

# NIGERIA'S 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

## *The Question of Legitimacy for the Tinubu Administration*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article raises concerns about the legitimacy crisis likely to confront the government of Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu, following the nature of the conduct and outcome of the 2023 presidential elections. While legitimacy is crucial to government and governance, citizens' compliance and cooperation with the government, and how elections and their outcomes are perceived can influence the government's legitimacy. The study reveals how INEC'S conduct, Tinubu's personality crisis and the burdens facing the ruling APC in a pluralistic society, as well as the emerging youth category, would affect Tinubu's legitimacy as Nigeria's president. The analysis relies on careful observation of Nigerian politics and elections as well as the views expressed by experts, political parties, local and international observers and newspaper reports before, during and after the 2023 elections. It offers an empirical contribution to our understanding of the relationship between elections and the legitimacy of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** presidential elections, Bola Tinubu, legitimacy, Nigeria, political parties

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria held its seventh presidential and National Assembly (NASS) elections in February 2023. While the elections were marred by some irregularities, they were also adjudged by observers to be *relatively* free, fair and credible (Habib 2023; *Premium Times* 2023). The political parties in the elections shared the votes and NASS seats.<sup>1</sup> Unlike previous elections, where hundreds of lives were lost

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1 INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, stated that seven and eight political parties respectively won seats at the Senate and House of Representatives.

(Sanni 2019), the 2023 elections recorded fewer violent cases and casualty figures (Folorunsho-Francis et al. 2023).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, irregularities persisted during the elections (Akeaya-Inne 2023; Acheampong 2023; Ijaseun 2023).<sup>3</sup> Samson Itodo, Yiaga Africa's Executive Director, who followed the elections closely, states that all the concerns anticipated in the election manipulation risks index (EMRI) played out in the conduct of the elections (Itodo 2023). These relate mostly to the inability of the umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to meet its own promises and curb political shenanigans.

During the elections, voters were attacked and there was an apparent manipulation of the election's outcome. In Lagos, cases of intimidation, violence and voter suppression were rife. One voter, Efidi Bina Jennifer, was attacked by thugs and her face was bruised (Folorunso-Francis et al. 2023). In Port Harcourt, attacks on voters were linked to former Rivers State governor Nyesom Wike, who worked for Bola Tinubu, the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate (ibid.). According to Adeseye Ogunlewe, a leader in the APC, Wike was 'compensated' with a ministerial position for his role during Tinubu's election (*Channels Television* 2023a). There were cases of ballot box and BVAS snatching and the destruction of ballot boxes and papers in other parts of the country (ibid.). Journalist Reuben Abati (2023) opined that the elections were '...the worst in terms of management [as] violence raged [on] in Lagos, Rivers, Taraba [and] as political gladiators turned the elections into war and an opportunity for bloodshed'.

Irregularities indicate that the election results might have been altered. Furthermore, both winner and runners-up won in unexpected locations. Three major candidates unpredictably received a significant number of voters from across the country. Although the APC won the presidential election by a margin of less than two million votes, scoring 8 794 726 votes, and leading in 12 of Nigeria's 36 states, the other main opposition parties – the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP), scored more than 13 million votes and won in 24 states.<sup>4</sup>

A key issue here is the diffused nature of the votes and the fact that the winner did not have a convincing majority of votes, which raises an important concern about the legitimacy of Bola Tinubu's presidency. In addition, Nigeria is a deeply polarised country (Mustapha 2002; Agbibo & Okem 2011) largely along differences in ethnicity, religion and region. There are three major ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani, Igbos and Yoruba, but Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups. The country is 51% Muslim, 48% Christians and a small category that practise

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2 There were reported killings in Rivers and in Taraba.

3 Some of the irregularities include the late arrival of voting materials, breakdown of BVAS machine, poor technical skills by INEC staff, and IReV shut down due to a technical glitch.

4 Apart from previously belonging in the same political party, Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi ran on a joint ticket in the 2019 presidential election.

African traditional and/or no religions (Agbiboa & Okem 2011, p.112). The major ethnic groups are found in the north, east and west. These ethno-religious-regional fault lines often threaten the existence of Nigeria even if it has managed to live together as one nation, surviving a civil war between 1967 and 1970. Nigeria's political elite often attempt to manipulate ethnicity, religion and region to advance their political objectives (ibid.; Rothchild 1986, pp. 66-68). With the outcomes of the elections, there is a chance that the divisions along these polarised lines would deepen inter-group tension, weakening cohesion and threatening the legitimacy of a government whose leader comes from the southwest.

