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The aftermath of Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections and its impact on the sub-region

Dirk Kohnert ¹

'Old politician's strategy in 2023 Nigerian elections'



Source: © [Mustapha Buluma](#), 10 February 2022 ²

Abstract: Presidential elections were held in Nigeria on 25 February 2023. The candidate of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party Bola Ahmed Tinubu won the election. He was known as a political 'godfather' in the South West. His major contender, Atiku Abubakar, 76, running on behalf of the major oppositional People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost, as well as the third, Peter Obi, 61, a candidate for the little-known Labor Party. He had hoped to break the two-party system that ruled the country since the end of military rule. But he failed despite enjoying passionate support on social media, especially among the Nigerian youth. Acting President Buhari, whose term has ended, had renewed his call for foreign powers not to interfere in Nigeria's internal affairs. Given the recent history of military coups in West Africa, including Russia's involvement, the military command again dismissed coup rumours. However, the latter were largely ignored by the general public anyway. Most people focused on more pressing concerns such as insecurity, fuel shortages and a shortage of new banknotes. Although Nigeria is a resource-rich country and oil and gas revenues have funded national budgets for decades, around 40% of Nigerians (83 million people) live below the poverty line while another 25% (53 million) are at risk. So far, Nigeria has not been able to benefit from rising global oil prices. Oil production has fallen to historic lows since 2021. Gasoline subsidies continue to consume too much of oil revenue. Nigeria's growth prospects are bleak due to further declines in oil production and heightened uncertainty. The new president has to cooperate closely with ECOWAS to tackle gang violence and insecurity in the West African region. The cooperation documents Nigeria's role as a political, economic and security policy hegemon in West Africa, often said 'too big to fail', as it is by far the largest and most powerful nation in sub-Saharan Africa alongside South Africa.

Keywords: [Nigeria](#), [2023 Nigerian presidential election](#), [governance](#), [Military coups in Nigeria](#), [conspiracy theory](#), [deep state](#), [Poverty in Nigeria](#), [Nigerian bandit conflict](#), [Boko Haram](#), [international trade](#), [migration](#), [sustainable development](#), [West-Africa](#), [ECOWAS](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), [African Studies](#)

JEL-Code: D31, D62, D63, D72, D74, E26, F15, F22, F35, F52, F63, I31, N17, N37, N47, O17, O35, Z13

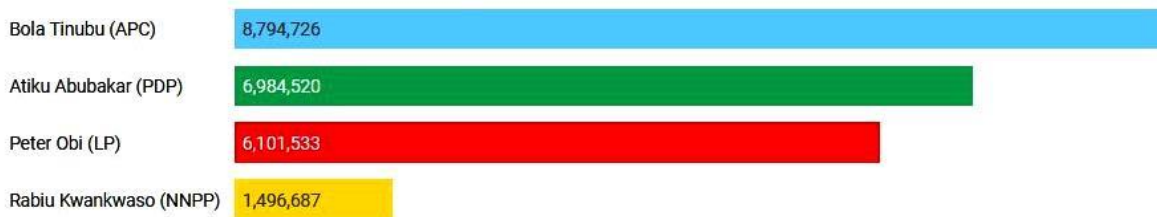
¹ Dirk Kohnert, associated expert, [GIGA-Institute for African Affairs, Hamburg](#). Draft: 3 March 2023.

² © Mustapha Buluma, Facebook page: Buluma's Cartoons. [Everypedia](#), 2022 – For a more detailed biography see [Africa cartoons](#), CV of M. Buluma. [Mustapha Buluma](#), [Daily Trust](#), [Nairaland.com](#), 10 February 2022.

1. Introduction

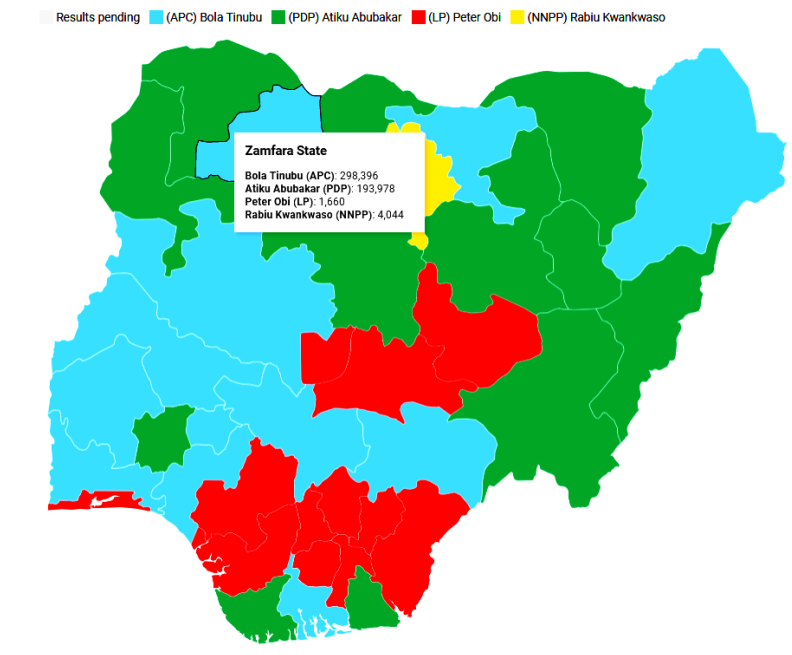
Presidential elections had been held in Nigeria on February 25, 2023. The candidate of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party [Bola Tinubu](#) was declared the winner with 36 % of votes after defeating two of his closest rivals in the most competitive election for decades. The Independent Nigerian Election Commission ([INEC](#)) announced final results on 1 March, after a chaotic count lasting almost four days. Tinubu's victory was irrefutable, with 8.79 m votes, putting him well ahead of main opposition challenger [Atiku Abubakar](#) with 6.98 m and the newcomer [Peter Obi](#) with 6.1m votes. For the first time, none of these candidates was a former officer, which was also considered a success. However, less than 10 % of the candidates were women (Burke, 2023). Still, provisional data signalled Nigeria's lowest-ever voter turnout of 27 %. The growing insecurity that had plagued the pre-elections certainly had contributed significantly to dampening turnout. For example, INEP recorded over 134 attacks on its offices or personnel (Gavin, 2023). The [ECOWAS](#) which had deployed about 240 election observers declared the elections as largely peaceful although it criticised poor planning and a lack of transparency which, however, did not affect the final result. It appealed to leaders of the opposition to promote peace and use constitutional means to address any grievances they may have.

