WANEP ALERT AND RESPONSE MECHANISM

WARM

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NIGERIA

2023 General Elections:
IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL POLITICAL STABILITY, PEACE AND SECURITY

WANEP
Building Relationships for Peace

WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

2023 General Elections:

IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL POLITICAL STABILITY, PEACE AND SECURITY

1. Background

Nigeria's general elections scheduled for February and March 2023, will be the seventh since the country returned to democratic governance in 1999. With a chequered political history of military governments, Nigeria's current political climate referred to as the fourth Republic has been the longest and most consistent period of democratic stability since its independence. Steady progress has been made in democratic governance over the last two decades which is encapsulated in the peaceful political transition of the 2015 Presidential elections from the former ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressive Congress (APC) that ushered in the Government of President Muhammadu Buhari. Another significant progress is the growing political culture of multiparty democracy, inclusive participation of civil society and citizens, freedom of the media and efforts to strengthen the Constitution.

The upcoming elections present further opportunities to enhance good governance to address democratic fault lines that have exacerbated citizen disenchantment in recent times. As President Buhari completes his second term by May 2023, the country is again at a political crossroad that could define the future stability of Nigeria. The situation is further complicated by internal and external security, economic and social challenges with potential consequences for election security. Internally, the

Map of Nigeria in National Colours
Credit: Dailypost.ng

proliferation and operations of violent extremist groups, pervasive inter and intra-communal violence, armed insurgence by separatist groups, transhumance conflicts, organised crimes of kidnapping, human and drug trafficking led by armed bandits, have polarised and fractured social cohesion. These threats continue to have ripple effects on regional peace and security stability. A nodal instance is the spillover of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacks into the Lake Chad Basin, which have caused increased state fragility and its attendant complex humanitarian emergencies.

The rising youth political awareness and demand for social economic and governance reforms have gained traction with the 2021 #EndSARS nationwide protests. Already, the

WANEP ALERT AND RESPONSE MECHANISM (WARM)

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

WARM 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 WARM 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.

recent Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) data reveals that the youth aged 18-34 constitute 78.7 per cent of 12,298,944 new registrants.[1] This suggests that the youth demography has a potential impact on the 2023 elections. West Africa's predominantly youth populations, of which 64 per cent is under age 24, have been galvanized by the EndSARS youth protests in Nigeria in the use of digital technology and social media as veritable platforms for mobilisation in protest against the lack of inclusive participation in governance and decision-making processes, rising poverty as well as mass unemployment across the countries in the region[2]. The increasing discontent evident amongst Nigeria's youth during the #EndSARS protests reflects a simmering trend in other West African states, with implications for regional security.

The #EndSARS Protest in Nigeria in October 2020
Credit: Getty Images

The internal dynamics have further been worsened by global energy crisis as a result of the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, and continental and regional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy of the country. The rise in inflation and the devaluation of the Naira have negatively impacted livelihoods and economic well-being of citizens with ripple effects experienced in the number of trade union strikes. According to WANEP NEWS, between January and August 2022, the country recorded over 30 labour strikes by essential service providers including teachers and university lecturers, medical and healthcare service professionals and transport unions[3].

The consequences of this on the stability of political and social structures reflect in the weak economy, which poses a high risk before, during and after the 2023 general elections. It is also instructive that the upcoming election will be organised within the context of widespread concern about democratic regression in the governance landscape of West Africa. Therefore, as the largest democracy and critical actor in regional peace and security, Nigeria's 2023 elections have significance for democratic stability in the region. ECOWAS agenda, for example, has remained central to Nigeria's foreign policy, as evident in her leadership role as an actor in regional peace and security. This leadership role of Nigeria (provision of resources, military capabilities and support to ECOWAS peace and conflict prevention missions) is germane to regional stability. ECOWAS' interventions led by Nigeria in responding to civil wars and other political crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Mali among others, in the early 1990s and beyond have contributed to stability in the region. However, rising insecurity coupled with multifaceted governance challenges have weakened Nigeria's support to ECOWAS in regional political stability, peace and security.

Notwithstanding the seeming enduring and protracted security, socio-economic and political obstacles bedevilling the country ahead of the elections, Nigeria has the resilient factors and that could be leveraged to surmount the conundrums to conduct a peaceful election and harness its potentials to consolidate democratic governance. This is evident in the country's ability to organize six successful elections in the past 23 years amidst similar political and socio-economic challenges. This is largely due to the critical role of critical actors including the increasing role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the media and national infrastructure for peace as well as the international community in Nigeria's democratic governance. Already, key stakeholders including security agencies, CSOs, peace committees, traditional and faith-based organisations, the media, and international partners have activated various interventions aimed at engaging political actors to foster peace ahead of the elections. To be able to navigate the current dilemma

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[1] See Channel Television. Available at https://www.channelstv.com/2022/08/01/eight-million-youths-complete-voter-registration-ahead-of-2023-elections/ Updated August 1, 2022. (Accessed on 22/08/2022).

[2] Frimpong, O.B. and Commodore, R. (2021). #EndSARS Youth Protest in Nigeria: Lessons and Opportunities for Regional Stability. SVNP Special Issue No. 1 Africa Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC

[3] WANEP National Early Warning System. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 10/09/2022).

facing the country amid preparations for the 2023 general elections, an analysis of the challenges and opportunities for democratic consolidation in the country and its implications for regional stability is essential.

This policy brief provides an analysis of the implications of the 2023 general elections for regional political stability, peace and security. It further provides options for stakeholders' interventions to ensure a peaceful political transition and strengthen democratic governance stability, peace and security in Nigeria and the West African region.
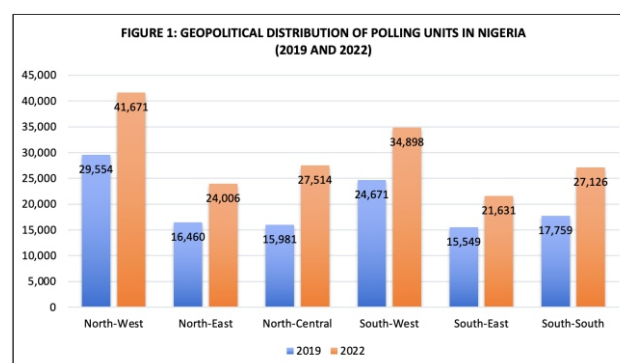
2.   Prevailing Political Context

a.   INEC's Preparedness

As part of the preparation for the 2023 general elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has launched a reviewed version of the regulations and guidelines for the conduct of elections[4]. This, including the amended Electoral Act 2022 and the 1999 Constitution, mandates INEC to pilot the electoral process and ensure free and fair elections[5]. As of July 31, 2022, the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) process had recorded additional 12,298,944 million voters to the country's voters list for the 2023 general elections[6]. This increases registered voters from 84,000,484 recorded in the 2019 elections to 96,299,428 (an increase of 12.8%) for the 2023 elections[7]. The increase recorded is largely attributable to increased voter outreach activities through various media platforms, active civil participation, INEC's deployment of digital strategy - INEC Voter Enrolment Device (IVED), and extension of the registration process[8]. The transparent and effective use of the CVR systems and technology to administer the election presents the potential to improve the credibility of the electoral process and as well, serves as future reference and practice in other countries across the region.

Additionally, the use of electronic devices such as the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) is part of recent innovations intended to enhance credibility in the electoral process. Also, the appointment of Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) to replace those whose tenure had ended and the redeployment of staff within INEC point to the Commission's preparedness. Currently, 176,846 Polling Units (Pus) exist across 8,809 electoral Wards, 774 LGAs and 37 States including the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja.[9] This marks an increase of 56,872 new polling units, compared to 119, 973 polling units in the 2019 election. A further breakdown shows that the Northern States were allotted an additional 31,196 polling units and States in the south with 25,676.[10] While the increases show growing citizens' interest in participating in the upcoming elections, it also calls for the expansion of the resource capacity of INEC to effectively conduct the electoral process.

