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TRANSCRIPT  
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**“Nigeria Elections 2023: What To Watch For”**

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Dizolele:

On February 25th, Saturday this week, Nigerians will head to the polls to elect a number of officials. This includes states assemblies, members of the house of representatives, senators, governors. But of course, all eyes will be focused on the election of the president of the republic. We know that the outgoing president, President Muhammadu Buhari, has served his constitutionally mandated maximum of four – maximum – pardon me. He served his constitutionally mandated two years of each four years. He is exiting. He has been the leader of the All Progressives Party.

And he is now leaving the position, creating the space for about a field of 18 major candidates who are vying for that position. But four of them really stand out. This includes Mr. Bola Tinubu, former governor of Lagos state. Mr. Atiku Abubakar, who's a former vice president representing the Peoples Democratic Party. Mr. Peter Obi of the Labour Party and a former governor of the Anambra state. As well as Mr. Raibu Kwankwaso, of the New Nigerian Peoples Party, and a former governor of Kano state.

Nigeria is the most important country in the subregion. It's also the most populated country on the continent, with 200 million – over 200 million people. It is the largest oil-producing country on the continent, as well as the largest economy in Africa. This means that what happens in Nigeria matters.

My name is Mvemba Phezo Dizolele. I'm the senior fellow and director of the Africa Program here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Considering the importance of these elections, I'm joined today by one of the foremost experts on Nigerian politics and development, Ms. Yemi Adamolekun, who's executive director of Enough Is Enough Nigeria.

Yemi, welcome, and thank you for joining us.

Yemi Adamolekun:

Thank you very much for having me. I'm not sure about being an expert, but certainly happy to talk about Nigeria.

Mr. Dizolele:

You are an expert. And thank you for joining us.

What is the state of the electoral process in Nigeria as you head to the elections?

Ms. Adamolekun: Well, today is Tuesday. Elections, as you said, are on Saturday. Campaigns will end Thursday night. Interestingly, Tinubu, the APC candidate, is having his final rally in Lagos today. Atiku, I believe, had his final rally in Adamawa on Saturday. So they are winding down their campaigns as we head to the polls.

What's also been very interesting is the proliferation of surveys and opinion polls that have come into play over the last one week. I think one was released today; probably will be the final one if another one doesn't show up tomorrow.

And then really just people getting ready for – in Nigeria we shut down the whole country for elections. So, there's no movement. You basically can only walk to your poll units and then go back home and follow what else is happening. So that's interesting.

And then at the back of that is the challenges that we've faced over the last few months on food scarcity and the redesign of our currency, which has caused major, major problems across the country.

So, I think those really would be the – what I would say were the highlights or sort of the context of where we are as people get ready for elections.

Mr. Dizolele: The strength of the electoral process, is it one that is conducive to trust? The registration and PVC card delivery and so on, did it instill trust in the electorate in Nigeria?

Ms. Adamolekun: Well, I think yes and no. So the PVC process was very challenging. And there are several allegations of voter suppression through that process, either people finding it very difficult to pick up their PVCs or being told that their PVCs were not printed, that they would then be printed, but, at least as I know as of today, they haven't gotten any word back from the election management body.

And then the election management body had, I'd say, an interesting posture of saying, well, if we distributed 80 percent of the cards, we've done well. So, it raises another issue of, well, they're then 12 percent of the population that are disenfranchised. What does that mean for them? So, yes, the number looks good, but there are people who cannot vote. And that is quite important.

However, on the other side of trust is the fact that technology is now part of our legal framework. So, the election management body is allowed to use any technology that it deems necessary for conducting elections. And so, this time around we have what is called a verification system, the Bimodal Voter Authentication System, which allows you to be verified with your facial features or with your fingerprints. And unlike previous elections when there was a possibility for manual override, so if you are not authentic – if you are not authenticated electronically, there's what we call an incidence form that just allows the electoral officer to write down the fact that you were there. And that was manipulated in many different ways.

So, the fact that right now, if you're not authenticated by that piece of machine, you cannot vote; it doesn't matter the fact that you are physically standing there. It doesn't matter that you have your permanent voter's card. It doesn't matter that you were actually listed in the voter's register. You can point to yourself. Look, that's me. As long as the device doesn't authenticate you or verify you, you will not be able to vote. And there's quite a bit of excitement around what that means for the election and what that means for sort of curbing duplicate voters or people voting in places that they're not really registered; people voting by proximity. Let me use it that way.