Graph 1: Nigeria presidential elections 2023, results



Source: INEC; Labs, 2023

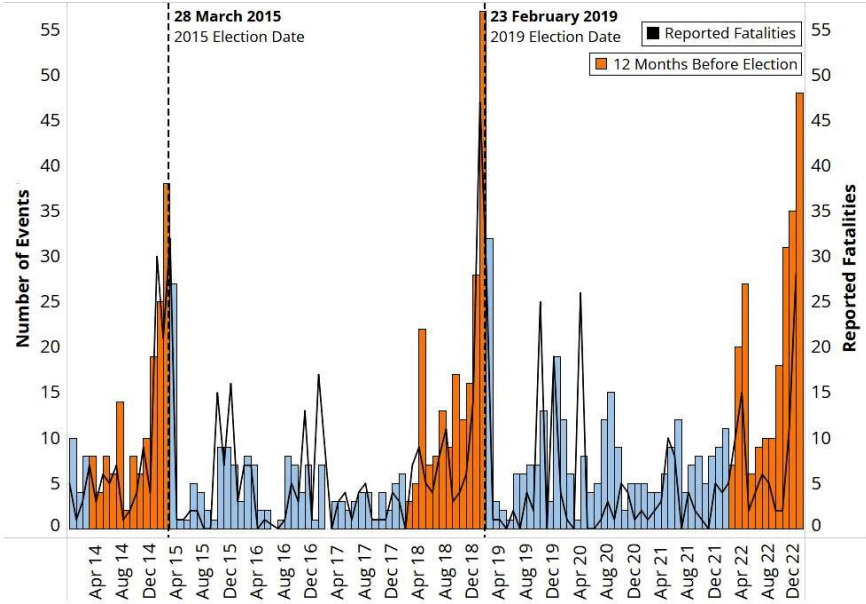
Graph 2: Nigerian presidential election 2023, state-by-state results



Source: INEC; Labs, 2023

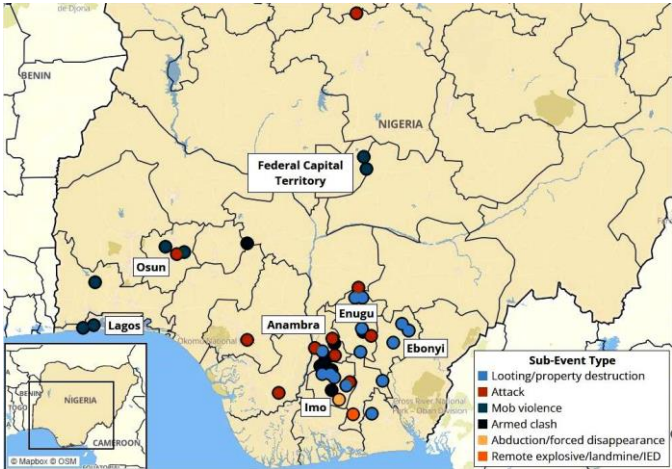
The pre-elections were marred by electoral violence. In the 12 months preceding the election, over 200 violent events had been recorded involving party members and supporters, resulting in nearly 100 reported fatalities (Serwat & Carboni, 2023). This corresponded largely with the run-ups to the previous two election years, with over 150 events and more than 100 reported death between 2018 and 2019, and an estimated 115 events and over 90 death between 2014 and 2015. The Niger Delta and the South East accounted for the largest share of violence against INEC offices and staff in the run-up to the 2023 elections (Serwat & Carboni, 2023).

Graph 3: Violence involving political parties in Nigeria
1 January 2014 to 31 January 2023



Source: Graph: Christian Jaffe, Text: Serwat & Carboni, 2023
ACLED, Election Watch, 2023

Graph 4: Violence against INEC offices and staff
1 January 2021 to 18 February 2023



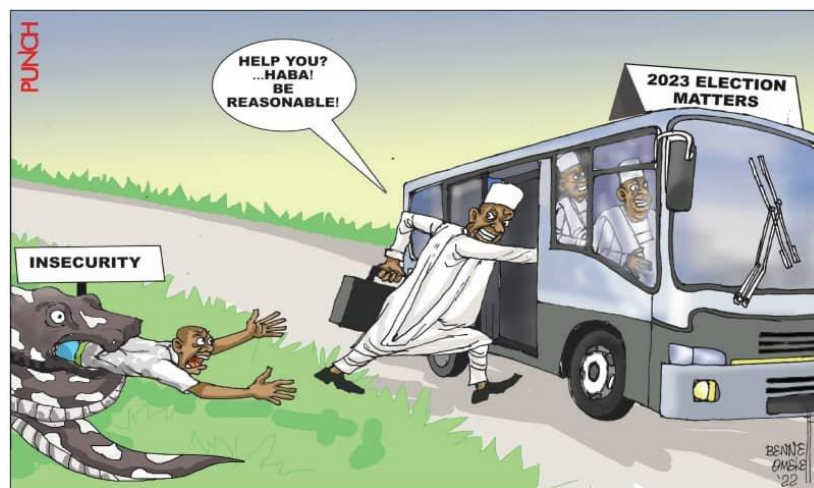
Source: Graph: Christian Jaffe, Text: Serwat & Carboni, 2023
ACLED, Election Watch, 2023

In total, more than 93.4 million voters had been registered on the Nigerian electoral roll. That was over 11 million more than four years ago. On 11 January 2023, the Independent National Electoral Commission ([INEC](#)) released a new register, from which it said 53,264 ineligible

voters had been removed (Macaulay, 2023). Incumbent President [Muhammadu Buhari](#), a ‘Northerner’ and retired general of the Nigerian army, cannot stand again due to poor health and because his term has ended. According to opinion polls, three candidates had realistic chances of winning (Macaulay, 2023). First, [Bola Tinubu](#), 70 years old, represented the ruling [All Progressives Congress](#) (APC) party. He was known as a political ‘godfather’ in the South West. Second, [Atiku Abubakar](#), 76, was running on behalf of the main opposition [People's Democratic Party](#) (PDP). He was the candidate of the Northern establishment. He formerly was governor of [Adamawa State](#) (North-Eastern Nigeria) and run for the presidency five times but lost them all. Third, [Peter Obi](#), 61, was the candidate for the little-known [Labour Party](#) and hoped to break the two-party system that ruled the country from the end of military rule from 1966 to 1999, with an interregnum by [Shehu Shagari](#) from 1979 to 1983.

Nigerians, like neighbouring peoples in Benin and Togo, were obsessed with the mantra of ‘change’ of prevailing socio-economic and security conditions. Although Obi was a PDP member until last year, he enjoyed passionate support on social media, especially among Nigeria's youth. He is a wealthy businessman and served as Governor of the South-Eastern state of [Anambra](#) from 2006 to 2014 (Macaulay, 2023).

