipation across a continent where democratic backsliding is becoming increasingly prevalent. Radical change, the erosion of democracy or a continuation of the status quo were all plausible outcomes. As the results were revealed, acknowledgment of the results came from the international community. The following are the reactions of fellow African states, as well as the global powers from the West and East.

3.1. The African Continent

Across the African continent leaders eagerly congratulated President-elect Tinubu after the February election. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Mahamat, issued a [formal statement](#) warmly congratulating Tinubu, while also commending Nigerians for “resilience in their commitment to democratic values by casting their votes for the leaders of their choice.” The premiers from neighbours Ghana and Benin also sent congratulations, by [tweet](#) and [open letter](#). The president of Ghana congratulated Tinubu and his competitors on a race well run, while expressing his desire to deepen ties between the two nations. The premier of Benin went so far as to call Tinubu “a unifier and a detribalised Nigerian, who would move Nigeria to greater heights.”

Similarly, the Presidents of [Sierra Leone](#) and [The Gambia](#) also offered their congratulations. The executive of Sierra Leone called Nigeria a beacon of democracy in Africa and expressed a desire to work with Tinubu to continue advancing bilateral relations.

The overarching sentiment across the continent was one of relief and satisfaction with a fair election and a peaceful transition of power. This showed the Nigerian commitment to the democratic experiment and served as a symbol for other African nations. Moreover, the protests in Nigeria and electoral challenges from competitors via the court system showed the strength of the nation's civil society movements and its justice system.

3.2. The United States

Prior to the election, United States (US) President Joe Biden released an [official statement](#) commending a peace accord signed by the major party candidates. The [peace pact](#) was supposed to ensure “the conduct of free, fair, credible, transparent and verifiable elections cognisant of the need to maintain a peaceful environment before, during and after the 2023 general elections” and “to place national interest above personal and partisan concerns”.

Despite the sporadic violence on the streets (see [Section 7](#)) and questions about the efficiency of election procedures, US Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price issued a [statement](#) on 1st March congratulating the people of Nigeria and President-elect Tinubu. Price also praised the competitiveness of the election, marking it as “a new period in Nigerian politics and democracy,” one which reflects the diversity of views in the African nation.

Given the widespread concern over the election procedure, doubts about the credibility of results and the violence seen at polling stations, it is no surprise the statement from the US official drew criticism. Republican ranking Senate Foreign Relations Committee member, Jim Hirsch, released an [official statement](#) in which he expressed disappointment with the Biden Administration's embrace of the election result. He stated that the US should be supporting the people of Nigeria and worried the “rush to judgement” would hamper future relations between the two countries.

The disagreement within the US government is reminiscent of Washington's recent approach to the West African nation. According to [Chatham House](#), the US and the UK have turned a blind eye to democratic backsliding in Nigeria, whilst increasing support for the military. Moreover, the western nations have engaged inconsistently in the West African state, often condemning Nigeria whenever they disagree with its policies. The relationship has been strained and perhaps undermined by US actions in Nigeria. Yet, the US must maintain close ties with Africa's largest democracy as it seeks to maintain influence in a region where Chinese investment is expanding.

As scrutiny of the election procedure increased, the US Department of State [imposed entry restrictions](#) on Nigerians who they deemed undermined the democratic process. This includes individuals who engaged in voter intimidation and vote manipulation. Eventually, the

Department of State issued a [second statement](#) which expressed greater concern for the violence, voter suppression and general election procedure. It also called on INEC to strengthen election procedures ahead of the gubernatorial elections and praised the Nigerian people who spoke out against the violence and election irregularities.

President Biden's [warm wishes](#) to President-elect Tinubu on inauguration day reflect American mixed-messaging. While the American President congratulated his Nigerian counterpart, he also issued a warning that elected leaders must show that democracy can deliver on the needs of the people.