A radical new bloc has recently added to these polarised categories: the category of young people. Aged between 18 and 35, and eager for a change in governance and welfare, these young Nigerians seek a different country. Although they have always existed, and are often described as a ticking timebomb, they have become more vocal with the use of technology, their coordinated resistance to official brutality with the #EndSARS protest being a case in point. As a former governor of Ekiti State, Ayo Fayose, remarked in a television interview in February 2023: 'don't let us deceive ourselves, they [the youth] don't want us [old politicians] again'. Many youth, particularly from the southern part of Nigeria, participated in the #EndSARS protest in 2020 and it appears many of them voted for Peter Obi, the LP's presidential candidate, in the elections (Obadare 2023; Adeoye 2023; cf. Mimiko 2022). Obi received 6 101 533 votes and led in 11 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. He also won in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial nerve centre and Tinubu's stronghold. Atiku Abubakar, the first runner-up and PDP candidate scored 6 984 520 votes.

The broad distribution of the votes and Tinubu's reception of only a small fraction of the 24 025 940 votes cast, scoring 36.6% of the total votes, and the fact that his victory is questioned by the runners up and their followers – numbering close to 15 million voters or 62% of the votes cast – raise legitimacy question for Tinubu. Legitimacy is about acceptance and trust. It is about citizens' compliance and cooperation with government and governance (Bermana et al. 2019, pp. 291-317), based on the fact that 'a rule, institution, or leader *has the right* to govern' (Encyclopedia Princetoniensis 2014). It refers to 'a *widespread belief* that current arrangements of power are *appropriate, proper, just, and in keeping with agreed-upon rules*' (ibid., my emphasis). If legitimacy rests on fairness, justice and widespread acceptance, and free, fair and credible elections increase government's acceptance and legitimacy (Bermana et al. 2019), its absence makes a government illegitimate, at least to the people that reject such a government. Today, it appears that a vast majority of the population questions Tinubu's legitimacy to rule over Nigeria. This is because they perceive Nigeria's presidential elections to be far from free, fair or credible (Akinterinwa 2023) and Tinubu's occupation as a fraudulent

appropriation of state power. This is reinforced by Tinubu's victory from a small number of voters, rather than widespread acceptance across Nigeria. Indeed, less than 10% of the total registered voters and less than 5% of the country's entire population – 200 000+ – voted for Tinubu, indicating that Tinubu is not a popular president.

The question of Tinubu's legitimacy is further compounded by the nature of the winner-takes-all approach of Nigerian politics, which automatically excludes other candidates and their followers from governance. It tends to worsen the underlying issues around ethnicism, religious suspicion, regional politics and the emerging youth category and anger that beg for serious attention. Against this background, this article examines the legitimacy question that besieges the Tinubu presidency. Many Nigerians, particularly the young people, neither accept nor trust Tinubu with state power. Nothing demonstrates this more than the trending tweets 'RevolutionNow' upon INEC's declaration of Tinubu as Nigeria's president-elect (Sahara Reporters 2023a). For many youths, the quest is for a better life, demonstrated by how they flee Nigeria in droves, embarking on sometimes dangerous trips through the Sahara Desert or Mediterranean Sea, because they have no faith in the country's future.

The lack of trust and legitimacy in Tinubu's presidency, I argue, stems from three interrelated factors: (1) the abysmal nature of the management and conduct of the 2023 presidential elections by INEC as well as the judiciary; (2) the perception of Tinubu's personality; and (3) the failure of Tinubu's network, party and their character to relate to Nigerians. This study is significant given the issues around the credibility of elections and election management in Nigeria, and the increasing mistrust – and lack of social contract – between the people and the impending government. This analysis is further significant in exploring the nature, quality and relationship between Nigeria's elections and democracy two decades after Nigeria's democratisation. Apart from a careful observation of the Nigerian polity, the article draws data from extant views of experts, election managers, political parties, local and international observers and media reports on the conduct and outcome of the elections. There are three substantive sections in the article, mapped according to the areas identified above, and a conclusion that reflects on the issues raised in the substantive sections.