Cartoon 2: Insecurity ... why Nigeria's 2023 elections matter



Source: © [Bennett Omeke](#), PUNCH, [Facebook](#), 2022 ³

Theoretically, it would have been possible for [Buhari](#) and the ruling powers to bypass the constitutional term limit, as has been done time and again by his African peers, for example in [Rwanda](#) and neighbouring [Benin](#) and [Togo](#) (Versteeg, 2020; Kohnert, 2019). Yet, Buhari lost support in his own party due to his failure to reinstall security in the country and his perceived lame-duck personality and contemplative decision-making (Obadare, 2019). Moreover, according to the ‘iron rule’ of informal Nigerian politics of power-sharing, passed down from colonial times, the presidency has to rotate between the three major ethnic groups and regions, the [Hausa-Fulani](#) in the North, the [Yoruba](#) in the Southwest and the [Igbo](#) in the southeast (Orji, 2008). Because the two presidents preceding Buhari, [Umaru Musa Yar'Adua](#) (2007-2010) and [Goodluck Jonathan](#), (2010-2015), stood for the North and the East, this time it

³ “[Bennett Omeke](#) is a cartoonist for [The Punch](#) newspaper’s “Viewpoint” section. He favours simple, high-contrast, single-panel illustrations with bite.” [Africa Cartoons](#), CV, 2022. - The cartoon shows retired [General Buhari](#), who was elected president in 2015 because he was believed to be the best candidate to eliminate crime and insecurity, as a failing president, fleeing insecurity by boarding the 2023 election campaign bus, carrying his (money) suitcase ... “Haba”, expression of surprise, disbelief, annoyance in [Nigerian Pidgin English](#).

would be a candidate from Yorubaland's turn, that is of [Bola Tinubu](#), who actually won indeed.

Yet, the new president is not to be envied for his office. His task lying ahead is barely manageable. Nigeria, the giant of Africa, by far the most resource-rich and populous African country with a current population of around 200 million people, expected to grow to over 400 million by 2050 (Vigneron, 2018), is handicapped by an ongoing internal crisis. Therefore, it remains a fragile sub-regional power.

All these tasks have to be accomplished against the backdrop of weakening macroeconomic stability as a result of the recession triggered by the [COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria](#) in 2020 (Worldbank, Nigeria, 2023). Since 2021, Nigeria has been unable to benefit from the surging global oil prices. [Oil production](#) fell to historic lows and the economically unsustainable petrol subsidy still feeds on the gross oil revenues. The surging inflation pushes millions of [Nigerians into poverty](#). In 2018, 40% of Nigerians lived below the poverty line, while another 25% (53 million) were vulnerable. Growing inequality adversely affected poverty reduction and inclusive growth. Poverty is driven by the lack of jobs which further contributes to regional inequality, social and political unrest and growing insecurity because many see no alternative but to join criminal gangs to earn their living (Worldbank, Nigeria, 2023).

Thus, the challenges awaiting the new president are considerable. He will have to fight endemic corruption, reduce the dependence on the oil export sector, revitalize the energy, agricultural and mining sectors, improve education notably for the poor- and lower-middle class, strengthen the fight against [Boko Haram](#) and other criminal groups, and to push regional integration. All these ambitious goals demand stability in a country that is often said to be 'too big to fail' (Vigneron, 2018).

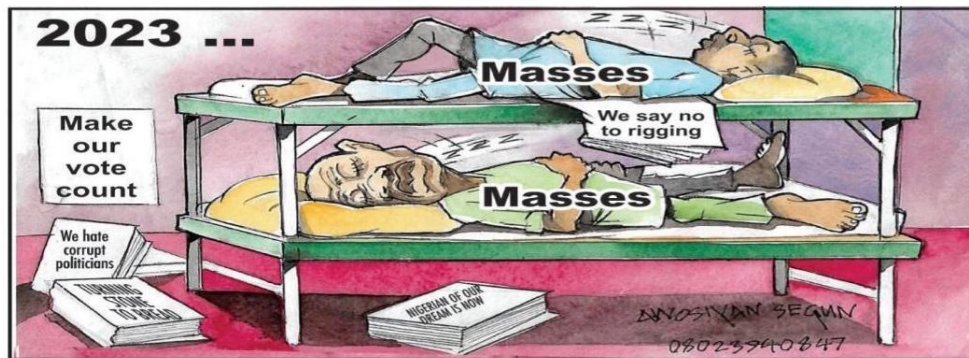
The recent history of Nigeria's residential provides valuable lessons about the pitfalls of electoral campaigns, not least regarding outside interference. In 2015, for example, leaked messages showed a failed plan to discredit [Muhammadu Buhari](#) and get [Goodluck Jonathan](#) re-elected, apparently backed by the notorious [Cambridge Analytica](#) possibly assisted by Israeli private intelligence operators. Communications appear to have occurred on encrypted [Hushmail](#) accounts, located in [Vancouver](#), Canada, or other special devices used for secure phone calls, whose servers were often located in [Russia](#). Allegedly, a so-called 'Team Jorge' was responsible for finding material that could be leveraged to undermine Buhari (Kirchgaessner et al, 2023).

In the following, an outline of possible scenarios of the aftermath of the election will serve as background to assess its impact on Nigerian domestic politics and foreign relations and regional integration, as well as on the country's economic and social fabric. This will serve as a base to evaluate its meaning for regional integration with a focus on [West Africa](#) and the [ECOWAS](#).

2. Scenarios of Nigeria's 2023 Presidentials

In the following, based on a brief analysis of the primaries and the election campaign, three possible main scenarios for the outcome of the 2023 presidential election will be assessed: (1) Possible impact of conspiracy theories and ideologies of the 'deep state'. (2) Peaceful change options. (3) The likelihood of coup attempts.

Cartoon 3: Nigeria 2023 and the sleeping electorate⁴



The dreamers!

Source: © Awosiyan Segun, [Vanguard](#) (Nigeria), 15th February 2023

2.1 Pre-elections and election campaigns

Election forecasts based on pre-election surveys and the pulse-feeling of the electorate had so far little meaning in the Nigerian context (Ikem & Afamefune & Udegbonam, 2021). Violence has been a basic feature in [Nigerian elections](#) since colonial times (Ugwuoke & Ajah & Chukwuemeka, 2020). According to lessons learned from previous presidential elections in Nigeria, the pre-election period was the most violent time of election campaigns. Electoral terrorism typically occurred in the period before, during and immediately after elections (Ewi, 2015). During the pre-election period in 2015, for example, terrible attacks took place. According to reports of the International Crisis Group (ICG), indiscriminate violence rocked a third of the 36 states: [Akwa Ibom](#), [Anambra](#), [Bayelsa](#), [Benue](#), [Delta](#), [Edo](#), [Ekiti](#), [Kwara](#), [Niger](#), [Oyo](#), [Plateau](#) and [Taraba](#) between 22 and 25 March 2015. [Boko Haram](#) also acquired several places in [Borno](#), [Adamawa](#) and [Yobe](#). Between January and March 2015, Boko Haram carried out 70 attacks in which more than 3 000 people were killed, with 2 000 allegedly dying in a single massacre in [Baga](#) in Borno state, close to [Lake Chad](#) (Ewi, 2015).

Fortunately, there have been no similar outbreaks of violence in the 2023 elections so far. However, it cannot be ruled out that even after the election, disgruntled losers will incite violence. Also, it is apparently of little importance, what the candidates promised during pre-election campaigns. In general, Nigerians vote with a shallow knowledge of what the political parties and candidates have to offer. It was the regional affiliation of the candidates and not their competence or political ideology that was decisive for victory. Therefore, the whole electoral process often triggered ethno-religious conflicts, further consolidating the idea of a rotating presidency as a negotiated solution (Faluyi, 2022).

