Nigeria in 2015

The March and April elections at the federal and state level dominated the political scene. For the first time in Nigeria’s history, a sitting president was voted out of office. Muhammadu Buhari won decisively and was given a strong political mandate. An improved election commission conducted the most credible elections yet in Nigeria’s history, although it had initially appeared that the postponement of the elections would derail the whole election process with unforeseeable repercussions. However, at the end of the day, the political class and the vast majority of the elites demonstrated their willingness and ability to stabilise the Fourth Republic. The new government intensified the fight against the Islamist insurgency in the North-East, which improved the security situation as a whole. However, Buhari faced economic challenges amplified by plummeting oil and gas prices.

Domestic Politics

The most prominent issues were the general elections, scheduled for 14 February (presidential and National Assembly), 28 February (gubernatorial and state assemblies), and the ongoing threat of Boko Haram. At the beginning of the year, all eyes were on the elections, in which the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta, and the former military dictator and three-time presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari battled for the presidency, a repeat of the previous election in 2011. While Jonathan, of the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), kept his vice president, Namadi Sambo, a Muslim from the North as running mate, Buhari, of the All Progressives Congress (APC), named former Lagos state attorney general, Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian from the South-West. The other 12 aspirants and their respective running mates played little to no role in the outcome.
At the start of the year, logistical and technical problems within the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), along with the ongoing Islamic insurgency in the North, meant that only two-thirds of the 67.4 m registered voters had collected their ‘Permanent Voters’ Cards’ (PVCs). Accordingly, the INEC extended the collection deadline until 8 February. At this point, doubts were raised as to whether the elections would take place at all, given the undercurrent of political change in favour of Buhari. However, the ability of the APC to seal a strong alliance between the North-West and South-West, which Nigeria had last seen on the eve of the civil war, presented Jonathan with an insuperable challenge, despite the fact that the presidency and the PDP had a level of resources no other candidate could hope to match. In fact, the credibility of Jonathan and the PDP had already reached a nadir from which they never really recovered. Moreover, the APC was able to demonstrate unity and stayed away from any provocative language during the election campaign.

On 22 January, at Chatham House in London, Sambo Dasuki, the national security adviser, insinuated that elections would not take place as scheduled. This was the prelude to similar indications by the security agencies, who were about to commence a six-week special campaign against the Islamist insurgents in the North-East and would not be available to support the planned elections. Thus, on 7 February, the well respected INEC chairman, Attahiru Jega, announced that the polls would be shifted to 28 March (presidential and National Assembly), and 11 April (gubernatorial and state assemblies). Although the elections were delayed, they still met the constitutional deadline.

Soon afterwards, the two main presidential contenders accepted the postponement and the incumbent pledged that the new president would be sworn in on 29 May, the day that marks the beginning of a new presidential term. In addition, the INEC extended the deadline for collecting the PVCs to 8 March and almost 80% of the registered voters eventually collected their cards. The uneven