## ELECTION CONDUCT, INEC AND THE JUDICIARY

### *Lack of Trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)*

The aphorism: those who vote do not count but those who count the votes do, becomes apt when assessing the activities of INEC vis-à-vis the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections. INEC, like many government institutions

in Nigeria, suffers from a trust deficit. One of the issues that plagues INEC's integrity is its management of elections. Apart from suffering from 'legitimacy and credibility' crises embedded in its 'institutional history', 'INEC has not been able to engender public confidence in the electoral process or organise transparent and credible elections' (Agbaje & Adejumobi 2006; Ibeanu 2022; Anifowoshe & Babawale 2003). The president appoints INEC's senior officials, including its chairman and commissioners. Even if their appointments are approved by the parliament, in a country where the majority of lawmakers belong to the ruling party and have tendency to rubberstamp the president's requests, legislative approval hardly increases the Commission's integrity before the public.

Many do not believe that INEC and its officials are neutral in the conduct of elections, neither do they perceive the challenges INEC confront as natural. There are many reasons for this. Almost all the previous elections INEC conducted are considered flawed, largely due to INEC's 'lack of professionalism' (Omotola 2010, pp. 535-553), with interference by politicians and manipulation of election results by INEC officials (*ibid.*). As many elections conducted by INEC were inconclusive, observers refer to INEC as the *inconclusive* national electoral commission (Adiorho 2019). Some INEC officials have been caught receiving payment to compromise the elections outcome (Sahara Reporters 2023b). Since Nigeria is a country where many believe that everyone has a price, the perception that INEC officials are compromised by politicians is rife.<sup>5</sup> It is also a country where many government officials are seen as corrupt and as a result there is a strong suspicion that INEC might have been compromised.

The logistical challenges that INEC faced during the conduct of the 2023 presidential elections were not seen as merely circumstantial. They were believed to have been orchestrated by top INEC officials to subvert the will of the people and alter the outcome of the elections. It is on this basis that the integrity of INEC's conduct of the 2023 presidential and NASS elections is being questioned, raising a legitimacy issue for the winner, Bola Tinubu of the APC. The manifestation of the compromise played as follows on 25 February 2023.

There were 18 presidential candidates for the 2023 presidential seat. INEC registered 93 469 008 voters and distributed 87 209 007 permanent voters' cards (PVCs) to voters across the country (Nathaniel 2023). The distribution of PVCs, many argue, is skewed to favour the ruling party's areas of strength. While many complained that they were not able to receive their cards, most of the voters in the ruling party's stronghold received their PVCs (Omorogbe 2022). Many others were dissatisfied with INEC's style of PVC distribution, which required registered

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5 In a discussion with an INEC official over the 2023 election, she states that INEC staff, especially their bosses, make excess money during elections.

voters to book a time, sometimes a whole day, to visit the INEC office and join a long queue before they could receive their cards. Since this exercise happened only on weekdays, it excluded workers who could not leave their workplace. INEC's strict deadline aggravated the problem, though INEC later extended the deadline and opened on weekends.

INEC promised free, fair and credible elections (Moses 2023), and received more than 300 billion naira from the federal government (*The Guardian* Editorial 2022).<sup>6</sup> During the election, police and security agencies supplied more than 400 000 security agents for the protection of INEC staff and voters (Taiwo-Obalonye 2023). Even the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) deployed its staff to curb voter inducement and vote buying. In accordance with its authority to decide the conduct of elections, as stipulated in the electoral guidelines in Electoral Act of 2022, INEC publicly outlined how the election would be conducted (Dazang 2023). Election officials would arrive at the respective polling units by 7.30 am, set up their devices and brief voters on voting guidelines. Accreditation and voting would commence by 8.30 am. INEC was to accredit voters using the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), a technological innovation introduced to curb overvoting and rigging. After voting, votes would be collated, counted and recorded on the EC8A and E60 forms. Party agents would each receive a copy of the results and a scanned copy would then be uploaded on the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), another innovation designed to enhance transparency and integrity between the polling units and the central collation centre. The INEC Chairman explained at Chatham House:

IReV is a dedicated web portal for the public view of polling unit results as soon as they are finalised on election day. This has been employed in several elections conducted by the commission in the past few years. In particular, the uploading of polling unit results to the IReV portal has been deployed in 105 constituencies, where the commission conducted off season election since August 2020.

(*Channels Television* 2023)

He added that election results on IReV reconciled with those from political party agents to a 99.9% accuracy rate (*ibid.*).