⁴ Cartoonist: © Awosiyan Segun, PhD Professor of English Language and Linguistics Sc, University of Lagos. [African Cartoons](#), 2023.

However, an innovation, used for the first time in Nigerian elections, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), introduced by [INEC](#) in 2021, will make [electoral fraud](#) more difficult. It allows for a dual identification of voters on election day through their [fingerprints](#) and [facial recognition](#). Also, the BVAS uploads vote results directly to the INEC results viewing portal for all to see (Macaulay, 2023). Violent protests by disappointed voters because of alleged election rigging could be significantly reduced as a result, but cannot yet be ruled out, especially at the municipal level (Ayeni & Esan, 2018).

2.2 Peaceful change

The 2023 elections should be interpreted against the background of the development of the Nigerian presidential system. In October 1979, a civilian administration took over from the last military regime and adopted a federal [presidential constitution](#). The presidency, entrusted to [Shehu Shagari](#), became an executive position, with powers similar to those of its [American antetype](#). The legislature turned into a bicameral [National Assembly](#), comprising a [Senate](#) and a [House of Representatives](#). This demanded considerable administrative and political power to make the system function, as well as the financial and manpower resources for proper and effective governance (Adeniran, 1984). It had to embrace up to [371 ethnic groups](#) with different cultures and traditions, chained together by the legacy of [British colonial rule](#). It thus constituted one of the world's most deeply divided countries (Suberu, 2019).

Cartoon 4: *The youth, 2023 elections and Politicians*



Source: © [Mustapha Buluma](#), *Daily Trust*, [Nairaland.com](#), 10 February 2022 ⁵

The electoral process is lengthy and cumbersome. It takes about a year from the announcement of the names of candidates by political parties till the voters can go to the polling box. Moreover, according to the constitution, a candidate must have received a plurality of votes cast in his favour and is obliged to receive at least 25 % of votes in two-thirds of the total number of states. This requires 25 % of votes in 24 states out of the total 36 states (Ahmad & Uddin & Shah, 2022).

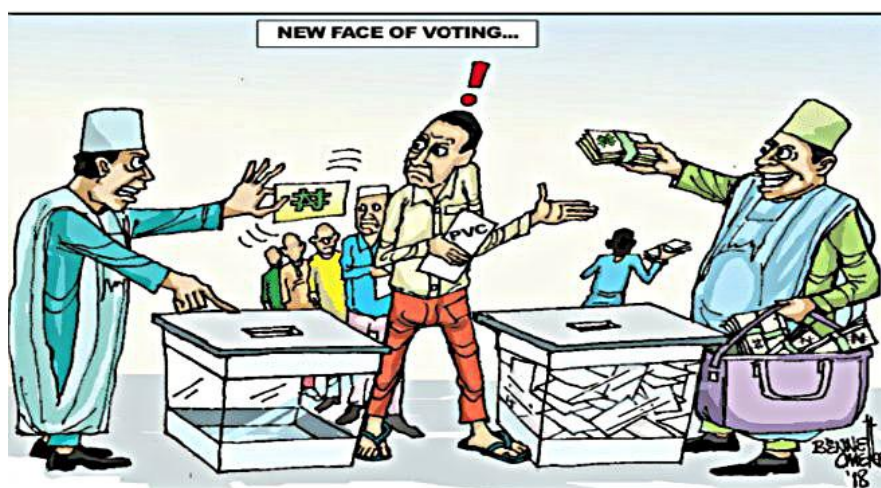
⁵ [Mustapha Buluma](#) is a self-taught Nigerian political cartoonist and illustrator. He got his B.sc in Economics from Ahmadu Bello University. He is a now professional Nigerian Artist based in Kaduna State, specializing in political cartoons and children's book illustration. As an Illustrator, he has also shown his art in thirty children's books for various distributors since 2008. Facebook page: © Bulama's Cartoons. [Everypedia](#), 2022 – For a more detailed biography see [Africa cartoons](#), CV of M. Bulama.

In early 2022 the Nigerian parliament rejected a bill to allow the more than 25 million Nigerians living in the [diaspora to vote](#) in their embassies or consulates abroad. On 25 February 2023, also a Nigerian court dismissed a lawsuit seeking to allow the diaspora to vote outside the country in the 2023 presidential election (Agences, 2023). The government announced in 2021 its intention to allow diaspora voting by law, but not yet for the 2023 elections.

Although Nigerians, as citizens worldwide, often call for a strong leader to unite and develop their country, they love democracy because of the painful history of Nigerian military dictatorship. After four decades of trials and troubles, Nigeria presents itself today as one of the most powerful established democracies in Africa. This raises legitimate hopes for a peaceful electoral process.

2.3 The impact of business on Nigerian elections

Cartoon 5: *vote rigging - politics in Nairaland*



Source: © [Bennett Omeke, The Punch](#), Lagos, 2018 ⁶

Elections in almost any democratic regime worldwide are governed by money if only to finance the costly election campaigns. Nevertheless, African countries like Nigeria are a special case, because presidential candidates and state governors often consider the investment in the electoral process only as start-up capital for scrupulous personal enrichment by embezzlement of state funds and corruption and money laundering during their tenure, and transferring the money to private overseas accounts. This was material to over 45 years of wasted development chances during the existence of independent Nigeria (Markovska & Adams, 2015; Sule & Tal, 2018).

Although [Sani Abacha](#), the most notorious culprit in this respect (FATF, 2011) was still a military dictator who seized power in the [last successful coup d'etat](#) in [Nigerian military history](#), this does not mean that this practice has not continued under democratic governments ⁷. Despite the efforts made to combat money laundering in Nigeria embezzlement and

⁶ Punch cartoon about [Ekiti Governorship Election 2018](#). -© [Politics – Nairaland](#)

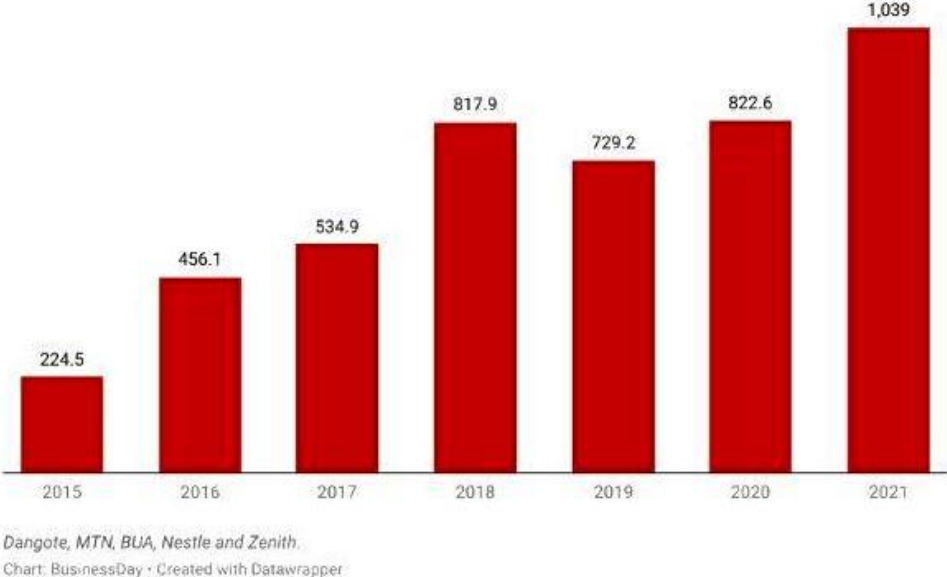
⁷ According to a USA Senate report of 2011, Sani Abacha's wife and their son were stopped at Lagos airport immediately after the death of her husband in 1998, with 38 suitcases full of cash, and the son with USD 100 million in cash (Markovska & Adams, 2015).

