

MIGRATION AND ELECTORAL DYNAMICS: TRACING HISTORICAL PATTERNS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON NIGERIA'S 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

The Nigeria's 2023 general elections happened to be the Nigeria's 6th consecutive election in the Second Republic that is since the return to democratic rule in the year 1999. As the most populous black nation and a major player in the global community, the Nigeria 2023 general elections were closely monitored by both national and international observers. Before the election, campaigns flagged off by a range of strange and complex pressing issues which all political party flag bearers promised to tackle such as corruption, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, lack of basic amenities, all of which posed major challenges to the Nigeria development and also the significant reasons while many Nigerians are migrating to foreign countries. This paper is aiming to expose the reason for the poor outing of electorates in the general elections in 2023 significantly because of migration of Nigerians, with this research, it is going to be study how eighteen political parties and flag bearers eyeing and vying for the top positions at all level especially to the senate, as gubernatorial winner and to the presidential villa in Abuja, Nigeria. In this parameter, this research intends to explain the key issues and implications that affect the results of the general elections in 2023 which is migration phenomenon. This research is going to adopt qualitative method, while recommendations and suggestions are going to be mentioned for further studies.

Keywords: General elections, Nigeria, Political party, Unemployment, Electorates, Nation.

Introduction

While elections have created many policy shifts, migration remains a long-term issue requiring strategic planning, government at all levels will need to balance political promises with economic realities, and businesses must stay afloat of regulatory changes to maintain workforce flexibility. The 2023 general election was the 7th election in the series of general elections held since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. Nevertheless, democracy in Nigeria has been complex due to the fact of multiple ethnic and religious affiliations that make up the population, the prevalence of military

coups, and the lack of economic development. Ultimately, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria became a major test of the nation's democratic progress due to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduction of new technology machines including the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) to be adopted to improve administration of the 2023 elections throughout the states in Nigeria buttressing this optimism was the Nigeria Electoral Act 2022. Upon all the mechanisms put in place by the government across the country, this research found out that the general

elections fell short of Nigerian citizen's legitimate and reasonable expectations, as several accredited election observers and observation groups both local and international reported that the credibility of the 2023 general elections was greatly marred by numerous pitfalls but the champion of them is the migration of many Nigerians out of the country on before the 2023 general elections. Other pitfalls are attributed to election administration such as failure of operational and logistics management, inefficient management of permanent voter's cards (PVCs) distribution, political violence during campaigns, instances of vote manipulation, lack of transparent results collation and declaration process, poor crisis communication among others.

Build Up to the 2023 Nigeria General Elections

The 2023 general election was the 1st nationwide conducted within the framework of the new Electoral Act, which President Muhammadu Buhari signed law in February 2022. Continuing Nigeria's reputation for using advanced technology in elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) utilized two technological innovations to improve the integrity and transparency of the electoral process (BVAS) which verifies and authenticates registered voters, and the INEC Results Viewing Portal which is a public-facing voter tabulation system that the INEC deployed nationwide. The background of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria was fraught with uncertainty, this was largely a result of migration of millions of electorates out of the country before the general election. This was a result of the past experiences of the Nigerian electorate, many of whom have a long-held belief that their votes do not count and there is nothing going to be shown as benefits of their votes from the

government, this belief stems from a feeling of powerlessness to question their elected leaders at various levels either the local, state and federal government. Subjected to over 3 decades of military rule after its independence in 1960 which was the Africa's largest country by GDP and population size has witnessed a series of general elections in recent times. Since the return of democracy which heralded the start of its 4th Republic in 1999, Nigeria has now held ten general elections. While some of these elections have been characterized by irregularities, others have been outright abysmal. Such was the case with the 2007 general elections that brought the late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua into office, President Yar'Adua would eventually confess and acknowledge that election was nothing close to being free and fair. This is the singular reason that led to his decision to prioritize electoral reforms.

