

# IMPACT OF ELECTION POSTPONEMENT ON NIGERIA'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE SINCE THE FOURTH REPUBLIC (1999-2023)

BY

**Neba Ambesi Polycarp, PhD**  
**Wellspring University, Benin City, Nigeria**  
**Email:neba.ambesi@wellspringuniversity.edu.ng,**  
**polly.neba@gmail.com**  
**GSM: 07030508393**

**And,**  
**Keneton Gweke**  
**Wellspring University, Benin City, Nigeria**  
**Email:gkeneton@gmail.com**  
**GSM: 08121805995**

## **Abstract**

*Elections are in every sense critical to democracy and it is the mechanism by which the idea of a democratic government is attained, and means by which the government remains accountable to the governed. In so many ways, the conduct of a nation's elections substantially impinges its image internationally. Therefore undue delays or arbitrary postponement of elections is in a way inimical to democracy and by extension how a country is perceived globally. The Fourth Republic (1999) has been the longest uninterrupted democratic dispensation since the history of Nigeria's independence (1960). The nation has had six general elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with three of these elections delayed or postponed for various reasons. This research is basically analytical, drawing its data primarily from secondary sources and analysed using qualitative method; a system which provide exploratory insight with the help of textual analysis. One of the findings is that, election postponement presented Nigeria to the world as a nation with weak internal structure and institutions. It went on to recommend that Nigeria must seek to implement findings and recommendations of most election observers and other relevant stakeholders if the negative image of the nation caused by election postponement will be reversed.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Election postponement, national image, credible elections, electoral management bodies*

## **Introduction**

Every political entity has its system of leadership, providing governance, therefore, the criticality of its leadership selection apparatus or election mechanism and processes as in the case of democracy must be seen to be transparent, fair, credible and acceptable to the majority in society and indeed the international community, if that government will retain its credibility and legitimacy.

Since the Fourth Republic, Nigeria has had its general elections postponed three times for various reasons. These reasons range from logistical problems-late arrival of sensitive and non sensitive materials to polling stations, sometimes due to difficulties in accessing some geographical terrains in the country, weather conditions,

non- payment of salaries to staff and ad-hoc staff of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security challenges amongst other challenges. These challenges have been adduced as reasons for the postponements of three general elections in Nigeria, an occurrence that triggered mixed reactions by Nigerians and the international community.

It must be stated here that election postponements is not particular to Nigeria. "Across Africa 27 of 102 presidential elections have been delayed since 2009" "20 of the 51 countries that held presidential elections have experience one or more postponement in the past 10 years". The delays range from two years to several years, many lasting several weeks. Ivory Coast had the longest of them all, they had a five years delay. The reason for the postponements range from civil wars, natural disasters, insurgency, improper planning by the electoral bodies. In some cases, political office holders sometimes out of their desperation to hang onto power, attempts to skirt constitutional term limit (Salem, 2019). "The United Nations and other partners have also conducted a number of recent reviews and stock takings of postponed Nigerian elections and its blatant effect on her democracy and other sectors of the nation". [Chinedu, 2019].

Nigeria as a nation is simply a component part of a larger system, in this case the international system, her actions and inactions have ripple effects on this larger system to which she is a fundamental part. In an election season, what happens in the country becomes news at the international level. Citizens of other nations of the earth start to form opinions about Nigeria in their minds based on the news filtering out of the country. The nature of the perception created in their minds at an overall scale either paints a picture of Nigeria as a strong and properly functional nation or generally weak and dysfunctional. This is in fact the definition of a nation's international image.

System theory simply implies that no component part of a whole functions in isolation of the others as such what affects one impacts the others interacting with it. Therefore, when an election is postponed for any reason, after some nations have made contributions in cash and in many other areas like training of INEC staff, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) voters enlightenment campaigns, elections observers both local and international monitoring the election and the various stakeholders at the global level and for some reasons, dates previously fixed is now moved, all of these international actors playing one role or the other are in a sense affected. They definitely send back reports to their countries and corporate headquarters in the case of International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), as to what is going on in the country, particularly the election they have come to monitor or observe, again such reports put a dent on the nation's image internationally.

## **Literature Review**

### **History of Elections in Nigeria**

The administration of democratic elections in Nigeria dates back to 1958 before independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was inaugurated to conduct the 1959 federal elections. Prior to 1958, regional laws and government regulated and conducted elections.

At the time an expertrate by the name Roland Edward Wraith headed ECN and four other Nigerians representing the regions and the Federal Capital Territory FCT Lagos. The immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 was conducted by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), established in 1960. Prior to the conduct of the 1964 election, the Chief Electoral Officer, Kofo Abayomi resigned and some party officials from the NCNC and Action Group doubted the credibility of a free and fair election. The electoral body was dissolved after the military coup of 1966. In 1978, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo, organising the election of 1979 which ushered in Nigeria Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It also conducted the general elections of 1983.

Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) became the military head of state on the 27th August, 1985 after removing Major General Muhammadu Buhari. In January 1986, IBB and his Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) initiated a transition process to return the nation to civilian rule setting October 1990 as a date for this return. The 1987 decree established the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to oversee the process chaired by professor Eme Awa, who held office from 1987 to 1989 and resigned after a disagreement with Babangida, preceded by Ovie Whisky and succeeded by Humphrey Nwosu, Babangida proceeded later on to shift the handover date to 1992 while banning politicians and public officials of the Second Republic from participating in the Third Republic, but later lifted the ban on political parties in May 1989, again he shifted the handover date to January 1993. (Agbese, 1990; Odinkalu, 2001; Adeniran 1991; Emanuel Ojo, 2014).

The Third Republic election of 1993 conducted under former military dictator Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) unofficial result though not declared indicated a victory for Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), who defeated Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC). The winner was never declared as election was annulled by Babangida and reasons adduced for the annulment was election irregularities. It led to wide spread protest across the nation and political unrest which eventually led IBB to resign, a weak interim civilian government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan was put in place, later that same year Sani Abacha ascended to power as a military head of state via a process of bloodless coup. (News from African Watch, 1993; Campbell, 1994; The cable, June 12, 2017).

In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) which conducted other sets of elections. These elected individuals were not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha on June 1998 which aborted the process. In 1998, General Abdusalami Abubakar's administration dissolved NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC organised the transitional elections that ushered in the Nigerian Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999. (Amuwo and Lebeau, 2001; Obi, Cyril, Godwin Onuoha, 2022; Jide Ojo, 2022)

### **Political Participation in Nigeria 1999-2011**

Political Participation involves an active interaction between citizens and government. It is a two-way process. One party initiates and the other party responds. The importance of elections cannot be doubted.

At the very least, they provide the public with its clearest formal opportunity to influence the political process and also help directly or indirectly to determine who will hold government power. There was an increase in the level of participation in 2003 compared to 1999. The level of participation increased by ten (10%). Factor that could be responsible for this was the fact that Nigerian electorates doubted the sincerity of the military to relinquish power in 1999. So when they noticed that the Nigerian state had really democratized, then the level of participation increased in 2003. In 2007, there was decrease in the level of electoral participation. The level of participation dropped by twelve (12%) in 2007. The main factor responsible for this was imposition of candidates and election rigging that was the order of the day in 2003 elections and the do or die affair syndrome injected into the polity in the 2007 elections by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). In 2011 it further slipped down by 5.1% as a result of the fact that electorates had lost confidence in the electoral process because they thought the trend would continue. Apart from presidential elections, level of citizens participation in Nigeria since 1999 has been on a steady decline. In 1999, 57,938,945 voters were registered those who actually voted in presidential elections were 30,280,052, representing almost sixty-percent (60%) of this on the roll. In 2003, 60.82 million were on the voters register and 42,018,735 voters cast their vote during elections. Thus about 70% of those on the roll participated in the presidential poll. In 2007, 61 million, voters were registered while 35.41 million voted. In percentage terms, 58% of those registered turned out for voting during the presidential elections. While in 2011, 73,528,040 voters were registered the presidential election results showed that the average turn out of voters was put at 52.9%. (INEC Report on the general elections, 2011) (Nwoba and Nwose, 2019)

According to the chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Prof. Attahiru Jega, only 75% of the 70 million qualified voters participated in the general elections. This was due to the fact that the entire electoral process was shoddily handled. Apart from political apathy displayed, the elections were scuttled by problems like poorly printed ballot papers and none availability of essential materials including result sheet (Peter, 2011).

### **The Benchmark of Elections**

Elections are the core or central institution of democratic representative governments. This is so because, the consent of the governed in democracy is the singular point from where the authority of the government derives its life and legitimacy. The fundamental mechanism to render, interpret, convert, or translate that consent into governmental authority is for free and fair elections to be conducted or hold periodically.

There are undemocratic elections even though all contemporary democracies hold elections, Right-wing autocratic government, Marxist regimes, and single-party governments also stage elections to give their government a semblance of legitimacy. In such elections, there may be only one candidate or a list of candidates, with no alternative options. When genuine choices are trapped only within a particular party, we say it is not democracy. These kinds of elections are manipulated to ensure a single authoritarian emerges as head of government. (Adejumobi, 2000; Kura, 2008).

## **What Are Democratic Elections?**

Jeane Kirkpatrick, scholar and former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has offered this definition: "Democratic elections are not merely symbolic....They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism and to present alternatives."( Kirk Patrick, 1984). Adejumobi, ( 2000). Agrees that the consent of the governed through a process of legitimate elections is the only way a government can drive legitimacy and uphold integrity in a democracy, but added that in Africa there is a rapid decline of free, fair and credible elections, and sometimes the total absence of elections. These are signs of a gradual slide and reversal to dictatorship. He said, "Election rigging and brigandage, violence and election annulment are common practices. That tend towards...despotic political rulership under the guise of civil governance. Elections in their current form or state in most African states appear to be a fading shadow of democracy"

Kirkpatrick's definition conveys the sense of the fact that Democratic elections are competitive. There must be oppositions of ideas put forth by different candidates on different political party platforms with the unchallenged or unrestricted access to freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the liberty necessary to voice their criticisms of the government openly and to bring alternative policies and candidates to the voters. Just because the opposition has access to the ballot is not enough. Elections in which the opposition is barred from the airwaves, has its rallies harassed or its newspapers censored, are not democratic. The party in power may enjoy the advantages of incumbency, but the rules and conduct of the election contest must be fair.

