

2023 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The history of elections in Nigeria is replete with intrigues, internal party crises, electoral violence, thuggery/hooliganism, rigging, pre- and post-election litigations, among others. The 2023 elections recorded a paradigm shift in the playing out of events. Focusing on the 2023 Presidential Election, the study argues that the New Electoral Law was and remains the defining law for the conduct of elections in Nigeria and holds better electoral prospects for the country. It further argues that the 2023 elections differed significantly and considerably despite its outcome and hold prospects for better conduct of future elections for the emergence of a better Nigerian State. The findings reveal that the involvement of the youths changed the narrative while the deployment of technology by both state and non-state actors in the election was both a curse and a blessing. The paper is both descriptive and analytical and relied on both primary and secondary data and concludes that hooliganism/thuggery in the election was less experienced and only in Lagos and Port Harcourt, with post-election crisis absent. By omission and commission, INEC and its electoral workers manipulated the election's results in the collation centers rather than at the polling places. In general, declaring the 2023 elections result, INEC jettisoned the New Electoral Law. These events produced post-election difficulties which the courts, relying on technicalities, failed to resolve; and produced further, some diplomatic implications. The New Electoral Law must be strictly interpreted by the courts, and must be followed if Nigeria is to go forward.

Keywords: Election, Democracy, INEC, Electronic transmission of Results, Institutional Deceit, Ethno-Religious profiling.

Introduction

Elections are the most fundamental component of modern-day representative democracy. It is a method by which electorates pick their representatives for various positions of governance on a regular basis; it refers to formalised methods for recruitment of political office holders by a country or groups of electorates. (Igini, 2013) The Nigerian constitution, 1999 as amended provides for a change of the country's leadership through periodic election in every four years. It is for this reason that there have been elections in Nigeria specifically in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and the just concluded 2023 general elections. The year 2023 elections marked the 7th election for this purpose in the political history of Nigeria since 1999 when the country returned to civil rule (Husaini, 2023). The post-2023 elections Nigeria is beset with challenges that demand attention and thoughtful solutions to ensure a united Nigeria that can guarantee

transparent, credible, and peaceful process in the future. Over the years, writers and commentators appear to have concentrated on Nigeria's grappling with various pre-elections obstacles, ranging from logistical difficulties to political tensions and security concerns. The 2023 elections differed from previous elections in a number of ways. This study also differs from other studies on elections in Nigeria being that it dwells among other things, on the aftermath of the 2023 presidential election.

The pre-2023 presidential election Nigeria was characterised by banditry, kidnapping, nomadism/farmers conflicts, youth unemployment, separatists' agitation, and tensions of ethno-religious proportion amidst economic hardship (Yesuf, 2022). These generated distrust of the Nigerian population against the leaders of the state. As the tenure of former President, Muhammadu Buhari on whose old age and health instability among other sundry reasons the Nigerian population seem to have blamed the above factors drew to a close, the state was charged politically as the opportunity to change its leadership provided a beacon of hope for Nigerians especially the youth population who saw it as best opportunity to install a president that will return the country to its path to the glory of an ideal society. The enactment of the Electoral Law, 2022 by the National Assembly and the introduction of modern technology into the electoral process by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with tantalising press briefings coated in the promises to guarantee free, fair and credible poll, worked and heightened the hope (Burke, 2023). However, this high hope appears to have been dashed by the INEC's handling of the electoral process leading to the declaration of the presidential election result and launched Nigeria into a state of heightened challenges. (Adekaiyola, 2023) supports this when he averred that the wake of the 2023 elections in Nigeria, saw the country at a pivotal juncture, facing an array of complex issues that demanded careful analysis and decisive action. As the dust settles on the electoral process, it becomes imperative to assess the aftermath of the presidential election, unearthing both the problems that have emerged and the prospects that lie ahead. This paper aims to comprehensively examine the post-2023 election landscape in Nigeria, shedding light on the challenges and exploring potential pathways to progress.

These challenges emanated from the election result declaration by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); and range from institutional deceit, exacerbation of disillusionment and loss of faith in the Nigerian state by majorly the youth population, deeper polarisation of the Nigerian citizens along ethnic and religious lines and the attendant diplomatic implications. These among other challenges, as Suberu (2007) captures it, stemmed from the "sordid manipulation and outrageous maladministration" exhibited by the ranks of the electoral umpire and the government. To pave the way for a brighter democratic future, it is essential to identify these challenges and devise a way forward aimed to ensure unity, restore hope and strengthen the democratic foundation of the nation.

