

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Nigeria Election Briefing February 2015

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#### Nigeria Summary 11 February 2015

*The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) postpones presidential, legislative and state elections citing security concerns. The national elections will now take place on 28 March and state elections on 11 April. The delay does not affect President Goodluck Jonathan (2010 – present)’s term in office ending on 29 May. Jonathan will use the delay to shore up his support amongst Nigeria’s governors. Instability caused by the delay increases the risk that the Nigerian military may seek to return to its previous political role.*

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#### Postponement of elections raises the risk of electioneering and violence

The **Independent National Election Commission (INEC)** has postponed the presidential, legislative and state elections, triggering a period of increased **People’s Democratic Party (PDP)** electioneering. Despite government and opposition calls for calm, the delay raises the risk of electoral violence. INEC chairman **Attahiru Jega** announced on 7 February that the national elections will now take place on 28 March and state elections on 11 April.<sup>1</sup> The polls had originally been scheduled for 14 February and 28 February respectively. The delay does not affect President **Goodluck Jonathan’s** (2010 – present) term in office which officially ends on 29 May.

The postponement followed warnings by national security adviser **Sambo Dasuki** in January that security forces could not guarantee voter safety and the distribution of voter identity cards due to their focus on the intensifying campaign against **Boko Haram**.<sup>2</sup> Regional military forces from **Chad** and **Cameroon** in concert with the Nigerian military launched a ground and air offensive against Boko Haram on 3 February.<sup>3</sup> The Nigerian government may have determined the timing of the offensive to coincide with the original electoral timetable. INEC is a highly politicised body with close ties to the PDP, and would not have postponed the polls without its implicit approval.<sup>4</sup>

Jonathan will use the delay to shore up his depleted support amongst Nigeria’s influential governors. If the PDP and the opposition **All Progressives Congress (APC)** enter the elections with a similar number of governors, it increases the possibility of Nigeria’s first-ever presidential run-off. To win a presidential election outright, a candidate must win at least a quarter of votes in at least two-thirds of all states and the **Federal Capital Territory**. Statistical analysis suggests that Jonathan may win an overall popular majority but not the necessary state-wide spread to avoid a run-off.<sup>5</sup> If a second round is required, the rules dictate that it take place within seven days of the original poll.

There is increasing uncertainty within Nigeria’s business and political elite about Jonathan’s ability to fend off the electoral challenge of APC presidential candidate **Muhammadu Buhari** (see *ARC Nigeria January 2015 Briefing*). According to a former government minister,

*“Jonathan cannot win this election. He should go... change is coming.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Punch, 10 Feb 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Nigeria Guardian, 22 Jan 2015.

<sup>3</sup> This Day, 3 Feb 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Source, western diplomat, Lagos

<sup>5</sup> www.africanarguments.org

<sup>6</sup> Source, former government minister, Niger Delta



Buhari poses a significant electoral threat to Jonathan. His message of “change” has struck a chord amid concern about the long-term implications of Jonathan’s failure to deliver meaningful political and economic reform. Promised reforms in the power generation and oil and gas sectors have not materialised, while Jonathan has proved unwilling to tackle corruption in a meaningful manner. Buhari, as a northerner and a former major general, offers hope – where Jonathan has failed – to addressing the underlying socio-economic causes of the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east.

As a Muslim, Buhari offers a religiously and geographically balanced ticket with running mate **Lagos**-based Christian pastor **Yemi Osinbajo**. The APC is expected to dominate the **North Central, North Eastern** and **North Western Zones**, as well as the **South West**.<sup>7</sup> Buhari will hope that Osinbajo will help the APC build sufficient support to divide the **South South** and **South East Zones**.

### Economy limits PDP’s options

The delay will allow Jonathan to direct both PDP and government resources into increasing support amongst governors who are responsible for delivering the votes of their states. The PDP cannot rely on the same number of state governors as it did during the 2011 election. It enters the election controlling only 20 states (with the probable support of two others) compared to 27 in 2011.<sup>8</sup> The APC controls 14 states. But this is ever-shifting ground, with defections and alliances – from and on both sides – continuing to shape and reshape the political landscape.