3.3. The UK, the Commonwealth, and the EU

Like the United States, the [United Kingdom](#) and the [European Union](#) condemned the potential for election day violence and praised the signing of the peace accord by the major Nigerian parties. By March 1st, both the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and the [Foreign Office](#) had issued congratulations to President-elect Tinubu. They also commended the Nigerian people for their “participation, patience and resilience” throughout the voting process.

The UK government, the Commonwealth observation mission and the EU observation mission all noted that election day was plagued with technical issues, delays, and organisational mishaps. However, the [Commonwealth mission](#) did declare that election day had been “largely peaceful” and noted that security officers at most polling units were professional and inobtrusive. All parties reiterated their desire for the candidates to uphold the peace agreement they signed before the election took place, further highlighting the concerns over election results' credibility and the potential for post-election violence.

3.4. China

On 4th March the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China released an [official statement](#) in which President Xi Jinping congratulated President-elect Tinubu. The government press release emphasised the support the two countries have shown each other on “issues of major concern,” and spoke about how the two nations have worked together, “closely coordinating on regional and international affairs. The Chinese government reinforced the strong bilateral relations between the two countries, with Xi himself stating that the PRC “attached great importance to the development of China – Nigeria relations.”

The results of the election likely came as a relief to the Chinese who have [invested over \\$47 billion](#) in new infrastructure projects in Nigeria. The continuation of the APC in the executive branch of government helps ensure that these projects will continue to go ahead. Nigeria is China's second largest trading partner in Africa and its largest export market. Huawei has been successful in installing nearly 10,000 km of fibre optic cables in Nigeria and the Chinese technology firm has trained over 1,000 Nigerian civil servants in cybersecurity. Huawei's strength in Nigerian technology and security poses questions about the potential for executive overreach and the transformation of Nigeria into a surveillance state.

With the APC continuing to hold the mandate in Nigeria, China will hope that business will proceed as usual. In Nigeria, China has a reliable trading partner, and ally who stays out of its internal affairs. [Reports](#) show that Nigeria under former President Muhammadu Buhari is one of the few nations that "joined statements at the United Nations backing the Chinese government's crackdowns against Muslim Uyghurs in China's western Xinjiang province."

3.5. Russia and India

The day before China congratulated President-elect Tinubu, the world's most populous nation did the same. President Narendra Modi sent a [tweet](#) congratulating the new president and expressed his desire to further strengthen the relationship between Nigeria and India.

Like China, India will be hoping that the APC remaining in power will mean a continuation of the status quo. India and Nigeria have a particularly lucrative relationship with nearly [\\$15 billion in bilateral trade](#) occurring from 2021-2022. Crucially, India is the largest foreign importer of Nigerian petroleum products, and the African nation is India's largest trading partner on the continent. The two are inextricably linked by commodity trading, with Nigeria benefiting from nearly \$15 billion in foreign direct investment from the subcontinent.

A day later the Russian government [hailed](#) the successful Nigerian election and reiterated "its willingness to bolster the relationship of traditional friendship and cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Federal Republic of Nigeria." Russia may not have the massive economic investments in Nigeria that the other Asian powers do, but it does export important amounts of wheat to the region. Moreover, Moscow is seeking to make greater incursions into the African market, and while North Africa is more likely to be its primary focus, Nigeria remains in its potential orbit of influence.

Notably, unlike many Western leaders and observers, the large Asian states did not make any remarks about election procedures, violence, and the state of Nigerian democracy. All the focus has been put on (re)establishing strong bilateral relationships and securing Nigerian trade.

5. Currency redesign and impact

By Zsanett Papp

5.1. Impact of the currency redesign policy on the elections

In October 2022, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) [announced](#) a new policy that the highest denominations of the Naira, the Nigerian currency, (N200, N500 and N1000 notes) would be redesigned, giving a deadline of 31 January 2023 for all old notes to be deposited in banks in exchange for new ones. The launch of the new notes in November 2022 faced [initial resistance](#) from the Minister for Finance, Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed, who expressed opposition due to the lack of consultation. However, President Muhammadu Buhari [proceeded](#) to implement the currency redesign despite the objections.