### **Democratic elections are time bound**

Take away the time bound concept from elections, democracy would have been systematically ushered to its tomb. The core component of democracy is to keep the elevated subject to the electorate's will therefore a true democracy does not elect dictators; one whose position remains unchallenged through a democratic process or put in office as president-for-life. Elected officials are accountable to the people, and they must return to the voters at prescribed intervals to seek their mandate to continue in office.

This means that the officials in a democracy must accept the risk of being voted out of office. (Yannis, 2023). VOA, (2019) report stated that one of the reasons why elections are delayed or postponed in some countries is due to the sit tight syndrome of some political office holders desiring to skirt constitutional term limit. It is therefore imperative to place a limit to how long elections can be postponed. Toby and Sead (2020) argued that though it is important to postpone elections in the case of disaster, it is also critical that "substantive concepts of democracy and electoral integrity, rather than existing international/national laws and standards, should be used to inform decisions about postponement by relevant stakeholders, be it an electoral management body (EMB), government, parliament, or the judiciary". In the view of Linz J.J. (1998), he said Democracy is by definition a government system of leadership or government where the governed or electorate can impose change through democratic elections taking place at regular intervals there by making those they voted into office accountable to them.

Also the Electoral Obligation and Standards Database (EOS) of the Carter Center (2023) stated that elections are to be held at periodic intervals.

### **The Exception**

There is a major component of a democracy that stands out as the one exception; it is the judicial arm of government. (judges), this is so to insulate them against popular pressure or pressure from a section of the public. This exception helps to ensure their impartiality and they are appointed for life and can only be removed only for serious improprieties, (Choi, Gulati and Posner, 2010). Choi., Gulati, and Posner, (2010) Opine that elected judges are not less independent than appointed judges, it was also stated that appointed judges focus more on providing proper services to citizens but on the other hand elected judges focus more on their legacy while in office by creating precedence.

### **Democratic Elections Are Inclusive.**

Citizen and voter definition must include a large majority or demography of the adult population. A government hand-picked by a small minority or exclusive group can not be considered a democracy... no matter how democratic its internal workings may appear. (Saunders, 2010). Elections must hold periodically and regularly based on the limits stipulated by the constitution and the electoral laws Leal Louw-Vaudran (2016).

"Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 21 establishes a set of core principles for democratic elections within political elections:

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures". United Nations. (2023).

### **The Historical struggle of Democracy.**

Highlighted all through history of democracy is the struggle of excluded groups... whether racial, religious or ethnic minorities, or women--to win full citizenship, and with it the right to vote and hold office. In the United States, for example, only white male property holders enjoyed the right to elect and be elected when the Constitution was signed in 1787. The property qualification disappeared by the early 19th century, and women won the right to vote in 1920. Black Americans, however, did not enjoy full voting rights in the southern United States until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. And finally, in 1971, younger citizens were given the right to vote when the United States lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.( RATCLIFFE, 2013). (NARIZNY, 2012). (Timothy, 1986). Francis (1994) Stated that in South Africa Black Suffrage was only achieved after 300 years of that nation's existence.

### **Some Attributes of Authentic Democracy.**

Democratic elections are definitive. They determine the leadership of the government. Subject to the laws and constitution of the country, popularly elected representatives hold the reins of power. They are not simply figureheads or symbolic leaders. "Finally, democratic elections are not limited to selecting candidates.

Voters can also be asked to decide policy issues directly through referendums and initiatives that are placed on the ballot. In the United States, for example, state legislatures can decide to "refer," or place, an issue directly before the voters. In the case of an initiative, citizens themselves can gather a prescribed number of signatures (usually a percentage of the number of registered voters in that state) and require that an issue be placed on the next ballot--even over the objections of the state legislature or governor". (Oberholtzer, 1891).

### **Democratic Ethics**

The context in which democracy thrives is accountability and openness, with one very important exception: the act of voting itself. To cast a free ballot and minimize the opportunity for intimidation, voters in a democracy must be permitted to cast their ballots in secret. (Maley and Jørgen, 2019).

At the same time, the protection of the ballot box and tallying of vote totals must be conducted as openly as possible, so that citizens are confident that the results are accurate and that the government does, indeed, rest upon their "consent." One of the most difficult concepts for some to accept, especially in nations where the transition of power has historically taken place at the point of a gun, is that of the "loyal opposition." This idea is a vital one, however. It means, in essence, that all sides in a democracy share a common commitment to its basic values. Political competitors do not necessarily have to like each other, but they must tolerate one another and acknowledge that each has a legitimate and important role to play. Moreover, the ground rules of the society must encourage tolerance and civility in public debate. (Gibson, 1992).

When the election is over, the losers accept the judgement of the voters. If the incumbent party loses, it turns over power peacefully. No matter who wins, both sides agree to cooperate in solving the common challenges of the society. The losers, now in the political opposition, know that they will not lose their lives or go to jail. On the contrary, the opposition, whether it consists of one party or many, can continue to participate in public life with the knowledge that its role is essential in any democracy worthy of the name. They are loyal not to the specific policies of the government, but to the fundamental legitimacy of the state and to the democratic process itself. (Anderson and Tverdova, 2001).