corruption are still deeply rooted. One reason is that politicians are protected by the immunity clause provided by the [Nigerian constitution](#) (Section 308(1) and (2) of the 1999 Constitution) which provides enough time for political officeholders to clear up their acts while in office. This holds both for the formal sector of the routine business of politicians and their informal power based on illegal transactions in the informal sector, for example by participating in the gains of transnational crime (Markovska & Adams, 2015).

Also, a recent cross-sectional study on the impact of venality during the [Fourth Nigerian Republic](#) (1999-2015) found that a lot of money was used in general elections, giving an undue advantage to politicians who had the means to buy their way into office. Competing political elites, parties and godfathers desperately tried to secure victory for wealth accumulation and to win at all costs, including vote buying, rigging of elections, political thuggery, election malpractices, and poor service delivery in office by political office holders (Sule & Tal, 2018; Sule & Sani & Mat, 2018).

The outcome of the presidential elections even impacted the [Nigerian stock market](#). Thus, the stock market’s reaction to the [2011 Presidential election](#) was negative, probably because of the unwelcome election results for business and the uncertainty surrounding it. The election campaign was shadowed by the controversy of whether a Northerner or Southerner should become president, given the tradition of rotating the top office between the north and the south. [Goodluck Jonathan](#), a Christian from the [Niger Delta](#) finally won the elections on 19 April 2011 which caused widespread [post-electoral violence in the northern, Muslim parts of the country](#). The 2015 Presidential elections, on the contrary, had a positive impact on the stock market probably because business welcomed the change in leadership from the Peoples Democratic Party ([PDP](#)) to All Progressives Congress ([APC](#)) (Osuala & Onoh & Nwansi, 2018).

Graph 5: slow reforms hurt stocks
Combined profits of Nigeria’s top 5 firms (in Naira, billion) ⁸



Source: Akinmurele, 2022

⁸ “The flat performance in the share prices of these big firms despite surging profits is due to the slow pace of economic reforms in Africa’s largest economy.” (Akinmurele, 2022).

An outstanding example of the close relationship between politics and business in Nigeria is the case of [Aliko Dangote](#), Africa's richest businessman, and the richest black person in the world. He is a descendant of the influential family of Alhaji Alhassan Dantata (1877-1955) from Kano, which was considered the richest African merchant family of the colonial era (Gelin, 2017). Aminu Dantata was closely associated with President Shehu Shagari and took advantage of Nigeria's indigenisation policy of the 1970s. He acquired shares in several companies. Already Sanussi Dantata, Aliko Dangote's grandfather, was a director of [Shell-Nigeria](#) and the Palm Line Agency, a subsidiary of the United Africa Company of Nigeria [UAC](#) in the 1960s. Also politically active, he headed the [Kano](#) State chapter of the influential Northern People's Congress ([NPC](#)) (Gelin, 2017). His grandson, Aliko Dangote, was compared already by the [Los Angeles Times](#) to the [Russian oligarchs](#) of the 1990s because he systematically built his fortune by exploiting his political connections to take over public companies when they were privatised in the early 2000s (Keating, 2012). Moreover, Dangote contributed US\$ 1.5 m to President [Olusegun Obasanjo](#)'s 2003 re-election campaign and spent millions of dollars to support subsequent Presidents [Umaru Musa Yar'Adua](#) and [Goodluck Jonathan](#). Dangote's cosy relationship with Nigeria's political elite has been seen as highly controversial, despite his generous philanthropy, including funding millions of dollars for education, health, and social projects in several countries (Keating, 2012). However, contrary to the similar controversial ethical discourse on the close links between South Africa's former President [Jacob Zuma](#) and the [Gupta family](#), Dangote's involvement in Nigerian politics has not been seen as a type of state capture (Adetayo, 2020).

Cartoon 6: Alhaji Aliko Dangote

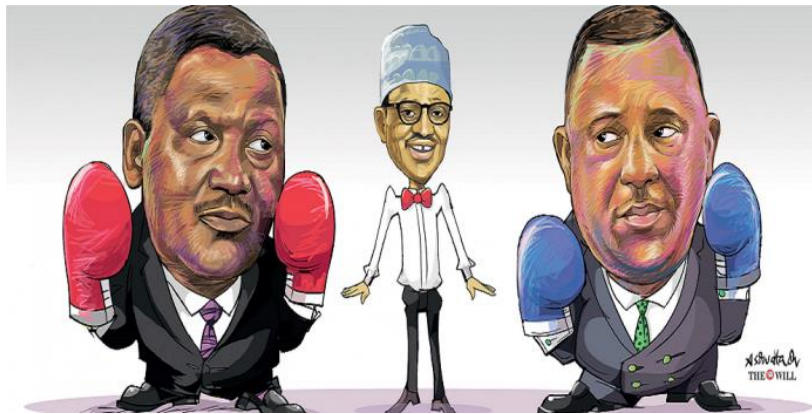


Source: © [New Bulama's cartoons](#), 26 August 2020⁹

Dangote was at odds with his rival business tycoon [Abdul Samad Rabiu](#). Both are descendants of parents of [Kano state](#) who were also successful businessmen. As fierce competitors, they try to outmanoeuvre and outsmart each other to dominate the promising markets in Nigeria and across Africa (The Will, 2021).

⁹ "When a Nigerian wants to intimidate you ...", cartoon by Nigeria's award-winning cartoonist, © [Mustapha Bulama](#) on Facebook.

Cartoon 7: ‘War of the billionaires: Dangote vs Rabi: Rivalry without end’



Source: © *The Will*, 13 June 2021

Interestingly enough, also the trader and businessman [Peter Obi](#), the newcomer among the presidential candidates, heralded by national and international media, as a promising candidate for the Nigerian youth (although he too is over 60 years old) is a billionaire. He invested in nearly everything from banking to a brewery at home and abroad. In 2021, the [Pandora Papers](#) revealed that he owned business entities registered in tax havens, including the British Virgin Islands, and had failed to declare them to Nigeria’s asset registry for politicians (Adeoye, 2022; Bolaji, 2023). The offshore company in the British Virgin Islands was formally managed by his daughter and ran a foreign bank account to avoid tax payments (Ojonugwa, 2023).