Overview of the 2023 Presidential Election

Nigeria's 2023 presidential election was a historic occasion that signaled the changeover to a new administration in the nation. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, had vigorous campaigning, a wide range of candidate profiles, and significant concerns that influenced the electoral process. The essential elements of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election are covered in depth in this overview, including the candidates, significant political parties, electoral changes, difficulties, and overall effect on the future of the country.

The 2023 Presidential Election featured a diverse range of candidates who represented different political parties. On the whole, eighteen political parties participated in the presidential Election. Major parties in contention included the ruling party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the main opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and featured Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the Yoruba ethnic extraction and Alhaji Atiku Abubaka of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group as presidential candidates respectively. However, the withdrawal from the PDP presidential primary election by Mr. Peter Gregory Obi of the Igbo ethnic extraction, his decamp to the Labour party and subsequent emergence as the Labour Party's Presidential candidate, brought the presumed minor Labour Party to lime light and also positioned him among major candidates for the 2023 presidential election.

The emergence of the trio as presidential flag bearers of their political parties gave the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria the widest ethnic coloration (Hassan, Idayat, 2023) since 1999 as their candidacies reflected the three major ethnic groups in the country. No doubt, ethnicity has always constituted a factor in Nigerian politics (Joseph, 1987) but it got heightened in the just concluded 2023 election. Religious tensions in the nation also increased as a result of the APC's fielding of a Muslim-Muslim ticket consisting of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Kashim Shettima. In a report, the International Crisis Group have finetuned this when they wrote that "tension around the election is deepening religious and regional polarisation" (Africa Report, 2023). In the past, major parties have tried to balance their presidential ticket to include members of both major religions. However, the APC struggled in the election to acquire access to political power and inclusive political representation along ethno-religious and regional lines as worries mounted over the impact such a ticket win may have on religion relations in the nation (Hassan, 2023). While the ruling part sought re-election, emphasising its achievements in the past eight years, the opposition parties, on the other hand, fielded strong candidates with promises of addressing key challenges confronting the country.

Tension continued to build up amidst intense campaigns and propaganda as the date for the presidential election drew nearer. The partisan divide got exacerbated by hate speech and fake news. Such destructive sentiments were spread by speakers for and supporters of the APC and PDP on both the social media and in the news media. While many of their supporters joined in this activity thereby increasing the toxicity of social media networks where influencers, some of whom are journalists and others employed by political parties, dealt in skewed narratives and hash speeches (Ezeibe, 2021), Obi's Labour party appear to had distinguished itself and focused on topical issues during the campaign. Nigeria's 2023 presidential election campaign was characterised by increased hostility as political groups and candidates fought for control of the continent's most populous country (Election Watch, 2023). Nigeria's strategic prominence on the continent made it a focus of both domestic and international attention during the election process.

The political environment of Nigeria has always been impacted by its varied cultural, ethnic, and religious population. These dynamics were apparent throughout the 2023 Presidential Election campaign as contenders tried to win over different geographic areas. Young people, albeit, not a homogeneous group, had their allegiances split among the front-runners. However, it remains a

fact that Mr. Peter Gregory Obi's candidacy appeared to have gained a substantial youth following leading to the emergence of what has gone down in the annals of Nigerian history as 'the Obedient Movement' (Arica's Report, 2023).

Political allegiances and voter choices were frequently heavily influenced by ethno-religious factors, and exacerbated tensions and rivalry between various communities. Major violent activities recorded during the 2023 election were in Porth Harcourt in Rivers state and Lagos state where ethnic jingoism was invoked against the Igbo population due largely to their support for the Labour Party presidential candidate. According to the Center for Democracy and Development, the tensions in some cases culminated to violent attacks leading to deaths. This is made manifest in the 109 deaths related to election violence that were recorded in the build up to the 2023 elections (Center for Democracy and Development, 2023). The 2023 election campaign had its own share of incidents of electoral violence. Rival supporters clashed in some parts of the country, leading to injuries and fatalities. Acts of thuggery and vandalism were recorded during some campaign events, and further heightened tensions. These violent episodes raised concerns about the potential for more significant disruptions on the actual election day. However, the 2023 presidential election can be generally viewed as the most peaceful of elections in the political history of Nigeria (Buba, 2023). The 2ND and 3RD Respondent (Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Senator Shettima Kasim), in the 2023 Presidential Election Petition filed by Mr. Peter Gregory Obi and the Labour Party challenging the INEC declaration of the duo as winners of the poll, support the general view of the 2023 presidential election as peaceful when they wrote in their final written address thus:

The petition in issue in this address is very novel in the sense that it is not a petition *stricto senso*, familiar to our electoral jurisprudence, as the petitioners are not, this time around, complaining about election rigging, ballot box snatching, ballot box stuffing, violence, thuggery, vote buying, voter's intimidation, disenfranchisement, interference by military or police, and such other electoral vices. The crux of their grouse this time around, is that while the presidential election was peacefully conducted all over the country (as corroborated by their primary witnesses) and the results accurately recorded in the various Form EC8As, some unidentified results were not uploaded electronically to the INEC Election Result Viewing (IREV) portal (2nd and 3rd Respondents Final written Address to the Presidential Election Tribunal, 2023).

This is due largely, to the fact that thuggery, hooliganism among other election related violence were very low. However, the absence of all these does not still proclaim the 2023 presidential election credible. Accusations of plans for electoral malpractices were common during the campaign, with various parties alleging attempts to manipulate the election results. Claims of voter intimidation and vote-buying were rampant and may have further eroded trust in the electoral process (Oloniniran, 2023). These allegations added to the tension and raised doubts about the election's fairness and credibility.

Two events that happened in the year 2022 appeared to have impacted on citizens emotion and brightened confidence on the eagerly expected electoral process. One among the events is enactment of the 2022 Electoral Act, which among other things provides for electronic accreditation of voters and the transmission of election results direct from the polling units by the presiding officers, seemed to have diffused the fears and allegations of plans for electoral

malpractices to a reasonable extent. Festus Ogun supports this when he opined that it is reasonable to say that the new Electoral Act is an appropriate improvement over the one that was repealed. Unquestionably, its implementation has the potential to clean up Nigeria's tainted political environment, lower the number of lawsuits involving elections, and increase the openness and accountability of the electoral processes (Ogun, 2022). The Electoral Act of 2022 was a landmark legislation aimed at addressing the various flaws and inadequacies in Nigeria's electoral process. It sought to introduce critical changes to ensure free, fair, and credible elections in the country (Eme, 2023). The act came as a response to growing concerns over electoral malpractices, violence, voter intimidation, and irregularities that had marred previous elections.

The second event was the redesigning and swapping of some naira denominations. October 2022 saw the proclamation of a viselike monetary policy by the Central bank of Nigeria that culminated into the redesigning and swapping of the three highest denominations of the naira (Haruna, 2022). Also, a cashless policy that severely placed limit to the maximum amount of cash withdrawal by individuals to ₦20,000.00 daily followed. The essence of these financial policies would have been aggressive deceleration of capital outflows, acceleration of capital inflows, appreciation of the legal tender, deceleration of illicit flowing of the naira among others. But the placing of deadline for validity of the old notes of the redesigned denominations for January 31, 2023 (CBN, 2022) spelt serious implication for the 2023 elections slated to hold in February and March, 2023. The inclusion of demonetisation of the 2023 elections as part of its target (Komolafe, 2023), made these monetary policies a political war cloaked in the gab of monetary policy as some politicians, especially in the ruling party, who had stacked a lot of the old denominations for vote buying among other illegal financial engagements during the elections and those in the opposition parties, who considered it a premeditated arrangement to stave them of cash during the election, perceived it (Nigerian Tribune, 2023).

To say that these financial policies failed to realise their intent and purpose is however, stating the obvious. No doubt, the federal government proclamation of demonetisation of the elections raised the expectation that illicit flowing of the naira to bribe election officials would be reduced drastically (Akanpelu, 2013) and would make way for a better electoral process. Also, the short period when the monetary policies were in place saw ransom entrepreneurship (Ekechukwu and Osaat) declined drastically as there was no cash anywhere. Therefore, kidnapping for ransom became very unattractive. A take home from the entire quagmire is that the Nigerian masses bore the brunt of the monetary policies as they were thrown into severe financial situation through cash starvation. Even the daily withdrawal limit of ₦20,000.00 proved unrealisable. Yet the politicians were still seen flaunting the new naira notes thereby putting a question mark on the cashless policy (Daily Post, 2023). In fact, these financial policies were seriously sabotaged by the NCC, the financial institutions and the government. Networks became too poor and made online financial transactions very difficult while three state Governors took to litigation and challenged the cashless policy and the deadline for validity of the old naira notes. The Nigerian apex court, no doubt, granted the three governors requests.

