

## THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

## WEBINAR

## NIGERIA'S ELECTIONS AND THEIR SECURITY, ECONOMIC, AND CRIME IMPLICATIONS

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## PARTICIPANTS:

MODERATOR: VANDA FELBAB-BROWN

Senior Fellow, Director, Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors, Co-Director, Africa Security Initiative, The Brookings Institution

MATTHEW PAGE

Associate Fellow, Chatham House

PHILIP ADEMOLA OLAYOKU

Coordinator, West African Transitional Justice Centre

CYNTHIA MBAMALU

Director of Programs, Yiaga Africa

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**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Thank you for joining us today. I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, director of the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors, co-director of Africa Security Initiative and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. And I'm delighted to be hosting today a stellar panel on Nigeria's elections, security, political, economic and crime implications. The panel includes Mr. Matthew Page, Ms. Cynthia Mbamalu, Dr. Philip Olayoku, and we are perhaps hoping that will also be able to be joined by Dr. Leena Koni Hoffman. Unfortunately, she is stuck in the logistical situation, but she might be able to join us later. On February 25th, Nigeria will vote for its next president. It will also vote for the federal parliament with all 109 Senate seats being elected or reelected and 360 seats in the House. On March 11, gubernatorial and state legislative elections will follow, with half of the 36 governors stepping down. This is also a moment where President Muhammadu Buhari is stepping down after two terms, as is constitutionally mandated, a major change of power in Nigeria. And it's a very exciting election, both in terms of the significance that we will hear from our panelists, but also just in terms of the actual dynamics of this election.

As it's not been often the case in Nigeria, there are more than two candidates representing more than just the two most prominent party. From the All Progressive Congress, the APC, which is also the party of President Buhari, former governor of Lagos Bola Ahmed Tinubu, is running. And representing the second largest party or the second large party, I should say, the People's Democratic Party, PDP, is Mr. Atiku Abubakar, who has already run for elections for the presidential level six times a phase that is well known to Nigerian voters. What is different about this election is that in addition to the representatives of APC and PDP, there are others running. Among them is Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra State, representing the Labor Party, and Rabiu Kwankwaso, former governor of Kano and former federal Minister of Defense of the New Nigeria People's Party. So this election is more competitive than has been the case and certainly exciting, certainly generating a lot of excitement just in terms of the electoral dynamics.

At the same time, some of the larger issues that Nigeria has had to deal with continue to be daunting. Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, and yet, according to its own National Bureau of Statistics, 63% of Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor. Insecurity continues to be a massive challenge in the country, something we will also talk more about. And insecurity has been, at minimum, not getting better and in some ways getting worse. It's not just the insecurity in northeast centering on groups like the Islamic State in West Africa province and banditry in Northwest, farmers-

herders issues in the middle belt and pushing into the south. But we have also seen significant rise in robberies, highway kidnapping, highway robberies, as well as a significant rise of violent cultism in the south. And last year, perhaps 10,000 Nigerians died as a result of violence, violent attacks. And of course, corruption is something that has plagued Nigeria for decades, something that is foremost on the issue for many Nigerians.

And still some 77% of Nigerians remain dissatisfied with the pervasive corruption and the efforts to counter it. None of these are new issues. They might be new in their manifestations, but they have been a significant challenge for Nigeria for years to come. And so one of the big questions is, in addition to the exciting dynamism of these elections, how are the candidates promising to address the issues and which of them will be able to do so, or whoever is elected, how will they be able to tackle those issues? So I'm delighted that I have really three stellar and hopefully four stellar panelists to elucidate those issues for us.

Let me start with Mr. Page, whom I am going to introduce and then ask the first question to. Matthew Page is associate fellow at Chatham House and non-resident scholar with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He's also a nonresident fellow with the Center for Democracy and Development in Nigeria. I highly recommend his book, "Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know," that came out a few years ago, but in my view, it is still the thing to go to read as you are starting to, as you are trying to understand Nigeria as well as particularly pertaining to the crime, politics, crime, corruption dynamics, his book, "Understanding Kleptocracy." From 2003 to 2016, Mr. Page served in many roles in the US intelligence community as really the top intelligence analyst on Nigeria. This was at the State Department, National Intelligence Council, Defense Department and elsewhere. So, Matthew, I am so delighted that you are able to join us today for the panel and so eager to hear your views. Please let me ask you to give us the big picture. So this election is exciting because the dynamics, that is the obedient factor. How significant is the elections? What are the key issues, challenges and trends at stake?

**Matthew Page** Wonderful. Thanks, Vanda, and thanks to Brookings for organizing this really timely session. It's a privilege to speak alongside Philip and Cynthia. These are two people that I have enormous respect for, and it's, it's very nice of them to allow me to essentially introduce and tee up some of the issues for them to talk about with their expertise. Real quickly, I want to sort of boil down, I guess, how I think about this election in terms of why it matters. So this is real big picture thinking, I

guess. And you've touched on a lot of these issues, Vanda, in your introductory remarks. Elections in Nigeria are always this sort of seminal political event in a country of superlatives. So Nigeria is Africa's largest economy. By 2045, it will be the third most populous country in the world. I like to point out the fact that its 36 states are really small countries in terms of their populations and budgets. 28 of these, as you mentioned, Vanda, will hold gubernatorial elections in early March. The remainder are on sort of not, have been knocked off their, their usual four-year cycle, and so they take place at other times during that that four year period.

There are 93 million registered voters preparing to hopefully vote this time around and roughly 177,000 polling places. So for those of us that, you know, come from countries where, you know, the scale, logistical scale of voting is not quite that that incredible, it's something to keep in mind as we, as we look ahead to what's about to happen in Nigeria. But at the same time, you know, we're thinking of this as a major democratic event. At the same time, it's also a reminder that Nigeria's democracy is in trouble. It's not a full democracy. It's not a particularly healthy democracy in many ways. And scholars, of course, look at Nigeria, democracy scholars look at Nigeria as really more of a competitive authoritarian state. And this is a term that political scientists have coined to describe a situation where formal democratic institutions, through the means of elections, are seen as the primary way of obtaining political power. However, politicians, incumbents violate the rules of the game so often and to such an extent that the regime itself fails to meet minimum standards of democracy. So it's one of those situations where a country like Nigeria has enormous democratic potential and its democratic trajectory has, has crested and troughed at different moments.

But at the moment, I would say that, you know, we are at a, at a worrying juncture in terms of Nigeria's democratic progress. And I'll talk a little bit more about that. So it's important to remember that Nigerian democracy is in trouble, but also that Nigeria's political trajectory always has the potential to trend more positively. And I view Nigeria's elections both, both sort of these off-cycle elections I mentioned a moment ago and also these every four years big marquee events as a chance for Nigeria's democracy to send a proof of life message to the world. This is something we're all looking at to, to sort of see, see where the wind is blowing in terms of Nigeria's democracy.