This will take the form of lucrative government concessions and promises of political office. The options available to the PDP are, however, limited as declining oil prices constrain its finances. The final version of the draft 2015 budget included capital expenditure spending of 8.9%, down from 23.7% in the 2014 budget.<sup>9</sup>

The delay to the election will further undermine investor confidence and economic activity. On 10 February, the naira fell to a record low of 200.02 to the **United States** dollar despite a **Central Bank of Nigeria** intervention.<sup>10</sup> This economic constraint increases the risk that the PDP and its cadres will resort to outright bribery, intimidation and electoral fraud. If the PDP is unable to guarantee sufficient support at the end of this six-week period, INEC may make further changes to the electoral calendar.

### Repeat of military intervention?

The delay increases the risk that the Nigerian military may seek to return to its previous political role. Local media published on 6 February a recording by a military intelligence officer of PDP officials and security officials allegedly conspiring to interfere in the June 2014 **Ekiti State** by-election.<sup>11</sup> The officer claimed he released the audio to draw attention to the risk of the government deploying the military for political purposes. There is an increased possibility of the military intervening politically as it did following the annulment of the 1993 elections, though nothing as yet to signal that a coup is imminent.

### Implications

It is unlikely that Nigeria will cancel the elections entirely, though further delays are possible. If Jonathan remains in office beyond the end of his official mandate on 29 May, there is a high risk of widespread political violence and international sanctions.

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<sup>7</sup> Source, management consultant, Lagos

<sup>8</sup> In the 2011 election, Jonathan won 21 mostly southern states, while Buhari won 11 states in the predominately Muslim north

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, 4 Feb 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, 10 Feb 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Sahara Reporters, 6 Feb 2015.

In the short term, the suspension increases the risk of violent political protests in northern Nigeria's major urban centres including **Kaduna** and **Kano**. Allegations of electioneering and electoral fraud may also trigger protests in the commercial capital, Lagos. The local security situation may deteriorate rapidly. This would raise the risk of the senior echelons of the Nigerian military intervening in the political sphere.

The PDP's network of patronage should still ensure Jonathan wins. The suspension undermines Jonathan's domestic and international authority. A narrow win on the back of allegations of electioneering and electoral fraud would mean that Jonathan lacks the popular mandate to reform Nigeria's political and economic structural issues.

Investors will postpone key decision making until the election cycle is complete. Nigeria's economy will remain tumultuous amid increased risk of inflation, exchange rate volatility and savings stagnation.

## Planner

**29 May 2015 Abuja (Nigeria)** Presidential inauguration;

**11 Apr 2015 (Nigeria)** State governor and assembly elections;

**28 Mar 2015 (Nigeria)** Presidential and legislative election;

## Chronology

**10 Feb 2015 (Nigeria)** *This Day*. Former president **Olusegun Obasanjo** (1999 – 2007) publicly endorses **Muhammadu Buhari's** election campaign;

**10 Feb 2015 (Nigeria)** *Reuters*. Naira falls to a record low of 200.02 to the **United States** dollar despite **Central Bank of Nigeria** intervention;

**8 Feb 2015 Abuja (Nigeria)** *Vanguard*. The **Independent National Election Commission (INEC)** suspends 14 February presidential and legislative election until 28 March citing security concerns;

**8 Feb 2015 Abuja (Nigeria)** *This Day*. Buhari calls for calm in response to delays to the election;

**8 Feb 2015 (Nigeria)** *Guardian*. Both the **United States** and **United Kingdom** issue statements calling on the government to desist from using security concerns to delay the elections;

**8 Feb 2015 (Nigeria)** *Press Release*. **African Union** commission chair **Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma** calls for calm and on all parties to respect the decision of the INEC;

**5 Feb 2015 Abuja (Nigeria)** *Nigeria Guardian*. **PricewaterhouseCoopers** audit reveals that the **Nigerian National Petroleum Corp** failed to remit \$1.48 billion owed to the government and calls for reform of its accounting procedures;

**4 Feb 2015 Abuja (Nigeria)** *Nigeria Guardian*. Final draft of 2015 budget includes capital expenditure of 8.9%, down from 23.7% in the 2014 budget;

**4 Feb 2015 Bayelsa (Nigeria)** *Reuters*. President **Goodluck Jonathan** (2010 – present) addresses political rally in home state alongside **Mujahid Dokubo-Asari**, former leader of the militant **Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force**;