Cartoon 8: shady biography of three major presidential candidates ?
‘Obi, Tinubu & Atiku: Allegations of corruption, trafficking, tax evasion’



Source: © *The Will*, 29 January 2023; Ojonugwa, 2023

2.4 Impact of conspiracy theories and ideologies of the 'deep state'?¹⁰

Cartoon 9: Nigerian politicians would join the devil to win elections ¹¹



Source: © Mike Asukwo, 2019

The official campaign period for the [2023 Nigerian presidential election](#) began at the end of September 2022 with the signing of a peace accord in [Abuja](#) by nearly all candidates along with the parties' national chairmen. However, the elections were hotly contested, and it was assumed by many voters that almost every contender would be willing to join even the 'devil' if that would help to win. Elections in Nigeria are highly controversial because the country is plagued by long-standing problems of regionalism, ethnicity and religious divide. Moreover, cultural diversity, political instability, corruption and nepotism reduced economic growth, despite its wealth in natural resources, notably oil from the Niger delta (Ahmad & Uddin & Shah, 2022). It is against this background that [QAnon](#) and other conspiracy ideologies could gain credibility in the population as shown by the following succinct analysis.

In early 2020 [QAnon](#) promoters began to focus also on [media](#) in [Nigeria](#), with nearly [280 million people](#), by far Africa's most populous nation and the world's biggest Black society. They sent e-mails portraying U.S. Democrats as anti-Black to multiple newsrooms and individual journalists, including journalists of [Cool FM](#), [Wazobia FM](#) and [Nigeria Info FM](#), the countries' three biggest private radio stations. The emails also slandered presidential candidate [Joe Biden](#), alleging he disrespected blacks and was protected by [paedophiles](#) (Obaji, 2020). The smear campaigns also showed that [QAnon](#) supporters were desperately looking to draw Africans into their movement. They tried to convince Nigerians to join their campaign by referring to a report by the [African Child Policy Forum](#), published in November 2019, which found that Africa was experiencing an increase in child sexual exploitation, including 'tourism marriages' between young girls and male tourists in [North Africa](#) and the online recruitment of young girls in [West Africa](#) 'into pornographic films and bestiality'. Many Nigerians were worried that the defamation campaign could impact negatively the country's

¹⁰ The following chapter is an excerpt from another recent publication of the author: Kohnert, Dirk (2023): [QAnon and other conspiracy ideologies' impact on Sub-Saharan Africa in the age of Global Capitalism](#). MPRA WP No. 15917

¹¹ © Nigerian cartoonist Etim Bassey Asukwo, pen name [Mike Asukwo](#), or "[Basati](#)". He is an internationally renowned artist and Chief Editorial Artist with [Business Day](#) from Lagos. © (all rights reserved) – Source of cartoon: Jimoh, Ganiyu A. (2019): [Masked in Metaphors: Counter-Narratives in the Works of Nigerian Cartoonist Mike Asukwo](#). *African Arts*, vol. 52(2), pp. 32-39

reputation because people might start attributing Nigeria's problems to the [U.S. Democrats](#) (Obaji, 2020).

Similar conspiracy ideologies spread all the more so as [Nigeria](#) has long been considered an African stronghold of [ritual killings](#). They were said to show the mounting despair of Nigerians because of mounting inequality and the run for personal wealth and security amid the creeping collapse of law and order. In 2017, the criminal ritual gang of [herbalists](#), the *Badoo Boys*, spread terror across [Lagos State](#), the country's commercial capital, by crushing the skulls of its victims. Allegedly, at least one suspect confessed that desperate politicians paid as much as US\$ 1,000 for a handkerchief soaked with the blood of the murdered person for ritual purposes (Obadare, 2022). In February 2022, [Nigeria's House of Representatives](#) urged the [federal government of Nigeria](#) to declare a state of emergency on the rising incidence of ritual killings in the country (Obadare, 2022). Between 5 January and 28 December 2021, the statistics of ritual-related deaths generated from *Nigeria Watch* and [WANEP's](#) National Early Warning System (NEWS) showed a total of over 168 ritual murders in 80 incidents across 20 States in Nigeria (WANEP, 2022). The [Nigerian police force](#) confirmed that there were at least three murders a week in Nigeria as a result of [human sacrifices](#) (Campbell & Roberts & Sarkaria, 2020). Allegedly, members of the [Nigerian political elite](#) regularly visit shrines to swear oaths, ask for a deity's blessing, or seek 'spiritual defence' against their political adversaries. In 2004, police discovered dozens of corpses at a [shrine in Okija](#) in the [Ihiala](#) Local Government Area of the southeastern [state of Anambra](#), where many of the state's senior politicians had also sworn oaths (Obadare, 2022). The [Okija-shrine](#) was only the tip of the iceberg. Many Western-educated Nigerians considered the continued existence and strength of the country's traditional and informal social control systems as a repulsive contradiction to the country's quest to become a 'modern' state with [good governance](#). However, the terms 'shrine' or 'secret cult' carries quasi-automatically a diabolical meaning of [paganism](#) for those who advocated good governance and the [rule of law](#). Yet, there is strong evidence that [Okija](#) and similar secret cults remained very popular among Nigerians, irrespective of their [religion](#), [social status](#) and [level of education](#), and honoured and feared at the same time (Kohnert, 2007).

This aroused international attention when on 21 September 2001 the mutilated corpse of a young boy called 'Adam', apparently a victim of [ritual murder](#), was found on the banks of the [River Thames](#) in London. [Scotland Yard](#) which investigated the crime showed a stunning exhibition of what scientific method can now achieve in tracing back the origin of the body to [Yorubaland, South Western Nigeria](#). Nevertheless, police and media interpretations of African occultism revealed persistent ignorance, scepticism, and naivety. They reproduced all the massive deeply-rooted European prejudices on African culture and religion, cherished for generations on the [Dark continent](#) and [African Otherness](#) (Sanders, 2003). Twenty years later, in 2021, BBC journalists tried to disclose the secret of the still unsolved case. They found that the boy and his mother were refugees who had lived in [Hamburg](#), Germany until late 2001 before moving to [London](#) where they had overhanded the boy to a notorious Nigerian [human trafficker](#) (Crawfordn& Smith (2021). An anthropologic analysis of the case revealed all possible fallacies of [homogenisation](#), [presumed identity](#) and the impact of [globalisation](#) usually related to the unsettling story of [African Otherness](#) (Sanders, 2003; Ranger, 2007).

2.5 Likelihood of coup attempts

In early February, shortly before leaving office, incumbent President [Muhammadu Buhari](#) renewed his call to foreign powers not to interfere in Nigeria's internal affairs. According to the Acting Director of Defence Information, Tukur Gusau, a brigadier general, 'unscrupulous elements' had spread these rumours claiming that some military officers had met with a presidential candidate to disrupt the general elections and set the country on fire (Premium Times, 2023). Allegedly, an official from the [APC](#) said that generals had held a secret meeting with the rival [PDP](#) presidential candidate [Atiku Abubakar](#) (Ewokor, 2023). Although the claims were largely ignored by the public, violent unrest in the aftermath of the elections could not be excluded. This, the more so because the political atmosphere was already extremely tense because of the high level of insecurity, mounting inflation and unemployment, fuel scarcity, the shortage of new banknotes and the prevailing socio-economic deprivation.