(*Figure 1* shows coparative breakdown of the total number of Polling Units across the Geo-political Zones for 2019 and 2023 Elections)

Source: www.inecnigeria.org
Visualised by WANEP NEWS

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[4]https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/534667-2023-inec-releases-guidelines-for-conduct-of-elections.html

[5]https://www.icirnigeria.org/inec-suspends-voter-registration-in-imo-lga-after-killing-of-staff-by-gunmen/

[6]https://inecnigeria.org/news-all/inec-introduces-new-technology-as-continuous-voter-registration-exercise-recommences-june-26/

[7]https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/546547-16-things-to-know-about-just-concluded-voter-registration.html

[8]https://inecnigeria.org/news-all/inec-introduces-new-technology-as-continuous-voter-registration-exercise-recommences-june-26/

[9]https://www.inecnigeria.org/

[10]https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/469219-inec-polling-units-and-the-future-of-elections-in-nigeria-by-reuben-abati.html

(Figure 2 shows coparative analysis of the Polling Units across the Regions in Nigeria for 2019 and 2023)

FIGURE 2: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: DISTRIBUTION OF POLLING UNITS ACROSS REGIONS IN NIGERIA- 2019 & 2022
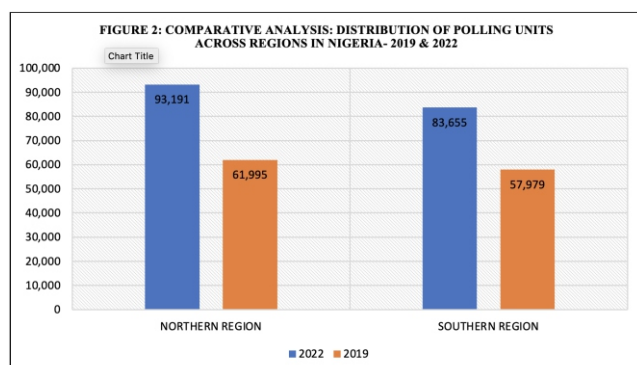
Source: www.inecnigeria.org
Visualised by WANEP NEWS

Although the country has witnessed a 12.8 per cent increase in voters' registration, there are also concerns about pervasive rising insecurity in the country, which threatens citizens' participation, preparedness and conduct of credible elections. At different times in April and June 2022, INEC suspended the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) in some Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Imo, Anambra, and Kaduna States following the spate of insecurity and incessant attacks on its field officers.[11] INEC has also expressed the agency's limitations in monitoring cases of vote-buying, voters' intimidation, and staff collaboration with political parties, which could undermine the credibility and integrity of electoral process. While INEC's mandate is focused on conducting elections, the involvement of anti-corruption agencies and security services in monitoring criminal and corrupt activities during the electioneering period is also paramount. This will checkmate political party campaign financing, bribery, vote buying and the abuse of incumbency that influenced citizens' rights to participate in the electoral process by limiting their free choice of a candidate. However, anti-corruption efforts must be fair and devoid of partisan political motivation, or perceptions to prevent the heightening of tensions and political violence during the election period.

b.   Re-amendments of the Electoral Act

President Mohammadu Buhari signed the Electoral Act Amendment Bill, 2022 into law on February 25, 2022, to repeal the Electoral Act No 6, 2010, with innovations to regulate the conduct of Federal, State and Area Council elections in Nigeria.[12] The new Electoral Act, amongst other provisions, gives legislative backing to the use of smart card readers for voter accreditation and electronic transmission of election results.[13] The technological innovations introduced in the electoral process including electronic accreditation of voters and transmission of election results, as deployed during the recent governorship elections in Ekiti and Osun States, serves as a litmus test to enhance INEC's preparations ahead of the elections. The use of technology upgrades also has the potential to minimise incidents of election-related irregularities and further instil transparency and accountability in the electoral processes. Similar technologies were used during the Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal held election between 2012 and 2020. In as much as the use of technology enhanced the credibility of the elections in these countries, the processes were also reported to be fraught with challenges including systems manipulation, biometric identification machine breakdowns, failure of biometric card readers and eventual delay in the announcement of results. These challenges further demonstrate that technological solutions are valuable but insufficient in solving political problems when political interests have the incentive and ability to manipulate the technology.

Also, Section 54 (2) of the Election Act 2022, mandates the INEC to ensure inclusive participation of persons with disabilities (PwDs) and other vulnerable groups in the election process.[14] Although this was enshrined in the previous Electoral Act 2010, the provision was discretionary. Additionally, the Prohibition of Discrimination Against Persons Living with Disabilities Law, 2019, amongst other global frameworks constitute veritable tools for mainstreaming the needs of PwDs in the electoral process. The disaggregated data on the number of registered new voters show that 87,083 persons with disabilities completed their voter registration out of 216,442 that applied to the Commission for one issue or the other.[15] In this regard, the INEC should ensure adequate provision for PwDs to access polling centres and exercise their franchise as well as prevent electoral fraud that affects PwDs and other vulnerable groups.

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[11] Ibid.
[12] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/breaking-buhari-signs-electoral-act-amendment-bill/
[13] Biometric Elections Technology, Voter Experience and Turnout in Ghana (2020), https://www.eisa.org/pdf/JAE18.1Adams.pdf (Accessed 30/09/2022.
[14] https://www.thecable.ng/review-key-provisions-of-electoral-act-2022
[15] https://tribuneonlineng.com/2023-will-youths-make-their-number-count-this-time/

c. Electoral Violence and Political Party Disputes

Electoral disputes and violence have been a critical concern in the political landscape of Nigeria. Despite the generally impressive scorecard in the conduct of the 2011 and 2015 general elections, the violence that erupted, particularly in the North and other parts of the country, defied logic. Reports indicate about 800 people were killed, 700 in Kaduna alone in 2011.[16] Similar violent incidents were reported across the country in the 2015 and 2019 general elections leading to 106 and 626 fatalities, respectively.[17]

**Table 1:** *Incidents and Fatalities related to Electoral Violence in Nigeria (2003 – 2019)*

| Year | Approx. Number of Election-related violence and fatalities in Nigeria | | | | | |
	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	Total
# of Incidents	52	30	158	66	152	458
# of Fatalities	*100*	*300*	*800*	*106*	*626*	*1,932*

Sources: Reports from HRW 2007 and 2011, NDI 2007, SBM Intelligence 2019, Nigeria CS Situation Room 2019, WANEP ESR 2019.

In the lead-up to the 2023 elections, power contestation has heightened inter and intra-party competition tensions and conflicts in the country. As a result, the current political climate ahead of the elections is replete with vile propaganda, political intimidation, distortions, physical attacks, and destruction of parties' properties by supporters of political opponents. This poses a high risk to the peaceful conduct of the election and the conducive atmosphere for citizens to participate in the electoral process.