The European Union lend voice to the fact that certain measures considered positive that boosted public trust were introduced by INEC when the union captured in its report that, early in the

process, while enjoying wide stakeholder trust, INEC launched a number of constructive actions to boost election administration United Nations Report, 2023. The Yiaga Africa added that these encouraging developments increased popular confidence and hope that the 2023 general election will provide free choice, a fair battle, and reliable results, leading to a renaissance of engaged citizenship as young people's resilience and strength were on full show, using technology and social media to impact political discussions, voting attitudes, and electoral transparency. The advent of a 'third force' provided voters with more voting alternatives, making the elections more interesting and competitive. Despite the country's instability, currency reform policy, and premium motor spirit scarcity, voters demonstrated exceptional resilience in casting their ballots and demanding accountable government leadership (Yiaga Africa Report). However, as the election date approached, some began to question INEC's administrative and operational efficiency, as well as its in-house capabilities. Due to operational inefficiencies and a lack of transparency, public trust rapidly eroded and was seriously harmed on February 25, 2023 that marked the presidential election (United Nations Report).

The 2023 Presidential Election campaign in Nigeria was characterised by a tense and challenging political environment. Regional and ethnic dynamics, security concerns, electoral violence, disinformation, and allegations of electoral malpractices all contributed to the heightened tension during this crucial period (Centre for Democracy and Development). As the election approached, the focus shifted to the conduct of the election itself, with hopes that all stakeholders would work towards a peaceful and credible process. The outcome of the election would shape Nigeria's future trajectory, making it essential for all parties to uphold democratic principles and prioritise the nation's stability and prosperity above all else.

In the aftermath of previous elections, concerns about electoral integrity prompted the government and civil societies to advocate for electoral reforms (Leonard, 2022). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) worked to improve the electoral process, ensure transparency, and build public trust. These reforms aimed to address past issues such as voter suppression, electoral violence, and vote rigging, allowing for a more credible and fair election (Mahmood, 2023).

The 2023 Presidential Election campaigns revolved around pressing issues affecting Nigeria's population. Among the prominent topics were the economy, security, corruption, infrastructural development, unemployment, healthcare, and education (Centre for Democracy and Development). Candidates presented their proposed solutions to these issues, engaging with the public through rallies, town hall meetings, and media appearances. Nigeria's vast cultural and ethnic diversity played a crucial role in shaping the electoral landscape. Candidates had to navigate regional sentiments, forming alliances and garnering support from different parts of the country. Ethno-religious considerations were not absent, making it vital for candidates to appeal to a broad spectrum of the population.

On the election day, security seemed to have been intensified to prevent any untoward incidents or disruptions during the voting process (Akinyode, 2023). The electoral commission was perceived to have ensured the efficient functioning of polling units across the country. Voter turnout seemed pleasant and was a crucial factor in determining the legitimacy of the election and reflected citizens' engagement and faith in the democratic process. Despite efforts to enhance transparency, the 2023 Presidential Election, a critical milestone in the nation's

democratic journey, was marred, not just by the few violent incidents recorded in some places among logistical complexities (Adeyemi, 2023) but also by ‘Institutional Deceit’ that cast a shadow on its credibility. As the cornerstone of any democratic society, elections serve as the ultimate expression of the will of the people. However, when the very institutions designed to uphold the integrity of the electoral process become compromised, the very foundation of democracy is threatened (Annan, 2015). Aside Intimidation and Suppression of Voters, Election Manipulation, Media Bias and Misinformation, among others which are commonly associated with previous elections (Horder, 2022) in Nigeria, new legislation and the promise of technology aimed at electronic transmission and upload of election results from the polling units to the IREV in real time caused a shift and seem to have magnified partisanship of the ranks in the Nigerian electoral management body, INEC during the election under review. It is common knowledge that the electronic transmission and upload of the presidential election result to IREV was greatly sabotaged by INEC when the electoral commission shut down the portal and declared a glitch that made the presidential elections result transmission in real time impossible. The sabotage by INEC is buttressed by the fact that both the presidential and the National Assembly elections held simultaneously. While the results for the National Assembly elections were being transmitted without a glitch, that of the presidential election could not be uploaded (Adebiyi, 2023). Narrating in a briefing, the mischief that beclouded the upload of the presidential election results, the ECOWAS Election observation team have summarised the entire episode as a crime watch devoid of election observation and describing the process as brazen theft perpetrated on the Nigerian people (ECOWAS, 2023).