INEC claimed it had improved significantly from 2019 and had made sufficient preparations for the 2023 elections, including anticipating likely challenges and conducting mock elections in all 36 states (Suleiman 2023a). They dismissed concerns by some stakeholders about technological issues and, more

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6 INEC's budget for 2023 is almost double the sum of N189 billion spent on the 2019 elections.

importantly, that IReV might be abandoned on election day. In a press statement issued on 22 November 2022, INEC national commissioner and chairman of information and voter education, Festus Okoye, stated that:

The Commission has repeatedly assured Nigerians that it will transmit results directly from the polling units as we witnessed in Ekiti and Osun State Governorship elections and 103 more constituencies where off-cycle Governorship/FCT Area Council elections and by-elections were held.

Indeed, INEC had conducted many off-cycle elections and the processes were perceived to be relatively fair and credible (Ijaseun 2022). While this does not mean that the elections were perfect and free from irregularities, given the shenanigans of many Nigerian politicians determined to manipulate the elections through inducements, vote-buying and violence (Oguntola 2022), election outcomes were believed to represent the will of the people. Professor Yakubu on different occasions insisted that the election would pass the integrity and credibility test. 'As I have said *repeatedly*, the Commission's allegiance is to Nigeria. Our loyalty is to Nigerians who want free, fair, credible and *verifiable* elections supported by technology, which guarantees transparent accreditation and upload of polling unit results for citizens to view in real-time on Election Day'. He added: 'It is for these reasons that the BVAS and the IReV were introduced' (Suleiman 2023b).

What INEC did differently in these state and constituency elections, particularly the use of new technologies (which made overvoting impossible and the real-time recording of votes possible), it failed to effect in the presidential and NASS elections despite its verbal commitments to do so. Firstly, INEC officials failed to arrive and commence voting on time, contrary to the arrangement the Commission claimed it had in place (News Agency of Nigeria 2023), causing many to be disenfranchised. According to Itodo (2023), 'Yesterday, as at 7:30 am, only 27% of polling units recorded early arrival based on our sample size, and by 9:30 am, only 41% had recorded accreditation and voting'. He went on to state that 'We [the CSOs] foresaw this would happen because in our pre-election statement, we did note that this election was going to be a very challenging one, and it's now clear that all the predictions and projections were actually real'.

Secondly and perhaps more importantly, INEC failed to align the results at the polling units with IReV at its national collation centres. IReV for the presidential election results was down and there was no way that voters could receive and follow the results from the polling units across the country. Manual collation was thus adopted, tantamount to changing the rules in the middle of the game. INEC official, Festus Okoye, claimed that the Commission faced unexpected technical

glitches (Oladipupo 2023), contrary to the assurances INEC had issued to prior to the elections. Efforts by the parties to point this out for rectification during collation at the national collation centre failed to convince the Commission's chair, and INEC announced the election results with APC's Bola Tinubu declared winner. Interestingly, the result was declared at 4.00 am when everyone was asleep.

INEC adjudged the elections to be 'free, fair and credible' and urged aggrieved parties to 'approach the courts to ventilate their concerns and wait for the matter to be resolved' (Amodu 2023). Without IReV working fully, the declared results were not accepted by the political parties and many members of the public, challenging the legitimacy of INEC's results and questioning the emergence and presidency of Bola Tinubu.

The controversy trailing INEC's compromise would be further amplified when members of the APC undertook the task of defending INEC's inability to upload results from the polling units as promised by the Commission. Apart from claiming that no election is perfect, they aver that what happened on election day was not unexpected given the heavy traffic the INEC server experienced, even though fewer than 30% of registered voters participated in the elections. Without linking their sources to INEC, some APC members presented videos on social media to show that INEC turned off its portal to prevent hacking. However, the responses from INEC and the APC to the Commission's inability to upload results on IReV were inconsistent. When a report that 'hackers' had been arrested in Abuja surfaced on the internet (Obeche 2023), APC supporters circulated the video (on WhatsApp) claiming that there were 163 attempts to hack into INEC's results portal. Connecting the hack to a meeting the LP candidate had with some Nigerians in the diaspora, the APC defended INEC's decision not to upload results on IReV. It turned out, however, that those arrested in Abuja had no connection whatsoever with the meeting Obi had abroad and that those arrested were, in fact, members of Emperor Technologies, a software company consulted by INEC to supply the Commission with BVAS machines. On receiving this news, the police released them (Adejobi 2023).