And then, thirdly, the fact that results will be transmitted electronically. So inasmuch as we still have a manual process of collating results through the different sort of stages or different layers of the country, it also will be transmitted electronically, which then means – and that is on a portal that every citizen has access to. So, you literally can watch the results as they are uploaded by the electoral management body.

So, I think it's some of those things that give people some kind of hope in the process that we – that it might be different. It will be the first time that we will have an election that has this level of technology, if I want to use that word. So, it'll be interesting to see how it plays out.

Mr. Dizolele:

Those kinds of issues can corrode trust in the process. So, given that the INEC had said that if they register 80 percent that's good

enough, were there other recourses for the electorate that might feel frustrated by that?

Ms. Adamolekun:

Certainly. I mean, I don't think for anyone who wants to vote, even if it's one vote, I want to vote. So, I really don't care if you – if you have 88 percent PVC collection, or 99.5 percent. As long as I am not able to vote for that particular person, then that's a relatively important issue. And for Nigerians – particularly I think I will say Lagos, and I can speak for Lagos because we tried to engage in the process here. Because in Lagos, the cards came in quite late, even by INEC's own admission. So, if you started PVC collection two months prior and our cards literally come in a week before it ends, there should be some concessions around people's ability to pick up their cards, which was not provided.

Now, what then happens after elections, I don't know. But a big part of the conversation that we certainly will have is the need for that piece of plastic too, what's it called, to make you an eligible voter. Because if your data is on INEC's database, and you can show another piece of government ID – a passport, a driver's license, an ID card, a national identity number or slip, which is what is being distributed – anything issued by government who can show who you and verify that you're a Nigerian citizen, that can be corroborated with your presence on the voter's register, should allow a Nigerian to vote. And that certainly will be an advocacy point after the elections.

Mr. Dizolele:

Quite a challenge there.

We'd like to welcome Idayat Hassan, who has just joined us. Idayat is the director of the Centre for Democracy and Development, based in Abuja. Idayat, what is your assessment of the electoral process at this point, as we lead to the elections?

Idayat Hassan:

So far so good. It's been exciting. It's been interesting. And at times, it's been a bit worrying. So there's a bit of a mismatch really for us because, as Nigerians, we are heading to go to the polls. We are heading to actually exercise our franchise on Saturday. And these elections are quite important for us, for a lot of reasons. It goes beyond the fact that it's going to represent 24 years of unbroken democracy, the longest in the history of the country. But importantly, the fact that you have a three-horse race, compared

to the – so you have a choice. Not to say that this is a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea. You have a lot of choices to actually make in this election itself. So, it's interesting for Nigerians, and with the increase in the number of registered voters.

But what's really worrying is that, like, four days into the elections, all of a sudden we are very worried. We are worried that the election administration itself might be impacted by the naira swap demonetization policy, which, of course, until the changing of the color of naira like we say it locally here, but this naira has become extremely scarce to Nigerians. They don't have access to naira. You have money in bank, but you don't have physical cash to spend. This is not a cashless economy. Most of the economy is actually cash-based.

So as ordinary citizens, people are suffering. And many people will not be able to travel to vote. But also, at the same time, we know that institutions are quite important. And there are lots of institutions that will be involved in these elections. The election management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, is just one of that. The security agencies, like almost 25 of them, coming together under the auspices of the Interagency Consultative Committee on Election Security will also need cash. And if you heard about the story of Nigeria that we are experiencing, that epidemic of insecurity from the jihadi insurgency of the Islamic State in the West African province, or its sister organization, the Boko Haram, to the bandits, to separationist agitation, to kidnapping – all forms of violent conflict ongoing in the country just as prevailing insecurity aside the political violence.

You need a lot of security forces. We don't even know if we have enough to curtail this insecurity on election day so that people can freely exercise their franchise. And you still have also some observers who need money to also deploy on the field, as well as citizens who often travel from one place to the other to vote in Nigeria.