The 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria was supposed to mark another milestone in the country’s democratic journey. However, the credibility of the election was called into question when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) sabotaged the process by intentionally obstructing the transparent transmission and uploading of election results, thereby sparking outrage among citizens and casting doubts on the legitimacy of the electoral process. Prior to the 2023 Presidential Election, INEC had announced the introduction of an electronic result transmission system to enhance transparency and credibility. But during the election, the system allegedly experienced critical failures and disruptions, leading to widespread suspicions of sabotage. Incidents of network outages, system glitches, and delays in transmitting results were reported, and raised concerns about INEC’s commitment to ensuring a smooth and transparent electoral process (Eghobamien, Igenegbai and Owoade, 2023).

The uploading of election results is a crucial step in the electoral process, that would have allowed for real-time scrutiny and verification of the outcome. However, during the 2023 Presidential Election, INEC appeared to have either by omission or commission failed to provide sufficient access to election observers and opposition parties’ agents during the result uploading process. This lack of transparency fueled suspicions that INEC connived with the party in power and deliberately concealing information and tampering with the results. This eroded public trust on the entire process and the electoral commission. The delayed release of election results further fueled suspicions of sabotage by INEC. The protracted period between the conclusion of voting and the announcement of results heightened tensions and gave rise to speculation about potential electoral malpractices (Igini). This delay not only intensified public anxiety but also provided fertile ground for misinformation and rumors, undermining the integrity of the election. The

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), an institution charged with the duty to conduct elections in Nigeria deceived the Nigerian people to whom officials of the electoral body had numerous times promised a free, fair, credible and transparent polls in 2023. But of course, contrary was the case and the aftermath are accompanying challenges that need to be addressed.

Post 2023 Presidential Challenges

The 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria was anticipated with hope and enthusiasm, as it presented an opportunity for the Nigerian people to choose leaders who would address pressing issues and drive the nation towards progress and prosperity (Ma, 2023). However, the aftermath of the election appears to have injured the emotions of Nigerians, especially young people and begot a rise in disillusionment and deeper polarisation of the Nigerian population due to increased ethno-religious profiling among the populace, as the promises made during the campaigns seem to be fading away, leaving many citizens disheartened and skeptical about the country's future. Factors that heightened the disillusionment of the Nigerian people in the post 2023 presidential election and the potential consequences for the nation include;

Broken Promises and Unfulfilled Expectation

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that plays a pivotal role in upholding the democratic process and ensuring free and fair elections in any democratic nation, superintended over the 2023 elections that were marked by a series of broken promises and unfulfilled expectations. Buttressing this, Same Amadi writes that Prof. Mamood Yakubu, chairing Nigeria's elections regulatory body, had repeatedly promised to conduct free, fair and credible elections in 2023 Nigeria. His bold claim may have been informed by the electoral legislation requirement of biometric voter authentication as against manipulable manual accreditation, as well as electronic transmission of election results via the Biometric Voter authentication System (BVAS); technological innovations that motivated many Nigerian youths to swell the voter register and organise themselves into the third force to wrestle political power from status quo politicians (Amadi, 2023). Furthermore, INEC enacted guidelines to make it mandatory for every polling officer to immediately transmit results electronically to the electoral platform that is protected from manipulation and INEC chairman continued to assure Nigerians that he would follow the guidelines (INEC Manual, 2023).

February 25, 2023, the day of presidential election saw Prof. Yakubu betrayed good conscience and integrity when he ignored the security of electronic data transfer and permitted election result to be manually collated (Eluemunor, 2023). This violated the explicit provisions of the 2022 electoral law and INEC guideline. Despite rejection of the result by the Nigerian population, the INEC chair went on and certified the challenged results and announced a President-elect, an act that suggests that the election administration body had the authority to break its own rules. INEC demolished the whole transparency and accountability structure for the election with a stroke, leaving both international and local observers horrified. This therefore raised concerns about the integrity of the electoral process and the future of democracy itself in Nigeria with the dare implication of loss of hope in the Nigerian system and exacerbation of disillusionment among the Nigerian population. The heightened disillusionment of the Nigerian people after the 2023 presidential election poses significant challenges for the country's future. It could lead to decreased civic engagement, protests, and even civil unrest if these issues are not

adequately addressed. The government must recognise the gravity of the situation and take proactive steps to rebuild public trust and confidence.