APC members and supporters did not reject the allegation of rigging or electoral malpractices but claimed that all (major) parties were involved in their respective strongholds. Speaking with CNN's Zain Asher, for instance, Ajuri Ngilale, a presidential media aide and spokesperson of the APC campaign committee, claimed that there were irregularities in Eastern Nigeria, Peter Obi's base, and not just in Lagos and the southwest (Ngilale 2023). Put differently, APC implicitly admitted to 'winning' the elections not because it did not rig but because it outrigged its opponents. APC was, in effect, the smartest rigger.

The seeming compromise by INEC makes the declared result quite controversial and its winner unacceptable to all. As many have observed, the



failure to transmit results electronically undermined the integrity of the elections, casting serious aspersions on the outcome of the presidential election. According to the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JSPC):

in most polling units, accreditations and voting took place transparently... Results was also counted transparently and entered into the form EC8A transparently. ... By contrast, [however], the transmission of results failed transparency test. ... the high expectations of Nigerians for a credible, free and fair elections have not been met by the election held on Saturday, February 25, 2023. Rather than improve on the credibility deficit of the 2019 elections, the recent election seems to have increased them and weaken the process further.

(Sahara Reporters 2023c)

### *Lack of Trust in the Judiciary*

The transfer of the resolution of the election dispute to the judiciary is problematic in Nigeria where the judiciary is believed to be heavily compromised (Salahu 2022). As Ibeanu observes, the neutrality of the judiciary 'in electoral matters has been routinely questioned' (Ibeanu 2022, p.16). The Nigerian judiciary – from the bar to the bench - suffers from its own peculiar problems. The president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Yakubu Maikyau, admitted this much when he apologised on behalf of all lawyers to Nigerians for letting the country down and pleaded with the bar and the bench to do better (Agency Report 2023). Like INEC officials, judges in Nigeria's courts are not independent of political influences, including their appointment by politicians. Many judges have ethnic, religious, regional and political affiliations that make them lean toward the ruling parties. They are also susceptible to monetary inducements (Daniels 2016). At the valedictory session of the Nigerian Senate, Senator Bulkachuwa admitted to influencing his wife, who was the president of the Nigerian Appeal Court between 2014 and 2020, to help his colleagues retain their senate seats (Oyero 2023a).

Acknowledging such influence, Senator Ali Ndume stated that being married to a judge has put him under intense pressure from fellow politicians (Oyero 2023b). Chidi Odinkalu, a lawyer, academic, and public commentator alleged that the vast majority of the judges in Nigeria today are related to those in positions of authority. At the same time, many judges have had their wards appointed to positions. Through this, he suggests that these judges have either been strategically positioned or sufficiently induced to compromise judicial process in favour of politicians in the ruling party who win elections fraudulently. These make judgements purchasable and questionable. Consequently, while judicial

pronouncements may not be based on the law or the delivery of justice, there is judgement that serves sentimental interests. These practices, which often seem hidden but are not unknown to the public, diminish the public's confidence in the conduct and outcome of the election's petitions' tribunals, thus weakening people's faith in the democratic arrangement.

Together, these question the integrity of the electoral process and the declared winner, as well as the outcome of election petition tribunal, and consequently undermine the legitimacy of Bola Tinubu as Nigeria's president.

### TINBU'S CHARACTER

Bola Tinubu is not new to Nigeria's politics. He has been involved since at least 1992. Elected as a senator in 1992 during the short-lived Third Republic (1992-1993), Tinubu went into exile shortly after the general elections on 12 June 1993, believed to have been won by Chief Moshood Abiola, were annulled by the Ibrahim Babangida military junta. He played a prominent role as a financier of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a pro-democracy group established in 1994 to fight for the restoration of Abiola's mandate and democracy in Nigeria. Tinubu returned to Nigeria after General Sanni Abacha's death in 1998 and contested for Lagos governorship which he won, and governed Lagos from 1999 to 2007.

Ever since his days as governor Tinubu has played a significant role in the politics of Lagos and Nigeria. He is the godfather of Lagos politics, largely, if not singly, determining his successors. As Shaka Momodu (2023) observes:

From being selected as a candidate to fly the Alliance for Democracy (AD) flag for the Lagos governorship, Tinubu has become the Selector-in-Chief of candidates for elections, year in, year out... He [Tinubu] has become the who-must-be-obeyed regardless of any objection or dissenting views. He is the only one who must select every candidate for every elective position and to a large extent, nearly all appointive positions in Lagos, in particular and some South-west states under the then ACN control.