As the next election comes around, opposition parties will again have the opportunity to compete for power. In addition, a pluralistic society, one in which the reach of government is limited, tends to offer election losers alternatives for public service outside government. Those defeated at the polls may choose to continue as a formal opposition party, but they may also decide to participate in the wider political process and debate through writing, teaching, or joining one of many private organizations concerned with public policy issues. Democratic elections, after all, are not a fight for survival but a competition to serve.

### **Transition From Military to Civilian Rule**

The transition programs to civilian governance offered by various military leaders in Nigeria since 1974, reveals a unique pattern. Typically, the besieged junta leader proposes a military withdrawal timetable and abort the very program he initiated. The set up of agencies, commissions, and electoral bodies are usually a deceptive device put in place to hang on to power or at least preventing and making sure authentic democracy never see the light of day.

The attainment of a bona fide democracy has remained elusive based on the fact that the military helped to institutionalised corruption amidst mass or extreme poverty. The antidemocratic nature of the military institution has made it ill-prepared and many times incapable to midwife the birth of democracy in the county. (IJOMAH, 2000).

The re-birth of democracy in 1999 marking the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic as the military exited the scene, stepping out of Nigeria's political space was due to disdain and rejection of that kind of government by Nigerians at the domestic front and mounting international pressure and sanctions, crippling almost every sector of the nation, above all the nation was forced out of almost all international events, making it a pariah state in the international community.

### **International Image of Nations**

"Countries aim to enhance their image in order to derive economic, trade, tourism benefits, but also to create political and military alliances, cultural or ideological benefits. For this reason, the increase of image is an important dimension for the performance of the state interest. To accomplish this interest by increasing international image of the country, state and non-state actors take various measures often using communication channels, spots, they organize various student's visits, or cultural exchanges etc. (Hasan, 2017)".

If a nation's image impacts almost every aspect of its sectors or national life, it therefore follows that what a nation is in the mind of the world is a critical factor in nation building because by it a nation's interest both domestic and foreign can be preserved. (Jarol and Robert 2014) agreed that the media plays a vital role in determining whether or not a nation's image is enhanced or destroyed in the international system.

The effective use of public diplomacy is a critical factor in enhancing the image of a nation in the minds and hearts of a foreign public developed nations uses government medium or other means to serve their interest, but developing countries uses government medium to reach out to foreign governments instead of using public diplomacy to cultivate the image of their nation in the mind and hearts of foreign public. (Ibrahima, 2022).

On the other hand the image of a nation can be properly defined in a foreign country with a specific agenda to market a particular goods produced in the nation if the producing nation is able to put the right variable in place to sell the image of their nation (Nina, Ingeborg, and Inger, 1998).

In other words when a nation's image is being developed there must be a clear goals in mind as to what they seek to achieve internationally. Images of nations can be built around certain goods produced in the nation that they seek to market in foreign countries if the government of the producing county have all the variables right, especially the concept of public diplomacy, a lot can be Achieved.

There are many factors that come into consideration that either make or mar the image of a nation internationally. Corruption in the handing of government affairs, economic corruption, fraud carried out by citizens of a nation on those in other countries i.e internet fraud and fraud in all its forms and substandard products coming out of a nation into foreign markets etc.

Jan-Benedict, (2019) is of the view that, "a nation's image refers to a network of meanings in people's minds based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expressions of that nation. When these meanings are a result of active management with specific effort to deliberately create perceptions in the minds of citizens of other nations, strategically making efforts to advance specific meanings by policy makers in foreign territories, this is called nation branding or the building of a nation's image".

The task of the nation image maker is to select particular meanings to associate with the country, and then to develop strategies that will transfer these particular meanings to the country. To achieve this transfer, the image maker can use three interrelated and mutually supporting pathways: Image development, image communication, and image internationally. The country's meanings must be related to the nation's equity, which is the key mediator in achieving favourable outcomes regarding the image building of a nation.

Government of nations must become the chief marketer of their nation's image internationally, they are to link the verbal, visual and behavioural attributes of their nation in people's mind to create the meaning they want foreign public to have about their country.

It is a known fact that in building a nation's image government of nations can imbue and enhance the image of the nation with elements of the country's culture. Indeed, some certain products or goods have become veritable icons, representative of a national identity and has become a part of that nation's culture.

One of the foremost task a nation must strive to achieve and promote is nationalism amongst citizens, also the power of the media must not be ignored, both formal and Informal communication must be delineate and strategic to accurately brand, protect and enhance the nation's image before his target audience abroad. Across board government agencies must ensure that they are all working to protect the nation's image or brand, "It is essential to ensure that both within and outside the country not only is communication happening at the same wavelength but also in the same language". All hands must be on deck including social organisations like political parties or political organizations they are to monitor moral values of the country in a world that is rapidly advancing towards the concept of "Zero mistakes", so critical today is the core multipliers of a nation's image equity which is the "moral values of the people." "The importance of corruption index for example is highly significant in portraying the image value of a nation. Thus, their task will be to ensure that the core value of the nation correctly reflects and protects moral principles that portray human values. It must also be noted that business entities most also uphold high moral values as well, academic institutions who's job is primarily to shape the minds and perception of society and to ensure that both public and private sectors are well informed about global current trends and positions of things most not be left out. Lastly global and international partners must not be ignored to enhance a nation's image that country must monitor their pulse and control their share of what is said about their nation internationally if positive result or outcomes will be achieved. (Syed, 2018).