The zoning arrangement for the presidency under the principle of rotation of power between the North and South remains one of the most contentious issues in the selection of presidential flagbearers across political parties at the national level. This and other unresolved political party disputes resulted in mass defections of aggrieved members and the formation of new political alliances. According to WANEP NEWS, the internal primary elections conducted for various political offices were largely fraught with cases of violent attacks, thuggery, vote-buying, demonstrations, and withdrawal of political party aspirants aimed at influencing the outcome of the elections. Between January and August 2022, 76 incidents of political violence with 45 fatalities and 60 injuries were recorded in Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Cross-River, Kano, Gombe, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos, Borno, and Rivers States during internal

FATALITIES: ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE (FEBRUARY-AUGUST 2022)
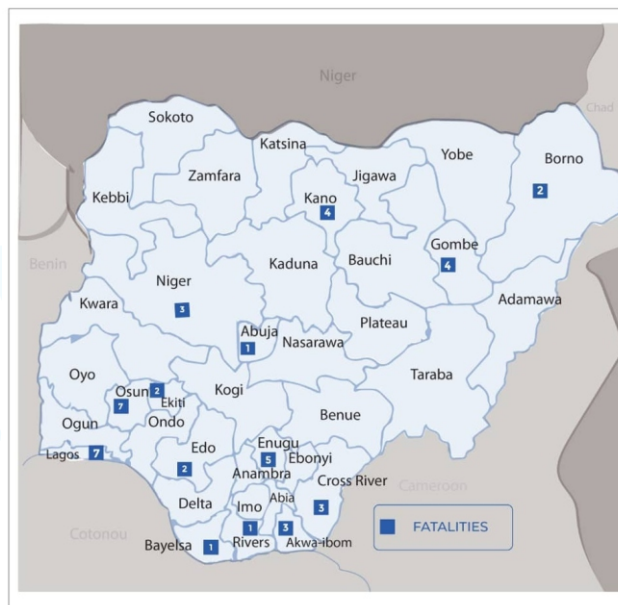
Source: WANEP NEWS

primary elections.[18] Journalists and police officers were among the affected victims. Notably, the two most prominent political parties-APC and the PDP continue to witness massive defections.

The jettisoning of the zoning arrangement by the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), retaining the presidential candidate to the North (former Vice-President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar) and Southern, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa as Vice-Presidential candidate, has been viewed by many as a renege of internal party agreement to ensure geopolitical inclusivity in contesting for Presidential elections, particularly after eight years of northern rule led by the current President Mohammadu Buhari. Although the APC observed the North-South power rotation, the choice of a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket (Senator Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, from the south and a Muslim/Senator, Kashim Shettima, a northern Muslim) has also created internal party divisions and national concerns over sensitivity of ethno-religious issues. Christian-dominated groups and the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) have expressed their concerns against the lack of consideration for Nigeria's religious pluralism in the election and nomination of Presidential and Vice Presidential tickets by the APC. These are symptomatic of protracted ethno-

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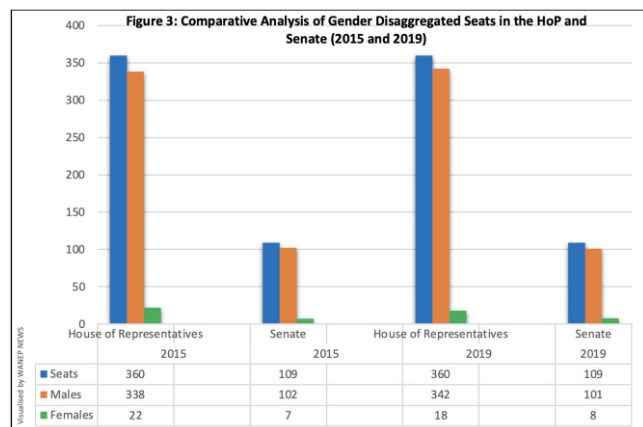[16] Tracking Election violence in Nigeria. https://www.cfr.org/blog/tracking-election-violence-nigeria (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[17] Nigeria – Electoral Violence in Numbers (2019). https://www.sbmintel.com/2019/03/election-violence-in-numbers/ Accessed 10/09/2022).

[18] Source: WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS): www.wanep.org/news/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

religious tensions and conflicts reflected in intra and inter-party disagreements that could heighten tension ahead of the elections in 2023.

d. Gender concerns around the election

Female representation in politics and other leadership positions in Nigeria has remained low despite their numerical population and voting strength. Trends in female representation in politics also show a decline across all levels of governance in the country. For instance, there were 22 females in a-360 member House of Representatives in 2015, which was reduced to 18 females in 2019, while a Senate 109 seats had 8 females elected in 2019, and the seven in 2015.[19] Across the 36 States, no female governor was elected while five females occupied the deputy governorship position in 2015 in States comprising Osun, Ogun, Lagos, Rivers, and Enugu States. In 2019 there were four female deputy governors in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun, and Rivers States.[20] At the State House of Assemblies, there were 51 females out of 990 members in 2015 compared to 45 female representations recorded in 2019.[21] In the lead-up to the 2023 elections, 10 female governorship candidates in six States and 24 female deputy governorship candidates in 15 States have made it to the ballot to contest the 2023 general elections.[22] These fall short of the 30 per cent quota as the target set out by International Parliamentary Union (IPU) and other bodies.

Figure 3: Comparative Analysis of Gender Disaggregated Seats in the HoP and Senate (2015 and 2019)

A breakdown of INEC's report at the end of the PVC registration exercise on July 31, 2022, indicates that there are 6,224,866 female eligible voters as compared to the 6,074,078 male.[23] However, the voting strength of women has historically not reflected their numerical strength. Nigeria currently ranks 181 of 193 countries on the 'Gender Equality Index' for countries with low women representation in governance.[24] However, the development of a National Gender Policy (2006) increases agitations for gender parity and inclusion of women in governance in the country. The agitations escalated following the rejection of five Gender Equality Bills that sought to amend the 1999 Nigerian Constitution by the National Assembly. The rejection of the Gender Equality Bills has continued to engender widespread criticisms and demonstrations from women groups and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs),[25] as a violation of the provisions of section 42 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), and other international gender and human rights instruments, of which Nigeria is a signatory.[26]

e. Socio-economic environment and impact on peaceful elections

The general socio-economic situation in Nigeria is a cause for concern. According to Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perception Index, Nigeria dropped to 159 in 2021, from 149 in 2020, out of 180 countries surveyed globally.[27] This placed the country as the second most corrupt nation in West Africa – an indication that corruption in the country's public sector has worsened over the last five years despite the current administration's effort to curb bad practices.[28] The country remains among the world's poorest nations, ranking 161 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (2020).[29] Poverty is widespread with more than 40 per cent of the population or almost 83 million people, living below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira ($381.75) per year.[30] The Global Hunger

[19] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/528219-low-number-of-women-in-politics-bane-of-nigerias-development-minister.html (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[20] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/528219-low-number-of-women-in-politics-bane-of-nigerias-development-minister.html; https://leadership.ng/2023-10-female-governorship-candidates-24-running-mates-emerge/

[21] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/100-women-groups-seek-speedy-passage-of-bill-to-create-additional-seats-for-women-in-nass/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[22] https://leadership.ng/2023-10-female-governorship-candidates-24-running-mates-emerge/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[23] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/546547-16-things-to-know-about-just-concluded-voter-registration.html (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[24] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/only-6-women-active-in-nigerian-politics-report/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[25] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/opinion-condemnation-of-the-national-assemblys-rejection-of-bills-seeking-gender-equality/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[26] Ibid.

[27] https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/nigeria-is-the-second-most-corrupt-country-in-west-africa-ahead-of-ghana-according-to/fe24rqk (Accessed 22/08/2022).
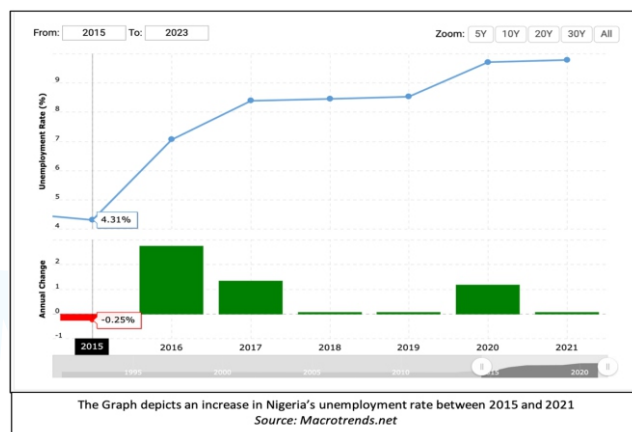
[28] Ibid.