So, if you are from Lagos, most people go back to Lagos to vote during the elections irrespective of living all their lives, actually, here in Abuja and even paying in taxes in Abuja. The old naira

swap principle have not changed the contest of the elections. And it's worrying because it will actually impact the quality of the elections, one in which for the first time Nigerians are having a bit of confidence that the elections might be a bit improved, credible. And above all, it is an opportunity for them to renegotiate development in this country.

So, there are a lot – as much as there are excitement, there are, indeed, worries. And these worries do have a lot of implication for what we will actually see on election day. This might be external challenges, but these external challenges will definitely contribute to other internal challenges that might impact the elections.

Mr. Dizolele: Considering all of these challenges, Idayat, why did the government – I presume this is a decision that was taken through the central bank, but through the executive – why did that decision come just as Nigerians are going to the poll for such a critical – at such a critical juncture?

Ms. Hassan: I think it's really – it's a fact that we don't know. There are a lot of speculations, but one thing we've all come to an agreement on is that this is to curb food buying. But in the real sense, will it curb food buying? I doubt that. I think it will actually make food buying to become cheaper because here everybody needs some cash, really, in their hands. So I think it's ill-planned. It's not well-planned. It's ill-timed, and it shouldn't be something that would actually have happened here.

Other countries here in Africa have also done a naira swap. They've demonetized their currency. They have now gone through what Nigeria is currently experiencing with this whole policy.

Mr. Dizolele: Beyond the naira swap, how do you assess these elections to be different from the previous ones?

Ms. Hassan: These elections are different for a host of reasons. These elections are different because of the excitement that we can actually feel in the land, really. These elections are not one where – it's one where Nigerians are quite enthusiastic to participate in the election.

It goes beyond the youth, the young people. It includes the citizens. Finally, in the history of this country, everyone followed at least

four electoral cycle. Nigerians now know that votes do have consequences. And this knowledge is actually driving the kind of excitement and the kind – the participation we are seeing in this election.

The introduction of technology has also imbued some trust in the whole electoral process. So with the technology, Nigerians are viewing it more like a silver bullet which will lead to improved electoral system. They believe you can go to the INEC Result Viewing Platform and as a citizen you can start looking at the vote starting from your polling unit to be sure that it's actually conform to reality, on one hand.

On the other hand, you see – have Nigerians believing that this BVAS is one that will not allow for double/multiple voting because it authenticates your biometrics but, above all, it doesn't allow for the use of the incident form because with the smart-card reader – which, of course, led to the change in administration in 2015 – you could actually still use the incident form. Now, if you cannot be captured either using facial recognition – your facial, your biometrics, your facial biometrics – your fingerprint will actually work in this.

So this itself – this technology, designing of the new electoral apps, which has also addressed some of our advocacy concerns – advocacy issues – in the last years, have also imbued confidence in the whole system. So irrespective that this election is driven by lots of challenges you can think of – you can think of the insecurity itself. You can think of the demonetization. You can think of everything, but even the math parts that we have an option. And we have most firmly two dominant party states to one where there are equally important party who are able to secure a win at the national level, but the same is also obtainable at the subnational level.

The story of Nigerian elections – these 2023 elections – people often do not state is that – is the same way we've seen the emergence of the third force at the national level that there have also emerged other third forces at the states level, at the subnational level. So you may expect to see a governor who is not on the platform of either of these four parties. You expect to see more parliamentarians emerge which starts making people

believe that not only do their votes count, but maybe you don't have to have enough war chest – so much war chest to get elected into office.

Mr. Dizolele: In terms of – you know, there are always this – regional differences in Nigeria. One is faith. The other one is just regional ethnicity and so on. Yemi, how is that panning out this time?

Ms. Adamolekun: Yes.

It's the first election since 1979 that we've had a representation from Nigeria's old – along Nigeria's old regional lines; so northern Nigeria, western Nigeria, and eastern Nigeria. And I think in a lot of ways for a certain generation that's a very big deal in terms of who they vote for. For quite a number of younger Nigerians, it's not as important.

So you can have a – so if we take three parameters – age, religion, and ethnicity – for a lot of younger Nigerians, ethnicity is not a big deal. Neither is, really, religion inasmuch as really wanting a young – a young president they feel they can relate to. But for another demographic of Nigerian, ethnicity and religion do play very important roles. And of course, we're making broad statements here. There are young Nigerians where ethnicity and religion would play a role. But I would think on average it would seem that age is a more important part.