It's also a key litmus test, I would say, for important institutions, not just the electoral commission, which is one of the largest, if not the largest Nigerian government agency with, with an enormous budget, staff, both in terms of permanent cadre and an ad hoc staff that it employs at

election time, but also its judiciary, which has to resolve election disputes both before, during and after the elections. It's police and military, which notionally is responsible for setting the conditions, secure conditions where people can vote, but often is involved in election rigging or disrupting the vote or favoring particular candidates. Civil society organizations, right. Like the ones that Cynthia represents, political parties and then broader religious and cultural entities that also have a sort of, you know, political mobilization role in some respects. So I think it's, it's important to keep that in mind and to, and to watch those institutions as we enter the next few weeks.

I'd also say that elections are a bit of an exorcism of sorts and a chance to banish the ghosts of military rule for another four years. Every Nigerian election cycle there is whispers, talks, concerns about the potential of a coup, you know, often after the election to somehow annul the results. Of course, this, this has happened before, it happened most recently in 1993. So this is a bit of a legacy of Nigerian history that constantly weighs on the minds of Nigerians themselves, but also friends of Nigeria looking in from the outside. But it is important to remember that the times have changed. The military, certainly in the civil military relationship in Nigeria, has changed quite a bit. And it's been 25 years now, almost since the Nigeria's 1999 return to civilian rule.

I'd also say that the election is a bit of a test of strength for the country's kleptocratic ruling class. I think we're all watching, especially in light of Peter Obi's candidacy, to see if the country's sort of powerful ruling elites who really, regardless of their party, maintain their grip on the political system in Nigeria now since 1999, will they retrench decisively and maintain their hold on the system? Or will they face a strong challenge from candidates that enjoy the support of, of younger Nigerians? Nigerians maybe who are more progressive and focused on developing the countries rather than hooking into the patronage-driven political system. And this sort of section of the electorate— and there are really two intertwined separate sections of the electorate— are ones that I've sort of labeled this time around as makers and millennials. And by makers, I mean somewhat wealthier, better educated Nigerians of all ages who are striving to innovate and invest in the country, push for genuine development, good governance, more accountability and less impunity from those who are in charge. So that's sort of the makers.

The millennials, of course, is a term we see bandied about in in Western countries, certainly, but I think in the Nigerian context, I would view it as referring to younger Nigerians of all social class who came of age around the time of Nigeria's 1999 return to civilian rule. And this includes the many

young Nigerians who are alienated by state predation and bad governance, and perhaps also maybe sympathized with the 2020 End SARS protests against police brutality. So what I would say is that the makers and millennials are in a sense the, the constituency or slice of the electorate that we really should be watching this time around in 2023. Is this group's political influence on the rise? And if so, does that foreshadow a much-needed inflection point in Nigeria's democratic trajectory, one that we're all very concerned about and why we're speaking to each other today.

Very quickly, I want to highlight some of the key issues at stake, Vanda, because you mentioned you alluded to some of those in your introduction, and I'll just recap a few of them and then cede the floor to, to the next speaker. You mentioned that Nigeria's next president is going to inherit a real raft of, of fairly monumental and some might argue existential challenges. These are socioeconomic, governance and security challenges. And we know that this election could mark a path towards, but more likely a sort of a continuation of the status quo in terms of governance. Nigeria's stability and prosperity long term hinges on a transition away from poor governance and dysfunctional kleptocracy. And this may seem obvious, but Nigeria's ruling elites really haven't yet internalized this, is that they must pursue constructive economic and fiscal policies that unleash Nigeria's huge human and economic potential rather than stifling them. So providing basic public goods to all instead of enriching a select few. And I think in recent years we've seen this in terms of what have really been a series of self-inflicted economic wounds.

Nigeria now is very much trapped in a problematic cycle of high inflation, currency devaluation and manipulation, wasteful spending and irresponsible borrowing. Now, while Nigeria's debt to GDP ratio remains relatively low, at the same time, its debt service, debt servicing costs are incredibly high. So, for example, in its 2023 budget, debt servicing costs will account for 30% of the government, government's budget, and that is about equal to the amount of money that it spends on capital projects, infrastructure, doing new things and almost equal to the amount it spends on recurrent expenditure. So that's civil service salaries and other recurring expenses.

So another challenge, of course, is on the revenue side, where Nigeria has always been a country powered by petroleum revenues and has always had to manage a boom-bust cycle. Times when crude oil prices were high and the country received enormous windfalls, like during part of the Goodluck Jonathan administration, and then times when the crude oil prices dip significantly, and there are numerous examples of that in Nigerian history. But what we're caught in now, unfortunately,

is what I've termed sort of a bust bust cycle, which is that because of high production costs, oil theft and import dependency, Nigeria's bottom line suffers both when oil prices are too high and when they're too low. And there's no real sweet spot sort of Goldilocks zone where Nigerian public finances are boosted like they once were when oil prices are high. And we saw that with the Ukraine invasion, where rather than producing some major cash windfall for the Nigerian government, the spike in oil prices around the time of the Ukraine invasion actually put enormous financial pressures on the country. And obviously that is something that in the past would not have been the case.

So in terms of the fiscal picture, it's worrying. The security situation we'll talk about hopefully a little bit later and people can bring that out in the question and answer. But I think this goes back to governance and the need for reform. The security sector, Nigeria's security sector has enormous potential to tackle the country's many security challenges. But it's, you know, it's lacked the capacity and it has, you know, really caught in cycles in terms of corruption and gross human rights violations that undermine its capacity to, to secure Nigeria. And, of course, as we know, the army has become far too involved in providing internal security functions that really should be the responsibility of the police.

And finally, I would just cap this off in some of my remarks by really pointing to sort of what I see as one of the major issues at stake, which is the fundamental unsustainability of Nigeria's current sort of elite driven political system and political model. So this is a system where, again, a small subsection of elites from around the country carve up what is known in Nigeria as the national cake. You know, the national wealth is being divvied up and shared out between individuals and not being converted into, like I said, public goods or used to facilitate development. So this patronage driven political system, fueled by stolen public funds, won't be able to, to sort of last forever. And I think we are within the relatively near future reaching a sort of reckoning point for this current system. I'll leave it there and pass the microphone back to you, Vanda. Thank you.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Well, thank you very much, Matthew. You spoke about periodic exorcism of worries about the return of military rule as one element of elections. I would say that your brilliant overview of the issues at stake exorcised many myths and delusions that people could be holding about the place of superlatives and great complexity and enormous challenges that Nigeria is. And, you know, you spoke about the elections breathing life into Nigeria's democracies.