The new policy [aimed](#):

- to curb corruption, currency fraud;
- and the growing issue of kidnapping for ransom;
- as well as reduce inflation;
- and last but not least [address the problem](#) of excessive money circulation.

The currency redesign policy implemented by the CBN in the lead-up to Nigeria's 2023 General Election has had significant implications for the political landscape of the country, particularly concerning the prevalent [practice of 'cash politics'](#). and also far-reaching implications for [the well-being of Nigeria's citizens](#).

According to pre-election [analyses](#), there was a shortage of the newly redesigned currency in circulation, leading to banks and ATMs being overwhelmed and limited availability of funds for daily expenses. As a result, point-of-sale (POS) operators took advantage of the situation by raising transaction fees, worsening the financial burden on Nigerians. [Scarcity of redesigned banknotes](#) and complications with banking applications for transfers further intensified the difficulties faced by the population.

It is crucial to address the unintended consequences of the currency redesign policy and the subsequent impact on the election, including cash scarcity, fuel scarcity, and pervasive insecurity, which contributed to public discontent, protests, and social unrest. Given the fragile socio-political and economic conditions in Nigeria, the cash shortage added significant pressure, and was a catalyst in [fueling frustration and anger](#) as people shared videos on social media, highlighting the nationwide hardships. These challenges coincided with heightened political activities ahead of the 2023 general elections, creating a volatile environment. Such circumstances served to undermine the elections and threaten public tranquillity.

The term '[cash politics](#)' refers to the practice of inducing voters with cash or other incentives in order to buy support during elections. It was anticipated that the currency redesign would affect the [system of vote-selling](#). However, the currency redesign policy has raised concerns among politicians as it could hinder their plans for inducement and vote buying. Even though the policy aimed to eliminate vote buying and the use of illicit funds for political purposes, it has also disrupted economic activities, increased inflationary pressure, and added to citizens' financial hardships.

5.2 Reactions to the currency redesign policy

The ruling APC party, faced challenges as the policy has led to divisions within its ranks and may be perceived as a disadvantage by the opposition parties. Despite advocating for the use of advanced technologies and emphasising transparency, [Buhari failed](#) to deliver on his promise of establishing a legacy of fully free and fair elections. The [electoral process](#) was marred by widespread corruption, voter suppression, and violence, with security agents appearing complicit in protecting political thugs.

According to [BBC News](#), Buhari himself even violated electoral laws, demonstrating a lack of neutrality and abusing his incumbency power to favour his party's candidate. The counting of votes was also subject to manipulation and irregularities, raising doubts about the authenticity of the announced results. Election observers, including international missions, criticised the failure to transmit votes electronically and questioned the credibility of INEC's handling of the process. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo even called for the cancellation and rerun of elections that did not meet the standards of credibility and transparency. Consequently, Buhari's enduring legacy rather caused political instability, than the promised legacy of free, fair, transparent, and credible elections.

According to Yemi Kale, former Director-General of the [National Bureau of Statistics \(NBS\)](#) estimations, the currency redesign policy in Nigeria has had significant consequences, with estimates suggesting a loss of national productivity amounting to N10-15 trillion (\$21.6-32.5

billion) in the first quarter of 2023 as a main result of the difficulties created by the naira redesign policy. The intertwining relationship between money and politics has further amplified the impact of this policy, sparking intense reactions and debates among political actors. The motives and intentions behind the policy have been questioned, emphasising the importance of clear communication and transparency from the Central Bank of Nigeria and the government to alleviate confusion and address the concerns raised by various stakeholders.

The impact of the currency redesign policy on Nigeria's 2023 General Election has been [mixed](#). While it aimed to address corruption and promote a fair electoral process, it also generated significant challenges and sparked tensions within the political landscape. Effective solutions lie in sustained information campaigns, community action, and locally enforceable commitments to reject vote-buying strategies, which can foster new voting norms by transforming vote-selling from an independent to an interdependent choice.