Now, obviously, these are – I've been talking to people who are outside political parties. So people who are diehard party members would for the most part align with their party's choice. But for those who are just citizens who are just going to the polls, that would be sort of the general lay of the land.

And then religion is an issue that cannot really be swept away. So if you speak to, for example, those who are in the north central or someone who's from southern Kaduna who is a Christian, given their lived experiences of terror in what would seem to be very targeted based on their faith, the thought of a Muslim ticket that Tinubu's party represents or the one that's top of ticket a Muslim that Atiku's party represents are not parties that they are interested in for those reasons. Again, broad generalizations, but really the sentiment that comes through in conversations,

sentiments that come through in surveys that have been conducted by different bodies – and, really, if you look at the candidates themselves in how they choose to appeal to Nigerians. So the conversation you are having in a mosque or a church would be slightly different than your more public posture to Nigerians.

So it will be interesting to see how – but what is clear, though, is despite all their talk about issues and the people, the people are not separated from their ethnicity or their religion, or their age in that sense.

Mr. Dizolele:

So do the selections of the tickets – you know, we know that Tinubu, for instance, ticket is Muslim-Muslim. You referred to that. Peter Obi's Christian-Muslim. And Rabi'u Kwankwaso is Muslim-Muslim, if I'm – if I'm correct. Are those playing out at all within those conversations? I know you talked about the general sense of it, but it's also kind of a gentleman agreement that existed among Nigerians, at least the political elite, that there will be transfer from Christian to Muslim and also north to south. Is that still one of the drivers of the political scene, in this context?

Ms. Adamolekun:

I think it's very much so. I think for those who – and I think it was an interesting part about – so the north, for example, has one engine, whereas the south has two. So in the conversation around worries from the north, so if we're doing the rotation as you come to the south, so the question then becomes, in the south, who is my choice and why? I mean, I would speak to older Yoruba people, whose ethnic biases are very clear and they make no apologies for it.

They are clear that it's the time of the south, so they don't – they're not interested in voting for a Fulani candidate. And of the Yoruba and Igbo candidates that represent the south, they are Yoruba. Therefore, they will vote for the Yoruba candidate. So another is also the issue of if your candidate is competent, if they can lead you into the future. All of that is sort of secondary. It's just very clear around these are the options that have been given. And based on what is important to me, this is how I'm going to vote.

And also if you look at it in that sense, I mean, for eight years of Buhari presidency, for those who cannot imagine yet, in a sense, the northern part of Nigeria holding power for another four years,

it's also that clear around why. So I think it's important that we don't shy away from the fact that some of the choices that people are making are really that – I don't want to call them shallow, because in a multiethnic, multireligious society people's sense of their place and their rights within the country are extremely important, especially where you don't think the country is – has been governed in a fair way. So you're making choices that you believe are in your own self-interest, so to speak. Which then goes really to part of the conversation that we should be having, that we're not having, how we're a federation in name, but not in practice.

Mr. Dizolele: And what do you mean, in name and not in practice?

Ms. Adamolekun: Well, we're called the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Mr. Dizolele: I know you are, but you're also voting for governors and so on. This is also happening now.

Ms. Adamolekun: Yeah, well, that one is another election – oh, pardon me – that was election in two weeks. But it's not – we're a federal republic in name, but I think in practice we're more of a unitary state. So our military history plays very much in how we are governed and the way our institutions – so, for example, our police are federal. Our – well, our police are federal. A lot of our agencies are federal. And we share money federally. Everybody kind of generates money from the state, sends it to the center, and then the center reshapes it and gives you back your share of it. Whereas, technically, states should generate their own money and send the center a little bit of it to be used for defense and all the other things.

So because that's the case, the center has a lot of power. And there's a lot of attention focused on the president, you're quite right. So even though on Saturday we're voting not only for the president, we're also voting for members of the National Assembly that technically make our laws, the conversation is like 95 percent to 5 percent dominated by who is president. Which is a testament to how powerful the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is.

Mr. Dizolele: Very good.

So one such candidate is Peter Obi, who the world considers today an insurgent candidate. I think we see that this is the first time since 1979 that a third-force contender is taken very seriously. He doesn't have the same structure as all the other candidate – PDP and APC. But we see that a large number of people follow him, particularly the youth. And that has been across the country.

