

TWISTS AND TURNS IN THE 2015 NIGERIAN ELECTION: THE POSTPONEMENT SCENARIOS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

On February 14, 2015 an estimated 68.8 million Nigerians were expected to go to the polls to cast their vote in the federal election that includes electing the President. However, on February 8, 2015 a week to the elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) through its Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega announced a postponement after series of consultations with a wide range of

scheduled. Although INEC has stated its readiness to conduct free, fair and credible elections despite the allegations and widely reported non-collection of permanent voters card by over 30% of the registered population.

The postponement of the elections came after the National Council of States meeting and followed on reports by the National Security Adviser (NSA) that security will not be guaranteed on February 14 because of the intensified

operation against Islamist rebels in the northeast.¹ According to the National Security Adviser, Colonel Dasuki Sambio, security services require at least 6 weeks to conclude a major military operation against the Boko Haram insurgents in the region. In light of this, the Electoral Commission extended the deadline for the collection of the

Permanent Voters Card (PVC) to March 8, 2015 to enable all registered voters collect their PVC in readiness for the elections.

2.0 TWISTS AND TURNS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

The rescheduled elections have come under heavy criticisms by Nigerians and the international community given the enormous human, financial and material resources already committed towards the conduct of the elections. The criticism was on the possible political undertone of the postponement, a position expressed by eleven political parties allied together under Coalition of Progressives Political Parties who expressed disappointment with the decision by INEC to reschedule the general elections by six weeks. The main opposition party All Progressive Congress (APC) also condemned the shift but however called upon its supporters to remain calm. On one hand, some have argued that given the threats posed by Boko Haram, the postponement is a logical decision. Proponents of this thought holds that were elections to hold in the northeast and are inconclusive; the nation and INEC would have to deal with the issues of credibility, which could also pose a real challenge for the country. While the critics of the postponement argued that the postponement lacks basis because the military have been unable



Jega postpones elections
Source: www.vanguardngr.com

stakeholders including the leaders of political parties and other civil society groups on grounds of inadequate security to guarantee the protection of citizens if the election were to hold as

¹ <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/02/election-postponement-us-deeply-disappointed-kerry/#sthash.OEMksOPo.dpuf>

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

to combat insurgency in the North east in six-years hence a plan to combat it in six-weeks is unrealistic. This is further compounded by fears that the elections may not hold on March 28, 2015 as scheduled because the security agencies might not be able to guarantee the security of personnel and voting materials.

Protests and Demonstrations: Prior to the announcement by INEC on February 7, some groups had staged a protest march to the INEC Secretariat in an attempt to stop the Electoral Commission from postponing the elections but were stopped by security agents. However, since the pronouncement, there have been series of protests including that organised by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), who marched to the Governor's office in Lagos to express their grievances against the postponement. The group alleges that the postponement has political undertones and has threatened to hold a 'mock' election on Saturday, February 14, urging all students to come out en masse to vote. The results of the elections, they say, will be made public. This is a worrisome development which may turn violent should the military attempt to stop them and the students try to resist.

Ruling Party versus Opposition Party: The President has appealed to all stakeholders to accept the postponement in good faith reaffirming his commitment to the sanctity of May 29 as the terminal date of his term in office. The Ruling Party has also tried to convince Nigerians that the postponement "is in the interest of deepening democracy and national interest and not intended to favor the People's Democratic Party (PDP)", and commended INEC for the courage and obvious commitment to ensure a free and fair election. The opposition on the other hand is alleging that the ruling party instigated the postponement as a plot to rig the elections. Muhammad Buhari, the opposition presidential flag bearer of the All Progressive Congress

(APC) has reiterated the sentiments of some Nigerians that it is unlikely for a 6-year insurgency to be defeated in 6-weeks. The APC flag bearer has warned that should the elections be further postponed, the polls could result in "a civilian and military coup". The party also described the postponement as "highly provocative" and a "major setback for democracy"² and appealed for calm from its supporters. The situation has created a major division in the national assembly. While APC members are accusing INEC of being manipulated by the presidency; PDP members have applauded INEC for doing the right thing and stopping the country from plunging into chaos.

International Interest and Influence: Noting the concerns and disappointments of Nigerians, the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS has called on all stakeholders to respect the postponement of the general elections and appealed for calm. The regional bloc also urged security services to remain dedicated to the restoration of normalcy in the north-east zone and encouraged INEC to ensure adequate distribution of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) in order to ensure free, fair and credible elections. However, the United States and Great Britain have criticized the postponement. In a recent statement, US Secretary of State John Kerry said that political interference with INEC is unacceptable and urged the Government to desist from using security concerns as a ploy for impeding Nigeria's democratic process.