## **Election Postponement in Nigeria**

Since the Fourth Republic (1999 till date) Nigeria has had six(6) general elections from 1999-2019. The 1999 election was on the basis of a nation just coming out of the oppressive military dictatorship rule, this election followed the sudden death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998 and his successor Gen. Abdusalam Abubakar's willingness to move Nigeria into democratic civilian rule was perceived by Nigerians and the international community as something positive and a big leap for Africa given the size, population, influence and wealth of Nigeria. In fact the former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter called the ensuing elections as "the most important in the world this year"( the Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1999).

The transition period was short (4 months) and there were huge challenges ranging from infrastructural decay, poor communication systems, frequent shortage of fuel, the nation's vast size and population etc.( the Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1999).

Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo was the elected president and the nation moved on to democratic civilian rule. The elections were generally peaceful and violent free even though there were obvious areas of improvement especially on the part of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Moving from 1999, owing to the fact that Nigeria has moved or transitioned to democracy, the 2003 election was the first election after the military era of 1999 to be conducted by civilians. Most opposition parties numbering up to twenty (20) rejected the result of the presidential election, sighting massive fraud and irregularities. "Don Etiebet the secretary general of the largest opposition party, the All Nigeria People's Party said the votes did not reflect the wishes of the people, that there were no elections in many states of the country, and where there were some semblance of election, the results were manipulated, falsified, changed, upturned to the favour of PDP" (VOA, 2003).

The case of the 2007 election was far more complicated than the previous one. It was marred by wide spread violence, voters intimidation, ballot box stuffing and snatching. This trend could be observed all through 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. (Egwu, Leonard and Matlosa, 2015).

The 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections were greatly marred by irregularities, and political rascality. In fact, it was recorded in 2007, that president Obasanjo stated that as for him and PDP the election was a "do or die affair" (Omotola 2010).

## **2011 Election Post-ponement**

Nigeria has had three major postponement of its general elections so far the first was in 2011, the general election was postponed or pushed forward for two days, from April 2nd to the 4th of April 2011, due to logistical challenges, i.e late arrival of electoral materials in some parts of the country. Election has already started when the chairman of INEC Prof Attahiru Jega, announced the cancellation of voting, and subsequent postponement of the exercise (effect of election postponement). The INEC boss said "The unanticipated emergency we have experienced with the late arrival of result sheets in some parts of the country, the result sheets are central to elections and their integrity. . .the commission has taken the difficult but necessary decision to postpone the national assembly elections to April 4, 2011". (Sahara Reporters 2019).

**2015 Election Post-ponement.**

Since 2011, it appeared a trend of postponement of election was entrenched in Nigerian democratic process. Again in 2015 for the second time the general election was postponed but this time for a totally different reason as far as the statement of the authorities goes. It was due to security challenges being experienced at the time in the nation. The head of security agency- the nation's security adviser informed the president that Boko Haram is still ravaging in the North Eastern part of the country, the terrorist group at the time had taken control of some local government areas, prompting the then president Goodluck Jonathan at the advice of the National Security Adviser(NSA), who in turn consulted with the council of states, consequently leading INEC to postpone the election because personnel and materials of INEC could not be guaranteed safety. The INEC boss said the commission has decided to reschedule the 2015 general elections; thus the national elections i.e (presidential and national assembly) are now to hold on March 25, 2015, while the state elections (governorship and state assembly) are to hold on April 11, 2015. (Attahiru, 2015)

Following a letter written by the National Security Adviser (NSA) to INEC on Wednesday, 4th February, 2015; the NSA, the Armed Services and other Intelligence Agencies at the National Council of State meeting – the highest advisory to the President comprising past and present leaders in Nigeria - held on Thursday, 5th February 2015, unanimously agreed that the safety and security of election operations could not be guaranteed. They also emphasized that the Security Services needed at least six weeks within which to conclude a major military operation against the insurgency in North-East Nigeria; and that during this operation, the military would be concentrating its attention in the theatre of operations such that they might not be able to provide the traditional support they render to the Police and other agencies during elections. Why INEC postponed elections, by Jega (EDITOR Guardian News, 2015). Consequently, INEC had to reschedule the elections to 28th March, and 11th April, 2015, relying on Section 26 (1) of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended. According to Jega (2015) the total number of Permanent Voter Cards (PVC's) collected as at 5th February 2015, was 45,829,808, representing 66.58% of the total number of registered voters. Consequently, INEC promised to use the period of the extension to keep on perfecting its systems and processes for conducting the best elections in Nigeria's history. In particular, it was expected to resolve all outstanding issues related to non-collection of PVCs, which agitate the minds of many Nigerians Why INEC postponed elections, by Jega (EDITOR Guardian News, 2015).

