



OUTLOOK ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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As the parties officially kick-start their campaigns for the 2023 elections today, Wednesday, September 28, 2022, observers are keen to unravel who will take over from President Buhari as he concludes his 2nd term in office on May 29, 2023. Candidates running for elective office will have an extended campaign period of about six months, relative to previous election cycles that allowed for three months for electoral campaigns.

The 2023 election is expected to be influenced by several dynamics, such as the role President Muhammadu Buhari will play in the choice of his successor; the presence of 3 major candidates on the electoral ballot, the growing participation of Nigerian youths, which has propelled the candidacy of the Labour Party's Presidential Candidate, Mr. Peter Obi; the internal crisis within the major opposition party the PDP; availability of campaign funds to finance campaigns for about six months; clamor for power shift to the south; religious and ethnic considerations; insecurity in parts of the Northwest and the Southeast; the implications of high inflation, a depreciating exchange rate and rising unemployment on the electoral choices of voters.

There is no gainsaying that the 2023 presidential elections can be characterized into four quadrants based on popular demand and current political trends; with the elections mainly focused on the candidacies of the ruling party; Ahmed Tinubu, All Progressive Congress, APC, Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP, Peter Obi of the Labour Party, LP, and the fifteen others including Rabiu Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples' Party, NNPP. The 2023 presidential race is between eighteen presidential candidates, compared to the 2019 electoral year with seventy-eight presidential candidates, with polling votes dominated by the two main parties, the PDP and the APC, garnering about 96% of the total votes cast during the presidential election.

A cursory look at the 2019 election shows that out of a total registered voters/turnout of 82,344,107, about 35% voted in the thirty-six states plus the FCT. This number shows a wide margin in the citizen's representation and participation in the electoral process, which is a huge determining factor to be considered in the upcoming elections. The voters' participation in the 2015 elections that brought President Buhari into power became a groundbreaking scenario of the opposition taking over power from an incumbent President, recording a 47.08% Voter Turnout of the 67,422,005 registered voters compared to the 2011 elections, with 39,469,484 (53.7%) Total Votes/Voter Turnout of the 73,528,040 registered Voters.

Geopolitical Zones	Number of States	PDP States	APC States	Others	Registered voters in millions
North West	7	1	6	-	22.67
South West	6	2	4	-	18.3
South South	6	5	1	-	15.2
North Central	6	1	5	-	14.1
North East	6	3	3	-	12.8
South East	5	2	2	1	11.49
FCT	-	-	1	-	1.5
Total	36	14	22	1	96.06

Source: INEC and ACIOE Associates Research



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Using this table, the ruling party, the APC, will expect to have an edge in the polls, given its existing power structure. However, the outlook for the ruling party remains uncertain as prices of goods and services have doubled over the past four years, and Nigerians have witnessed significant erosion of their disposable incomes. Polls conducted by bodies such as ANAP have indicated that the dynamics in some of the strongholds of the ruling party as well as the opposition party reflect that the Labour Party could take significant votes, particularly in the South-South and South-East regions. In a state such as Kano, where the ruling party holds sway, the emergence of Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso on the ballot is expected to alter the voting patterns of voters in Kano.

Over the years, various factors have been identified to influence electoral processes, particularly in Nigeria. These include but are not limited to race, culture, emotions, sentiments, education, social influence, political socialization, and religion. According to the Cypriot referendum of 2004, the research identifies four distinct voting behaviours depending on the election type. Citizens tend to adopt different decision criteria in exercising their franchise; for instance, in a presidential or national election, it is the norm for people to vote based on their political beliefs, for legislative or local elections based on communal interest, or in a referendum based on policy interest.

The 2015 electoral process in Nigeria can be said to have been majorly influenced based on biases, as the majority clamoured for a paradigm shift from the then ruling party now the opposition, the PDP, premised on a desire for a change, the mantra on which the ruling party took over power. Sentiments favoring a shift in power to the North, infighting within the PDP, and allegations of rampant corruption swayed voting sentiments in favor of then-candidate General Buhari of the APC.

The above scenario is not farfetched from the current outcry in 2022, where economic factors, clamor for power shift, and a significant rise in the registered voters considered to be youth are expected to influence voting patterns. Of the 12 m newly registered voters in 2022, more than 8m were considered to be youth. The Labour Party candidate is hoping to benefit from this youth population even though his party does not appear to have conventional party structures across the country. The APC candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the Southwest region of Nigeria, will leverage the existing power structure of the APC, even though cracks within the party and disenchantment amongst Nigerians on insecurity, unemployment, and the downturn in the economy are expected to affect the votes of the ruling party. For the PDP, its candidate Atiku Abubakar who comes from the Northeastern part of Nigeria, is hoping to leverage the strength of the voting population in the north in order to win the elections. However, the popularity of Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, the party candidate for NNPP, the dominance of APC in 14 out of the 19 northern states, and the likelihood that Christian-dominated states in the North Central region may vote for the Labour Party candidate are key issues that the PDP candidate will have to deal with.

With the enactment of the 2022 Electoral Act (as amended); the Nigerian electoral process has been upgraded to promote transparency and the actualization of a free and fair election if the laws are implemented appropriately. It is crystal clear that the presidential race lies mainly between the three gladiators from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, that is; APC (the BATified), PDP (the ATIKUlated), and the LP (the OBI'dients), contrary to the two-party battle we have become accustomed to in previous election cycles. Also, with the third party, there is the fear of a possibility of a runoff happening, as it may be difficult to easily have the 25% constitutional requirement to declare a president.

Although the elections are still a long shot away, however, the electoral process looks more promising as many continue to believe and hope for a better Nigeria, with many willing to ensure they fulfill their civic responsibility to vote the right candidate into power to secure the future of our great nation, Nigeria. Finally, as the campaign kicks off, there is sufficient time for the candidates to reassure their supporters and convince members of the public about what makes them the most suitable candidate for the position.