Idayat, what does this insurgency mean, if we can call it that? And how is that playing out, again, on the ground?

Ms. Hassan:

It's been interesting. I think it's been interesting. It's energized the contest. I, in particular, would say I'm excited because without Obi or a Kwankwaso on the ticket, on the ballot and coming out frontline, it would have been boring. And even this projected improved turnout, if we get it, might not have actually happened. So they has energized the young people online and, of course, offline.

And it's also helped to shift the discussion really in these elections, because here we are not just talking about – we are talking – we are now looking – in fact, more and more we are beginning we look into what each of the candidates are bringing to the table, with Peter Obi. And I think it's actually – it's his youthfulness. The fact that he's 61, in a contest where the oldest is 76, the other is 70, and the next to – the third is 66. What is 61? It's actually – it's also makes him something that people can actually – somebody that young people can relate with.

His whole austere mien is also very good, especially to people, because, first and foremost, you are seeing somebody that people have known in the last three years to carry his bag and, what is it, fly on economy ticket locally. It's not like this is manufactured last minute into the elections. This is something people have known. So he's been able to bring a kind of excitement. And he's able to form a movement, because this is actually an insurgency, but it's actually a movement. It's not really like a political party coalition that all the other people are galvanizing around interest.

And I think whichever way – if he wins, if he doesn't – he has actually changed the face of Nigeria's politics. And above all, he has given the dominant party a run for their money in these elections.

And he has thrown in a spanner to the ability to predict who will actually win these elections.

Mr. Dizolele:

Besides his age, he's 61, I presume the average age in Nigeria is still, what, 19, like the rest of the continent? About there, 18, 19, maybe 17? So there's still a gap there with the youth. So what is that the youth see in him that attract them to him? Because you've seen these pictures across, again, throughout Nigeria where he's traveled, the throngs of young people following him. What do they see?

Ms. Hassan:

I think it's also his ability to relate with the young people. He's not offish. You see him when he's going on his campaign. He's there openly. He's not eating from anybody. He's relating. Then the bulk of his campaign are also led by young people. I think maybe that's the point we should bring. Aside from the older generation, it has a lot of young people. And because it's movement, because of the online where everybody feels like we'll be there contesting for the elections through Obi, they are not – it's not just Obi that is contesting . Some of these young people are contesting. They are vying these elections – in these elections, alongside Obi.

But what is important to underline at every point is that young people in Nigeria is not monolithic. It's a heterogeneous category. While some, called the Obidient, are supporting Obi, you also equally have a fanatical following for Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, who is also another third force, a fourth one, a possible spoiler in this race considering the love the young people have for him in the ancient city of Kano, Nigeria's vote bank. And of course, pickets of northern Nigeria. At the same time, some of these young people are BATified, following Bola Ahmed Tinubu of APC, while the others are articulated in supporting Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party.

But the difference is that the Obidient are very, very vocal. They believe in what they are doing. They are not silent or shy Trumpers here. They are extremely expressive. And they are supporting their candidate with any and everything that they have gotten.

Mr. Dizolele:

So, Yemi, Idayat just described some of the drivers, the attraction to Peter Obi, particularly from the youth. With Kwankwaso, what is making him strong? And what is his base?

Ms. Adamolekun:

I mean, Idayat spoke to that as well. I mean, Kano – I think while Lagos probably has now the largest voting numbers, there are a lot of registered voters in Kano. A historic decider in some elections. But I think what's clear is that Kwankwaso doesn't have a chance. So it's literally – I mean, we mentioned four candidates. And I always say that I like to mention Omoyele Sowore as well, not because he has a chance in terms of numbers but he's been – at least in the last two election cycles – very consistent about being anti-establishment.

Very clear that if you really want a change, a departure from what is, that you need to pick someone who is not – has never been and is not part of the dominant party. Peter Obi was a member of the PDP. Rabi Kwankwaso has been both members of APC and PDP. So in that context, his point is that they're not really very different because they were – in a sense, they've been part of those parties.