Well, I am absolutely thrilled now that I can turn to Cynthia Mbamalu to be one of the makers who is making democracy in Nigeria not just be hanging on life support, but in fact to be thriving robustly with a steady heartbeat. Cynthia Mbamalu is the co-founder and director of programs at Yiaga Africa. She is a lawyer in comparative constitutional law, and she specializes in human rights, democracy promotion, constitution building, women's rights, and encouraging the inclusive political leadership that was one of the issues that Matthew highlighted as absolutely critical for Nigeria. For the past 15 years, she has worked in a variety of very important roles in supporting sustainable democracies in Nigeria and elsewhere. And very importantly for our panel and more importantly, for Nigeria, she was actively involved in advocacy that led to the adoption of the Electoral Act 2022 and something that is now the, the rule system for Nigeria's elections, which is something I very much want to hear just in a second.

I would also just add that Miss Mbamalu is the founding member of Not Too Young to Run Movement and Ready to Run campaign, promoting young men and women to seek political leadership, to break out of the pattern of very old men, often representing the country. So, Miss Mbamalu, absolutely thrilling to have you here. We've already teed up the larger political issues, and I am very keen to get your take on the mechanics of the election, the significance of the Electoral Act of 2022. What are we seeing in terms of registration? Matthew mentioned violence, which is a pervasive feature of Nigeria's elections. How has it been playing out with violence this year? Over to you.

**Cynthia Mbamalu** Yeah. Thank you. Dr. Vanda, and it was really nice listening to Matthew share his thoughts. I'm a huge follower of his work, and so just to say, like, as has already been stated, this election, it's very important to Nigerians, it's the seventh election since our transition to civilian rule in 1999, but it's also the first elections to be conducted after the passage of the Electoral Act 2022 into law, it was actually signed in February 25th, February 2022. And interestingly, to be exactly one year after the law was passed, that we would be having our general presidential elections. And so what, what, what's the context like for in this pre-election phase? So like I mentioned, it's the first election that we'll be having with the new Electoral Act and there are prospects with, with the passage of this law. And I'll just highlight three key or rather four key issues to look out for with the electoral Act and how that impacts on the process.

And I think one major thing that has been, and the major determinants of conversations in these elections is electoral technology. And with the new Electoral Act, some technology will be



paying an important role in our elections. Technology as it relates to accreditation of voters through the bimodal accreditation system, the BVAS technology as it relates to elect, electoral results transmission. And INEC would be deploying, INEC's results portal, the INEC is the Independent National Electoral Commission, will be deploying the results portal for the first time for national elections. There's been several pilots before now, but this is the first time for national elections backed by law. So technology is obviously very key in this particular election, and it affects the process. I'll talk a bit about the process.

A second issue, from the Electoral Act that would be impacting on the process relates to the financial autonomy of INEC. This is key because it affects elections, the logistics and operations. The new Electoral Act provides, for INECs and for funding for elections to be released at least it's one year to the elections. And the Conversations with INEC highlights the fact that the findings were released early and materials selection, the materials like ballot papers, results forms and the BVAS technology they'll be used, all of those things have been procured and deployed to the state level. Now that is important because effective management of elections, the logistics impacts on the process and the acceptance of the outcome. So we can see that that particular innovation, the Electoral Act, did aid early procurement of electoral materials and planning for elections the logistics.

And the other introduction in the law that would have a major impact on the process is the process on results management as it relates to the oversight power of the Electoral Commission and the process. So the Electoral Act provides INEC, the Electoral Commission with the power to review results declared under duress or results not declared voluntarily or results declared in breach of the Electoral Act, the INEC's guideline or the electoral manual. Now, this is important because before, what we had was once results were declared as by the returning officers, only the courts could overturn the results. So we had instances where results were declared under duress and those results were upheld. And so with this process, with this introduction, there's a power for review of of the reports of the results that would be declared. So if you think around this and then I think the last important or the fourth, like I mentioned, four major innovations that will impact on the process, is a decision on over voting.

And I'll talk a bit about over voting now. Before the Electoral Act provided that over voting was happened, where total votes cast was more than the number of registered voters. However, with the new Electoral Act, what is required is that's where the total votes cast is more than total accredited.

Then the decision, the results, what actually needs to be canceled over accredited means for elections with the deployments of the BVAS technology, only those who show up and would actually determine the outcome. And so I just highlight broadly four key innovations in the Electoral Act that would impact on the process. But so beyond just the process, what's, what are we seeing when it comes to and when it comes to the numbers and then the issues? And I'll talk a bit about because you also raised issues around youth and the so-called taskforce or what people call the obedient movement.

And I'll begin and I'll talk a bit about the numbers. So it's an election, the Electoral Commission has released the final figures of registered voters and we'll have 93,469,008 registered with us, in the register with us for these elections. However, for those who may not be familiar with the process here, while we have a number of registered voters, only voters who successfully collect their permanent voter's card will be allowed to vote because the Electoral Act recognizes that for voters to vote, everyone must present a valid voters card at the polling unit. So why this, why the 93 million is your official figure. Before the elections, the Electoral Commission will release the final data of numbers of [inaudible] collected. So that gives us a sense on how many voters are expected or would be allowed to put on elections day. Well, from this number, the interesting thing about this number result is this is the story of youth. So I'm glad Matthew had mentioned initially the potential role of young people in these elections. The data identifies or reveal that young people between 18 and 34 years old constitute over 30 million of registered voters. So about 39.6%, which is approximately 40% of the voters are under 34 years old, or 34 and below.

Now that is that is a huge demographic that has the power, the potential to influence the outcome of the elections. Women and gender, women and men at this at this level we have about 48% women registered voters and 52% are male. But interestingly, the commission also was able to track disability registration. So for the first time we have some sense of data on persons with disabilities in the process, and this is key because the new Electoral Act now mandates the Commission to provide assistive materials for persons with disabilities. So it is important INEC to also identify this information to inform elections, the planning. So number wise for registration, that is what we have.

For candidacy, the based on the INEC's, the Electoral Commission's database on candidates, this election would be contested by about 15,336 candidates. And these candidates are contesting for

the office of the presidents, including their running mates, for the government with the eight state governors would be elected because other states are following that off-cycle. But 28 governors, 316 House of Representatives seats will be contested for, 109 Senate and 993 states constituency offices will be contested for, for state assembly. So that is a number. But we deemed this percentage youth candidates about 28.6% are young people between 25 and 35 years old. And the idea of 25 is because the Constitution recognizes that the minimum age to contest for office is 25 years to contest for state assembly and the House of Representatives, which is why for youth candidacy, the data is focuses on persons between 25 and 35, under thirty-five years old. Women candidates is sadly is barely 10% in this election. So number wise that is it.

But the major contenders, Matthew had already highlighted the four contenders I wouldn't spend a lot of time there. Well, we have the All Progressives Congress, the People's Democratic Party, the Liberal Party and the New Nigeria People's Party, NNPP. These so far are seen as major contenders for the presidential office. And so I wanted to, before delving into the process in particular to talk a bit around this supposed third force which is where you have the conversations around the obedience movement and I think Matthew would set out that this is one major factor that a lot of people, I think it's getting a lot of excitement back home. And because ordinarily we always have it's been a two person or two horse race, which is usually what we see in multiparty democracy, tendency of two party dominance.