[29] Human Development Index Report, 2020. https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/NGA.pdf (Accessed 22/08/2022).

[30] World Bank Brief, 2020. https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/lsms/brief/nigeria-releases-new-report-on-poverty-and-inequality-in-country (Accessed 22/08/2022).

Index of 2021 ranked the country among the top nations with a serious concern about socio-economic inequality, youth marginalisation, social exclusion and a penchant for violence as underlying structural causes of insecurity.[31] With elections being perceived as a "do or die affair", such vulnerabilities, especially among youth could be exploited to stimulate violent conflicts in the impending elections.

Also, a cursory look at some of the indices of economic growth in the years 2019 and 2022, shows that while the inflation rate in 2019 was 11.4 per cent, the second quarter of 2022 recorded 18.60 per cent.[32] This could be attributed to the lack of domestic production and weak political will in implementing the Petroleum Industry Bill passed in 2021 which has a snowball effect on the economy. In addition, the Russia-Ukraine war has triggered negative socio-economic impacts as the global prices of food and energy are significantly higher. The war has seen crude oil prices rise above $100 per barrel for Brent and $110 per barrel for the Bonny Light. As an importer of refined petroleum products, Nigeria is bearing the brunt of the surge in the crude oil market. The price of diesel - a non-subsidised product in Nigeria - has risen to N850, with significant cost to medium and small scale businesses due to recurrent fluctuation in power supply and the reliance on generators to run their businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further contributed to the inflation of commodity prices following the disruption in the supply chain. Over 80 per cent of Nigerians are employed in the informal sector,[33] which contributes about 65 per cent to Nigeria's total GDP.[34] The pandemic lockdown measures introduced in 2020 particularly affected the informal sector workers as the containment measures worsened various forms of socio-economic exclusions. The restriction on movement and shutdown of public transport services impacted on population's livelihood. Especially, the loss of income to informal sector workers who tended to work outside of their homes on daily bases increased their vulnerabilities to hunger, poverty and human rights abuses. About 20 per cent of Nigerian workers lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).[35]

The Graph depicts an increase in Nigeria's unemployment rate between 2015 and 2021
Source: Macrotrends.net

Unemployment is a major human security concern in the lead-up to the elections in 2023. The National Bureau of Statistics report in 2019 shows that the country had the fourth-highest unemployment rate in the region. As of 2022, the unemployment rate stood at 33 per cent (23.2 million) compared to the 2019 rate of 8.53 per cent.[36] Comparatively, the unemployment rate between the last transition (2015) increased from 4.31 per cent to 9.79 per cent in 2021. Currently, over 70 million people in Nigeria live in extreme poverty, representing 33 per cent of the country's population.[37] A constellation of socio-economic challenges is manifesting in socio-political tensions including citizen agitations, widespread despondency, demonstrations and labour strikes, that have affected the social cohesiveness of the country in the lead-up to the elections in 2023. Between January and September 2022, WANEP NEWS documented 304 public demonstrations, accounting for nine fatalities and 20 injured victims.[38] This trend has the potential to further increase tensions, violence, and security fragility in the country.

f. Youth demography and discontent

About 70 per cent of Nigeria's estimated 220 million population are below the age of 30, while a further 42 per cent are under the age of 15.[39] This accounts for the high turnout of youth in the voter registration exercise and the potential impact on the outcome of the 2023 general

[31] Global Hunger Index, 2021. https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2021.pdf (Accessed 22/08/2022).

[32] https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/economy/nigerias-inflation-surges-to-18-60-highest-in-5-years/

[33] https://punchng.com/80-4-of-nigerian-employment-in-informal-sector-says-wbank/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[34] https://theconversation.com/nigerias-pandemic-lockdown-measures-were-hard-on-informal-workers-

[35] https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/around-20-nigerian-workers-lost-jobs-due-covid-19-stats-office-2021-09-21/

[36] National Bureau of Statistics www.nigerianstat.gov.ng (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[37] https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/nigeria-is-no-longer-the-poverty-capital-of-the-world-but-still-has-over-70-million/2txm7g3 (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[38] www.wanep.org/news (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[39] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/544043-nigerias-large-youthful-population-could-be-an-asset-or-a-burden.html

elections. However, a greater proportion of the youth is saddled with lack of education, poor quality of life, unemployment, low living standards, poor health outcomes, marginalisation, and lack of inclusivity in the governance and decision-making process. This is leading to widespread discontent, resentment, and protest by youth in various States. A report by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicates that 42.5 per cent of Nigerian youths were unemployed at the end of 2020.[40] The direct impact of surge in unemployment among the youth is contributing to increasing insecurity, as most have become vulnerable to recruitment into criminal activities that threaten security ahead of the 2023 general election.

The political culture of recruiting youths as party thugs by politicians to win elections also has been a destabilising factor. Recorded cases of electoral violence during the internal primary elections by political parties to elect their flag-bearers were mostly carried out by youths mobilized as foot soldiers by party officials. However, the observed rush by young Nigerians, and other alleged excluded groups, to register as voters and collect their permanent voters' cards indicates increased political awareness and their readiness to challenge the existing political establishment and status quo, especially post EndSars nationwide demonstrations of 2020 led by young people.[41] Available data indicates students accounts for the highest voter registration of 4,501,595 out of the 8,784,677 million.[42] Ahead of the commencement of electioneering campaigns in September 2022, the prolonged strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) since February 2022, has security implications for the 2023 general elections.

g. The new media and social mobilisation

The social media space is a vital tool for advancing democratic governance through that creation of platforms for mass political participation. Out of over 220 million people in Nigeria, about 110 million have access to the internet, representing about 50 per cent of the population.[43] Out of this, over 53.15 million of the population is projected to be active on social media as of the beginning of 2022.[44] This implies that a substantial number of populations use social media for socio-economic and political discourse. Social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, among others, have become common platforms for citizens, especially young people to amplify their voices on governance issues as well as hold public officers accountable for their actions and inactions. The #EndSARS movement exploited the social media space to mobilize young people for the nationwide demonstration for security sector and political reforms. Political actors, INEC, religious organisations and CSOs have also leveraged on social media to mobilise civic enlightenment and participation to voter registration exercises and dissemination of information on the election. Analysts have argued that social movements evolving from the use of social media by youth may be key to achieving democratic reforms in Nigeria.[45] Despite its usefulness, social media has become a conduit for the spread of fake news, hate speeches, intemperate and inflammatory political statements as well as an avenue for inciting physical violence and mobilising groups to public disorder, that pose a risk to the security of the elections.

h. Inclusivity and participation of Nigerians in the Diaspora

Considerations of diaspora voting in general elections have been fraught with challenges. The Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives have constantly rejected the proposal for diaspora voting in Nigeria's national elections.[46] The argument for such rejection was that diaspora voting contradicts sections (2) and 117 (2) of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution which limits the right to vote to citizens physically present in the country.[47] Despite this, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), Nigerian in Diaspora Organisation in Europe (NIDOE) and NIDO-UK,[48] political parties and interest groups have continued to advocate and raised concerns over the non-constitutional

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[40] Op. Cit. National Bureau of Statistics.