**2019 Election Postponement.**

Logistical challenges was again given as was 2011 elections for the postponement of the 2019 general elections for one week, the rescheduled date were 23rd February(Ogbonna 2019). INEC briefs International Observers on reasons for rescheduling General Elections.Nigeria's electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission, is currently meeting with international observers on reasons for its rescheduled general elections. .“INEC briefs International Observers on reasons for rescheduling General Elections,” INEC tweeted on Saturday afternoon.

The meeting is coming a few hours after the INEC Chair Mahmood Yakubu, explained that a postponement was necessary due to logistics and operational plan problems. "This was a difficult decision for the commission to take but necessary for the successful delivery of the elections and the consolidation of our democracy," he added. "Consequently, the commission has decided to reschedule the Presidential and National Assembly elections to Saturday, 23 February 2019. "Furthermore, the Governorship, State House of Assembly, and Federal Capital Territory Area Council elections are rescheduled to Saturday, 9 March, 2019." (Timileyin, 2019)

There were serious and often negative responses from international observers, other nations and individuals to the postponement of the elections. The first global reaction to the postponement came from International Elections Observation Missions that had already been on ground in Nigeria for the exercise. The joint statement of the heads of the Observation Missions reveals: While we note that this decision has caused disappointment for many, we call on all Nigerians to continue to remain calm and supportive of the electoral process as INEC works to implement its new time line. We urge INEC to use this time to finalise all preparations and ensure that the new election dates are strictly adhered to. We encourage INEC to provide regular update information to the public on its preparation in the coming days and weeks to enhance confidence in the process.

Signatories to the above were, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia and leader of ECOWAS Observation Team, Hailemariam Desalegn, the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia and leader of AU Observation Team, Jakaya Kikwete, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania and leader of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Rupia Banda, former President of Zambia and leader of Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa Mission Team, Maria Arena, a Belgian member of the European Parliament and leader of the EU Election Observation Mission, Festus Mogae, former President of Botswana and Vaira Vike-Freiberga, former President of Latvia and leaders of National Democratic Institute / International Institute Election Observation Mission, Boubakar Adamou led the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation observation team and Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Director of African Political Affairs and UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and Sahel.

The response of the international election observation mission remains largely pacifying and diplomatically couched since their ultimate aim is peaceful conduct of the election. More so, it would amount to diplomatic blunder to overtly utter unfavourable comments in an unpleasant situation particularly while in a foreign land. However, it ought to be categorically stated that the postponement caused serious disappointment to the international community despite the civil language in which it was couched. (The Commonwealth, 2019).

Just like what was earlier stated, postponement of elections is not Peculiar to Nigeria. There are many reasons why elections are postponed. We have seen elections voided and postponed even in developed countries. One of such cases is the Berlin-Germany election challenge.

### **Berlin Germany Election, Voided And Postponed**

Berlin's highest court ordered the cancellation of an election that held on September 26, 2021 due to wide spread irregularities.

Germany's constitutional court declared that the state of Berlin would have to rerun its election the following year. The court ruled that the election would have to be repeated within 90 days, the presiding judge said the decision had to be taken because of the frequency and gravity of the mistake that have been made. The judge also spoke about serious systemic flaws in preparation for the election. Berlin held four (4) votes on the set day, federal elections, the state elections, local district elections and a referendum on socializing major housing companies. Though fraud has not be alleged, the logistical challenges was too much for many polling stations, reports heard that there were wide spread delays and irregularities violating electoral laws. Some ballot ran out, had wrong candidates listed on them, or were hastily photocopied, while some polling stations had to be closed during the day, or remained open longer than they should have.

Berlin top election official resigned as a result a few days after the election. An opposition party, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) even went ahead to demand the resignation of the interior minister Andreas Geisel.

Even the federal election was asked to be repeated by the Bundestag, this demand was made on November 10th, the repeated election was to hold in 431 of the 2256 Berlin electoral constituencies. It remains unclear when exactly that election repeat might happen. A repeated state election is very rare in Germany but not unprecedented. In 1991, Hamburg state election had to be repeated after a court had found out that the CDU had violated rules on picking candidates (Ben, 2022). The rerun elections finally took place on the 12th of Feb 2023, the authorities and electoral commission did all they could to repair broken trust because obviously the credibility of German electoral institution was on the line. Ben Knight (February 12, 2023).

## **Egypt**

In the same light one of the foremost state in North Africa, Egypt also had its parliamentary election postponed. The administrative court of Egypt formally delayed the parliamentary election leading the electoral commission to announce that elections could not be held due to legal obstacles prompting the electoral body to begin a process of setting a new timetable for the vote which was initially due for March 21. Constitutional court ruled that part of the electoral law was unconstitutional, this was the reason given for the postponement. (Louisa, 2015).

## **England**

Local elections were even postponed in England for one year due to the outbreak of corona virus in 2020. The last time election was delayed in England was in 2001, when they took place one month later because of the foot and mouth outbreak. (BBC news, 2020).

The Berlin election was postponed due to multiple irregularities forcing the court with competent jurisdiction to void and postpone the vote to a later date, the reason given was similar to the reason given why some elections in Nigeria was voided and postponed. Sometimes election voided or delayed or postponed are due to human factors that spiralled out of control. But that of Egypt was delayed because of constitutional factors while that of England was as a result of the outbreak of diseases, that is the election was delayed for the simple reason of public health.