But this time around we have a supposed third force, an imagine fourth contender. Although people would say an NNPP may not really be a major contender, but I would highlight why I think is also good to track what is happening with the NNPP. And I'll look at basically from our data on the campaigns ongoing national. So Africa has long term observers across the 774 local government areas in Nigeria. And what are we seeing? We're seeing that so far as at January, we have campaigns ongoing across the local government levels. We and the four parties that have achieved at least over 70% of local government levels covered are the PDP, the APC, the Labor Party and the NNPP. Now, what has made this a bit interesting is the obedience factor. So who has the answers with conversations around youth participation. And a lot of young people expressed anger with the system, the EndSARS was a protest against police brutality. So what happened was INEC commenced the continuous voter registration. We saw a spike in youth registration and the data from the Electoral Commission indicated that for new registrants, young people that are four years and

below made up 76% of new registered voters from 2021 to 2022. So it showed that a lot of young people were very interested in participating.

However, there was a major game changer during the party primaries, and there was a question around which candidate best represents youth interest. And at the time the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party had their party primaries. There was a lot of question around who was the possible candidate. Now, Peter Obi was a member of the People's Democratic Party and he had, he had, he had identified that the party wouldn't give him a fair competing chance at the party primaries and had moved from People's Democratic Party to the Labor Party. Labor Party had always been a political party but did not have national prominence.

Now so it's a combination of factors, basically. First, you had the increase of youth registration, young people looking for a candidate to support, and then there was this individual who seemed to present a position that he was challenging the existing patronage system, he was challenging the establishment, and he was presenting a, a different front for young people. And so the moment he moved to the Labor Party, it seems to have inspired this because we had younger people connect with him. While there's an argument that a lot of young voters still support the other parties, but if you look at the demography of supporters for Peter Obi, they are majority young people and the obedient [inaudible; connection lost] what it has done one is to give us that's a booster first, but that also influenced the quality of campaigns.

So conversations around issues, we have a lot more focus around issues now. If you look on social media, issues are on security or insecurity as the case would be because we have multidimensional levels of insecurity in Nigeria different from what we had before. And unemployment is also very, is becoming a major issue. Unemployment and job creation, which makes sense because of the high rates of youth unemployment and then also issues about, issues about, about poverty and the [inaudible] scarcity and what, what have you. So these issues was [inaudible; cuts out] And for us, because of the growing interest amongst young people the most, the electoral commission has an important role to ensure that when it comes to the process, especially diplomats of technology, that they, major districts compliance and universal deployment. And because young people are, have indicated interest to participate [inaudible; cuts out] Task Force and the role of INEC to build confidence in the process and ensure compliance with the rule.

The second is the quality of campaigns and investment in voter education, I would say the key issue, especially around how elections are won, because with the level of competition and controversy, there is a likelihood that the electoral outcomes may be contested. So is important there's better information around how elections are won and parties committing to accept an outcomes or leveraging on the, the courts to, to, to challenge outcomes if they are aggrieved by that. And I think the third issue is security. The commitment of security agencies to guarantee security in the elections would be great and would impact on one turnouts and would also inspire confidence on the outcome of [inaudible; connection lost] who will be influencing the elections.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Thank you very much. Cynthia, your transmission is breaking out. So perhaps if this continues as we continue talking, you might consider turning off the video. But thank you for absolutely terrific remarks that really elucidated in great detail both the electoral processes and mechanism overall, and particularly the changes that the Electoral Act of 2022 brought in. And you brought up a lot of important themes moving from the process to issues to substance. And I am so delighted that we have Dr. Philip Ademola Olayoku to be speaking with us about translating the electoral process into actual governance and into actual policies.

Dr. Philip Ademola Olayoku is the coordinator of the West African Transitional Justice Center, and he's also the senior research fellow at the Institut Francaise de Recherche en Afrique, at the University of Ibadan. He served as a consultant on the UNDP, the United Nations Development Program Anti-Corruption Initiative, as well as on the Media and Terrorism Project for the Center of Journalism, Innovation and Development. Among his many other accomplishments have been working as an expert for the African Union Commissions and the African Union Transition Justice policy, where he was one of the writers and consultants. He's also a member of the Nigerian Army Resource Center and has done extensive research on vigilante groups and non-state armed actors in Africa, as I know well, because I've been delighted to collaborate with Philip and he's one of the makers which Matthew talked about on many issues in Nigeria, including security policy.

But before we turn to security, Philip, I really want to pick your brains on the issue of the political dynamics and in policy. I know Cynthia already spoke about the fact that a lot of Nigerian elections are about personalities and about identities. Is the person from the north or is the person from the south. Is he— and most of the time it's men— a Muslim or a Christian. And issues are perhaps highlighted as problems, but rarely do we hear candidates actually presenting platforms.

What is it like with the election today? And one of the issues that of course is different about the elections, that the unofficial rule of changing candidates from south to north has not been kept, but some of the important parties. There is frustration in the South that some parties are not featuring Christian as either president or vice president, and both president and vice president are Muslim. And there is very much the sense that this is the Southeast moment. The South-East has long in Nigeria felt that they have been marginalized, they have not been able to hold on power. Hence another element to the Obi, to the obedient factor to the obvious candidacy beyond challenging establishment, beyond challenging the two parties. Please your thoughts on any of those issues.

**Philip Ademola Olayoku:** Yeah. Thank you very much, Vanda, for the very warm introduction. I'm happy to be invited by the Brookings Institution and to you, you know how very much I mean all of your work and it's been a privilege to collaborate you. Yeah. Thank you, everyone. It's also a privilege to be on the same panel with Matthew and Cynthia. And it's also been a learning experience for me from the kinds of data they have been trying out. And I hope I have some really good thing to contribute after those very wonderful sessions. Now, I would love to start from where Cynthia ended, and I'll try to make my intervention. Well, my intervention was from the perspective of an ordinary citizen, an ordinary Nigerian, who is part of this experience.

Now, I think way back to 2015 when it seems that the political climate in Nigeria is a bit heated up, especially because of the socio-economic conditions and people are just tired and they are [inaudible] of a change which had been promised, you know, at inception of this current administration. And so [inaudible] whether you just want fresh air, you just want a breather from all of this as you think that at times there seems to be no solution for what to imagine. And now what you have been offered is especially from the platform of civil society in Nigeria, of course, in collaboration with some government actors is that technology is going to be a major game changer, you know, in this election. And this is nothing new. If we go back to even 2015 when, you know, you had to get your voter accreditation system and there was a bit of panic even by the incumbent, incumbent government in terms of how this might play into the advantage.