Additionally, according to the [Chatham House Survey](#) the stringent consequences for political actors who engage in vote-buying, alongside political financing reforms and measures to enhance election security and ballot secrecy, are crucial steps in combating vote-selling. However, Buhari failed to succeed. The political corruption, poverty, inequality, and poor governance that have plagued the country for decades are a serious challenge to Nigeria's democracy, stability, development, and unity in the context of the new currency design policy.

6. Religious, tribal and regional divide

By Gabriel Pontin

The election also reflected the deep ethnic, religious, and cultural divides that have defined Nigerian politics for decades. Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups and two major religions: Christianity and Islam with Christianity holding dominance in the south and Islam in the north. The country is roughly divided into six geopolitical zones: North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East, and South-South. Each zone has its own political interests and aspirations, as well as historical grievances and conflicts with other zones.

6.2. Power rotation

One of the main issues that influenced the voting pattern in the 2023 election was the question of [zoning or power rotation](#). This is an informal arrangement among the political elite to ensure that power alternates between the North and South regions of the country, as well as among the major ethnic groups. The idea is to promote inclusivity, fairness, and national unity. However, this arrangement was violated by the PDP's decision to nominate Abubakar, a northern Muslim, after eight years of Buhari, another northern Muslim, as president. This angered many southerners who felt that it was their turn to produce the next president. Tinubu, a Yoruba from the South West zone, capitalised on this sentiment and campaigned on the slogan [“Emi Lokan” \(It’s my turn\)](#) in Yoruba language. Obi, an Igbo from the South East zone, also appealed to his ethnic base and other minority groups who felt marginalised by the dominant parties. He [presented himself as a fresh face](#) with integrity and competence who could bring change to Nigeria.

The religious factor also played a role in shaping voters' preferences. Nigeria has experienced several episodes of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims over the years. Some voters were [influenced by their religious affiliation or identity](#) when choosing their candidates. Tinubu and Abubakar are both Muslims, while Obi is a Christian. Tinubu tried to balance his ticket by choosing Kashim Shettima, a former governor of Borno state in the North East zone, as his running mate. Abubakar picked Ifeanyi Okowa, a governor of Delta state in the South South zone, as his vice presidential candidate. Obi selected Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, a former senator from Kaduna state in the North West zone, as his partner.

However, these choices did not seem to sway many voters across ethnic or religious lines. The election results showed that [each candidate won mostly in their own zones or regions](#) where they had strong ethnic or religious support. For example, Tinubu won in 12 states mostly in the South West and North West zones where he had Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani backing. Abubakar also won in 12 states mostly in the North East and North Central zones where he had Fulani and other minority groups' support. Obi won in 11 states plus the Federal Capital Territory mostly in the South East and South South zones where he had Igbo and other minority groups' backing. The only exception was Kwankwaso who won in Kano state where he was a popular former governor.

6.3. Regional commodity politics

The ethnic, religious, and cultural divides that have affected the 2023 Nigerian presidential election and its aftermath may also have an impact on the commodities sector in Nigeria and for export. Nigeria is a major producer and exporter of oil, gas, cocoa, rubber, palm oil, cashew nuts,

and other agricultural products. However, [these commodities are not evenly distributed across the country](#). The oil and gas resources are mainly located in the South East and South South zones, where the Igbo and other minority groups dominate. The cocoa, rubber, palm oil, and cashew nuts are mainly grown in the South West zone, where the Yoruba are the majority. The Northeast and North West zones, where the Hausa-Fulani and other Muslim groups are predominant, have fewer natural resources and depend more on livestock, grains, cotton, and groundnuts.

These regional disparities have created tensions and conflicts among different ethnic and religious groups over the control and sharing of the revenues from these commodities. The South East and South South zones [have been demanding more autonomy](#) and resource control from the federal government, which they accuse of exploiting their oil wealth and neglecting their development. They have also been facing environmental degradation and pollution from oil spills and gas flaring. The South West zone has also been clamouring for more fiscal federalism and devolution of power from the central government, which they perceive as being dominated by the North. They have also been advocating for more investment in agriculture and infrastructure to boost their productivity and competitiveness. The North East and North West zones have been suffering from poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment. They [have been facing the threat of terrorism from Boko Haram](#) and other extremist groups, who oppose Western education and modernization. They have also been experiencing droughts, desertification, and food insecurity due to climate change.