But Rabi Kwankwaso, I mean, doesn't have a chance, in my opinion – and I think pretty much everybody that's following Nigeria's politics would agree – in terms of being president. But he does have a very real chance of influencing who becomes the governor of Kano state, where he has served as a two-term governor, but also in terms of the vote in the north. And there's been a lot of speculation that he would, in a sense, align with either a Tinubu or an Atiku to sort of throw his weight behind them, since he knows that his votes will not count for much. There's something to be leveraged in that if it's a trade; throw my votes behind you for Kano. So, it will be interesting to see how that plays out.

But it's also very interesting in his own campaign style. So, he, obviously, is not as wealthy as a Tinubu or an Atiku, but he has spent his time campaigning in the smaller villages that a lot of the bigger candidates did not go to, so going by road from small village to small village and spending time with people and people who get to see him. So, if he comes to – like, if he comes to a state, he won't do a big rally in the capital city, but he will go to the smaller – kind of smaller towns in the state. I think that it will be very interesting

to see how that translates into numbers for him. And it will be a good lesson in terms of campaign strategy if it does translate into numbers.

Mr. Dizolele: So four of those main – three of the main candidates we’re discussing today are former governors.

Ms. Adamolekun: Yeah.

Mr. Dizolele: Does this add any value? The governor is closer to people. It’s compared to – we’ll talk about Abubakar Atiku in a little bit. You did mention wealth with Tinubu. Tinubu for a long time was considered the kingmaker. Now the kingmaker wants to be king himself. So what does the role of this experience as governor play in this – in this space here as they’re vying for the presidency?

Ms. Adamolekun: I think, for Tinubu, slightly different than Peter Obi. Tinubu, as you said, a kingmaker. So in Lagos politics, not only was he a two-term governor; he has successfully, in a sense, literally chosen his successors. And there have been two. The third one is currently vying for his own second term. Not only that in terms of politics, but also, quite frankly, in terms of the economy of Lagos state. I’m still waiting for the expose that will be done at some point that will fully show the length and breadth of Tinubu’s involvement in Lagos state, both in terms of businesses, real estate assets, not only physically but also in terms of its state treasury, and what that has done for his political career over the last, I don’t know, 20-odd years.

Now, for Peter, while there are some high points around his governorship in Anambra, I think a lot more people have said that another fellow governor of his, Chris Ngige, probably did a lot more than he did when he was governor. So his record as governor in Anambra is not as strong, without a shadow of a doubt, as Tinubu’s – as Tinubu’s is/was. And part of the joke with Tinubu’s candidature is that people are hoping for the Tinubu of 20 years ago, but age has taken a toll on him, as we’ve seen as he’s gone through the campaign.

But it’s interesting, when you speak to sort of diehard Tinubu voters, they – there’s an English word for this which escapes me at the moment. English is not my first language. But there’s a

nostalgia – that’s the word – for, well, of 20 years ago and what he was able to do and establish in Lagos.

Then, for Rabiw Kwankwaso, who was governor of Kano, I think same thing. I mean, he – even in his campaign, he references quite a lot what he did in Kano. And he uses that quite a lot about saying: We did this in Kano; we can do this in Nigeria. I did this in Kano; I can do this in Nigeria.

But the three men, very interestingly enough – one a northern governor, one a western governor, one an eastern governor – the one whose imprint on his state has far outlasted his tenure as governor is Tinubu, without a doubt.

And it’s also very interesting if you parallel that with what you said earlier about followers and supporters. So you see that in Tinubu’s supporters, Lagosians and then southwesterners more generally. You see that in Kwankwaso’s supporters, the kwankwasiyya movement, the red cap, very ardent followers.

You don’t see that with Peter Obi. So Peter Obi has gotten a new set of followers in young people who are passionate about his candidature, what he represents, as Idayat said who are very vocal online and I daresay slightly intolerant of others who don’t like their candidates. And they’re being vocal, which is fine. I mean, you can like your candidate, but that doesn’t mean that everybody who doesn’t like him is, like, some of the unprincipled words that they do share.

But also for me it’s an interesting dynamic about the sort of online/offline community around Peter Obi. So very vocal online. But also, because it’s online, you can’t really say how many people are in Nigeria or are supporting from the diaspora because it’s a hope that it represents the Nigeria that they want to see. And so for them – because, unfortunately, we don’t have diaspora voting – this is how they – this is how they come and are part of this engagement. It’s fully supporting Peter in the space that allows them to do that. They can’t attend a rally. They can’t do door-to-door campaigning for him. They can’t vote for him. But on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, any online space that you give them, they can put in their full weight, their time. I mean, there are some Twitter Spaces of Obidients that are six hours, seven hours, eight

hours long – literally, his supporters just talking about different issues, analyzing different issues, talking about – I mean, it’s been – as Idayat said, been absolutely fascinating. And it will be very interesting to see how that translates in – on Saturday.