But because of my interest in the social implications of technology of recent, I have always been a bit wary of the, the kinds of expectations that we, we have when it comes to technology fine, it's always often automated, but even recently we have had some discrepancies in the announcement of the upturning of elections in one of the six states in the South-West Osun states where a candidate

was declared, as you know, the winner of the election some weeks after the election has been overturned. I think this was supposed to be like why the technology itself was introduced. And so much as we are trying to, you know, embrace the use of technology and rightly so, you know, I've been drifting to a drifting gradually towards the, the era of the Internet of Things. Of course, we are there already we're just embracing that in Nigeria, of course, Lagos is fast becoming a smart city. You know, you have to use cards to into public busses and stuff like that. But we have to also be ready of the human factor when it comes to the embrace of technology.

I would like to, you know, put it on the table that if we lack digital infrastructure, then it's going to be a bit challenging when it comes to maximizing what technology can offer us. And so what it delivers on the Election Day, failed to accredit voters, then a lot of people may be disenfranchized. You know, voters could also have their votes scammed. And what are the states of these machines, how many of these machines do we have? You know, I'm not sure this is very public knowledge. You know, how many have been distributed to the polling units. Who are those that are going to operate these machines, how competent are they? What are the mechanisms, you know, that have been put in place in terms of trying to manage this digital infrastructure that has been introduced currently? You know, these are some of the very important questions that we need to ask.

I said this because I am, those that have been following this news in Nigeria will be our way of the [inaudible; connection lost] currency swap, which as and you go into the bank to withdraw money and the bank answers you cannot get more than 8000 naira which fairly, you know which cannot even cover transport to the bank in the first instance. And they tell you that why not go embrace the cashless policy of the government. And you left the bank and tried to recharge your phone and you don't even get your phone recharged, you know, this after you've attempted to retract your bank account. And so there's a lack of big infrastructure. I think there should be less enthusiasm about how technology would be like immediate game changer in all of this.

Now I don't, so I, I now drift to, you know, the context of the ethnic politics within this election. I was, I met a young lady recently from [inaudible] share our work with me. You know, ethnic voting in in in voting United States and ethnic voting in Nigeria. I shall start to make a case that should be like the same standards for judging this this this context. And I just summarize, I point to very interesting point to say that with the Obama candidacy for presidency, it was like, it was like an aberration that a Black person, you know, would not vote for Obama as a candidate, you know, at that

point, because this is like, you know, the realization of a dream that we had longed for for ages. So was expected that all Black voters, you know, should be in favor of the Democrats. Let me just, so I you can be at any, you know, side of the divide that's, that's left for everyone to, to take [inaudible].

So in Nigeria at the moment, you know look at candidates, which is, you know, creating an interesting dynamic even within the political space itself. And I tell you the reason why. Now, it's ordinarily expected that for someone to win an election, you should have a strong support, a strong political base, you know, within his own local territory. What's, what is happening at the moment is if the south east that has desired so long, you know, to, to have a go at the presidency or to have occupied, not trying to have a go, to occupy the seat, from the south east you know in the past you know to to to occupy the seat and now stands a very serious chance to occupy these seats also has some dissenting voices you know within the south east said, it is it's it's it's not democracy, that's the picture of democracy, that's that's how objective, you know the democratic process should be.

But in a situation where even your state governor, you know, because of perhaps party affiliation, you know, prefers to say that, okay, I have even the candidate from my own party that I have to push forward and I've asked, you know, the the the the prime candidate [inaudible] return to return back to the party. You know, in order for him to be able to realize his achievement. So we have a bit of interesting dynamic when it comes to the the trend in which devotes itself my my my the trends of the voting, you know only general basis you know, as this elections on our thoughts.

And I say this because there's as you all know there's also been a, and this is back to the history of this secessionist agitation that goes back to '67 to '70 and the emergence of IPOB as the new, you know, hope, of trying to liberate the southeast from the modernization and whatever economy stringent conditions that they've been experiencing in the past. So what might have got [inaudible] that has also wrecked their economy there, they seem to want out of the Nigerian state. You know, and this is like of course, this is the question of every secessionist agitation and even before we've had news of factions within IPOB itself, and the secession faction has said that during the, has lifted its own orders of curfew, some other factions are saying that they're going to allow, you know, the elections to take place. There must have been a bit of voter apathy in terms of security. Even people from that extraction, ethnic extraction in Nigeria, have their own divided opinions when it comes to IPOB. So it's a bit of a complicated situation at the moment.



And I, I draw that from, I draw, I draw that from the ethnic dimension into, you know, the religious dimension of the elections itself, you know. For me, when it comes to the question of identity and politics or even identities in general, it seems to be, you know, and a bit of a difference about how people try to process this, both in the south and in the northern part of Nigeria, and also in the middle belts, where they, you know, you have a fairly, a fair share of, you know, Christian population and some [inaudible]. In some states of the north, you have more Christians than Muslims. You have ethnic configuration in which the basic means of identity, religion has even become a myth of ethnic identity within some parts of the north. And this is the way I process it. And this is like very personal from my own research. You and some others may have some divergent views from that, and rightly so. But my own processing of that is the fact that when it comes to northern politics, there is, you know, the the payoff, you know, these religious identities.

And it's because of the kind of influence that some religious leaders, you know, have when it comes to the political climate or even the socioeconomic climate in some of these states, those that Matthew referred to as the elites and some of these people have great influence on persons, you know, when it comes to the decision-making process. I was having a conversation with one of my former lecturers like sometime late last year, and he made me realize that perhaps we may feel that some Northern countries are disadvantaged because of their religious affiliation. But one thing that stands out is that there seems to be a sort of unison of a voting pattern when it comes to northern Nigeria. And so there seems to be the influence from whatever, you know, on voters when it comes to the choice of candidates for election. And this trend has been on, you know, in previous elections. And so religion is going to play a major role in all of this.

In the south, in the south, you know, the southern candidates from Lagos, of course, or from wherever, who is running a Muslim-Muslim ticket. Well, this is public knowledge and a lot of Christians in the south are not very comfortable with this. And this has also been a major point of, of campaign. I tell you for a fact that the Christians in the south, of course from experience of course because I've been in the south for a while now, for in terms of residence and, so there is a bit of active campaign, you know, to, to say that there seems to be like the attempt to, to conclude an Islamization project in Nigeria. Wherever those and they have some of, some facts you know to, to back this up, whether these facts have been properly checked or not. I mean I leave that to, to each of us, you know, to decipher.

But what whatever it is, one thing I can say is that within the present political climate in Nigeria, there seems to be, you know, this, a renewed interest, an inverted interest like we've not had before. Of course, maybe as Cynthia's as Cynthia's realized, based on the position of youth and interest of the youth, you know, population in terms of the electoral process is all because of the social economic pains that, you know, people are not all, because of the belief and the fact that technology can even play a very important role. So there seems to be a bit of a renewed, invigorated interest in knowledge about the election and its processes.