Tinubu allegedly, and unsuccessfully, attempted to prevent his immediate successor, Babatunde Raji Fashola, from having a second term in 2011 before he was persuaded by the leaders of the Action Congress of Nigerian (ACN) and Oba Rilwan Akiolu to allow Fashola to continue as Lagos Governor (Akanni & Olowoapejo 2011; Oyebade 2015). Lagosians believe Fashola performed better than Tinubu, but Tinubu and his followers did not believe that Fashola had

executed Tinubu's blueprint for Lagos according to plan (*Premium Times* 2023). Tinubu prevented Akinwumi Ambode, Fashola's successor, from returning to Alausa in 2019 and replaced him with Babajide Sanwo-Olu, widely considered to be Tinubu's stooge and a rubber stamp governor with no real power (Adenekan 2018).

Tinubu played a prominent role in the spread of his political party, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), to the South West and was a frontline figure in the coalition between ACN and other political parties, including the Congress for Progressives Change (CPC), the new PDP (nPDP) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The alliance produced the APC in 2014 which presented Mohammadu Buhari as their presidential candidate and won the presidential election in 2014. Tinubu contributed to the formation of Buhari's cabinet, nominating Yemi Osinbajo as vice president. He won the party's presidential nomination in July 2022, defeating 13 other candidates, some of whom conceded on the grounds of the primary elections. The victory is said to be dependent on the winner's ability to financially induce voters, an area in which Tinubu is believed to be well acquainted (Mojeed 2023).

Tinubu is a wealthy man. He owns choice property and businesses in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria as well as Europe and America. The source(s) of his stupendous wealth, estimated at four billion dollars, is, however, unknown. Tinubu is reported to have been indicted for peddling and/or benefiting from the proceeds of drug trafficking while he was based in the United States in the 1990s (Raji 2023). This illicit activity, many believe, was Tinubu's initial source of wealth, contrary to the claim by his campaign organisation that he made money 'selling rice and chemicals' (Adeh 2022). On one occasion, Tinubu claimed he made money through investments in stocks and shares. On another occasion, he told BBC's Peter Okwoche that his wealth came from the inheritance of real estate (Adeh & Adewale 2022), yet he was not known to be financially buoyant when he took office as Lagos State governor in 1999. Some consider that Tinubu has become wealthy through corruption and by gaming Lagos state (Olawoyin 2020). Bode George accused Tinubu of establishing Alpha Beta, a financial consultancy firm, to siphon nine billion naira monthly from Lagos State's internally generated tax revenue of about 50 billion naira monthly (*Arise News* 2023).

Admittedly, Tinubu had been the governor of the richest state in Nigeria. But the perception of a highly corrupt politician sticks to him. Rather than use his access to power and state resources to build institutions in Lagos, it could be argued that he has personalised state powers and used the resources of Lagos state to build an edifice of patronage, drawing his clients from an array of highly accomplished professionals and the informal sector (Agbiboa 2018). Tinubu used state power to tacitly endorse the management of the National Union of

Road Transport Workers (NURTW), notorious for engaging in unruly behaviour, extorting commission (tax) from motorists in Lagos and living off their earnings (Agbibo 2022). The sprawling network of people and groups around Tinubu owe their ascendance in politics and public life to the landlord of Lagos, also known as the Lion of Bourdillon. The public perception is that these networks use their connection to Tinubu to coerce people for rewards, widely considered to be a classic case of patrimonialism. The implication is that such a political actor would extend his style of rule from Lagos to Nigeria and make it difficult to prioritise national interest.

Tinubu's emergence as Nigeria's president-elect has not erased these defects. If anything, it has amplified them, raising questions about the type of presidency Tinubu intends. In particular, it highlights the concerns of Nigerians, particularly the youth and the opposition parties, about Tinubu's character. Clearly, the youth, who are in the vanguard against Tinubu's presidency, are in no illusion about Tinubu. For many of these young people, Tinubu has neither a clean past nor a transparent present and there is nothing to indicate that his future would serve their or national interest. There would be no good governance with such and they fear that Tinubu would probably rule Nigeria as he does Lagos, and that things would be worse in the country. These character flaws form the basis upon which many young Nigerians rejected Tinubu as their president, thus detracting from his legitimacy (Anyebe 2023). Tinubu agreed with the youth by saying:

Now, to you, the young people of this country, I hear you loud and clear. I understand your pains, your yearnings for good governance, a functional economy and a safe nation that protects you and your future. I am aware that for many of you Nigeria has become a place of abiding challenges limiting your ability to see a bright future for yourselves. Remodelling our precious national home requires the harmonious efforts of all of us, especially the youth. Working together, we shall move this nation as never before.

