



## **Pôle Recherches et Publications**

### **Observatoire des Pays de la CEEAC et du Nigeria**

**Nigeria at the crossroads after a decade of President Buhari's leadership. What can Nigerians, Africa and the World expect from the future Federal Head of State?**

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January 2023

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a former colony of the UK that is in Sub-Saharan West Africa, bordering Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, largest economy since 2014, and leading oil producer. It plays a major political and economic role in Africa and wields significant influence in regional bodies such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The country's commercial centre, Lagos, is among the world's largest cities, with an annual economic output surpassing that of many African countries<sup>1</sup>. By 2050, Nigeria is poised to overtake the United States as the world's third most populous country, with a population projected to exceed 400 million<sup>2</sup>. At 216 million inhabitants as of mid-2020, Nigeria is currently the world's sixth most populous. Its status as a human and economic power undoubtedly makes it an African giant with the potential to influence continental politics, and also play an important role in world politics.

Although imperfect and described as 'democracy' by many observers and intellectuals in Nigeria and elsewhere, Nigerian democracy has made some progress since the end of military rule in 1999 and the establishment of the Fourth Republic. It became a multiparty democracy in 1999, after four decades of military rule punctuated by repeated coups and intermittent attempts to establish civilian government. Today, Nigeria is a federal republic with 36 states. Its political structure is similar to that of the United States, with a bicameral legislature comprising a 109-member Senate and a 360-member House of Representatives. Nigeria is a federation consisting of three tiers of government, namely the federal, state, and local governments with separation of powers and functions between the tiers. Nigeria operates an executive presidential system of government with executive powers vested in an elected president, elected governors of 36 states, and elected local government officials. Each of the 36 states also has an elected state assembly of between 24 and 40 members depending on the size of the population of the state. All elected officers have four-year term tenure except for the local government officials whose term ranges from two to three years depending on the

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<sup>1</sup> Husted T.F. and Blanchard P.L. (18/09/2020), Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S Policy, Congressional Research Service, p.2, retrieved from <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33964/pdf> accessed on 17/01/2023.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2019 Revision, 2019

law existing in the state. There is a two-term constitutional limit on the tenure of the President and the Governors<sup>3</sup>.

Since the organisation of "democratic" elections, four presidents have succeeded each other as head of state in Nigeria, notably Olusegun Obasanjo from 1999 to 2007, Umaru Yar'Adua from 2007-2010, Goodluck Jonathan from 2010-2015 (he acted as interim president as vice-president after the death of President Yar'Adua in 2010 before being elected in his turn in 2011).

Muhammadu Buhari came to power in 2015 after three unsuccessful attempts (2003, 2007 and 2011). It is the first time since the establishment of multiparty politics that an opposition candidate has defeated the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). This former military officer was involved in several coups, one of which enabled him to become president in 1983 before being deposed in the same way in 1985. Muhammadu Buhari then claimed to be a convert to democracy and did not fail to display his great ambitions for Nigeria. His reputation for being incorruptible and his military background made him an attractive candidate whom many Nigerians hoped might be able to more effectively handle the urgent security threats. He is then reappointed as head of state in 2019. After nearly a decade as President of Nigeria, President Buhari is about to hand over the baton to his successor who will be chosen in the presidential election of 25 February 2023. This election promises to be crucial because of the many structural and economic challenges facing the state and its people. What is the assessment of President Buhari's two terms in office? What are the strengths and ambitions of the candidates in running for the February 2023 election? How can we foresee the future of Nigeria for the next ten years? We will try to provide some answers to these questions in the following developments.

### **I- Eight years on: strengths and weaknesses of the Buhari presidency**

When he was sworn in on 29 May 2015, President Buhari set out three major priorities for his term of office aimed at making up for the 'calamitous legacy' of Goodluck Jonathan's presidency: ensuring socio-economic development, fighting corruption and tackling rampant insecurity. The successes and failures of his policies could only be more easily assessed based on these three priorities.