Whether in Africa or Europe, election delay has in its root human factors, sometimes it is a deliberate act of some persons seeking to sabotage and manipulate the election while at other times they are just emergencies or occurrences that suddenly sprang up that is out of the immediate control of those managing the electoral process.

### **Analysis**

Clearly, the postponement of all three general elections in Nigeria, 2011, 2015 and 2019 was due to two basic factors, logistical challenges on the part of INEC, and security issues on the part of the federal government. The ripple effects of these postponements on the electorates locally and the impact it had on the international image of Nigeria is the crux of this paper.

The impacts of these postponements on Nigerians who are the electorates at the national level has been both economic, psychological and social, because Nigerians who registered to vote in different parts of the country and who have now moved/relocated to other parts of the nation for work or other reasons, have to journey back to where they registered to vote. Time wasted and the financial burden that goes with it is always much. This kind of travel also involves those that may have travelled out of the country, they too are now forced to travel back to cast their votes. These postponements most of the time trigger voters apathy. Nigerians also suffer huge economic losses due to the fact that during the elections nobody is allowed to work (Chinedu, 2019).

The reaction of Nigerians to election postponement has greatly been negative. Firstly, most political parties participating in election condemned in strong terms the postponement of those elections. In 2019 the main opposition party (People's Democratic Party) candidates said "Buhari administration had more than enough money and time to prepare for this election" and accused Buhari of denying the vote to disenfranchise the Nigerian electorate in order to ensure turnout is low (McKenzie and Swails-Smith, 2019)

Nigerians at an individual level were annoyed and confused. One Nigerian on twitter reacted thus "do they take us as a joke. . . goodness gracious who did we offend in this country" (Ayobami and Arulogun, 2019). Anger, frustration and confusion expressed by Nigerians when elections are postponed to a large extent forms a basis on which the international communities take their cue. Since the world is now a global village Nigerians easily express their frustrations when elections are delayed on multiple social media platforms, a platform hosting countless number of people from around the world this will definitely leave on the nation's image some negative dent. Imagine for one moment someone working in an establishment in a foreign land who went to his boss seeking leave as a patriotic citizen to return to his country of origin to cast his vote but because voting was delayed and postponed, such individual will now be compelled to return to his boss again seeking for another leave or an extension for the previous leave granted. This certainly will present the nation in a bad light before these foreigners putting a heavy dent on the nation's image internationally. Also, the multiple deeming reports by local and international election observers that flows in during elections, are a clear testimony to the fact that Nigeria's image at the international level has been so negatively battered and impacted adversely.

## **International Reports**

Lets take a look at some of these international election observers' group reports on Nigeria's election and other international views put forth whenever there is election postponement in Nigeria. This will point more clearly the general perception of the international public about Nigeria.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2011) reported that NDI deployed 52 observers from 23 countries in Africa, North America, Asia and Europe. These were Short Term Observers (STOs), preceding this 52 individuals were Long Term Observers (LTOs) who were 12 in number, they were deployed in Nigeria from January to May 2011. The report of NDI is based on observation and facts gathered through sustained monitoring especially by the long term observers' group.

In 2011 one of the years in which general election was postponed in Nigeria, NDI reported that 2011 was a significant improvement in comparison with every other election held since 1999 owing to some factors like the adoption of a legal framework by amending the electoral act and constitutions and the fact that in many other areas INEC lived up to expectation with improved level at transparency and responsiveness to voter's needs.

"Despite these laudable improvements 2011 elections further underscores the need for more reforms", "the postponement of all three polls after voting had begun in some locations called to question INECs effectiveness and its level of apparition planning" (NDI final report, 2011)

In several parts of the country, observers notice flawed procedural shortcomings, logistical challenges and deliberate malpractice. It was also reported that there were incidents of more than 800 deaths after the presidential election in 2011, making it the bloodiest elections in Nigeria's history since the Fourth Republic. (NDI final report, 2011).

INEC's reasons for the postponement of the 2011 election was the same reason given again in 2015 for the postponement of the general elections, even though this time the government cited security challenges caused by Boko Haram particularly in the North Eastern part of Nigeria as their reason, but a careful look at real issues at stake from other perspectives shows that INEC was again very lacking in their logistical arrangements. This is not to remove from the fact that there were security challenges in some parts of the country.

In a swift reaction to the postponement of Nigeria's 2015 elections, the US embassy released a statement. "The United States is deeply disappointed by the decision to postpone Nigeria's presidential election, which had been scheduled for February 14. Political interference with the Independent National Electoral Commission is unacceptable, and it is critical that the government does not use security concerns as a pretext for impeding the electoral process. The international community will be watching closely as the Nigerian government prepares for elections on the newly scheduled dates. The United States underscores the importance of ensuring that there are no further delays. As I reaffirmed when I visited Lagos last month, we support a free, transparent and credible process in Nigeria and renew our calls on candidates, their supporters and Nigerian citizens to maintain calm and reject election related violence". (US embassy, 2015).