Meanwhile, the Nigeria's 2023 general election was the most keenly contested elections in the Nigeria's history, in 2015, the election that brought President Muhammad Buhari was seen by many Nigerians as an opportunity to reset the country's affairs after a steep slide into backwardness, due to what was perceived as the gross incompetence of the past administrations. The Muhammad Buhari's administration promised to tackle security issues, most especially and particularly the persistent threat posed by the Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the northeast of Nigeria. Other promises which won over the hearts and minds of Nigerians at that time included fighting corruption and prioritizing the economy. 8 years on, while Nigeria has made some significant progress in degrading Boko Haram and ISWAP, President Muhammad Buhari's claim that the insurgency has

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been “technically defeated” has been
disputed in several quarters, including
among policy analysts and commentators
both home and abroad. Moreso, the fight
against corruption has mostly been
perceived as “selective” and politically
motivated. In addition, Nigeria has not
made much progress on the economic
front in the past 8 years before the general
election in 2023, with a high debt profile
and a consistent rise in inflation. This has
brought a significant economic hardship
on Nigerians. A recent published report
from Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics
contends that over half of population lives
in multidimensional poverty across the
country, this really contribute and affect
the 2023 general elections which many
Nigerians see that the solution is to bypass
by migrating out of the country on before
the general elections. Beyond its apparent
failure of the government to deliver on
some of its promises, other challenges
have emerged under the Muhammadu
Buhari administration. In the North-West,

for instance, the nefarious activities of
armed bandits have claimed the lives of
thousands and led to the forced
displacement of many others. Recent
years have seen increased secessionist
agitations from the indigenous People of
Biafra and atrocities perpetrated by its
paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security
Network, as well as Yoruba Nation
agitators led by Oloye Sunday Igboho.
Concerned over the administration's
handling of the #EndSARS movement
also drove a wedge in state-society
relations, particularly between the
government and the young people, who
were protesting police brutality that they
claimed was mostly targeted at them,
similarly, the Fulani herdsmen killing
farmers mostly in Southern Nigeria.
Another more recent example is the timing
of the ill-informed cashless policy of the
Central Bank of Nigeria, which has not
only created a cash crunch across Nigeria,
but has also partly damaged Nigeria's
informal economy.

S/N	Category	Details / Figures
1	Presidential & National Assembly Elections	February 25, 2023
2	Governorship & State House of Assembly Elections	March 18, 2023
3	States	36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)
4	Local Government Areas (LGAs)	774
5	Total Registered Voters	93,469,008
6	Male Voters	49,054,162 (52%)
7	Female Voters	44,414,846 (47%)
8	Persons with Disabilities	85,362 (2021–2022 registration data)

9	Youth (18–34 years)	37,060,399 (39%)
10	Registration Areas / Wards	8,809
11	Polling Units	176,846
12	Presidential Constituency	1 (36 States & FCT)
13	Governorship Seats	28 States
14	Senatorial District Seats	109
15	House of Representatives Seats	360
16	State House of Assembly Seats	993
17	Total Available Seats	1,491
18	Registered Political Parties	18
19	Total Candidates	15,309
20	Men Candidates	91.7%
21	Women Candidates	8.3%
22	Youth Candidates	28.6%
23	Presidential Campaign Limit	₦5 Billion
24	Governorship Campaign Limit	₦1 Billion
25	Senate Campaign Limit	₦100 Million
26	House of Representatives Campaign Limit	₦70 Million
27	House of Assembly Campaign Limit	₦30 Million

Results and outcomes of the general election

By March 1, 2023, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declared that Bola Ahmed Tinubu of (APC) obtained 8,794,726 votes (36.6%), Atiku Abubakar of (PDP) came in second with 6,984,520 votes (29%), and Peter Obi of (LP) came third with 6,101,533 votes (25.4%), Rabiu Kwankwaso of (NNPP)

was declared to have 1,496,687 votes (6.2%). The results showed and demonstrated that among 93.5 million registered PVC card holders, only some 25 million (27%) had cast their votes. According to many findings, it is averred that migration of Nigerians before the general elections contributed significantly to the low turnout of the electorates during the election. Even though the result

process leading to the declaration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as winner was disputed by the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), The Labour Party (LP) and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP). PDP and LP headed to the Court of Appeal (CoA). Acting speedily and with efficiency, the Court of Appeal on March 8 granted the PDP and LP access to certified copies of INEC materials and technological data used in the February 25 elections. Meanwhile, PDP and LP alleged that INEC did not comply with court orders made in their favour, raising concerns for further court interventions. This made PDP to return to the Court of Appeal but, on March 15 withdrew the lawsuit again.