Deeper Polarisation of the Nigerian People

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria marked a pivotal moment in the country's political landscape, where the nation witnessed an alarming deepening of polarisation among its people. No doubt, political polarisation is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria; but the 2023 election intensified existing fault lines and created new divides within the society. Nigeria's diverse population is composed of over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct language, culture, and historical identity. The 2023 Presidential Election was keenly anticipated as a crucial opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate its democratic gains. However, as the election campaigns intensified, ethno-religious sentiment once again became a prominent theme. Political candidates, seeking to secure support from specific ethnic and religious groups, resorted to divisive rhetoric that stoked fears and suspicions among communities. The Muslem/Muslem ticket of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Kashim Shettima intensified the polarisation of the Nigerian people along religious lines and raised socially based mechanisms that provide common dispositions and incentives for individual and group behaviour. These traits do pose a danger to identity and instill a strong sense of unease. The Christian population, no doubt, consider having a Muslem President and a Muslem Vice President as abuse on secularism and threat to their Christian religion and identity.

Lingering historical grievances, such as past conflicts and perceived injustices, were revived during the election campaigns, adding to the simmering sentiment. The Igbo, a prominent ethnic group in Nigeria, have a history fraught with socio-political tensions and conflict. The memory of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), still lingers in the collective consciousness. These historical experiences have contributed to a heightened sensitivity surrounding the treatment of the Igbo community in political processes, often leading to ethnic profiling. This is made manifest in some utterances at some quarters that the Igbo man cannot be allowed to be president of Nigeria (Uhere, 2023).

It is truism that since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999, the Southeast region, the heartland of the Igbo people is yet to produce President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The 2023 presidential election provided a veritable opportunity to zone the apex position in Nigeria to the Southeast as part of measures to heal the wounds of the Civil War and douse the tension of separatist agitations in the region. However, the powers that be appear to have massaged ethnic sentiment against the Igbo as the major political parties failed to zone their presidential ticket to the southeast region. This may have also formed reason for the abuse of trust and deceit of the Nigerian people by the ranks of the electoral umpire to manipulate the electoral process against the Igbo man that had emerged a third force in the election despite running on the ticket of a rather minor political party but enjoyed more popularity and acceptance of majority of the electorates.

Ethno-religious profiling in elections has far-reaching implications for democracy. When individuals or groups are systematically targeted based on their ethnicity and religion, it not only undermines the fundamental principle of equal representation and level playing field for all but also erodes citizens' faith in the democratic process itself. A fair and inclusive election process is

essential to upholding democratic values and ensuring that the voice of every citizen is heard irrespective of ethno-religious background.

Diplomatic Implications

The process and outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria pose significant diplomatic dangers that could reverberate both regionally and globally. The potential challenges and risks associated with the election extend beyond domestic concerns, impacting Nigeria's relations with other nations and international organisations. Several diplomatic dangers have emerged from the electoral process and its outcome. Looking at the aftermath diplomatic dimensions, there are basically two varying diplomatic implications. While the United States through the Department of state, the British Prime Minister, the then Chairman of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State, General Embalo, among other world leaders were not reluctant to congratulate Bola Ahmed Tinubu on his declaration as winner of the election, Foreign Election Observer Missions viz; the ECOWAS, the AU, the European Union among others have in their independent reports on the election, condemned the electoral process as lacking in transparency and genuine process. Bola Akinterinwa (2023) adds that "there is nothing to suggest that the election has been in any way transparent, fair and credible."

The hasty manner with which the west and other world leaders seem to have accepted the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria despite the litigations challenging the process is that a leader that emerged from a process predicated on dishonesty and myriad electoral anomalies will invariably remain a puppet to them and will definitely, enhance their neo-colonial tendencies on such a country. So, their hasty recognition and acceptance of leadership emerging from such a process marred by conspicuous irregularities is informed by projection of their business interests in Nigeria. No doubt, the Western world interest in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is economic exploitation of material, mineral and human resources. The implication is the continuous exploitation of Nigeria's natural resources by the west while the Nigerian population will continue to live in conditions devoid of good living standard. This therefore suggests that countries of the west play lip service with democracy.

The Foreign Election observer Missions of the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) have contradicted the world leaders view of the presidential election as credible. In their reports on the election, they have observed that the entire process which the electoral body had numerous times promised a free, fair and credible outing was fraudulent with the ECOWAS describing it as a brazen theft and a crime watch. This goes to buttress the fact that the electoral process and outcome have no doubt, deepened Nigeria's image crisis. An electoral process that is marred by allegations of irregularities, fraud, or lack of transparency, could have the implication to damage Nigeria's reputation as a democratic nation. Such concerns may lead to strained diplomatic ties with countries that prioritise democratic norms and human rights (Ismaila and Othman, 2015).