Electoral Umpire's Exit Strategy: Another significant twist in the process concerns the end of tenure for the chair of INEC, Professor Attahiru Jega. Constitutionally, Professor Jega's tenure ends on June 13, 2015 and as such; he is

expected to proceed on 3 months terminal leave by or around March 1 in compliance with civil service regulations. This development is



Citizens Collecting PVC
Source: thenationonlineng.net

already generating a growing sense of disappointment in some quarters who blame Professor Jega for shoddy preparations for the election given that about 23 million of the estimated 68.3 million registered voters are yet to collect their PVC.

A civil society group, Transition Resurgent Group (TRG) echoed these sentiments stating that Jega "lacks the capacity to right the wrongs he created due to his large ego or pure mischief"³. Other stakeholders including the Coalition of Progressive Political Parties have alleged that the presidency is orchestrating a plot to replace Jega with a less-independent minded person who will pave the way for them to win the elections 'at all cost'. The Coalition has threatened to frustrate any attempt to stop Jega from conducting the elections, stating that should Jega be removed, they would be convinced that the ruling party engineered the postponement of the elections.

² www.news24.com.ng

³ Okoro Chinedu, 2015, "Group piles more pressure on under-fire Jega, INEC" available at www.news24.com.ng/Elections

3.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE, SECURITY AND STABILITY

The rescheduled election is a source of great apprehension to many stakeholders and has somewhat led to mass exodus of people from their places of residence to their states of origin in anticipation of an outbreak of violence. More worrisome is the fact that if elections are not conducted on the new dates on grounds of the military inability to restore normalcy in the north, there could be significant unrest, a situation that may plunge the country into chaos.

Another implication of the postponement is the growing lack of confidence in INEC by the citizenry, who feel that the eventual outcome of the elections may be manipulated. The situation has greatly undermined the independence of INEC and the possibility of conducting credible and transparent elections in March and April respectively. Another critical issue is the financial implications of the postponement to the international community including ECOWAS and AU, given the enormous resources they have committed to the deployment of long-term and short-term observation missions to monitor the elections.

The postponement and the diverse reactions have further exacerbated the economic situation in the country particularly on the business front. The Naira is at an all-time low against the dollar and stocks have continued to decline as investors react to the news of the postponement. Many investors are postponing any investments in the country till March on the understanding that with the elections over in February, the uncertainty would have given way to a form of fluid certainty by March. This has given impetus to build the following scenarios:

Best Case Scenario

- *INEC* leverages on the postponement of the election and

ensure that more eligible voters collect their Permanent Voters Card; INEC continues the process of voter education and training of INEC ad hoc staff towards ensuring increased synergy between them and all major stakeholders including political parties, security operatives, international observers and CSOs; International observers remain committed to monitoring the electoral process; elections are held in atmosphere of transparency, adjudged credible, free and fair with all parties accepting its outcome. A government is inaugurated on May 29th and Nigeria demonstrate its leadership in the region through a widely acceptable election and democratic process (*less likely*)

- *The* military on-slaught on the Boko Haram insurgents yield results and there is relative peace in the country especially, the north-eastern part leading to the conviction that elections can hold across the country; International organs including the UN, AU and ECOWAS continue engagement with the political actors; an agreement is reached to allow INEC perform its statutory function without pressure or influence from any of the political parties; INEC commits to the conduct of a credible and transparent election in

construes the military pronouncement of 'flushing them out' as an affront, increases their attack and making the entire north-east ungovernable; the accusations and counter-accusations between the ruling party and main opposition regarding the postponement of the election degenerates into polarization along regional, religious and ethnic lines; the credibility of the election is put to question and any move by the election management body is viewed from a biased perspective among the key actors. The conduct of the election is further made difficult by the security situation providing the grounds for the current administration to seek a 6-month interim arrangement; the public is inflamed by this request and demonstrations and violence erupts in various parts of the country (*likely*)

- *The* INEC Chair, Professor Attahiru Jega whose tenure is originally ending in June 2015 is disgusted with the influence and pressure from major political parties and decides to proceed on terminal leave ahead of the scheduled election date; political actors view the decision of the INEC Chair as orchestrated by the ruling party to appoint a more 'loyal' INEC Chair and subsequently rig the election; protests of different sorts and from different parts of the country provide impetus for the postponement of the election; this move is vehemently opposed by opposition political parties in some parts of the country leading to total breakdown of law and order (*Very likely*)



Peace Accord
Source: ng.undp.org

line with international standards; Political actors maintain their steadfastness to violence-free elections as contained in the January 2015 Peace Accord⁴ signed in Abuja (*less likely*)