Aside migration there are some other factors that affect the elections in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, as widely known Nigeria is a fragile state, available indices and indications show characteristics of a failing state. There are conflicts and agitations in Northern Nigeria, also chaos in Southern Nigeria, at the same time their protests in Western Nigeria, feelings of marginalization and exclusion, a rise in political and criminal violence, loss of control of borders, rise ethnic bigotry, religious diversity and cultural hostilities, food shortage, unemployment, inflation, rusting and crumbling infrastructure and weak federal schools and institutions. Others are, emergence of viable third force parties, until 2015, Nigeria's political landscape was dominated by one party – the People's Democratic Party. It was the only party strong enough to win presidential elections. This changed in 2015 when the All-Progressive Congress, a coalition of opposition parties, defeated the sitting president, Goodluck Jonathan. This heralded an era of a two-party dominant state. This emergence of the Labour Party

and the Nigeria People's Party seems to have changed the electoral dynamics. Another factor is insecurity, insecurity is simply the very opposite of what we have as security, the level of insecurity in Nigeria is multifaceted as such one cannot accurately categorized the patterns of insecurity. The 2023 elections took place in an environment of widespread of insecurity. With growing banditry in the North West, persistent violence driven by the Boko Haran insurgency, in the North East, the expansion of ISIS into Nigeria's North Central region, the expansion of farmer-herder violence in Southern Nigeria, and the emergence of the IPOB and Yoruba Nation agitators in the Southern and Western Nigeria respectively. Also, corruption is another issue, according to John Campbell, the United State of America Ambassador to Nigeria; corruption is a clog in the wheel of any nation struggling for the enthronement and consolidation of democracy and good governance. This shows that democracy cannot be predicted on a fragile and unstable political base. Corruption as a devastator has greatly eroded the fundamental values of democracy and its essential principles. Corruption in its popular conception is defined as the exploitation of public position, resources and power for selfish gain. For instance, corruption is defined by a philosopher as a betrayal of public trust for individual or group gain at public expenses, a historian analyze corruption as efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain via public purse. Also, money that is crucial in any election, especially in Nigeria, where the high level of poverty means that people need financial support before they can even attend campaign rallies. Vote trading has also become a prominent feature of election.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Some sections of Nigerians were disappointed that the IREV, which could have made a difference if INEC diligently and credibly deployed it, failed because they did not use the instrument to upload the presidential election results from Polling Units as promised excepts for the Senatorial and House of Representative elections. Others decried that Nigerians expected the 2023 general elections to usher in a much more improved and digitized electoral process. On this basis, INEC received an unprecedented sum of three hundred and fifty-five billion Naira to conduct a credible election. Despite the enormous financial commitment, and the incredible support received from the international community and civil society organizations, INEC failed to deliver on a straightforward mandate of meeting the expectation of many Nigerians. It is highly recommended that credible and competent personnels should be deploy to lead the mandate of INEC and they should be totally out of favorizing any candidate of any political party, one of the aims of this research is to analyze the numerous stories of unprofessionalism, rigging and intimidation by some Nigerians working for some political parties, this identifies some critical challenges that undermined and prevented a more efficient and effective election in 2023. In a nut shell, the outcome of the 2023 general elections has come with some systemic gaps which must be addressed promptly, this is resulted in three key points.