(Ajayi 2023)

However, many Nigeria youth do not believe Tinubu, their distrust stemming from the way Tinubu had attended to youth concerns during the #EndSARS protest in October 2020.<sup>7</sup> When the youth in their hundreds of thousands protested against police brutality, Tinubu not only failed to publicly condemn police brutality on the youth, he is also believed to have orchestrated the invitation of the military on the protesters on 20 October at the Lekki Toll Gate (Aytogo 2020). For Tinubu,

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7 #EndSARS was organised by young people in Nigeria protesting against the Nigerian police unit's extra-judicial attacks on the youth. The unit is known as SARS – acronym for Special Anti-Robbery Squad. Its operatives were accused of extortion, attacking and killing (young) people.

the protesters 'have made considerable gains within a very short period. ...they should also be careful not to fritter away such gains due to lack of moderation and strategic thinking' since the peaceful protest had been seized by 'hoodlums, thugs and assorted criminals...to perpetrate violence, disrupt civil life and harass, intimidate and assault innocent persons going about their lawful business'.<sup>8</sup> The fact that thugs attacked the protesters in Lagos State – under Sanwo-Olu's governorship – and those who attacked the protesters were never punished, gave the impression that there may be the hidden hand of a politician in the protest disruption.

Accordingly, the youth, including those of Yoruba and other ethnic groups in the East and the Middle Belt, voted against Tinubu in the 2023 presidential elections, rejecting his impending presidency. How widespread this view is can be further gleaned from the presidential election result in which Tinubu lost to the LP's Obi in Lagos.

#### THE FAILURE OF TINUBU'S NETWORK, PARTY AND CHARACTER TO RELATE TO NIGERIANS

Tinubu's presidency may suffer a crisis of legitimacy because of a combination of his brand of politics, the acerbic nature of his network of followers, and the failure of the APC to deliver change to Nigerians.

Tinubu's large cult following understands issues only from their own perspective. As far as they are concerned, Tinubu can do no wrong and any attempt to point out his flaws is treated as a personal attack on their leader. Tinubu himself makes provocative utterances and appears to be politically manipulative. He is perhaps the only major presidential candidate to hurl insults at his opponents and leave the real issues unaddressed during political campaigns. In one of his campaign rallies, he described Peter Obi as 'import and export', words whispered to him by Sanwo-Olu, Lagos State Governor. This moniker depicts Obi in a derogatory way as lacking any knowledge of governance and only capable of petty trading. Tinubu and his supporters refer to Labour Party as 'labourers', another disparaging term. Tinubu openly called Atiku a thief who breached civil service rules by running a private business while in government, and called for Atiku's disqualification (Ajayi & Alechenu 2023). Frustrated by Buhari's policy to redesign the naira, Tinubu extended his vituperation to the then president of his own APC party, and accused Buhari of using the naira notes redesign policy and fuel scarcity to sabotage his presidential ambition (Jimoh et al. 2023).

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8 See <https://saharareporters.com/2020/10/20/endsars-ex-lagos-governor-tinubu-justifies-use-force-peaceful-protesters-president> (accessed March 4, 2023)

The use of hate rhetoric, and the perception that Tinubu has a tendency to deploy thugs, even if clandestinely, in brutal attacks on political opponents and critics, worry those who oppose Tinubu's victory at the presidential polls. Prior to the elections, Tinubu had stated in a private discussion with his supporters that 'political power is not going to be served in a restaurant. They don't serve it a la carte. At all costs, fight for it, grab it and run with it' (Ajuwon 2022). Although some of his supporters depict this as a mere figure of speech, others have taken it literally, connecting the violence in Lagos and other parts of the country to Tinubu's supporters' determination to 'grab, snatch and run with power at all costs'.<sup>9</sup>

While Tinubu has substantial wealth to hire the most effective handlers and spin doctors, this has become a potential source of fear that may rob his presidency of legitimacy. Although Tinubu has succeeded in using his wealth to attract many followers who are strategically placed in politics, media, blue chip corporations, and other areas of social and political life, these followers do not have total control of every sector. Tinubu's acerbic commentaries about his opponents have also received vitriolic counters from the opposition, particularly Peter Obi's supporters and the PDP. Despite Obi distancing himself from such toxic reactions, they continue. Many of Obi's supporters are Igbos, making it easy for Tinubu's supporters to draw a parallel between them and IPOB. This further widens the gap between the APC-led presidency under a Yoruba person and the Igbos of the South East, Peter Obi's home.