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<sup>3</sup> UNCT (United Nations Common Team) Nigeria (February 2022), Common Country Analysis, p.51

➤ **In economic terms**

Nigeria is a country with immense economic and human potential. It is no coincidence that since 2014 it has been the largest economy on the African continent ahead of South Africa, and the 21<sup>st</sup> largest economy in the world<sup>4</sup>. It alone accounts for 20% of the continental GDP and 70% of the West African economy. Apart from the recessions of 2015-2016 and 2020, the country has generally experienced significant positive growth. It was 3.4% in 2022<sup>5</sup>. Nigeria's fortunes have for decades been based on black gold, on which the Nigerian economy is heavily dependent, a "mono-economy" as Michael Famoroti puts it, with oil as the main source of government revenue: 70% of revenues and 90% of foreign exchange<sup>6</sup>. This makes the country vulnerable to fluctuations in the world market. Despite this apparent wealth, the gap between rich and poor is widening, and inequalities remain stark. According to the World Bank in its poverty assessment report titled A Better Future For all Nigerians 2022, there were 95.1 million poor Nigerians in 2022. This increase by more than 5 million additional people as compared to the figures of 2020 (85.2 million people) is allegedly due to the covid-19 crisis driving up Nigeria's poverty rate. This is generating a lot of frustration and discontent among the underprivileged population, leading to a deficit of trust in the government.

However, President Buhari has made several efforts on the economic front despite the many endogenous and exogenous constraints. Firstly, measures to diversify the economy through the promotion of agriculture. President Buhari has put in place several programmes aiming at fostering agricultural development, namely:

- the Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP) of the Central Bank of Nigeria, launched on November 17, 2015 and which has disbursed more than 800 billion Naira to more than 4 million smallholder farmers of 23 different commodities (including Rice, Wheat, Maize, Cotton, Cassava, Poultry, Soybeans, Groundnut, and Fish), cultivating over 5 million hectares of farmland;

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<sup>4</sup> Nigeria Case-Study - A Rapidly Developing NEE (Newly Emerging Economy) on <https://evelyngraceacademy.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria-MAJOR-Case-Study-PDF.pdf> accessed on 17/01/2023

<sup>5</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2022), Concluding statement of the 2022 Article IV Mission

<sup>6</sup> Perousse de Montclos M.A (08/10/2022) Nigéria : corruption, indiscipline, impunité... La police n'est pas près de changer, in JeuneAfrique, in <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1383213/politique/nigeria-corruption-indiscipline-impunite-la-police-nest-pas-pres-de-changer/> accessed on 17/01/2023.

- Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI): Launched as a government-to-government partnership between the Nigerian and Moroccan Governments, in December 2016, aiming at producing enough quantity of fertilizer to sustain agriculture;
- The National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA);
- Agriculture for Food and Jobs Programme (AFAJ);
- National Livestock Transformation Programme (NLTP);
- The Green Imperative - a Nigeria-Brazil Agricultural Mechanisation Programme aimed at boosting agricultural production in Nigeria<sup>7</sup>.

But low investment, especially in irrigation<sup>8</sup>, still leads to insufficient productivity, in addition to numerous conflicts between herders and farmers and overall insecurity in several regions that disrupt agricultural activities. The effects of recent floods and high fertilizer prices have impacted both agricultural production and food prices. Ending the hyper-dependence on oil is quite complex and will probably require several governments and several mandates with a more effective policy to achieve it.

In terms of infrastructure development, President Buhari is emerging with a fairly satisfactory record, with the construction and maintenance of thousands of kilometres of railways and roads, as well as the development of air and sea port infrastructures<sup>9</sup>. Action has also been taken in the energy sector where access to electricity and drinking water remains problematic. The same applies to fuel shortages, which have persisted for several months in Nigeria, which seems rather incomprehensible in a country that is Africa's leading oil producer. To stem the supply problems that are at the root of this scarcity, the current government is considering a gradual reduction in subsidies by April 2023. The oil production has however declined since 2020 due to low investment and significant leakage<sup>10</sup>.

Despite efforts and improvements in some sectors that have enabled Nigeria to be recognised twice as top 10 most improved economies in the World Bank Doing Business<sup>11</sup>, Nigeria

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<sup>7</sup> The Buhari Administration Fifth Anniversary FACTSHEET (May 2020), on [https://statehouse.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/BUHARI-ADMINISTRATION-5-YEAR-FACTSHEET\\_MAY-2020.pdf](https://statehouse.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/BUHARI-ADMINISTRATION-5-YEAR-FACTSHEET_MAY-2020.pdf) accessed on 17/01/2023

<sup>8</sup> As of 2018, only about 5% of all cultivated land was irrigated, with most still depending completely on rainfall.

<sup>9</sup> The Buhari administration Factsheet 2022, p.5-17

<sup>10</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2022), Concluding statement of the 2022 article IV mission.