[41] https://www.wfd.org/commentary/nigeria-and-2023-general-elections (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[42] https://tribuneonlineng.com/2023-will-youths-make-their-number-count-this-time/ (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[43] https://gazettengr.com/atikus-interview-and-unfair-tinubu-muslim-muslim-dig/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[44] https://gazettengr.com/atikus-interview-and-unfair-tinubu-muslim-muslim-dig/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[45] https://theloop.ecpr.eu/social-media-may-be-the-cure-for-ailing-democracies-nigerias-endsars-revolution/

[46] https://republic.com.ng/nigeria/2023-election-updates/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[47] https://www.sunnewsonline.com/2023-inec-should-be-empowered-to-allow-nigerians-in-diaspora-vote-prof-magaji/

[48] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/544031-nidcom-to-continue-advocating-diaspora-voting-in-nigerian-elections-official.html (Accessed 10/08/2022).

provision for diaspora voting despite their significant contributions to the socio-economic development of Nigeria.[49] Currently, over 17 million Nigerians in the diaspora will not be able to vote in the 2023 elections.[50] Also, at the end of the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) on July 31, 2022, about seven million Nigerians were unable to complete their voter registration.[51] Despite public demands for INEC to recommence the process to prevent disenfranchising eligible citizens, the INEC Commissioner for Information and Voter Education, Festus Okoye, has absolved the Commission of disenfranchising citizens, as the majority of affected registrants are Nigerians living in the diaspora.[52] Regardless of the online pre-registration, the physical presence of registrants as demanded by the CVR process was challenging. These are precursors of disagreement that could disenfranchise some populations and impede participation in the elections.

3.   Human security challenges and impact on election security

Nigeria faces multi-dimensional security threats across all the geo-political zones within the country. A report by a global terrorism research and analysis group, Jihad Analytics (JA), has placed Nigeria as the second country mostly affected by terrorism in the world between Iraq and Syria.[53] Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has caused the deaths of over 350,000 people with more than 2.5 million people displaced in Nigeria.[54] While Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to expand their operations in the North-East, North-West, Middle-belt and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), incidents of escalating armed bandits' attacks in these locations, reveal a potential link between terrorists and armed bandits to strengthen and expand their operations in other parts of the country. For instance, the attacks on Kuje Correctional Centre in Abuja (FCT) and the Kaduna-Abuja rail track in July and March 2022, respectively, have raised concerns about the geographical spread, rapidity, and multiplicity of incidents

of insecurity challenging the capacity of state security to mitigate insurgency and armed conflict in the country ahead of the 2023 general elections. Trends emerging in the spread and attacks of terrorist and other criminal groups operating in the country could expand the ungoverned spaces that are beyond INEC to reach and manage its activities for credible elections in February and March 2023.

FIGURE 4: KEY INCIDENTS OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA (JANUARY - SEPTEMBER 2022)

Source: WANEP NEWS
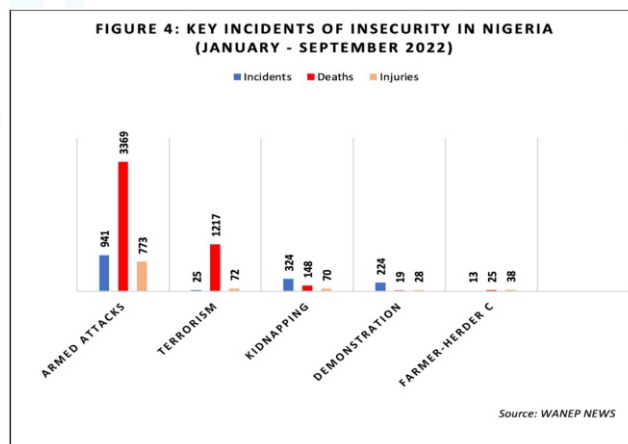
Furthermore, illicit weapons proliferation has been linked to the growing spate of armed attacks, kidnapping and other crimes in the country. According to data from the Nigeria Security Report, 7,222 fatalities were recorded between January and July 2022, with 3,823 victims abducted in the period.[55] Also, recent reports have shown that more than 13 billion naira have been paid to various criminal groups as ransom between June 2011 and July 2022.[56] The climate of fear emanating from recurrent insecurity has the potential to inhibit the inclusive participation of vulnerable populations in the elections. For instance, documented reports by WANEP NEWS indicate that 14 out of 24 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Niger State have been taken over by bandits.[57] In view of this, INEC has indicated that elections may not hold in 270 polling units in Niger State due to the internal displacement of residents from their homes by bandits.[58]

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[49] https://www.sunnewsonline.com/2023-inec-should-be-empowered-to-allow-nigerians-in-diaspora-vote-prof-magaji/

[50] https://www.sunnewsonline.com/2023-inec-should-be-empowered-to-allow-nigerians-in-diaspora-vote-prof-magaji/

[51] https://www.channelstv.com/2022/08/14/serap-asks-inec-to-allow-7-million-nigerians-complete-voter-registration/

[52] https://punchng.com/why-seven-million-diasporans-other-nigerians-unregistered-inec/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[53] Nigeria is ranked the world's 2nd most terrorised country after Iraq (2022), https://periscopeinternational.com/nigeria-now-ranked-worlds-2nd-most-terrorised-country-after-iraq/ (Accessed 15/09/2022.

[54] https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/14/former-boko-haram-militants-to-be-reintegrated-into-society// (Accessed 10/09/2022).

[55] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/insecurity-borno-benue-kaduna-top-unsafe-states-as-terrorists-kill-7222-abduct-3823-in-seven-months-report/#:~:text=Terrorists%2C%20bandits%20and%20other%20assailants,management%20and%20intelligence%20consulting%20company (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[56] https://punchng.com/n13-662bn-paid-as-ransom-in-11-years/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[57] https://www.ripplesnigeria.com/14-out-of-24-lgs-in-niger-under-bandits-control-inec/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[58] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/insecurity-elections-may-not-hold-in-270-polling-units-in-niger-inec/

In addition, 156 polling units across six LGAs in the Eastern part of Sokoto State are under the siege of bandits. The bandits have declared these units as a no-voting zone in the State.[59] Similarly, in Zamfara State, 356 polling units are either under bandit control or bordering areas of bandits' influence in the State.[60] More worrisome are reports that bandits are collecting the Permanent Voters' Card (PVCs) of some community residents in Zamfara and Sokoto States.[61] Currently, in Birnin Gwari and Dandume Axis of Kaduna State, the Ansaru terrorist groups have issued a ban on political campaigns.[62] Similarly, in some communities in Katsina, Zamfara and Niger States, armed bandits have also issued a similar ban on political activities.[63]

To guarantee safety amid heightened insecurity, there are renewed interests by several State Governments, legislators, and citizens for self-defence. The recent was the Zamfara State Government's directives to community residents to obtain firearms for self-defence due to the heightened armed violence by bandits in communities.[64] Compliance with this directive can create a demand that will fuel the proliferation of weapons in the communities. Moreover, the directive on the acquisition of weapons reveals the weak capacity of law enforcement agencies to provide local security, thus creating opportunities for non-state armed groups to strengthen their operations in vulnerable communities ahead of the elections.

Another cause for concern ahead of the election is the geo-political and regional imbalance that is generating violent agitations for secessions within the Federation. Separatist agitations continue to grow and threaten national stability and cohesion. IPOB's agitation for a separate Biafra nation continues to undermine state authority in the Southeastern region. Despite the Federal Government's proscription of IPOB as a terrorist group in September 2017, armed violence by suspected IPOB members, particularly through its paramilitary organisation - the Eastern Security Network (ESN) heightened in 2021. The arrest and extradition to Nigeria of the leader of the IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu on June 29, 2021, to continue his treasonable

felony trial[65] has further heightened tension between IPOB members and the state actors. As reflected in WANEP NEWS, his continued detention could precipitate violent actions by members of the IPOB to disrupt the conduct of elections in the South-East, especially in the backdrop of their violent activities and causalities.

The security landscape also continues to deteriorate with the influx of undocumented migrants through the country's porous borders from neighbouring West African countries. Although security officials are alleged to be accomplice in this crime, the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) has decried the inadequacy of its workforce to secure the nation's borderlines. Current statistics by the NIS reveal that Nigeria has an estimated 1,490 illegal entry points into the country covering 5,330 kilometres.[66] The porosity of the borders remains a significant threat and potential to undermine the credibility of elections following allegations that foreigners have the PVC. Additionally, WANEP NEWS reports reveal an influx of terrorists and bandits in the southern region, leading to heightened security concerns.