Nigeria plays a crucial role in regional organisations such as ECOWAS and the African Union. Political uncertainties resulting from the election could impede efforts toward regional integration, economic cooperation, and collective security. One good example is the coups in the 21st century West Africa, the latest being the Niger experience. As big brother and current chair of the ECOWAS community, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the Nigeria's president that emerged from

the widely condemned fraudulent electoral process, has condemned the military takeover of government in the Niger Republic, calling it illegitimate and rallying the ECOWAS member countries for a military action against Niger to restore the deposed civilian president in Niger. Bola Ahmed's disposition on the Niger coup has earned him both local and international criticisms with some critics arguing that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu lacks the local standi to call the junta regime in Niger illegitimate as himself (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) is also facing legitimacy crisis as Nigeria's President. Kayode Fayemi supports this when he averred that when countries are at peace and the leadership enjoys citizens acceptance, such a country is more effectively able in engaging meaningfully with their neighbours and the outside world (Fayemi, 2021). The election outcome may affect Nigeria's soft power and influence on regional and global platforms. Ismaila and Othman add that a loss of credibility due to electoral controversies could reduce Nigeria's ability to effectively advocate for its interests and shape international discussions (Ismaila and Othman). Nigeria's status as a prominent African democracy means that any flaws in its electoral process could impact the global perception of democracy in the continent, and could influence diplomatic engagements with international partners and organisations that prioritise democratic values (Green and Carson, 2023).

The election outcome might impact Nigeria's ability to effectively address regional security challenges, such as counterterrorism efforts against groups like Boko Haram. A leadership transition or internal instability could lead to a temporary vacuum in regional security cooperation, potentially affecting neighboring countries and international partners. The process and outcome of the 2023 elections in Nigeria carry substantial diplomatic dangers that extend beyond the country's borders. It is crucial for both Nigerian authorities and the international community to closely monitor the situation and engage diplomatically to mitigate potential risks and work toward a stable and democratic transition.

The Way Forward

Elections form crucial component of democracy because they provide the people a chance to voice their opinions and influence the direction of their country. Fallout from a closely contested presidential election may sometimes leave a path of hurt feelings, polarisation, and strained bonds with exacerbated disillusionment on the country as the overall implication. To maintain national unity, prosperity, and progress as Nigeria moves forward beyond the 2023 presidential election, it is essential to repair hurt feelings. The fervor and passion surrounding the 2023 presidential election led to heightened emotions, particularly when citizens, relying on the relevant agencies especially INEC's promises for free, fair and credible election held strong beliefs about the direction the country should take; investing not only their political aspirations but also their identity and values in their preferred candidates. The aftermath of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria led to emotional fractures within the society especially that of the young people and potentially overshadowing the greater goal of collective advancement. To chart a path forward, steps should be taken by the relevant agencies and stake holders towards healing.

The heightened disillusionment of the Nigerian people after the 2023 presidential election and the verdicts of the courts remains significant concern to be addressed. As the tribunal and the supreme court have laid the petitions to rest and as the nation moves forward from this chapter, it is expected that the focus will shift towards national unity and progress. The resolution of the

election petitions sets the stage for the new administration to concentrate on the pressing issues facing the country, fostering an environment of stability and growth. At the first instance, this will serve to address the root causes of disillusionment, engage with the concerns of the citizens, and take concrete actions to create a brighter and more promising future.

The act by INEC in sabotaging the transmission and uploading of the 2023 Presidential Election results in Nigeria raised serious concerns about the state of the nation's democracy. The alleged failures of the electronic result transmission system, lack of transparency, interference from external forces, and delayed release of results all contributed to public skepticism and mistrust. To restore faith in the electoral process, there is an urgent need for a thorough and independent investigation into these allegations. Strengthening the independence and transparency of INEC, enhancing its technical capabilities, and ensuring that all electoral stakeholders uphold democratic principles are essential steps to safeguarding the integrity of future elections in Nigeria. Only through such reforms can the nation build a resilient and trustworthy democratic system that truly reflects the will of the Nigerian citizens.

Ethnic profiling against the Igbo in the 2023 presidential election raises significant concerns about the state of democracy and inclusivity in the country. Addressing these and preventing future incidents of ethnic profiling is not only essential for upholding the principles of democracy but also for promoting social cohesion and national unity (Uwazuruike, 2023). By taking concerted and thoughtful actions through transparent investigation to ensure that responsible parties are brought to book; Promote awareness campaigns that emphasise the importance of a diverse and inclusive political environment; implement policies that ensure equal political opportunity for all; political dialogue that focuses on issues rather than ethnic jingoism, and civic engagements, Nigeria can move towards a more equitable and just political landscape where every citizen's voice is truly heard and respected.