<sup>11</sup> The Buhari administration Factsheet 2022, p.22

continues to face significant economic challenges, while the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. Unemployment was estimated in 2020 at 33.3% and 53.4% for youth<sup>12</sup>.

➤ **In the fight against corruption**

President Buhari has also made the fight against corruption a major priority in Nigeria since the beginning of his mandate. For decades, corruption has been a major impediment to the country's development and the equitable distribution of wealth. To rationalise the collection of public revenues, increase transparency and reduce the risks of theft and mismanagement, President Buhari initiated the operationalisation of the Treasury Single Account in August 2015. It is a public accounting system that enables the Government to manage its finances (revenues and payments) using a single/unified account or series of linked accounts domiciled at the Central Bank of Nigeria. This measure has resulted in the consolidation of more than 17,000 bank accounts previously spread across Deposit Money Banks (DMBs) in the country, and savings of an average of 4 billion Naira monthly in banking charges<sup>13</sup>.

The Buhari Administration also put in place Project Lighthouse, a financial data collection, integration and analysis engine deployed by the Federal Government starting in 2018 has helped identify debts (unpaid taxes, loans, insurance funds, etc) valued at more than 5 Trillion Naira, owed Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs); of which 1.5 Trillion Naira has been recovered so far<sup>14</sup>.

A major clean-up and anti-impunity campaign was also launched at the beginning of his term, with the arrest and conviction of several senior figures for corruption. Between May 2015 and October 2017, the Nigerian state was able to recover the sum of 29 billion dollars<sup>15</sup>. These anti-corruption efforts led to President Buhari being named African Union Anti-corruption Champion in 2018. However, there have been long-standing criticisms that the fight against corruption is a witch-hunt, as personalities close to Buhari's circle are not worried, focusing more on political opponents than on allies. While there has been a slight improvement in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, from 28/100 in 2016 to 24/100 in

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Common Team (UNCT) Nigeria (February 2022), Common Country Analysis, p.22

<sup>13</sup> The Buhari Administration Factsheet 2020, p.55

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.55-56

<sup>15</sup> Akpan M.J.D.A. & EYO F.M. (2018) Anti-Corruption War Under President Muhammadu Buhari In Nigeria: The Arsenal, Casualties, Victories and Corruption Perception Appraisal, in Global Journal of Politics and Law Research, Vol.6, No.3, p.40.

2021 with a rank of 154<sup>ème</sup> out of 180, it is clear that the perception of corruption remains high in Nigeria, indicating that efforts must be continued and with concrete impact, to revive public confidence.

➤ **In the fight against insecurity**

When President Buhari came to power in 2015, insecurity in the country was at an extremely high level with the all-powerful Boko Haram group in the North-East carrying out bloody attacks beyond comprehension. In 2015, Boko Haram ranked as the world's deadliest terror group on the Global Terrorism Index, and in 2017 among the four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths. From 2015 to 2019, Nigeria ranked third in terms of concentration of terrorist attacks in the world, with the largest increase in deaths recorded in 2015 (7,512 fatalities)<sup>16</sup>.

The security situation in Nigeria is very precarious; in addition to terrorism, there is maritime piracy, violent organised crime with the presence of a panoply of criminal gangs operating throughout the country; inter- community tensions that very often degenerate into bloody conflict; and rebellion in the South, particularly in Biafra. This notorious insecurity has dramatic consequences for the socio-economic and human development of Nigeria.

President Buhari eagerly awaited the issue of insecurity, given his military background and experience. Numerous measures were taken as part of the reorganisation of the security and military apparatus. The military command was relocated to Maidugari (the birthplace of Boko Haram) in 2015, the military budget was improved with the purchase of arms, aircraft and other equipment for security forces and agencies, many security operations were launched nationwide, Nigeria's engagement with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) was revamped which saw the multiplication of joint operations and counter-insurgency against Boko Haram<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> See Global Terrorism Index 2015, 2017, 2020 and 2022.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/464754-analysis-six-years-after-buhari-has-failed-to-keep-promise-of-securing-nigeria.html> accessed on 17/01/2023



other equipment for security forces and agencies, many security operations were launched nationwide, Nigeria's engagement with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) was revamped which saw the multiplication of joint operations and counter-insurgency against Boko Haram.

The fight against maritime piracy has had positive results, to the point that on 8 March 2022, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) decided to remove Nigeria from its Piracy List given the dramatic reduction in the number of reported incidents of piracy in the Nigerian waters, lowest record in 27 years<sup>18</sup>.