1- Religious romanticisms: In the 2023 general election, three candidates from the nation's three major tribes enjoined wide popularity. That brought to the fore the sense of rivalry between the different ethnic nationalities in the Nigeria. The APC's Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket

elicited widespread criticism across Nigeria, with groups like CAN frowning at it insensitivity to Nigeria's religious realities. Nyesom Wike, the then River State Governor criticized the move by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to produce another president from the North. He called it another Muslim-Muslim ticket of the All-Progressive Congress (APC). Wike cautioned those who claim that Nigeria is ripe for a Muslim-Muslim ticket not to justify and embrace the efforts at retaining the presidency in the North. He maintained that those involved in such misrepresentation are deceiving gullible of a few misusing the sensibility of compassionate Nigerians who want a united country that advances national cohesion. But with religion generating so much passion, the disunity among Nigerians has found full expression as we pitched the country as a battleground between Christians and Muslims. The influence of religion on the Nigerian state and the politicization of it by the state have created an unfortunate identity for Nigerian politics. This influence has made religion lose its spiritual authority in society to become a tool of selfish politicians and individuals to further their interest.

2- Tribalism and Nepotism: The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were crucial as they offered the opportunity to strengthen the Nigeria's democracy and address various prevalent issues that have been worsening for decades. But with the country as a nation of many paradoxes, most people make decisions based on primordial sentiments of their connections to candidates specifically through ethnic and tribal connections. For decays, the Nigerian state based its ideology and

formalities on the easel of religion, region and ethnicity. The citizens of the country must restructure these notions away from their mind sets simply because this trip will not the country anywhere if continue. According to Prof. Yusuff Turaki, a Professor of Social Ethics and a Doctoral Research Fellow at Yale Divinity School, who had devoted majority of his time to the Nigeria political legacy from the colonial era to the military and civilian rules concluded that the British founded Nigerian politics on three main structures. These structures are religious prejudice, regionalism and sectionalism also ethnicity and tribalism. Hence because of these faulty triune foundations, Nigeria continues to suffer from the political problem of leadership-followership combined with the ethnic-regional-religious syndrome. Ethnicity and tribalism are two weapons politicians have successfully deployed to win elections and cause havoc and problems. Prior to the elections, Nigeria politicians used ethnicity to divert the attention of many Nigerians from the main issues surrounding the nation. The election became a Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba affair. Lagos, which formally was the center of unity and progress, was manipulated and weaponized with the ethnicity play card to win the sympathy of Lagosians. If Nigerians will want to have it right in the future elections their notions will have to be change towards tribalism and nepotism.

3- **BVAS and Ballot Snatching:** The general elections held in 2023 were marred by violence in many part of Nigeria. The situation led to the loss of lives and disruption of the voting

process in many areas. In some cities and states, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) postponed and rescheduled the elections. Mobs attacked polling stations in Mina, Niger state, Delta, Lagos, Benue and Kastina state and took away BVAS machines. Some hoodlums moved in chased and stole the BVAS machine in a few areas of Benue state. On lookers at the polling units had to call on security agencies in the area who waded in and killed the hoodlums to recover the stolen BVAS machine. In a viral video circulated on X formerly called Twitter, allegedly taken at a location in Benue state, a young man wearing black T-shirt matched with blue jean trousers lying motionless on the ground with soldiers gathered around him, with many onlookers at the background, a spectator voice could be also be heard in the viral video shouting, "God bless Nigerian Army. No weapon fashion against you shall prosper". In Oshimili Local Government of Delta state, hoodlums stormed a polling station and stole two BVAS machines. But determining that the election must go on, INEC replaced the stolen BVAS machines, beefed up the security agency, and cast votes at the polling station. In Safana Local Government Area of Kastina state, hoodlums also stormed a polling unit and stole six BVAS machines, yet again, INEC was able to recover and use a backup BVAS machine then strengthen security to continue casting of votes at the location. In Dipolubi street of Surulere, Lagos, a woman was allegedly stabbed by thugs claimed to be loyal to a political party at the polling station, she, however, came back to cast her vote after receiving a first aid treatment, wearing a heavy

bandage on her face dripping with blood, her picture and video went viral on facebook, while some Nigerians commended her determination by donating money for her treatment.

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