I should also say that within the civil society, there have been a lot of, you know, advocacy. Prime time news, you see [inaudible] Africa for instance, the co-director trying to, you know, educate people on each part of the the electoral act, so that the democratic processes, and not to worry about it. And this is very important. I have very little time after this, and let me end on this note to say that we're also at the point where there seems to be an emergence of a sort of dictatorship from from the electorate, if I can put it that way, such that when it comes to who chooses to be neutral, with this electoral cycle, you know, your vote is your part, your vote is a right. But from a very critical perspective, to say that people should be, should not be forced to make their choices. Because when it comes to, you know, trying to make choices, it is very basically based on individual or communal experiences, you know, and some definitely will not accept you're not in a democracy as it should be.

Now, we not have, you know, people, you know, making their own choices. So the statement I'm making is that people who choose to be neutral, people would choose to, you know, not vote for certain parties because of some reason, should be allowed to be and should not be labeled as, you know, working against the community or working against the democratic processes. I think maybe there'll be some more time to speak. So thank you very much for the platform once again, and I look forward to an engaging discussion after this. Thank you.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Well, thank you very much, Philip. You brought up a very important issue, which is freedom not to vote, and the pressures that are multiple to vote for particular candidates. Nigeria has made very significant progress in the quality of elections. And just the fact that elections are taking place and power will hopefully change, power will change, hopefully without violence, is a very significant achievement. In the end, elections in Nigeria are also notoriously violent at the street level with criminal groups, militia groups both in the north and the south, being vigilante

groups, cultists, being often mobilized to deliver votes for particular candidates and to deliver financial resources and particularly votes for candidates.

And so oftentimes we see dips in various indicators of criminality, be it maritime piracy, or be it cultists activities or even oil bunkering, because during the elections, perpetrators and groups, criminal groups are actually working for political candidates. And certainly the level of that violence, not violent contestation after the election are announced, but the violence during the campaign and before the vote and around the time of the vote is a significant factor. This is just one snippet of the complexity of security issues that the next president and his team— his because all four are men— will need to tackle that have been growing more difficult.

You know, when President Buhari came to office, there was significant improvements in the push back against Boko Haram. But we have seen stalling of that effort by about 2016. The super camp strategy comes with grave limitations, and we have seen violence spreading to the northwest. Some of it is the Islamic State in West Africa province, which also conducted daring attacks right in Abuja and far from just the northeast last year. There is banditry. There is the complex, very difficult and yet crucial issue of farmers-herders conflict as well as the broader criminality I spoke about.

So perhaps we can get into some of these issues now in the last half an hour that I have reserved for taking questions from the audience. You can either submit questions online, many of you have already done so both throughout the course of our conversation, but also beforehand. In fact, I was very impressed and grateful for the course of questions we have, have received beforehand. And I've been pulling them together and collating them, and I look forward to hearing our terrific panelists now to reflect on them. Let me start with one question to any of you, Cynthia, Phillip, Matthew: has there been any serious articulation of an economic policy of a security policy, any other significant substantive issue by any of the candidates? Any one of you, please, just jump in, please.

**Matthew Page** I'm happy to, to kick off. I mean, I think the answer and Phillip and Cynthia may have a different, different take is that the, the campaign promises of what I would say are the three main candidates would sound very similar to one another, right. They talk about governing, governing better, delivering economic growth, delivering security. You know, they're very vague terms. And that's, and that's understandable, right, because in any country, campaign, you know, candidates make vague campaign promises. But we know from both past experience and I think, you

know, in terms of also the, the personalities, certainly of the two main candidates, that there's not, not a lot of substance, not a lot of policy thinking going, going on behind this.

And in the case of Obi, who is a insurgent candidate, right, a third party candidate, really, you know, looking to sort of break in and break and break apart the sort of dominant two party dynamic going on, it's understandable, right, that 110% of his campaign's energy is going into campaigning. You know, they're not sitting there drawing, drawing out policy documents and policy platforms. But certainly for the ruling party and the main opposition party, they in theory, should have a more detailed manifesto. But this goes back to what I was saying about the unsustainability of the sort of current, you know, patronage-driven political system in Nigeria, which is policy for the most part, right, is an afterthought. And a lot of Nigerian governance, as we know, is very, very ad hoc, very reactive, very much often driven by private pecuniary gain.

A good example, right, is the decision to reprint, you know, the naira, you know, in the, in the run up to the election. I mean, this was clearly a very poorly disguised attempt to create scarcity, you know, of, of a commodity, i.e. cash, a basic one that every Nigerian used ahead of the election, so that those with political connections, of course, would have access to the new naira and those without or those trying to break in from the outside, you know, the, the sort of the insurgent candidates, you know, both at the national, state and local level would, would struggle to do so.

And I think that, you know, there are countless other examples of how policy decisions are not taken according to some sort of broader strategy or taken even in terms by experts, but are taken very much, you know, yeah, without, without some sort of it within some sort of coherent framework. And so I think unfortunately, right this this election, these, these campaigns are very much falling into an old mold. And I recently described sort of Obi's campaign even as sort of conventionally unconventional in that sense.

**Cynthia Mbamalu** Yeah. So maybe just to just to add to that, I think one of the things we're beginning to see, I mean, this election is which is a positive as it relates to influence on the campaigns, if you look at the manifestos for all the parties, yes, they do highlight insecurity or securities everywhere. But the challenge is the details. So we're not asking for what I will do, but how. And I think that's where, for the major candidates that's where there's a major gap because the how is still not properly articulated. However, we've seen civil society organizations convene town halls. Some— I wouldn't call them debates— but something similar to debates because there's plenty of

national debate in the later parts of last year. And I think those platforms have been quite helpful to perhaps help candidates articulate better and inform policy conversations around the campaigns.

It has not achieved all the objectives it has sought to achieve because the goal was to inform issue-based campaigns that highlight strategies on how these promises would be achieved. While we've not seen that level of, how would I put it, consciousness of our candidates to articulate this point. But that is what some of those platforms that we've had, town halls, I know we had some on different media channels, not all candidates, the APC had not been very receptive of some of these platforms, but at least it has promoted conversations around these issues and we're hoping that the last little part of the campaigns would focus on strategies, on how these promises would be, would be achieved, especially security for one. It's not a simplistic conversation, and there's a lot more that we need to hear from the candidates around how these issues would be, would be addressed.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Philip, would you like to add anything?

**Philip Ademola Olayoku:** Yeah. Just very briefly, just to say that perhaps the idea of fact checking, you know, that's proliferated in Nigeria civil society, may scare some candidates, you know, to in trying to, you know, try to make promises and make reference to the fact that they cannot, you know, validate. And so that's as, I may put a bit of caution on them and rightly so. But there's also the other dimension of it where people try to demonize technology as fake news or whatever, you know, and so people are a bit careful in terms of how they make allusions to some facts.

