



Buhari - re-elected



Atiku - still contesting results

Nigeria's bumpy road to democracy

Africa's most populated country, Nigeria, after some 20 years of democratic governance, has just gone through another cycle of elections, with all kinds of challenges, writes ***Chido Onumah**.

Nigeria's much-anticipated presidential election took place on Saturday, February 23, 2019, after a one-week extension. Originally scheduled to hold on Saturday, February 16, the election was shifted at the eleventh hour by the country's election umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), citing logistical challenges. It was a decision that didn't go down well with political parties and politicians—who claimed they had expended a lot of resources preparing for the February 16 date—and Nigerians who had to travel long distances, many to their

states of origin, to cast their votes. That perhaps would explain the record low-turn when the election eventually held a week after. With more than 82 million registered voters, fewer than 29 million, representing about 35% voted, a shortfall from the 43.65% of registered voters that turned out in 2015.

In the early hours of Wednesday, February 27, after four days of suspense, the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), was declared winner with 15,191,847 votes, beating his main challenger, Atiku Abubakar, who

scored 11,262,978. Buhari won in 19 states while Mr. Abubakar won in 17 states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). While there are 91 officially registered political parties in Nigeria, 73 parties fielded presidential candidates, the highest in the history of the country. The election as expected was essentially a two-horse race between the incumbent, a retired general, Muhammadu Buhari, and the candidate of the main opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and former vice president, Atiku Abubakar.

It was a race between two political

heavyweights. After three previous attempts, Buhari defeated then president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, in 2015—the first time an incumbent president would be defeated in an election in Nigeria. A veteran of the Nigerian Civil War that lasted from 1967 to 1970, Buhari has been in government since 1975 when he was appointed military administrator of former North-eastern state, comprising

1999 after 16 years of military dictatorship. He had a rocky relationship with his boss during their second term from 2003 to 2007 and failed in his bid to succeed him in 2007. He ran for president for the first time in 1992 and would run again in 2011 and in 2015—in the APC primaries—against the eventual winner, Muhammadu Buhari.

While the candidates offered a lot

though Mr. Buhari scored better in the South-east and South-south in the 2019 election than he did in previous election, the low numbers compared to those of his opponent reflected the crisis of confidence that has trailed Buhari's style of governance and questioned the unity of the country under his watch.

President Buhari came to power four years ago promising “change,” and a



Oil infrastructure

today's Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi and Gombe States. He would become Nigeria's federal commissioner (minister) of petroleum between 1976 and 1978, and head of state after he seized power in a military coup on December 31, 1983, ending Nigeria's Second Republic.

Buhari's main challenger, Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president and billionaire businessman, worked for many years with the Nigeria Customs Service before his foray into politics. A protégé of Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, a retired general who opposed Abacha's dictatorship and would later die in prison, Atiku emerged as vice-president under retired general, Olusegun Obasanjo, when Nigeria returned to civilian rule in

in terms of political pedigree, the campaign itself didn't offer much in terms of the fundamental challenges confronting Nigeria, particularly the question of national integration. Some people have argued that not since the 30-month civil war that lasted from July 1967 to January 1970 has Nigerian been divided the way it has in the last four years of the Buhari administration. Much of that was reflected in the voting pattern.

Even though Buhari and Atiku are Fulani, Muslims and from northern Nigeria, much of Buhari's support during the election came from northern Nigeria as opposed to Atiku who controlled the votes in the South-east, South-south and parts of the South-west while gaining some grounds in the North. Even

break from the past. He vowed to tackle corruption, insecurity and unemployment. Very little appears to have changed after four years. Insecurity continues to be a major issue in the country with the unrelenting onslaught of the Boko Haram terrorist group in the North-east, kidnappers and freelance assassins in the southern part of the country and banditry in the North-west, including in the president's home state of Katsina. Much of the first term of the Buhari administration witnessed an upsurge in deadly violence by itinerant herdsmen on local farmers in the country's North-central zone and critics accused the president of not doing enough to tackle the problem.

On the economic front, while the country witnessed some gains, particu-

larly in the areas of road and rail infrastructure, unemployment remains high. The country's unemployment rate increased from 18.8 per cent in the third quarter of 2017 to 23.1 per cent in the third quarter of 2018, according to a report released in December 2018 by the country's apex statistical agency, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The report noted that the economically active or working age population (15 – 64 years of age) increased from 111.1 million in Q3 2017 to 115.5 million in Q3 2018.