4.   Resilient and Mitigating Factors

Despite persistent political tensions and threats to security in the lead-up to the presidential election, Nigeria has existing institutions that could be engaged to build trust and confidence among stakeholders to mitigate these threats and ensure a peaceful election. some of the key mitigating factors are outlined below:

The Role of the National Peace Committee: President Muhammadu Buhari has reiterated his commitment to free, fair, and credible elections, as it serves to provide opportunities to consolidate Nigeria's democratic credence. In addition to the Federal Government's commitment, the contributions of the National Peace Committee to peacebuilding processes in the pre, during and post-election has been acknowledged by INEC and

[59]Interview with Dr Murtala Rufia, Department of History Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto State; 6/8/2022

[60]Interview with Dr Murtala Rufia, Department of History Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto State; 6/8/2022

[61]Ibid

[62]https://dailytrust.com/election-may-not-hold-in-some-northwestern-states-don-warns (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[63]https://dailytrust.com/election-may-not-hold-in-some-northwestern-states-don-warns (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[64]https://dailypost.ng/2022/06/26/zamfara-banditry-gov-matawalle-directs-residents-to-obtain-guns-for-self-defense/

[65]https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/07/06/igbohos-cats-kanus-interception-and-buharis-language/; https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/07/nnamdi-kanu-caused-death-of-60-persons-in-4-months-butll-get-fair-trial-fg/

[66]https://www.channelstv.com/2022/05/24/immigration-decries-inability-to-effectively-man-borderlines-1490-illegal-entry-points/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

International Community. In the 2015 and 2019 elections, the National Peace Committee led the signing of the Abuja Peace Accord by all Presidential candidates and ensured a relatively peaceful electoral process in Nigeria. Reviving the Committee and timely engagement of relevant political actors and party aspirants ahead of the 2023 general election is significant to minimise the likely occurrence and escalation of threats to the election.

The Role of Law Enforcement Agencies in Election Security: The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) with other security agencies play complementary roles in ensuring a seamless and peaceful electoral process in the country. Also, the NPF has the responsibility to protect the electorate, INEC personnel and materials throughout the electoral period as contained in the 'NPF Standard Operational Guidelines/Rules for Police Officers on Electoral Duty,[67] which was launched in 2015. Given the growing insecurity in Nigeria, the utility of information sharing through security and civil society-based early warning and crisis risk response will shorten the turnover time for response to election-related disputes and violence during and after the elections. The Nigerian military continues to strengthen the existing election security architecture put in place by the Federal Government and INEC. In the lead-up to the 2023 general elections, the NPF has also convened an election security management workshop in August 2022 to enlighten security officers and the public on their duties throughout the electioneering process.[68]

International Community: Intergovernmental organisations, especially ECOWAS, AU and UNOWAS have been instrumental in addressing challenges of security and democratic governance in Nigeria. The presence of ECOWAS Headquarters, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN to West Africa and the Sahel, African Union Ambassadors and international partners in the country contribute to strengthening and upholding democratic norms, solidifying the gains that have already been made and making further progress more likely. These organisations will also engage in preventive diplomacy with the key political actors in and outside the country to ensure credible and peaceful elections. Another significant indicator of democracy strengthening in Nigeria is the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good

Governance (2001) to put in place elaborate normative frameworks and mechanisms to strengthen regional peace and security architecture.[69] Experts have referred to the Protocol as a veritable tool by ECOWAS that provides principles and guidelines for the promotion of democracy and peace including modalities for credible and transparent elections.[70]

Civil Society Interventions in Electoral Education and Security: To facilitate an inclusive and participatory process during the electioneering period, the role of civil society towards democratic consolidation has been phenomenal, as they continue to play a pivotal role in oversight, monitoring, advocacy, and lobbying, while also deepening public knowledge on INEC's electoral guidelines. Additionally, their seeming neutrality and impartiality during elections have over time given confidence to electorates to raise their concerns for action and consideration. Apart from advancing public confidence in democratic elections through monitoring and analyzing elections and electoral processes, the dissemination of election reports by CSOs and other election observers fosters INEC and government accountability within and beyond the electoral cycle. Fairness, level playing field, transparency and objectivity are the measuring instruments and indicators at the hands of civil society actors, local and international observers. In the 2019 general elections, a total of 116 domestic observers and 28 foreign observer groups were accredited by INEC to monitor/observe the conduct of the elections.[71] It is also important to underscore the availability of local and national response architectures that link early warning with the informed response, which will impact the credibility of the election and influence how threats are prevented and mitigated during the upcoming elections.

5. Implications for Regional Political Stability, Peace and Security

Nigeria's 2023 elections will take place in the wake of mounting complex socio-economic, political and security challenges. Therefore, the outcome of the elections will have far-reaching implications not only for Nigeria but the entire West Africa region, which faces

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[67] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/01/elections-g-launches-operational-guidelines-police-personnel/ (Accessed 10/08/2022).

[68] https://leadership.ng/just-in-police-host-election-security-meeting/ (Accessed 06/08/2022).

[69] www.wanep.org/news "The state of Democratic Governance in West Africa: Pitfalls, Implications and Pathways to Recovery". (Accessed 10/09/2022).
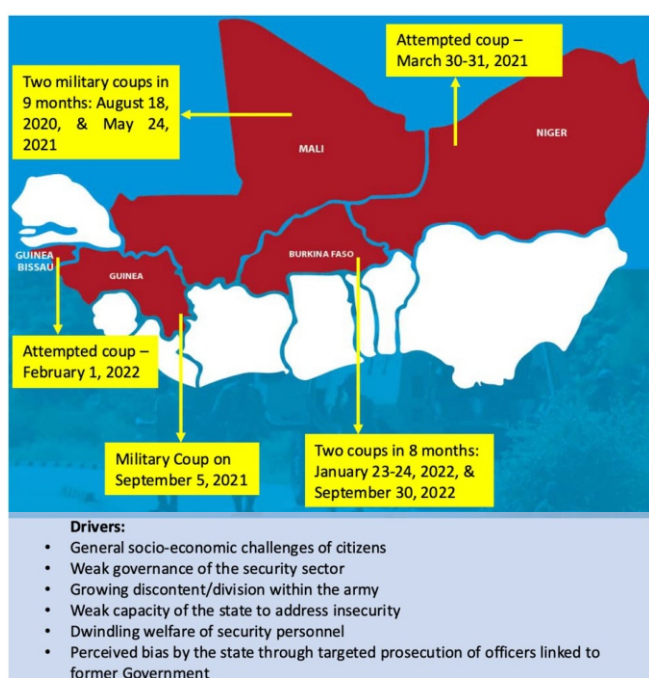
[70] Ibid.