But let me end on this note. There's a lot of difference between knowing the issues and understanding these issues. So what I've observed, you know, in all of this, in most of the candidates, even those that have been put forward, as you know, the drivers of the new change, is to know that they know this data, they could access the data, they believe in what is happening in other contexts. But for them to properly contextualize this detached data within the Nigeria situation has been totally impossible for them. You know, so you just you you hear very [inaudible] statements dismissed like three months, I'm going to end terrorism in Nigeria, in two days, I'm going to solve the economic problems and stuff like that instead of telling us things that they're going to do.

And on this note, I actually felt, and I mean, and this is not a very conventional thinking, but the approach of Tinubu, at Chatham House, of trying to bring people who were competent in different fields to make interventions work would that be is is sort of learning for candidates, because you're not going to work as an isolated president, you're going to work within the community. So so that

within a proper context of like drawing notes, you know, competence among your cycles, it is in the competence where it is actually, you know, in that cycle. So let me just end with that, yeah.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Thank you. We have received many questions about the quality of the elections and particularly what will happen and how the losers accept the elections. Are we going to see a lot of allegations of electoral fraud? Demands for recounts and even in that, sort of cluster of questions, group of questions, quite a few of our Nigerian participants were actually raising the issue whether the military would accept if Peter Obi is declared winner if the, the insurgent outside candidate bust the system.

So Cynthia, let me start with you and then go to Philip and Matthew, if you would like to add anything. You know, what about it, the day after the elections or the day after the results are announced, because potentially we could even have a second round in these Nigerian elections. What is likely to happen in terms of losers accepting the results will the courts be able to process challenges. Your thoughts on that and is the military going to accept any result?

**Cynthia Mbamalu** Well, I think I'll start with a very easy one. We're not looking forward to the military acceptance of an outcome. We're not looking at this as a major determinants. Major worry we have with military is and when it comes to security deployments if deployments is done in a way that guarantees confidence rather than deters participation because there are different levels of deployment. And if the military is professional and nonpartisan in its deployment. And that's what we believe is what would impact on the process. What yes is a worry around acceptance of outcome and because like this is the first time we've had really categorically states at this point who would win the election. So it shows that there is going to be competition.

However, I know there are efforts amongst our partners to get political parties to commit to a second peace accord. There was a peace accord signed earlier sometime in 2022 around campaigns. But there is a plan for another peace accord before the elections. And the core of one of the major issues in the peace accord is committing to accept an outcome of an elections and resorting to the courts if there are grievances with the outcome and the goal is to popularize this accord. Now, our courts are not more like they are more of persuasive effect. And the idea is if people commit to this, we can hold them accountable to their commitments.

The other part is around, are, already around voter education. Because one way to counter the threats of post-election violence, based on misinformation, on how the process, how elections are

won, is adequate voter education in the pre-election space. I believe a lot of populations still do not understand the importance of winning majority votes and require constitutional [inaudible]. And that is one of the things that would be we believe would be a trigger. But we have worries that this could be, this could lead to post-election violence. Yes. For either party and for anyone that wins, they would always be the other section would not agree with the results.

So there's a major worry around that, which is why in my conversation, I talked around things that we could ensure, mitigate those violence. First is compliance with the rules and procedures in the elections, they want a section believes that there was injustice in the conduct in the process. There would be a major challenge. So, for instance, issues around deployment of technology. And one of these we've seen in previous elections, if a particular geo political zone believes that technology was not used in the other parts of the country, they would question the outcome, if people question the results figures from other parts of the country, then it would be a major trigger for violence, which is why compliance, when it comes to the administration of elections, to the rules of procedure, is key. Managing logistics effectively. Because if you have late commencement in some locations, it would be seen as an injustice to those people in that location. So one of the things the Electoral Commission must seek to achieve that is fairness across, across the board.

The other parts are for me, which is the last point around this, because we can't totally run away from post-election violence, there's a likelihood for that. Well, I believe that is a lot of work ongoing, both by faith-based organizations and civil society partners in this pre-election space that could help manage the threats to violence post-elections. So I'm hoping that those engagement media partnerships be from now to the elections would inform how people accept the outcome of the elections.

And they have as I said, this was the last point, the third, the final part for me is the role of the courts. And I have to mention this because recent court decisions are beginning to create doubts or in the independence of the courts. We know that these elections may be decided in the courts. And the important thing is that if, if you ask citizens to be patient on with what the outcome from the court and there is lack of confidence in the independence of the courts, it could also be a trigger to post-election violence, meaning that from now until the elections, we need the judiciary that presents an independent front and commits to delivering judgment that truly puts the sovereignty of the people as

paramount beyond political interest. I believe that that is what another way to manage post elections and violence that could result from non-acceptance of electoral outcome.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Right. Thank you, Cynthia. Matthew or Phillip? Would you like to add anything, or I'll pivot to another question.

**Philip Ademola Olayoku:** Yeah. Just quickly, too. Yeah. So I just wanted to say just two quick points. The first thing is that the proliferation of, like, you well know, Vanda, non-state actors, no, perhaps the infusion of some non-state actors into paramilitary, you know, regional zones, you know, the Amotekun, the Eastern security network or whatever. You know, it is a cause for concern because this has actually been one of the major arguments against state police, you know, community policing. And to say that our political actors, you know, use these individuals on that implement to their own advantage. You know, or their advantages during the, you know, political or the electoral cycle. That's the first. And the second thing is that the culture, this is a culture that must be cultivated over time. And so the stop gap of electoral interventions may not be enough, you know, or sustainable when it comes to managing electoral violence in Nigeria. Yeah.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Thank you. Let me pivot to a major substantive issue, defining issue for Nigeria that several of our participants raised, and that's the badly needed reforms of the oil sector. And now, Matthew, let me start with you, given your tremendous work on corruption and kleptocracy in Nigeria and beyond, that is a fundamental issue that Nigeria must accomplish. It's also a very wicked problem and comes with many political consequences. So fighting the, finding the wherewithal to to fight patronage systems and conduct meaningful anti-corruption and the broadly oil reform measures is a tough one. What are the prospects that any of the candidates would take it on meaningfully once they come to office? And one of our participants is asking specifically whether Obi is better positioned to do it than others.

**Matthew Page** Well, certainly that, I think, is, you know, the perception or the argument that is being made. I think that the bottom line is that that issue that I mentioned earlier, where, you know, Nigeria's current political system, right, is sort of fueled by, by petroleum funds that are siphoned out through a variety of means, it's an extremely complicated picture, one which is, you know, damaging to the economic lifeblood of Nigeria. But mainly, you know, it mainly benefits the elites. And we also know that elites have, political elites have strong connections, family connections, you know, connections of their, of their personal networks into the oil business.