With all of the aforementioned in mind, clearly, the report of the international community was detrimental to Nigeria's international image, especially when elections are postponed. The US saw the postponement of 2015 elections as politicians trying to manipulate the election to their favour. This kind of statement by the US has far reaching consequences on Nigeria's image.

It must be stated still that election postponement has its positive sides. When the 2019 election was once again for the third time since the Fourth Republic postponed, it appeared like postponement of elections has come to stay.

In 2015 INEC had some serious logistical challenges that would have completely destroyed the integrity of the elections. Election postponement was announced on February 7th. The chairman of INEC Prof. Jega said 4% of the permanent voters cards of citizens were yet to arrive in the country from China.

That is, if elections were to go on, 4% of Nigeria's electorates would have been disenfranchised for no fault of theirs. 4% is 2.5 million voters whose cards were still in the country where it was being produced. INEC as at 11 February failed to provide ID cards for over 50,000 observers from 88 different groups. (Ogunlesi 2015)

In addition, observers groups were to have a briefing in two days training sponsored by International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES). This training did not happen until after the postponement. (Ogunlesi 2015).

This was the report from an insider, a worker or staff of one of the local election observers group, giving reasons why the election would have been a major disaster if it was not postponed. As factual as this may be, this reason further put a dent in the electoral image of Nigeria. Even though it enabled INEC to reorganize itself to properly prosecute the election.

Consistent with the position of Ogunlesi, The World stated in its report, 34 percent of voters were yet to receive their voters card and an Afro-barometer survey in January stated only 7 percent of voters believe INEC cannot conduct a free and fair election. (The World, 2015).

If election is close and Nigerians still have their voters card held up in another country for any reason, what does that say of a nation. Obviously, the impact on the nation's international image would have been badly affected, not just because the cards were not in country readily available for use, but also because the nation lacks the internal capacity to produce these cards internally or domestically for its citizens to use in such a very sensitive aspect of the nation, talking about the mechanism by which it is to chose those to run and manage its government (elections).

"No political conspiracy lies behind this postponement. It was necessary to avoid undermining the legitimacy of the elections and Nigeria democracy. The key question is whether the authorities will be ready by March 28. If they are not, and the election is postponed again, political tension will be dangerously increased. (The World, 2015)

Similarly the United States Institute for Peace agrees with the fact that election postponement will make for enhance election integrity in Nigeria. The 2019 election was postponed by one week, national assembly and presidential elections moved to 23rd February, while the governorship and state assembly was moved to March 9.

This postponement INEC said was due to logistical challenges, but the international community started to call for transparency in INEC in its post-election and pre-election communication of issues to be greatly enhanced. (Chris and Aly, 2019).

The two basic reasons put forth by the Constitution section 26(1) of the electoral act on which INEC can postpone elections are (1) when there is serious breach of violence and (2) on account of natural disaster or other emergency. Therefore, postponement of elections on the basis of INEC's logistical challenges is alien to the law of the land. (Ogunlesi, 2015).

"2019 General Election is seen as another step in Nigeria's political history to take a leap forward in proving to the outside world its ability to conduct elections and building on the general acknowledgement by the international community of improvement in the conduct of 2015 general election. The expectations of the international community and even the citizens were high in seeing the Electoral agencies especially the Independent National Electoral Commission to provide necessary enabling environment for credible election, given its wholesome responsibilities as spelt in the country's 1999 constitution". (Ayobami and Arulogun, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has thus had three of its general elections postponed, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

Once elections are shifted or delayed it is perceived by most Nigerians that something fraudulent is about to take place, but that is not always the case because sometimes unforeseen challenges come up that the electoral umpire has to grapple with in order to hold a free, fair and credible election.

Election postponement in Nigeria has adversely impacted the nation's international image owing to the fact that in most cases the reactions of Nigerians (the electorates) and the international community is usually not positive, they view such postponement with a lot of scepticism, largely due to the fact that the reasons adduced by Nigerian officials are easily surmountable challenges, if previous recommendations of stakeholders in election both local and international are promptly acted upon by the Nigerian government.

### **Effect of Postponed Election on Nigeria's International Image**

Postponed elections presented Nigeria to the world as a nation with weak internal structure and institutions, particularly a largely dysfunctional electoral system.

It has tainted in bad light most of the time, the government in power in the perception of the international community as trying to manipulate elections or shift constitutional term limit in office. Talking about the sit tight syndrome amongst some African leaders or presidents.

It is now almost always expected by international observers that elections may be postponed when a new election season draws close. This is a negative perception about Nigeria out there in the international community.

## **Recommendations**

1. Political office holders must refrain from trying to interfere in electoral matters or influence election outcome.

2. The international image of Nigeria will be enhanced drastically if the cumbersome nature of our election is dealt with by the increased introduction of electronic system in our election processes.
3. Nigeria must seek to implement recommendations of most election observers and other stakeholders.
4. Since most of the times, logistical issues are part of the main reason given for election postponement, preparation for the next election should commence early, also logistical challenges that will likely come up during the election must be anticipated in advance.
5. Those who seek to manipulate election through any means and those engaged in pre-election, election and post-election violence must be dealt with accordingly by the laws of the land.
6. Nigeria should adopt international best practices in the conduct of its elections without compromise.

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