[71] (Independent National Electoral Commission).

multidimensional political, peace and security challenges. The region is currently bedevilled with challenges of democratic governance stability. Between 2020 and 2022, the region's political landscape experienced military coups that overthrew elected governments in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. In addition, the region recorded two unsuccessful coups in Niger and Guinea Bissau within the same period. These coups have not only stymied democratic governance in the affected countries, but also plunged the countries into political uncertainties and are indicative of democratic governance decline in the region. There are also growing concerns about constitutional amendments to presidential term limits and lack of inclusivity in the electoral processes in some of the countries in the region. This trend threatens not just the progress made in democratic governance, but also the peace and human security of the region. Considering Nigeria as one of the most stable democracies and the largest economy in the region, the outcome of the 2023 elections has implications for regional governance stability. Thus, while a peaceful and credible electoral outcome could provide the opportunity to strengthen regional democratic governance stability, a dismal outcome will potentially harm the prospect of democratic transitions and the efforts of the ECOWAS and international partners to restore constitutional governance in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

Moreover, the leadership role of Nigeria in West Africa as a key actor in peace and security is its centrality to the implementation of ECOWAS peace and security

Drivers:
- General socio-economic challenges of citizens
- Weak governance of the security sector
- Growing discontent/division within the army
- Weak capacity of the state to address insecurity
- Dwindling welfare of security personnel
- Perceived bias by the state through targeted prosecution of officers linked to former Government

frameworks and norms diffusion in the region. Since the establishment of ECOWAS, it has developed and activated the implimentation of an array of peace and security frameworks including the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). Together they formed the basis for the ECOWAS Conflict and Prevention Framework (2008). Whereas the former focuses mostly on conflict management, the latter emphasises conflict prevention. Additional to this, ECOWAS has adopted other international frameworks including UN Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) and UN Resolution 2225 (Youth, Peace and Security) aimed at protecting and promoting inclusive harnessing of the potentials of women and youth's inclusive participation in the regional peace and security. Having viable and efficient leadership as a key actor in regional peace and security is important in ensuring the effective development of an Action Plan, implementation and enforcement of these regional and international frameworks that would contribute to the diffusion of norms and stabilisation of the sub-region. Aside from this, Nigeria is a critical player in the establishment and implementation of an ad-hoc counterterrorism force, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter Boko Haram insurgencies, recover and secure the environment of Lake Chad riparian communities. Given the increased insecurity which has contributed to weakening the leadership capacity of Nigeria in the region, a slip in the 2023 electoral outcome will potentially undermine regional efforts in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Furthermore, the weakening leadership role of Nigeria in the regional peace and security is the increasing geostrategic relevance of West Africa's natural resources to global powers, especially France, China and Russia. While France is leveraging its colonial ties with her former colonies in the region to undermine Nigeria's leadership role and ECOWAS efforts, China and Russia's strategic interests in natural resources and relations with countries in the region threaten Nigeria's leadership relevance. These competing interests of external forces have a possible impact on insecurity in Nigeria, with repercussions on regional stability. The foregoing bespeaks the utility of the leadership role of Nigeria in regional peace and security. However, the peace and security challenges bedevilling Nigeria have undermined

the security climate of the region and weakened its leadership role in regional stability. A nodal instance is the contagious effect of Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, which have turned the attacks into regional security and humanitarian crisis. A consequence of the armed attacks in the region is the growing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. For instance, more than 7.7 million people, comprising 80 per cent of women and children, have been displaced in the West and Central Africa region with 66 per cent of the IDPs located in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.[72] The humanitarian crisis in North-East, Nigeria remains one of the most severe in the region with 1.9 million IDPs recorded between January to December 2021.[73] According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 8.7 million people from Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States need humanitarian assistance, while 1.6 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition.[74] The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a total of 1.6million refugees representing a 08 per cent increase from July 2021. Chad hosts the largest number of refugees with 67 per cent from Sudan, while Cameroon hosts the second largest number of refugees mainly from Central Africa Republic (72%) and Nigeria (27%). Also, Niger hosts 61,320 refugees, mostly from Nigeria and Chad.[75] The influx of migrants into other countries does not only escalate tensions between residents and migrants over competition for limited resources including farmlands, water, and food, but also bear an economic burden on the host Governments. More importantly, a trend analysis also suggests that these gaps could be exploited as an avenue for extremist groups to establish presence and launch possible attacks across borders. This is justified by recent events of growing incidences of violence connected to Boko Haram attacks in Niger and Chad as well as suspected activities of terrorists along the Burkina Faso-Ghana borders. Governance stability is a prerequisite condition to capacitate states in the region to respond effectively to the multifaceted internal challenges. In this regard, a peaceful political transition in the aftermath of the 2023 election in Nigeria could potentially be leveraged to strengthen the capacity of the State to abate the socio-political and security challenges, which will inure regional stability.

Another dynamic is the consequences of peace, security and development challenges in Nigeria on regional development. The violent activities of terrorist and armed groups have harmed investments, businesses including the banking sector, tourism and hospitality sector, transport systems, companies, markets, and other economic initiatives. These attacks have crippled human capital development and investor interest not only in most affected States in Nigeria, but the entire country as well as neighbouring countries like Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin.[76] Socio-economic and political insecurity have forced people to migrate as well as triggered protests and demonstrations in the region. In 2021, a total of 857 incidents of protests and demonstrations were recorded in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Ghana, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Togo, among others.[77] The structural and systemic drivers of the demonstrations included ineffective social service delivery, working conditions, unemployment, high cost of living and inadequate social infrastructure in communities.

A notable trend in protests and demonstrations is the use of social and digital media spaces as veritable grounds by youths to express their concerns and dissatisfaction with the State. The socio-economic dislocation of youth is further exacerbated by the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economies of West African States, particularly in the informal sector that engages most young people. The cumulative effect of this is mirrored in recurrent violent confrontations between the State and young people, as evident in social unrest, perpetration of organized crime, conflicts and rising terrorism, and waning social cohesion across the sub-region. Although some of these instances reveal patterns of mobilisation of young people by political actors, they also reflect the despondency among the youth due to the lack of opportunities, leading to acute trust deficits. The growing utilisation of digital technology and social media as tools for young people in Nigeria to mobilize themselves to protest against governance deficiencies ahead of the 2023 elections has potential consequences on internal and regional political stability.

[72] UNHCR Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa Report (July 2022), (Accessed 07/09/2022).

[73] See: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%2031%20Dec%202021.pdf (Accessed 07/09/22).

[74] Ibid.

[75] See: https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/matrice-de-suivi-des-d-placements-dtm-sahel-central-liptako-gourma-tableau-de-bord-n-22 (Accessed 13/09/2022).

[76] African Journal on Conflict Resolution (2019). (Accessed 07/09/2022).

[77] Appiah-Nyamekye, J. et al. (2020). "Citizens' negative perceptions of police extend well beyond Nigeria's #EndSARS," Afrobarometer, Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 403, December 9, 2020.

6.   Scenarios

In view of the foregoing analysis, this policy brief envisages the following scenarios emerging ahead of the 2023 elections.

Best Case Scenario: (Unlikely)

Despite heightened insecurity concerns in the country, the presidential election is conducted with minimal cases of disenfranchisement and electoral irregularities. The country records a massive voter turnout, particularly among young people and women. The Election Security Task Force mitigates threats of violence and disruption of voting in hotspot states including the South East and Northern regions. Separatist groups agree to allow the voting process without interference following engagements with national and local authorities as well as with eminent ethnic and religious groups. The threat of insurgency beyond North East is contained by the military as polls take place peacefully in North West and North Central zones. The efficiency of the INEC and the applicability of the new electoral laws and voting technologies ensures transparency of the process. Based on preventive diplomacy efforts of International Observation Missions especially ECOWAS, Africa Union and UNOWAS and the National Peace Committee, major political parties commit to peaceful elections and political transition. INEC announces the results at the federal and state level which is accepted by contestants while aggrieved parties agree to non-violence options through a judicial process. The election is applauded by the international community and foreign and domestic observers. Nigeria's new leadership expresses continued commitment to achieving its long-term economic and development goals as well as championing full integration of the region.

Middle Case Scenario: (Probable)

The Government of Nigeria intensifies attacks against Boko Haram, ISWAP and other militia and criminal networks in the country. The insurgent attacks also persist creating fear and panic among the citizens in the conflict-affected North-East, North-West, South-East, and Middle-belt regions. These threats combined with public concerns about the current socio-economic situation in the country, contribute to raising tensions among the public and supporters of political parties resulting in violence and voter apathy in the lead-up to the election. Efforts by ECOWAS and AU Observations missions as well as the National Peace Committee, international guarantors and CSOs through preventive diplomacy to major presidential contestants and political leaders fail to restore the confidence of the citizens in the electoral process. Due to growing insecurity, voting in some of the polling stations in hotspot areas in the North and South-east remain suspended by INEC. There are reports of destruction of ballot boxes, clashes between armed groups and the security, but are contained and do not significantly affect the outcome of the elections. There is also intimidation and vote buying by political party supporters at polling stations. Some polling units in conflict-affected locations are declared inaccessible due to recurring violent extremists and bandits' attacks. In the post-election period, an uneasy calm swept over the country as the citizens are divided on the credibility of the elections. A winner emerges amid rancour by political parties with pockets of violence and announcements to challenge the results in court.