Mr. Dizolele: Very fascinating, indeed.

So, Idayat, the one candidate we’ve not spent a lot of time on, who is not a former governor, who has no track record in that space, but he was a vice president, and that’s Atiku Abubakar. Where does he stand in this – on this chessboard? What are his strengths? He often says that he saved the constitution last time when he was vice president and President Obasanjo was trying to stay a little longer than the constitution mandated. That’s one thing he often points out. But where does he stand? What is his track record?

Ms. Hassan: I think Abubakar – and firstly, he’s also a consummate politician. The three – three out of the four – in fact, all the four candidates are known to each other. They are friends. They have all been previously friends. They’ve all actively participated in the Nigerian electoral process since 1999. Only that three of them started politics together in 1993, which former Vice President Atiku Abubakar also belonged to that group, having vied for the presidential ticket of the Social Democratic Party, which lost in the first round to the now-claimed – later claimed winner of the 1993 elections, Moshood Kashimawo Abiola. And in 1999, he came up to be the vice president of Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 – and 2007.

Since then, he claims that, of course, he worked towards ensuring – he oversaw the privatization process – the privatization process of the whole of Nigeria during that period, a process where pundits have also claimed that he used to enrich himself legally, enrich himself. But there has been no court of competent jurisdiction that has adjudged him as guilty of these charges.

Atiku Abubakar is seen to be a unifier. He’s a unifier in national – unifier in national politicians with friends across all the 36 states of Nigeria and the FCT. He has been able to not just build a business – a business – of course, a consummate businessman, thriving businesses – but he’s been friendly. And he’s campaigning on this rebuilding Nigeria, reuniting whole – the country, the

unifier. He's married to a woman from Hausa, the major ethnic grouping of Nigeria. Previously was married to an Igbo woman, married to a Yoruba woman, as well as, of course, to a northerner as well, which he of course shows his acceptability.

While he's a Muslim and running a Muslim-Christian ticket, it's also important to note that in spite of him actually being that, he seems to be a tolerant Muslim. In fact, some of the themes that is currently being used against him was during his time in office he did not support the Sharia policy, which of course brought the introduction of religion into a country which has meant – which our constitution prescribes must be a secular one. And he refused to be referred to as Alhaji, but he stayed Vice President Atiku Abubakar.

But at 76 years old, running for the sixth time – because he ran in 2007. He ran in – he tried – he ran in 2007, he ran unsuccessfully at the party – during the party primaries in 2011. He ran in 2015 at the APC party primaries against General Muhammadu Buhari. He ran again as the presidential flag-bearer of PDP in the 2019 elections. So, if we take this electoral cycle, he is running the fifth time without adding the 1993. So he hopes will be the fifth time this lucky.

But what is working for him, really, is the fact that his party does have structures. What – which is what? The ground game across all the 176,846 polling units of the country. The fact that he's the only northerner in the race. He's also from the northeast of Nigeria, who equally have not produced any president compared to the northwest or the southwest of the country. And he will be taking a sizable number – or he will be sharing with Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress – the votes from northern Nigeria. And I think a point to highlight here is that 43 percent of the total registered number of voters are from the northwest and the southwest of the country. And this important part of the country will be determining who actually wins the votes.

Mr. Dizolele:

If we assume that insecurity, and banditry, and all the other challenges that come with that do not interrupt the process, that come Saturday people vote and across the board it's somewhat acceptable, do you, both of you, see the country going into a runoff

because just the way you described everybody pulling their own share of the electorate to their side? What's your read on that?

We'll start with Yemi.

Ms. Adamolekun:

I mean, we sponsored a poll by SBM Intelligence that its end result was that it was too close to call, and it will go to a runoff. I mean, as I say, polls are what people tell you. So it's a reflection of either they are lying or they tell you the truth. And for all the major polls that have been done, including – ours, Anap Foundation, and Stears, the common denominator is that you have a lot of people who claim to be undecided, and also choose not to tell you who they're going to vote for.