In Global Terrorism Index 2022, though Nigeria appears as the sixth country with the higher impact of terrorism, the country has recorded the second biggest decrease in terrorism death from 629 deaths in 2019 to 178 deaths in 2021. Though the efforts of Nigeria together with the Multinational Joint Task Force have been productive, the decline of Boko Haram coincides with its weakening following its splitting into two and the death of its leader Shekau in May 2021.

But in the end, Buhari's two terms in office, despite improvements, have not been able to curb the serious security crises that have rocked the country, particularly the growing crime rate throughout the country. This insecurity still threatens the holding of the presidential election on 25 February and the general election on 11 March. These elections could be cancelled or postponed if the current level of insecurity persists in the country, the independent electoral commission warned on 9 January 2023<sup>19</sup>. There have been 50 recorded attacks on offices of the electoral commission nationwide between 2019 and 2022, with three attacks recorded in December 2022 including targeted arson and the use of explosives, leaving five deaths in the south-eastern state of Imo. On January 15, Nigerian policemen repelled and attacked by unknown gunmen at the office of the INEC in the state of Enugu. According to the chairman of INEC's Board of electoral Institute Abdu Zuru, "if the insecurity is not monitored and dealt with decisively, it could ultimately culminate in the cancellation and/or postponement of

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<sup>18</sup> <https://areteafrica.com/2022/06/29/has-nigerias-piracy-problem-been-solved/> accessed on 19/01/2023

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.zawya.com/en/economy/africa/security-threat-to-next-elections-real-nigeria-heql2jca> 19/01/2023



elections in sufficient constituencies to hinder declaration of elections results"<sup>20</sup> that which would lead to a major constitutional crisis.

President Buhari's attempt to reform the security forces is still ongoing. The security forces in Nigeria have a major role to play in the fight against crime and insecurity, but for several years they have been characterised by amateurism, lack of coordination, lack of appropriate training, low recruitment rate, corruption and aggression, and disrespect for human rights. This state of affairs has led to a breakdown in trust between the security forces and citizens. One still remembers the End SARS (Special Antirrobbery Squad) protests in October 2020 followed by a bloody crackdown on street protests in Lagos. In several regions, the population has to rely on itself to ensure its security with the establishment of self-defence militias that are not always up to the task<sup>21</sup>.

All the recurrent security challenges faced by Nigeria, and the inability of the president and governments to effectively address them and keep citizens safe and secure, made many observers and scholars conclude Nigeria is a 'failed State'; and Wole Soyinka describes the country as a 'crumbling edifice on the edge of collapse'<sup>22</sup>. For many also, president Buhari lengthy and constant medical trips abroad (over 8 months spent in the UK between 2015 and 2017) left a leadership gap that emboldened insecurity<sup>23</sup>.

There is certainly much to do in a context where the future of the African giant is at stake. The upcoming election will also be a renewed opportunity to test Nigerian democracy, which has been on the right track for some decades. The main candidates in the race seem to be aware of the issues at stake and the aspirations of the people, though the elected candidate will still have to be judged according to his governance. In the following section, we review the leading candidates and their plans.

## **II- Focus on the main candidates and their projects for Nigeria's future**

18 candidates were nominated in September 2022 for the presidential election of 25 February 2023, each with a running mate for the post of Vice-President. But four candidates are

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/features/2023/1/18/nigeria-electoral-commission-attacks-spark-polls-concern> accessed on 20/01/2023

<sup>21</sup> Perousse de Montclos M.A (08/10/2022) Nigéria : corruption, indiscipline, impunité... La police n'est pas près de changer, in JeuneAfrique

<sup>22</sup> Rotberg J. R. & Campbell J. (27/05/2021) "Nigeria is a failed state" retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/27/nigeria-is-a-failed-state>

<sup>23</sup> idem.

emerging as the most popular and favourite. These are Tinubu Bola Ahmed of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the main opposition People's Democratic Party, Musa Mohammed Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and Peter Obi of the Labour Party. Based on data from the Nigerian media and social networks, we were able to highlight their respective strengths and programmes, as well as public opinion on each.