Worst Case Scenario

- *The* Boko Haram insurgents

• *The* rumors that began before the postponement of the election that the postponement is merely the first phase in an elaborate attempt to prevent some candidates from contesting the presidential elections continues to influence the opposition and some quarters of the country; proliferation of arms that is already rampant in some parts of the country due to the activities of militants and insurgents is further

⁴ 14 Presidential candidates signed a Peace Accord in Abuja on January 15 to ensure free and fair polls as well as run issue-based campaigns for the forthcoming general elections in the country.

mobilized and raises the likelihood of violence. Any pronouncement that is not in tandem with the expectations of the opposition sparks uncontrolled violence in various sections of the country (*likely*)

Realistic Case Scenario

- **Amidst** various speculations and uncertainties, the current dates of the election are maintained; the presidential election goes through the first round with no clear winner emerging; pockets of violence with accusations and counter-accusations from the ruling and opposition parties is witnessed and controlled; the re-run date is announced, providing opportunity for the international community and eminent citizens to prevail on the likely loser to accept the result in the interest of the country (*Very likely*)

- **INEC** ad hoc officials reject posting to some of the north-eastern states as insecurity continues leading to elections not holding in those states; citizens cry out for what they consider massive disenfranchisement; former-Heads of States are called in to form a transition committee and set a transition timetable that excludes both the current President and the candidate of the main opposition; the current President and all other candidates remain contestants in a new date to be decided by the transition committee; tensions associated with incumbency power is reduced during the election and the election is held in June amidst tight security; a winner emerges and the loser heads to court to challenge the process and outcome (*likely*)

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The institution of a Special Eminent

Persons Forum: Taking a clue from Ghana and other countries where respectable citizens have brokered peace between political divides, an Eminent Persons Forum comprising of religious leaders, non-controversial business moguls, apolitical past Presidents, ECOWAS leadership, representative of the Chair of African Union and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to West Africa should be immediately constituted. Their role will among others be to continually engage the key political actors and ensure they live by the Abuja accord wherein they committed to peaceful and nonviolent elections.

Coordination of Information: As was the case with the Ebola outbreak in Nigeria, a coordinated information mechanism should be established that regulates the utterances of politicians, minimizes rumor, and builds confidence among citizens and political actors on the electoral process. The coordination center should include the spokes persons of each of the political parties, the public relations office of INEC, ECOWAS Communication department, Nigeria's National Orientation Agency and representatives of CSOs and should be a source of regular and authentic information for the media and the general public regarding the electoral process.

Security Confidence: The security agents need to work collectively and collaboratively to ensure that they continually have the confidence of the electorates. All information originating from the security agents has to be conflict-sensitive. In this regard, the Inter Security Committee already working with INEC should be expanded to include key peace and security experts from the CSOs and academia as well as the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate.

Resourcing of the INEC ADR Unit: The ADR unit of INEC should be resourced and supported. The ECOWAS Political

Affairs Directorate should be incorporated into the ADR unit and CSOs with expertise in dialogue and mediation seconded to the unit. Political parties' grievances on the conduct of the electoral process should be channeled to the unit. The unit should work closely with the eminent persons to ensure that impasse on any issue is immediately channeled to the eminent persons.

Detailed Implementation Plan and the New Dates for the Election:

Efforts should be made to ensure that the new dates of the election are not tampered with. Logistical hitches should be effectively tackled with support of the international community. In addition, INEC should provide short-term milestones on weekly basis and introduce monitoring and feedback mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholders are carried along.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The evolving political situation in Nigeria raises a lot of concerns regarding a peaceful transition process and the stability of the country with implication on the region. The 'winner takes all' electoral system raises the stakes for contestants to find ways and means to win elections at all cost, particularly the presidential election. The relationship between the main political parties is strained and has in several instances led to politically-

motivated violence, as manifested in the recent incidents in several parts of the country. This situation poses very serious threats to the peaceful conduct of democratic and electoral processes in Nigeria in 2015. Data from WANEP-Nigeria National Early Warning System (NEWS) shows an average of 400 deaths per month in the last six months. The highest casualties are linked to the violent radicalism of Boko Haram and other splinter groups in North East of Nigeria; the agro pastoralist/ethno religious conflicts in the North Central

region. This complex mix of violent conflict reinforced by antagonisms by the ruling and opposition parties has heightened tensions and threat of widespread electoral violence in the 2015 general elections. The conditions are even more complicated with Nigeria's history of political and election disputes/violence, lack of internal party democracy and political parties formed and maintained along ethnic and religious lines.

WANEP is however convinced that if the aforementioned recommendations are

adhered to, Nigeria would come out of the seeming critical situation, conduct a free and fair election, earn the respect of international community and stabilize its democracy and polity



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