The ones who claim to be undecided I, personally, don't believe them. So if you add the percentage of those who claim to be undecided to those who choose not to tell you who they are going to vote for, it skews the numbers quite enough that whatever you get for the others are debatable. But I think polling is an interesting exercise. And the joke in my office at the moment is that we're all waiting for the INEC poll – live poll – that will happen on Saturday. (Laughter.)

So, in that regard, to be honest, I think on that one I would agree with what Idayat said at the very beginning of the conversation, that the dynamics are very different from what they've been in terms of voting patterns. So the two dominant parties understood how people voted, understood where their supporters were, understood where if they could they could instigate violence, orchestrate voter suppression either through the registration process or in other ways, and which is why you have – historic – I mean, as someone says, if you keep telling people their votes are not going to count, or there's going to be violence, or there's going to be rigging, at some point you're, like, why should I bother?

So if you continue – if you push out a narrative of the sort that the process is not going to yield what you want, you invariably dissuade people from participating in the process. But the interesting part about this election will be, will that change? Will people be this invested in something new enough that, despite claims of violence, despite concerns about what might or what might not be, that people do come out in their numbers and vote?

But what we do know to be true is that with lower voter turnout it's easier for your main parties to kind of shape the outcome of elections based on voting patterns and how they know – how much they pay attention to who participates in the process.

But if you have a higher voter turnout for whatever reason – your educated elites choose to come out, your urban players choose to leave their homes watching TV to play, people who have had mixed experiences under this administration decide they want to vote a different way just because people have done a lot of work on the ground educating citizens, mobilizing them to participate in the process, all of that – we really don't know how it shapes up till Saturday. So will we have a runoff? Maybe. Maybe not. I don't know. But, eh, we'll find out soon enough.

Mr. Dizolele: Well, we'll find out.

Idayat, what's your read of that?

Ms. Hassan: Oh, thank you very much. I think that I'm of the group that believes that maybe it's too close to call. At this point, we do not know who will win the elections, but the likelihood of a runoff are actually unlikely. Maybe 80 percent of our cities, there will be no runoff.

Now, there are two critical things that will actually define and polls itself. One, and importantly, will be who inherits the 12 million votes of former President Buhari. These 12 million votes does not belong to his party. These are his own votes. The second issue will be how will the 14 states who historically since 1999, have always voted PDP – Peoples Democratic Party – how they would vote in these elections. These two issues will be critical beyond who has got the highest number of registered voters and who has got the history of turnouts in these elections. And of course, this will determine what the outcome will look really like.

It will be very close. It will be very close. There will be a lot of upsets. It should not – our focus should not just be looking at the presidential race, but looking at the parliamentary races that will actually be happening during that election. We are going to be having – electing new senators and new house of representative members who will be at the national parliament, our own Nigerian National Assembly itself. The flavor of what parties are actually

people being elected from would go a lot in terms of instilling trust and confidence in Nigeria.

But this is too close to call. We don't know who will win. We don't know who will not win in the elections. That's all what we know. This is going to take pundits – (laughs) – and send them back to the drawing board in a poll where they cannot say who will win.

And I think it's also – when it comes to polling, the toxic nature of the contest is actually making people to hide their hands. For instance, if you are articulated you know that in places like southwestern part of the country it's not fashionable to say that you are going to vote such a person. Or if you are beatified and you are in the southeast. Or even among peers.

So these elections should actually – the polls – we've had, like, 14 polls really that we can say are top polls. But these elections, when thinking and analyzing it, we should think of the U.S. 2016 presidential elections and the Brexit, and know that there are a lot of silent or shy Trumpers in this country who will definitely show their hands on Saturday when we go to the polls.

Mr. Dizolele: Well, polling is no longer what it used to be in any country.

Ladies – Yemi Adamolekun, executive director of Enough is Enough Nigeria; Idayat Hassan, director of the Centre for Democracy and Development in Abuja – we thank you for this analysis. Godspeed. We wish Nigeria a lot of luck come Saturday and beyond. Thank you for joining us today. We appreciate you.

Ms. Hassan: Thank you.

Ms. Adamolekun: Thank you very much for having us.

(END)