Current economic growth is clearly insufficient to significantly reduce the country's high poverty and unemployment rates. Based on [China's](#) example, Nigeria's economy would need to grow at least 8 % - 10 % annually to reduce the poverty rate to single digits (Onyeiwu, 2023). Especially the Nigerian youths demand that the next president would fix these issues. Already during the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) they were involved in politics, reinforced by social media (Olabanjo, et al., 2022), at a rate never seen before, despite brutal repression of the protests by the police. Therefore, political [augurs](#) already cautioned that the new president should get his economic policies right or risk an implosion like that of the [Arab Spring](#) (Onyeiwu, 2023). However, given the strength of the Nigerian army on the one side, and the growing menace of Islamist terrorism on the other, this scenario is unlikely to happen. Yet, potential coup leaders within the army might use close relations with [Moscow](#) and try to establish a similar regime as in Mali after the [2021 coup d'état](#) assisted by Russian mercenaries of the [Wagner group](#) since September 2021 (Grewal & Kureshi, 2018).

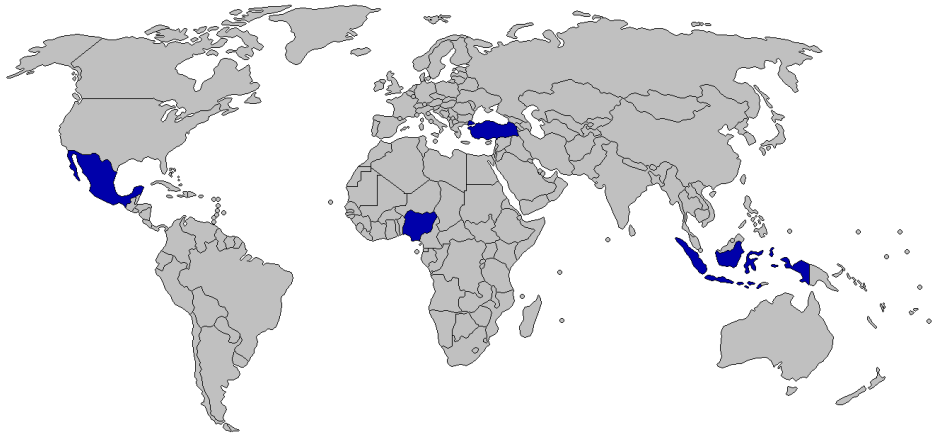
3. Implications of Nigeria's 2023 Presidentials on regional cooperation

Nigeria is a political and economic heavyweight trying to consolidate its strategic interest as a regional power both at the African and the global level since independence, suspiciously observed by its neighbours from [Francophone Africa](#), first and foremost [Côte d'Ivoire](#). [Abuja](#) already clearly showed its interest to join the five [BRICS](#) countries (Alao, 2011), to complement its established ties with the [MINT](#) economies of [Mexico](#), [Indonesia](#), [Nigeria](#), and [Turkey](#) since 2014. The latter were praised by investment bankers who coined the term because of their very favourable demographics for at least the next 20 years, and their interesting economic prospects. Yet, contrary to popular belief, it is not the availability of natural resources and the institutional quality of member countries, but market size, availability of infrastructure and openness of trade that play the most important role in attracting FDI to BRICS and MINT member countries (Asongu & Akpan & Isihak, 2018).

Nigeria consolidated its role as a regional hegemon in West Africa by establishing the [ECOWAS](#) in 1975 (Kwaja, 2023). [Paris](#) and [Francophone West Africa](#) followed suit in founding the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU / [UEMOA](#)) in 1994 (Kohnert, 2019). The ECOWAS is also an important player in the region's peace and security framework (Byiers & Dièye, 2022). Thus, led by Nigeria, ECOWAS troops were repeatedly involved in the settlement of civil wars, for example in [Liberia](#) and [Sierra Leone](#) in the 1990s and to sanction or prevent coup attempts, e.g. in [Guinea-Bissau](#). Nigeria was the largest troop

contributor and chief financier of the multilateral armed force missions of the [ECOMOG](#) established by ECOWAS for security and appeasement missions in West Africa (Rashid, 2013).

Graph 6: Map of the four [MINT](#) countries [Mexico](#), [Indonesia](#), [Nigeria](#), and [Turkey](#)



Source: [MINT](#)-countries, [Wikimedia](#)

Since 2012, the then Nigerian President [Goodluck Jonathan](#) began to lead mediation efforts with Mali's military within the ECOWAS framework. This support continued up to the [2021 Malian coup](#). On 31 May 2021, ECOWAS suspended Mali until the end of February 2022, provided the new leader in Bamako, Colonel [Assimi Goïta](#) would keep his promise to hand control to a democratically-elected government. However, this time ECOWAS did not impose sanctions on the Malian government, as it had done after the [2020 coup](#) (AFP, 2021).

Since [Emmanuel Macron's](#) visit to [Abjua](#) in 2018, the first state visit by a French President to Nigeria, the rapprochement between [France](#) and Nigeria opened up new perspectives for foreign trade and foreign policy in the region, including the outdated rivalry between ECOWAS and UEMOA. This would be all the more true if [Peter Obi](#), considered by some to be the 'Nigerian Macron', should gain a genuine success during the 2023 presidential election. At a time of heightened distrust of France in [West Africa](#), such a scenario would be the opportunity to reshuffle the cards of [Paris'](#) strategy on a regional scale (Fasquelle, 2023). This opportunity should be all the more promising regarding the impact of the [Russian aggression in Ukraine](#) and its implications for the global energy market. The oil- and gas-rich Nigeria could transform into a key strategic partner for the energy transition in the [EU](#), and the Franco-Nigerian relationship is at its heart (McLorrain, 2022). Nigeria is already France's largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa. France accounted for nearly € 10 bn of [FDI](#) in Nigeria in 2019, as well as € 5 bn in annual trade. In addition, Paris provided military support in the context of antiterrorism operations at the northern frontiers of Nigeria (McLorrain, 2022).

However, the dubious position of France in the question of abandoning the post-colonial [F CFA](#), and the precipitated adoption of the new common West African [eco](#) in the WAEMU ([UEMOA](#)), gave rise to the suspicion that [Paris](#) could continue to undermine the long-lasting ambitions of [WAMZ](#) member states with its [divide-and-rule](#) policy to upkeep its *chasse gardée* of the infamous [Françafrique](#) patronage network. In June 2021 the [ECOWAS](#) announced 2027 as the new date to launch the [eco](#) (Kohnert, 2022). Furthermore, France-Africa relations were tainted by neo-colonial arrogance and the gloomy history of heavy

military losses in counter-insurgency against [Islamist terrorism in the Sahel](#) and its most damning failure to stem the [Rwanda genocide](#) in 1994 (Melly, 2021).