6.4. National division's effect on commodities

These ethnic, religious, and cultural divides may affect the commodities sector in Nigeria and for export in several ways. For example, they may:

- lead to political instability and violence that could disrupt the production and transportation of commodities within Nigeria and to foreign markets;
- create mistrust and hostility among different regions and groups that could hamper cooperation and coordination in managing the commodities sector;
- result in policy uncertainty and inconsistency that could discourage investment and innovation in the commodities sector;
- fuel corruption and mismanagement that could reduce the efficiency and quality of the commodities sector.

The ethnic, religious, and cultural divides that have defined the 2023 Nigerian presidential election and its aftermath are not new or unique to Nigeria. They are part of the legacy of colonialism, military rule, corruption, poverty, inequality, and poor governance that have plagued the country for decades. However, they also pose a serious challenge to Nigeria's democracy, stability, development, and unity. Unless these issues are addressed through dialogue, reconciliation, reform, and justice, they will continue to undermine Nigeria's potential as a major power on the continent.

7. Violence in the election, security concerns

By Vitas Carosella

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 the West African state has not held a single election without some form of violence. The 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections were no different. In fact, the threat of election related violence was in the air nearly a year before election day. A [joint project](#) between the US non-profit data collection and analysis organisation [ACLED](#) and the Lagos based [Centre for Democracy and Development](#), tracked political violence trends within Nigeria between 1st January 2022 and 21st April 2023, a full month after the end of the election cycle. From the first day of 2022 until the beginning of the campaign cycle on 28 September 2022, there were nearly 8,000 fatalities in Nigeria. During the election cycle, which finalised with the second election day on March 18, 2023, there were a staggering 1,867 violent events in Nigeria, leading to over 4,500 fatalities.

The level of violence around the elections can be attributed to several key factors. Nigeria has been suffering from an economic recession which has led to gas shortages and a currency crisis (see [Section 5](#)). On top of that, security concerns have risen under outgoing President Buhari's mandate, with a rise in kidnappings, murders and terrorist and gang-related violence. According to the American think tank the [Centre for Strategic and International Studies](#) (CSIS), local and regional conflicts existed in nearly every region of the country before the elections. The terrorist group Boko Haram was attacking in the northeast, as was the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Meanwhile, banditry and ethno-religious tensions continued to be an issue in the northwest and north-central parts of the nation. In the South East, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) were agitating for secession, while militancy and cult clashes were a constant in the South South.

As the elections neared, election-related violence escalated. Voice Of America News [reported](#) several attacks during the campaign cycle, including gunmen attacking PDP Vice Presidential

Candidate Ifeanyi Okowa's security team, a machete attack at a campaign rally and nearly 134 attacks on INEC facilities and personnel. Experts from local civil society organisation [Yiagra Africa](#) claimed that politicians were using violence to suppress votes. To protect voters and ensure safety, President Buhari announced there would be new police vehicles and anti-riot equipment for the national police force.

Regardless, media and election observers reported multiple incidents of violence across the country on both election days. The Financial Times [witnessed](#) armed men removing a presidential ballot box in the polling station in Surlulere, Lagos. Nigeria's most populous city was notably dangerous during the election period, with ABC [reporting](#) voter intimidation and the outright prevention of voting occurred throughout the city. Meanwhile, vote-buying was occurring in Enugu State, where N200 (US \$0.43) were on offer for an individual's vote.

The most notable act of election-related violence was the [murder](#) of the Labour Party senatorial candidate in Enugu East. He along with five of his supporters were killed, while in Kano State clashes between supporters of the APC and the NNPP led to three more fatalities. Violence and a heightened sense of insecurity lowered voter turnout. Nearly two-thirds of eligible voters did not cast a ballot, with only 25 million votes being counted in a country with a population of 220 million inhabitants.