➤ **Bola Ahmed Tinubu**

He is the candidate of the current ruling majority, backed by the incumbent President Buhari. Bola Ahmed Tinubu is a 70-year-old wealthy businessman and politician, and former Lagos state governor from 1999 to 2007. He was once forced to exile due to his activities within the pro-democracy National Democratic coalition under Sani Abacha military regime. He has a great experience in politics and is a huge influence across the country. The man who is called "the godfather" or the "kingmaker" believes that it is his turn to become king. He wants to use his experience as Lagos governor and the positive gains he obtained to strengthen his candidacy for the presidency, stating "what my team and I achieved in Lagos, together we all can achieve in Nigeria"<sup>24</sup>. Under his tenure, Lagos massively grew its income through huge foreign investment.

Bola Tinubu's project for Nigeria has been outlined in a manifesto of 80 pages entitled The Renewed Hope 2023. Action Plan for a better Nigeria. His priority will therefore be on national security (equipping the armed forces with more modern hardware and needed technological support, reforming the police to tackle the widespread insecurity), economy (creating jobs and bringing down rising inflation), agriculture, power oil and gas, transportation and education if elected in 2023. The manifesto also outlines policy options for healthcare, the digital economy, women empowerment, judicial reform, federalism/decentralisation of power and foreign policy. He promises huge investment in sports, entertainment and culture, youth empowerment and entrepreneurship<sup>25</sup>.

However, public opinion around Tinubu appears mixed and divided, reflecting the divide between a youth hungry for change and an elderly elite. He is seen by many as belonging to

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<sup>24</sup> <https://businessday.ng/amp/news/article/2023-tinubu-unveils-agenda-prioritises-security-economy-power-others/> accessed on 20/01/2023

<sup>25</sup> <https://amp.lepoint.fr/2478860> accessed on 20/01/2023

an old political class that has run out of ideas and has been on the political scene for too long, which is seen as a fault, says Udo Jude Ilo of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa<sup>26</sup>. He has been many times accused of corruption, or keeping a grip on state finances, though never convicted. His health issues may also be an obstacle, as many Nigerians may be weary of another president with health issues after the death of Umaru Yar'Adua in office in 2010, and the current Buhari who spent considerable time abroad to receive medical care. Many people have also not forgotten his comments after the death of EndSars protesters in Lagos in 2020 when he questioned the intentions of young protesters who died.

➤ **Abubakar Atiku.**

The 76-year-old former vice president under Olusegun Obasanjo from 1999 to 2007 is the PDP's candidate for the sixth time this year. The PDP after 16 years in power is since 2015 the main opposition party in Nigeria. His manifesto titled "My covenant with Nigerians" as well as his policy document JOBS (Jobs, Opportunity, Being united and Security) reveal his priorities for the Nigerian state if he is elected to lead the federal state, based on reunification, economy, security, education and true federalism. He intends to restore Nigeria's unity, social justice, cooperation and consensus among citizens as well as the fight against tribalism, and the promise to form a government of national unity if elected, to establish strong and effective democratic governance to guarantee the security and safety of life and goods, build a strong and resilient economy to create jobs and wealth, promote a federal system enabling the federal state to foster national unity, improve the educational system and provide qualitative education. He is for the privatisation of state-owned oil companies and the removal of fuel subsidies with a roadmap on how the money saved will be used.

Atiku Abubakar appears like a highly experienced candidate and an investor in various domains such as education. However, for many Nigerians, he represents another symbol of gerontocracy. A 2010 US Senate Committee report linking him to the transfer of 40 million dollars in "suspect funds" to America has deepened voters' suspicion about his rectitude<sup>27</sup>, though he denies all allegations of corruption. Voters may have also become jaded by his repeated attempts at the presidency. He might also be fragilized by inner division within the PDP following his final designation as a candidate, based on ethnic divisions. The party didn't

<sup>26</sup> <https://amp.lepoint.fr/2478860> accessed on 20/01/2023

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/6da0fbe4-b085-4d1a-a30f-834faebb473f> accessed on 22/01/2023

respect the "zoning" code and elites from the south are against the solidification of northern control of the party. Nigeria's politics have been shaped by efforts to distribute power and state resources equitably in a country that is home to over 250 ethnic groups and has witnessed recurrent conflict along ethno-regional and religious lines. The "federal character" principle, enshrined in the 1999 constitution, requires that appointments to government posts reflect the country's diversity. By a de facto system known as "zoning," political parties rotate candidates for elected office on an ethno-regional basis. Perceived violations of these arrangements have led to conflict: in 2011, for instance, frustrated expectations that a northerner would retain the presidency contributed to post-election riots in which hundreds died<sup>28</sup>.