Finally, a growing number of young Africans regarded the [ECOWAS](#) as a club of incumbent presidents, too weak and too sluggish to criticize civilian leaders who manipulate democratic rules and, on the other hand, unwilling to acknowledge the strength of popular support for military leaders who promise reform. Thus, by supporting ECOWAS as a legitimate African crisis management institution, France runs the risk of being perceived as supporting mainly the old guard of the political and economic establishment (Melly, 2021).

3 Conclusion

The outcome of Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections could shape politics across Africa, including neighbouring West African countries, like [Benin](#) and [Togo](#) (Kohnert & Preuss, 2019), where regular sham elections are not delivering the kind of leadership, accountability, and service delivery that citizens would like to see (Gavin, 2023). Moreover, growing insecurity in times of pre-election could increase voter fatigue and cynicism in other African countries also affected by security challenges, like in the [DR-Congo](#) and such a diverse array of countries like [Malawi](#), [Botswana](#), [Ghana](#), [Sierra Leone](#), and [Kenya](#) (Jenkins, 2021). Incumbent regimes often deliberately constructed, fostered, fuelled, and exacerbated the sense of threat and insecurity to legitimise their tactics to skew the electoral playing field. Militarization of the electoral process could serve the same objective. Even the language of security and the politics of fear are themselves becoming important tools for autocrats to influence the electoral outcome to gain an advantage in the polls (Jenkins, 2021).

On the other hand, the growth of [social media](#) (Kohnert, 2022a) and the appeal of politicians like [Peter Obi](#) to the Nigerian youth and social movements of the youth, in general, could exert spread effects beyond Nigeria and trigger new enthusiasm for political participation, drawing inspiration from [Zambia's](#) youth-driven democratic transfer of power in 2021 (Gavin, 2023). The emergence of a strong [third party](#) in Nigeria's 2023 election presents a unique example, focussing on personalities rather than parties or regional and ethnic affiliation, for the growth of democracy all over [Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (Hassan, 2023).

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Résumé : [*Les conséquences des élections présidentielles de 2023 au Nigeria et son impact sur la sous-région*] - Des élections présidentielles ont eu lieu au Nigeria le 25 février 2023. Le candidat du parti au pouvoir, le All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a remporté l'élection. Il était connu comme un « parrain » politique dans le Sud-ouest. Son principal concurrent, Atiku Abubakar, 76 ans, candidat du principal parti d'opposition, le Parti démocratique populaire (PDP), a perdu, ainsi que le troisième, Peter Obi, 61 ans, candidat du parti travailliste peu connu. Il avait espéré briser le système bipartite qui dirigeait le pays depuis la fin du régime militaire. Mais il a échoué malgré un soutien passionné sur les réseaux sociaux, en particulier parmi la jeunesse nigériane. Le président par intérim Buhari, dont le mandat est terminé, avait renouvelé son appel aux puissances étrangères pour qu'elles ne s'immiscent pas dans les affaires intérieures du Nigeria. Compte tenu de l'histoire récente des coups d'État militaires en Afrique de l'Ouest, y compris l'implication de la Russie, le commandement militaire a de nouveau rejeté les rumeurs de coup d'État. Cependant, ces derniers étaient de toute façon largement ignorés du grand public. La plupart des gens se sont concentrés sur des préoccupations plus urgentes telles que l'insécurité, les pénuries de carburant et la pénurie de nouveaux billets. Bien que le Nigeria soit un pays riche en ressources et que les revenus du pétrole et du gaz aient financé les budgets nationaux pendant des décennies, environ 40 % des Nigériens (83 millions de personnes) vivent en dessous du seuil de pauvreté tandis que 25 % (53 millions) sont à risque. Jusqu'à présent, le Nigeria n'a pas pu profiter de la hausse des prix mondiaux du pétrole. La production de pétrole est tombée à des niveaux historiquement bas depuis 2021. Les subventions à l'essence continuent de consommer trop de revenus pétroliers. Les perspectives de croissance du Nigeria sont sombres en raison de nouvelles baisses de la production pétrolière et d'une incertitude accrue. Le nouveau président doit coopérer étroitement avec la CEDEAO pour lutter contre la violence des gangs et l'insécurité dans la région de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. La coopération documente le rôle du Nigeria en tant qu'hégémon politique, économique et de sécurité en Afrique de l'Ouest, souvent qualifié de "trop grand pour échouer", car il s'agit de loin de la nation la plus grande et la plus puissante d'Afrique subsaharienne aux côtés de l'Afrique du Sud..

Zusammenfassung : [*Die Folgen der Präsidentschaftswahlen in Nigeria 2023 und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Subregion*] - Am 25. Februar 2023 fanden in Nigeria Präsidentschaftswahlen statt. Der Kandidat der nigerianischen Regierungspartei All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Ahmed Tinubu, gewann die Wahl. Er war im Südwesten als politischer „Pate“ bekannt. Sein größter Konkurrent, Atiku Abubakar, 76, der im Namen der größten oppositionellen People's Democratic Party (PDP) kandidiert, verlor ebenso wie der dritte, Peter Obi, 61, ein Kandidat der wenig bekannten Labour Party. Er hatte gehofft, das Zweiparteiensystem zu durchbrechen, das das Land seit dem Ende der Militärherrschaft regierte. Aber er scheiterte, obwohl er in den sozialen Medien leidenschaftliche Unterstützung genoss, insbesondere unter der nigerianischen Jugend. Der amtierende Präsident Buhari, dessen Amtszeit abgelaufen ist, hatte seinen Aufruf an ausländische Mächte erneuert, sich nicht in die inneren Angelegenheiten Nigerias einzumischen. Angesichts der jüngsten Geschichte von Militärputschen in Westafrika, einschließlich der Beteiligung Russlands, wies das Militärkommando Putschgerüchte erneut zurück. Letztere wurden jedoch von der breiten Öffentlichkeit ohnehin weitgehend ignoriert. Die meisten Menschen konzentrierten sich auf dringendere Probleme wie Unsicherheit, Kraftstoffknappheit und einen Mangel an neuen Banknoten. Obwohl Nigeria ein rohstoffreiches Land ist und Öl- und Gaseinnahmen seit Jahrzehnten die Staatshaushalte finanzieren, leben rund 40 % der Nigerianer (83 Millionen Menschen) unterhalb der Armutsgrenze, während weitere 25 % (53 Millionen) gefährdet sind. Bisher konnte Nigeria nicht von steigenden globalen Ölpreisen profitieren. Die Ölförderung ist seit 2021 auf historische Tiefststände gefallen. Benzinsubventionen verschlingen weiterhin zu viele Öleinnahmen. Nigerias Wachstumsaussichten sind aufgrund weiterer Rückgänge der Ölförderung und erhöhter Unsicherheit düster. Der neue Präsident muss eng mit der ECOWAS zusammenarbeiten, um Bandengewalt und Unsicherheit in der westafrikanischen Region zu bekämpfen. Diese Kooperation dokumentiert Nigerias Rolle als politischer, wirtschaftlicher und sicherheitspolitischer Hegemon in Westafrika, der oft als „too big to fail“ bezeichnet wird, da Nigeria neben Südafrika die mit Abstand größte und mächtigste Nation in Subsahara-Afrika ist.