Corruption, or fighting it, remains a touchy issue. The introduction of a whistleblower policy—which rewards Nigerians who report fraud and corruption—by the government in December 2016, has led to the recovery of large sums of money by the country's anti-corruption agencies while the Treasury Single Account (TSA) which was initiated by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2012 and implemented by the Buhari administration, has helped reduce graft in the public service by consolidating all government revenues in a single account at the Central Bank of Nigeria. On the issue of politically exposed persons (PEPs), the opposition has severely accused the Buhari administration of only targeting those opposed to the government.

These concerns, including the need to diversify the economy and reduce, if not end, the country's dependence on oil will dominate Mr. Buhari's second term which starts on May 29. The reliance on oil has not only exacerbated prebendal politics in Nigeria, it has led to widespread poverty, created huge environmental problem, a booming “ransom industry” and an army of “militants” whose stock-in-trade often includes destruction of oil pipelines and kidnaping of oil workers, particularly expatriates in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta region.

Yet, there appears to be no let-up in the quest for what some people have described as the “curse of oil.” Indeed, the last four years has witnessed intensified exploration—bordering on maniacal obsession—for crude oil in the Lake Chad Basin and other parts of northern Nigeria, a search that was initiated many years ago when Mr. Buhari was Federal Commissioner (Minister) for Petroleum

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between 1976 and 1978 under the military regime of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. There is also the issue of a new minimum wage which pitted the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) against the government last year with labour threatening to shut down the country on several occasions.

Though the election is over, there remains great uncertainty. Mr. Abubakar, the runner-up, has yet to congratulate President Buhari who was declared winner by the electoral commission. He has signified his intention to challenge the result at the election tribunal. A week after the result was announced, the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal sitting in Abuja granted Mr. Abubakar leave to inspect all election materials used by INEC during the presidential election.

The expectation is that the coming weeks will witness legal fireworks at the election tribunal and ultimately at the Supreme Court in case parties decide to appeal the decision of the tribunal. The opposition has also taken its case to the court of public opinion. A day before the election tribunal's ruling, Uche Secondus, National Chairman of Mr. Abubakar's People's Democratic Party (PDP), led hundreds of party supporters to the national headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to register their dissatisfaction with the

outcome of the presidential election. The opposition is accusing the government of vote buying, suppression of votes in its stronghold, manipulation of results, and militarizing the election. More than two dozen people, including security personnel, died during the election, the highest number of deaths on election day since the country returned to democracy in 1999.

The opposition is also accusing the government of muzzling the judiciary in anticipation of the outcome of the election. President Buhari suspended the country's Chief Justice, Walter Onnoghen, over allegation of false declaration of assets, and appointed an acting Chief Justice, Ibrahim Tanko Muhammad, to replace him on the eve of the swearing-in of judges who will oversee election petitions. The president's action didn't have the input of the National Judicial Council (NJC), a body constitutionally mandated to undertake such task, and many legal experts worry that Mr. Buhari's action could lead to a constitutional crisis if not handled carefully.

The president's health will be a major issue in his second term. Mr. Buhari was in and out hospital in the UK for treatment for undisclosed illness, staying on one occasion for more than three months.

While the major election for president, 109 senators and members of the Federal House of Representatives—among the highest paid legislators in the world—took place on February 23, elections for the country's 36 governors and state assembly members will take place on March 9.

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Why it's so hard for most countries to be economically independent from the West



Western leaders : Macron of France and the US' Trump

The structures of the global economy present challenges to any country or political party that wants to try to break out of US hegemony, writes ***Justin Podur**.

Why is it so difficult even for huge countries with large, diversified economies to maintain independence from the West?

If anyone could have done it, it was Brazil. In the 19th century it was imagined that Brazil could be a Colossus of the South to match the US, the Colossus of the North. It never panned out that way.

And 100 years later, it still hasn't happened. With a US\$2 trillion GDP

(a respectable \$9,800 per capita), nearly 200 million people, and a strong manufacturing base (the second largest in the Americas and 28.5% of its GDP), Brazil is far from a tiny, weak island or peninsula dependent on a patron state to keep it afloat.

When Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva won a historic election to become president of Brazil in 2003, it seemed like an irreversible change in the country's politics. Even though Lula's Workers'

Party was accused of being communists who wanted to redistribute all of the country's concentrated wealth, the party's redistributive politics were in fact modest — a programme to eradicate hunger in Brazil called Zero Hunger, a family-based welfare program called the Family Allowance, and an infrastructure spending program to try to create jobs. But its politics of national sovereignty were ambitious.

It was under Workers' Party rule