### **Rabiu Kwankwaso.**

The 66 years old former Governor of Kano State and former Defence minister under president Olusegun Obasanjo is the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) he joined in March 2022. He is running as presidential candidate for the first time, after his first attempt in 2015 during the APC primary he lost to Buhari. He tried again in 2019, this time around during the PDP primary he also lost to Atiku Abubakar. This year, Rabiu Kwankwaso is determined to achieve his goal. In a 152 pages manifesto titled My Pledges to you, he promises to restructure the country in all the domains, paying more attention on education, making all entry examination into the tertiary institutions free for citizens. As governor in Kano, he sponsored hundreds of students from Kano to study abroad. His second top priority is security, and he intends to recruit more people (at least 750 000) in the armed forces. He is also favourable to the suppression of fuel subsidy. As a PhD holder, he considers himself as the most qualified candidate, coupled with a relevant experience in the high spheres of administration. An attempted alliance with the Labour Party of Peter Obi failed<sup>29</sup>. He actually appears to be the most popular candidate in the North-West which is the highest voting region in Nigeria, though it will take more time and resources to the NNPP to become as entrenched as the PDP or the APC. Some people see him as the candidate of the masses best equipped

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<sup>28</sup> The 2011 zoning controversy resulted from the 2010 death of incumbent President Umaru Yar'Adua, a northerner. He was succeeded by southern-born Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, who won reelection in 2011. Many northerners, including some prominent figures within Jonathan's party, opposed Jonathan's candidacy on the grounds that a northerner should have held the presidency for two consecutive terms. For an account of this controversy and the post-election violence.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/562907-kwankwaso-unveils-manifesto-presents-position-on-restructuring-education-security.html> accessed on 23/01/2023

and made for the position, while others say he is in the race as a spoiler to split votes, especially with early rumours on his stepping down<sup>30</sup>.

➤ **Peter Obi**

At 61, the former governor of Anambra State and Labour Party candidate is emerging as the outsider and the surprise candidate, with his campaign gaining in intensity and popularity with each passing day. He is contesting a presidential election for the second time after being Atiku Abubakar's running mate in 2019 for the PDP against President Buhari. Peter Obi appears to be the youngest presidential candidate at this election and has therefore seduced youths who see in him an opportunity to put an end to long decades of gerontocracy. His performance as governor of the Anambra State followed by some international recognition and distinction has convinced many of his competence and potential to rule Nigeria, and his reputation of credibility to make a difference. Former president Obasanjo who endorsed him said "none of the contestants is a saint, but Obi is the one with an edge over the others"<sup>31</sup>. During his presentation on January 16 at the Chatham House International Affairs Think Tank in London, he set as top priorities tackling deep-rooted insecurity and corruption, promoting social and political mobility for Nigerian citizens, working on the mental health of communities traumatized by decades of violence in a country he also considers a failing state in need of new political leadership. He proposed dialogue with the secessionists and the implementation of a range of security and economic reforms<sup>32</sup>. Peter Obi is very popular among youths, most especially those of southern urban areas who are more present and active on social media, created the "Obi-dient" movement, and are also massively present during rallies. However, it is worth being careful about the dichotomy between social media agitation and effective support in the polls. The Labour Party does not have a very good territorial base like the main parties like the PDP or the APC and will have to make an extra effort to win votes and support in the strongholds of the dominant parties. But whatever the final result of Petr Obi, for many observers he will have had the merit of reviving the interest of young Nigerians in politics, which would be beneficial in the long term for a country with a large young population.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.thecable.ng/nnpp-kwankwaso-in-presidential-race-to-win-not-to-split-votes/amp> accessed on 23/01/2023

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61865502.amp> accessed on 18/01/2023.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/events/al/research-event/nigerians-2023-elections-vision-policy-change-and-institutional-reforms> accessed on 17/01/2023.

Many of Obi's supporters are hoping to see an ethnic Igbo man at the helm of the federal state for the first time. It should be recalled that ethnic and religious cleavages are important determinants of elections in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

Whoever wins the February 25 presidential election will have his work cut out for him to lift Nigeria out of all the challenges it faces, which currently feature in most of the political projects or programmes of candidates, namely: the economy, security, the fight against corruption, the building of national unity, in short, the integral and multidimensional development of Nigeria and the reinforcement of its status as a leader on the continental sphere. The people have high expectations and hopes of seeing a far better Nigeria in the next decades, but the candidates also have a great responsibility to maintain a peaceful atmosphere before, during and after the election. A post-electoral crisis should not be allowed to add to Nigeria's instability.

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