While views are divided over IPOB, even among the Igbos, the Biafran identity is a popular, yet unresolved national question in Nigeria. Proof of this could be found in a call made by the Governor of Anambra State, Charles Soludo, for the federal government to release Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB, to him (Ugwu 2023).<sup>10</sup> Soludo's request came after the Igbo leader had made a similar request to Buhari (Adenekan 2023). An interesting dimension is that Tinubu's position on IPOB and Nnamdi Kanu is unknown. If Tinubu decides to pander to the sentiments in the northern part of Nigeria, Kanu would remain in state custody and continue to face trial. This suggests that the IPOB conundrum would remain as during Buhari's presidency IPOB members would neither accept nor submit to the state.

While Obi promised to negotiate with all armed violent groups if elected president, Tinubu is evasive on how to deal with the Biafra question. He is also unpopular in the South East. His most impressive performance was 66 405 or 13% of the votes in Imo state, where the APC has a sitting governor (*Vanguard Newspaper* 2023). If there are no concerted efforts to treat the region fairly and integrate it into

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg2Zl3kDgcE> (accessed March 10, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Nnamdi Kanu is in detention and standing trial for treason, inciting the public and starting the Eastern Security Network, a militant arm of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB).

the federation, Tinubu's victory may reverse the chance of integrating the Igbos in a united Nigeria. The view by Tinubu's deputy that restructuring is irrelevant may widen this gulf, raising further concerns about the performance of the APC in government in Nigeria. With a promise to change Nigeria, and in power since 2015, the APC has performed below expectations (Aytogo 2021). Nigeria is now badly divided, is in deep debt and suffers from economic malaise. Food prices are high and security is far worse than in 2015. Even Tinubu has on an occasion distanced himself from his party, and on different occasions has criticised Buhari for this poor performance (Adenekan 2023).

It should be noted that the north did not give Tinubu most of their votes. Although he won in some northern states, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, a Fulani man from Adamawa, and the PDP candidate, had more votes than Tinubu in the region. And while Tinubu is a Muslim from the south, southern Muslims are not considered serious Muslims by northern Muslims. This may explain why Tinubu opted for a northern Muslim rather than a Christian as his running mate. More importantly, the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry are serious issues that the president-elect must deal with. The failure to win massively in the north, despite having a northern Muslim running mate, also raises some question about Tinubu's acceptance in the north.

## CONCLUSION

While the presidential and NASS elections have been held and 'won', Tinubu, the declared winner, faces a serious legitimacy crisis. How he is able to manage this will determine whether Nigeria will survive or descend into a serious imbroglio on his watch. At the moment, there is much apprehension about Tinubu and loyalties are divided in the country. INEC's inability to conduct what everyone would consider free, fair and credible elections, Tinubu's personality and the tenor of discourse around Tinubu's network of supporters during the campaigns, have a tendency to widen the gap between him and the people who do not believe in his presidency. The vices that characterise Tinubu's politics are antithetical to the aspirations of Obi's supporters, most of whom are Igbos, the young and the educated.

Although INEC declared Tinubu the winner of the presidential elections, he is not considered the winner nor accepted by the majority of voters, including people from his own southwest region, as the rightful president of Nigeria. For example, Pa Ayo Adebajo, the leader of Afenifere, a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organisation, stated emphatically that Nigeria would not remain the same if Peter Obi did not win the elections. He rejected the results that produced Tinubu. The PDP staged a protest and headed for the courts, just as the LP has approached

the court. After the verdict at the presidential election tribunal, PDP and LP have headed for the Supreme Court. Should Tinubu win the court cases before him, the widespread concern that the courts are compromised would not go away. At the same time, Tinubu and his party have the difficult task of healing, reconciling and uniting the nation.

What the analysis above indicates is that the Nigerian state is so badly divided that the president will have a major task in building trust and mending the broken ties between and among Nigeria's divided categories, especially the youth who have no faith in the country. As Babajide Ogunsanwo, an analyst on *Channels Television* programme asserts, any candidate who wins the presidential elections must first jettison their manifesto and work for the unity of the country. This is the urgent task to which Tinubu should commit himself.

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