Religion plays a significant role in the Nigerian society, with Christianity and Islam being the dominant faiths. Politicians often used religious sentiments as a tool to sway voters during the 2023 election. Appeals were made to religious identity, with candidates presenting themselves as champions of their respective faiths. Consequently, this divisive approach further heightened tensions and created animosity between religious communities. The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria undoubtedly left a lasting impact on the nation's social fabric, resulting in a deeper polarisation of its people along the lines of religion. Addressing this polarisation requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including political and religious leaders, civil society, and citizens alike. By working together to promote inclusivity, unity, and genuine dialogue, Nigeria can rise above the religious divisive aftermath of the election and build a more harmonious and prosperous future for its citizens.

The diplomatic challenges posed by the 2023 elections in Nigeria call for a strategic and cooperative way forward to ensure stability, respect for democratic principles, and positive diplomatic engagements. To chart a path forward and avert diplomatic dangers, Nigeria must prioritise conducting transparent, credible, and inclusive elections. Collaborating with international observers and organisations to objectively monitor the electoral process can enhance legitimacy of the outcome and minimise concerns of irregularities. In the case of electoral disputes or unrest, diplomatic channels should be exploited for dialogue and mediation

to ensure that the rule of law prevails. international partners, regional bodies, and diplomatic envoys can play a vital role in facilitating conversations between political stakeholders and promoting peaceful resolution. To ameliorate Nigeria's image crisis, it is imperative to engage in effective public diplomacy, including robust communication strategies and outreach efforts to shape a positive narrative on Nigeria's democratic progress, economic potential, and contributions to regional and global stability.

The way forward for Nigeria in addressing the diplomatic challenges of the 2023 elections requires a comprehensive approach that prioritises transparent governance, regional cooperation, economic development, and a commitment to democratic principles and human rights. By actively engaging with international partners and stakeholders, Nigeria can navigate these challenges and contribute positively to regional and global diplomacy.

Conclusion

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria highlighted a range of broken promises and unfulfilled expectations surrounding the conduct of free, fair and credible election. The failure to address issues related to transparency, voter inclusion, electronic transmission of results from polling units, political violence, and accountability raises serious questions about the health of democracy in the nation. Urgent and comprehensive reforms within INEC and the broader electoral framework are imperative to restore public trust, ensure the integrity of future elections, and safeguard the democratic principles that underpin the nation's governance.

The exacerbated disillusionment and deeper polarisation of the Nigerian people as products of the 2023 presidential election pose significant implications to the nation's stability and progress. A divided populace makes it harder to build consensus, address pressing issues, and foster national unity. It hampers efforts to promote inclusivity, which is crucial for Nigeria's growth and development. To move forward, Nigerian leaders must prioritise national unity and inclusivity over parochial political interests. Efforts should be made to bridge ethnic, religious, and regional divides through policies that promote social cohesion and equitable development. Strengthening institutions responsible for overseeing elections and bringing those responsible for shambolic electoral process to book. Countering misinformation is also crucial to ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes.

Furthermore, the government should focus on tackling economic disparities, creating jobs, and providing essential services to all citizens, irrespective of their political leanings or affiliations. Encouraging constructive dialogue and fostering an environment of tolerance and respect for diverse opinions can help heal the wounds of polarisation and foster a more cohesive society. Addressing ethno-religious profiling is a complex endeavor that requires a multi-faceted approach. It involves not only immediate corrective measures to rectify injustices but also long-term efforts to promote tolerance, diversity, and inclusivity.

The aftermath of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria presents a unique opportunity for the nation to address and mend injured emotions that may have emerged during the electoral process. By taking deliberate steps to foster understanding, rebuild trust, and promote unity, Nigeria can chart a path towards healing that transcends political divides and paves the way for a

more cohesive, prosperous, and harmonious future. As the wounds of the election begin to mend, the nation's resilience and commitment to collective progress will shine through, forging a stronger, more united Nigeria. It is time for political leaders, civil society, and citizens to come together, transcend differences, and prioritise the common good, ensuring that the democratic process becomes a true reflection of the will of the Nigerian people. Only then can Nigeria stride confidently towards a brighter future and consolidate its place as a vibrant and flourishing democracy in the African continent and beyond.

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