Worst Case Scenario: (Likely)

Despite insurgent attacks, physical violence, and tensions among political parties and supporters, especially the APC, PDP and LP, the election is held as planned in February 2023. The lead-up to the elections is marred by widespread inter-intra party wrangling, particularly as campaigns commence. The election process is trailed by accusations and counter-accusations by political parties claiming intimidation, irregularities and electoral fraud as well as the accusation of INEC's complicity of bias favouring the ruling political party. Security agencies and, ECOWAS, AU and international communities are accused of bias and weak effort to push for transparency and credibility of the electoral process. Polls are conducted as violence escalates across all the geo-political zones with terrorists and bandits attacking and kidnapping local and international observers. Separatist groups enforce a sit-at-home to deter voters in the southeast from voting. Killings of voters and INEC officials, destructions elections materials and burning of INEC offices in hotspot areas are recorded especially in the South East as well as in the North East, North Central and North Western Regions. Security agencies are incapacitated due to shortage of manpower deployed across vulnerable spots. The announcement of the election outcome foreshadows widespread violent demonstrations, the security forces are deployed to maintain law and order, while a state of emergency is imposed. Political parties file an injunction against the election results in court.

7.   Recommendations

ECOWAS/AU/UN and the International Community:

a.   The ECOWAS, AU, UN, and other international partners should intensify their engagements with the Federal Government and other political leaders to ensure political parties are committed to promoting peaceful and credible elections through preventive diplomacy and dialogue.

b.   ECOWAS, AU, and UN should provide technical assistance to the Government of Nigeria, INEC and security agencies on election dispute management and security to enhance election security coordination before, during and after the general elections.

Federal and State Governments:

a.   The Federal and State Governments should jointly review their peace and security strategies with the current security dynamics and trends, not only to ensure the safety and protection of voters and populations but also create, mitigate or enhance its   preparation for the conduct of credible elections, especially in the southeast and northern regions of Nigeria.

b.   Nation-wide sensitization on civic education on voting processes and non-violence should be reinforced on self-defence strategies and community policing enhancement across hotspot communities and regions. protection strategies for and tolerance by relevant Government agencies, for example, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), CSOs, traditional/religious groups and the media on peaceful elections. This should be complemented with the support of relevant stakeholders from the inter-faith mediation cluster to deal with issues of religious intolerance and promote trust, mutual respect, and social cohesion ahead of 2023.

Political Parties:

a.   Considering the nation's fragile unity and stability, political parties should enhance and expand awareness campaigns on peaceful elections, non-violence, and the dangers of hate speech to all their political party members and supporters in the lead-up to the general elections.

b.   Political party leadership should ensure their political party agents adhere to electoral guidelines to avoid electoral fraud, irregularities, and violence. This should be complemented with capacity building training in collaboration with INEC, CSOs and security agencies.

National Peace Committee:

a.   The National Peace Committee should intensify its engagements with the presidential aspirants and political party leaders ahead of the commencement of elections campaigns in September 2022. The committee should incorporate lessons learnt from the 2015 and 2019 elections to prevent violence during the electioneering process and to enhance peaceful election outcomes in 2023. The signing of the peace accord should be cascaded to all other political offices at the national and state levels including the State, Senate, House of Representatives and State House of Assembly elections in February and March 2023.

The Security and Justice Sectors:

a.   The Federal Government should strengthen the capacity of security agencies including the provision of logistical support for effective delivery in terms of security to mitigate issues of human security threats before, during and after the elections.

b.   The country's judiciary and other avenues of seeking redress should be fortified and facilitated to work efficiently so that all grievances in the elections are addressed without fear or favour.

c.   Timely and vigorous judgements of election-related litigations would constitute a violence arresting valve. In this regard, the country's judiciary must be seen to be independent and capable of making decisions without political interference.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC):

a.　　The documentation of lessons learnt and international best practices from Election Management Bodies (EMBs) across West Africa by INEC is crucial and should be replicated where necessary as part of pre-emptive measures aimed at ensuring better programming in the 2023 elections in addition to the introduction of the BVAS technology. This upholds the credibility of elections and enhances the electorate's confidence in the electoral umpire.

b.　　To forestall occurrences that could disrupt the electoral cycle at stipulated dates, INEC should enhance its contingency/management plans including effective collaboration with security agencies to prevent adverse actions that could sabotage its efforts in ensuring peaceful elections in 2023, particularly in hard-to-reach communities.

c.　　As part of efforts towards strengthening electoral accountability and ensuring a transparent electoral process, INEC should facilitate a national dialogue conference primarily to create communication exchange with political leaderships and representatives of political parties across the State on challenges that could undermine the democratic principles of equity, equality, and fairness.

Civil Society Organisations and the Media:

a.　　The commitment of CSOs in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in promoting peace through sensitization programmes on non-violence pre-electioneering period is commendable; and should be amplified in partnership with political parties considering the surge in arson, political thuggery, intimidation/threats, among others, during political party campaigns ahead of the general elections.

b.　　WANEP through its Election Situation Room (ESR) should ensure effective observation and reporting of the electoral processes as well as intensify public education campaigns on non-violence and better monitoring of the elections.

c.　　The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should intensify efforts to regulate media institutions to prevent the broadcast of hate speeches capable of destabilizing the polity. The media should maintain ethical standards and ensure professionalism and neutrality in their reportage as well as provide coverage opportunities to political parties.

d.　　CSOs should consolidate and coordinate their efforts in monitoring the electoral process as well as intensify sensitisation on the importance of exercising their franchise and voting for credible candidates.

8.　　Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Nigeria has achieved steady progress in democratic governance over the last two decades. Pivotal to the progress is the evidence of the peaceful political turnover witnessed in the aftermath of the 2015 presidential election. In addition to this is the growing political culture of periodic multiparty elections, free media space for active civil society and citizens' participation in governance as well as adherence to constitutionalism. The 2023 general elections further present opportunities for Nigeria to harness its dividends for democratic consolidation in the political landscape of the country. However, rising insecurity, socio-economic and political challenges bedevilling the country ahead of the elections pose high risks to election security. It is also instructive that the upcoming election will be organised within the context of widespread concern about democratic regression and rising insecurity in regional security ecosystem. Therefore, as the largest democracy and critical actor in regional peace and security, Nigeria's 2023 elections have potential implications for democratic stability in the region.

Despite the seeming protracted security, socio-economic and political obstacles bedevilling the country ahead of the election, there are also resilient factors that could be leveraged to conduct peaceful elections and harness its dividends to consolidate democratic governance. Already, key stakeholders including security

agencies, INEC, CSOs, peace committees, traditional and faith-based organisations, the media, and international partners have activated various interventions aimed at fostering peace aand security ahead of the elections. While such interventions are necessary for safeguarding citizens' participation and election security, what is critically important is the need for internal and international interlocutors to intensify collaboration and engagement with critical stakeholders including INEC, political parties, and other relevant actors to sustain dialogue aimed at managing potential disputes and respond effectively to threats to election security to ensure peaceful political transition in Nigeria in 2023. This will be catalytic to strengthen Nigeria's capacity to assuage the socio-economic and security challenges, which will contribute to bolstering regional political stability, peace and security.

NIGERIA

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