Violence even increased between the February presidential elections and the March gubernatorial voting. This can be partially attributed to voter frustration about the electoral process and results from the February election day. PDP presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar led his supporters in a [peaceful protest](#) against the results of the presidential election. They marched down the streets of Abuja to the INEC headquarters where they called for a new election under better conditions. There was a general fear that these protests would perpetuate the already existing violence.

Yet despite reports of violence during the entire election period, both [Ecowas](#) and the [African Union](#) concurred that the violence was "isolated," and that the general voting environment was peaceful. Both parties did, however, admit concern over the increased use of disinformation to inflame already existing tensions.

As the elections fade into the background and Bola Tinubu takes over as President of the Republic of Nigeria, violence has begun to subside. Despite nearly 1,500 fatalities occurring between the first election day and the end of data collection in late April, the number of violent events has dropped steadily since February 25th – except for a notable spike on the day of the gubernatorial elections. The decrease in violence reflects an easing of tensions and shows there is hope for greater security in Nigeria. Whilst the end of the election does not solve the ethno-religious tensions and terrorist incursions across the nation, it does lessen the pressure and return the state to a normal state of affairs. There is hope that Nigerian security will increase

under Tinubu as he fights to unify the nation and help Nigeria out of recession. As violence decreases across the state Nigeria's neighbours can rest easy knowing there is a decreasing likelihood that violence will spill across their borders.

8. Conclusion

Ultimately, following the fiercely contested election, Nigerians can finally have peace, with their future in the hands of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the APC. Despite challenges from Atiku Abubakar of the PDP and Peter Obi of the Labour Party, the nation has largely accepted its fate. The inauguration held on 29th May demonstrates the peaceful transition of a resilient country, from one leader to the next, putting aside all identity politics and differences in the hopes of a united Nigeria.

Although Tinubu inherits a government with significant challenges there is belief that he can once again restore economic prosperity, owing to his record as Governor of Lagos state. His critics have gone silent for now, but remain a reminder of the many problems facing Africa's largest democracy, a cornerstone of the wider African political landscape.

Nigeria's tradition of power rotation between North and South, Christian and Muslim, has endured Abubakar's electoral challenge. The regional debate between zones over the wealth created by renewables should be kept from the brink as long as power rotation remains in place, preventing a state primarily built for and by any one demographic group.

Despite the woes of INEC and its attempt to publish voting results live, Nigeria remains committed to democracy, the youth are not going anywhere and will have a major part to play in future elections. It is likely that Peter Obi will be the main challenger in 2027, while citizens will await to see if Abubakar will challenge for the Presidency for the seventh time. With enthusiasm growing amongst young voters, it is critical that Nigeria continues to improve security throughout its election cycles to minimise potential threats to voters and increase voter turnout. Africa's largest democracy can ill afford attacks on voters and candidates like those seen this year.

The international reaction has been generally positive with Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping sending their well wishes, and signalling an upcoming cooperative relationship. Although Western states expressed some concern about the election process, reaction across the continent has been positive, with leaders of neighbouring African states signalling continued bilateral relations with Nigeria.

The election was overall successful, on account of the good voter turnout and generally peaceful demeanour. Many lessons have been learned from this election, INEC will have to make improvements with the displaying of voter results for the future, as this significantly impacted this year's election discourse, and became the mainstay of procedural challenges. The #Obidient movement has shown that Nigeria's youth is a cornerstone of the electorate, and can be mobilised effectively when given something to believe in. Future elections will have to build on the lessons learned, considering ways to limit outbreaks of violence, and quell the identity politics which are ever so prevalent in Nigerian politics. Despite questionable policy decisions such as the currency redesign, the election serves as an exhibition of Nigeria's democratic maturity and the international reaction has generally been supportive of the result. ■