The supposed reforms that took place under Buhari of the oil sector and the NNPC, I think were relatively superficial. I think that the NNPC remains sort of a, sort of fountain of corruption and sort of the engine room of Nigeria's kleptocracy in many ways. In a sense, you know, the reforms were meant to inoculate the organization against the criticism that it had been receiving in many years. But it remains a company that is not transparent, not, not subject to rigorous oil oversight. And so that, that poses enormous problems for Nigeria's incoming president, both in terms of it being a revenue source for the country, but also, you know, the pressures on him, even if that incoming president does have a desire to reform the oil sector, which, of course, as we know is necessary to attract investment, it's necessary to, to address many of the environmental and climate impacts of Nigeria's oil sector and the health impacts as we know, you know, anyone who spent time in Port Harcourt knows of the, of the air pollution there. You know, anyone knows of the sort of damaging effects of gas flaring and oil pollution on the environment in the coastal regions of Nigeria.

So there's a, there's a broad spectrum of challenges, not least of which, of course, is corruption, but also the long-term viability of the oil sector, because we know that the cost of producing a barrel of oil in Nigeria ranks among the highest in the world. We also know that much of that production is moving offshore in areas that require more technical expertise and, and investment in order to access quantities of oil and gas.

So the question is, does sort of, do old school politicians like, I would argue, the ruling party candidate and the, the main opposition party candidate, those, those two individuals are really sort of old school candidates, both of whom directly or indirectly have or had connections to Nigeria's petroleum sector. Or this potentially this new insurgent up and coming insurgent candidate, which many young Nigerians, as we said, are very excited about view as a reformer, but whose ability to reform what is hitherto been an unreformable reformable entity, the national oil company or the sector, what is his capacity, real capacity to do that? And that, that is still an open question. So I'll, I'll leave it there.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Great. Let me follow up with you, Cynthia and Phillip. So, you know, there is this tremendous excitement about Obi and huge influx of expectation of what Obi can do. I would love your take if Obi is not elected, is this the end of his career or is he going to be you know, he the Labor Party has nowhere the, the machinery that PDP and APC have, right. There is excitement about him, but the on the street mechanisms of getting the votes are favoring the

traditional parties. Are we going to see him, you know, staying on or running again? Building the political machinery is kind of one question.

And Philip, for you, some of our viewers are asking whether we could see amplification of secessionism in the Southeast. You know, you spoke about IBOP. Certainly when I was last in Nigeria, I was struck by the amount of talk about secessionism. It's not new, but the frequency and intensity seem different, at least from a sort of time in the air kind of perception. And now, of course, there is the Obi fascination. So, Cynthia, Obi's chances, the implications if he is not elected this time around. And Philip, you know, are we exacerbate the, exaggerating the threat of secessionism in the South.

**Cynthia Mbamalu** Well, thank you. We, I had this conversation last week actually, around what happens, right, if if, for instance, will he does not win the election? Well, that is too close to call. So I don't want to make any predictions. But for me, one of the things I'm excited about is the fact that his emergence as a candidate sparks interest in the electoral process. And we had young people hosting Twitter spaces, discussing elections. You have young people going out to campaign for him without being members of the Labor Party. So people who are saying we may have no structure, but we will go and create structures that can vote for him.

That level of activism is needed of political and interest amongst young people is needed for our democracy is where we need more citizens to be engaged and to ask question, which for me, if we think about how will this impact on his elections, for me was the elections whether he wins or not, I believe that what makes a movement sustainable is its ability to build, to be able to transform into a viable platform. And for me, every elections, not every election, is one first contest. Sometimes an election is to be won in the next electoral cycle. And so if, if, for instance, he doesn't win the elections, what I would, what I look to, to see is that he sustains this engagement, transforming this movement into some level of citizen consciousness, demanding accountability, but focus on building the platform to the next elections. Because we have the 24/7 elections. And a lot of politicians are already campaigning for that particular elections.

So his ability to move this movement into a national platform that consistently engages till the elections, I think that will keep his supporters connected to the issues but will also inspire more support and base for him towards the next elections. For these elections, one of the things I would say for the obedience movement is yes, electoral politics is local. Our data is showing that for the

Labor Party campaigns, we're seeing between 65 to 70% campaigns across the local government areas, which shows a lot of work needs to be done.

So it also requires that beyond the presidency, other candidates running for the other respective offices should also, must also be campaigning actively, because that is what promotes a party, party platform. So it's beyond the office of the President for the Labor Party for the legislative offices, the Labor Party also needs to show that level of force in its campaign. That for me, I believe, is what would push its popularity, or transform it from a movement to a platform and getting to the next election, it's going to be key for Peter Obi.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Well, we are about 7 minutes away from closing what could be a conversation for hours. And, you know, one of the enormous joys of going to Nigeria each time is to be able to have very long conversations that go long into the night about all manner of political and substantive issues. So we will not do this today, but we will host other events on Nigeria and Brookings and very much looking forward to continuing our dialogue. So I have a last question for each of you, if you can. So we're limited to perhaps a minute and a half, 2 minutes.

Let me start with you, Cynthia, but also let Philip and Matthew know the question. So for you, Cynthia, we haven't spoken about the issues of IDPs, internally displaced people in Nigeria, of which there are millions, whether they have been displaced by Boko Haram and ISWA, herders-farmers, conflict, issues in the south. How will they be able to vote, and particularly those who are not in camps? This is very significant. As the governor of Borno, Mr. Zulum, for example, has been massively driving people out of IDP camps, whether or not they are in fact going into safe areas. And Matthew, for you, what are the implications of the elections for U.S. Nigeria reelection relations? And Philip, for you, this issue of what will the elections, what kind of significance will, have the elections have for ECOWAS, and Nigeria's role in ECOWAS? So, Cynthia, in about 2 minutes, please.

**Cynthia Mbamalu** Yes. So sadly, the, the IDP voting framework that we currently have focuses on voting in identified or the formal camps. And so currently that is what it provides for. However, there is no clarity on how individuals who are not in these camps would be voting. But a lot of engagement is going on with INEC to provide a better guideline or a more inclusive guideline for voters who have been displaced for any of the, any other reason. And so that's and that's and that's one point. Second, what I wanted to also highlight is on technology and why? Because for accreditation of voters, BVAS would be used. One, we've, we've confirmed that all the BVAS

technologies machines have been deployed to all the states for every polling unit. There were some faulty ones that would be that would be replaced before the elections. But why this is important is because it's also affected IDP voting. The BVAS is configured to polling units. What this means is already there is a [cuts out; video skips].

**Matthew Page** Difference, but it's such an important one. And I know there'll be a lot of policymakers tuning in or watching this video later. So my take is that in both Washington and London, European capitals in recent years, there has been a declining focus on democracy and governance. So it's good that right now all the world's you know, Africa policymakers are tuned in to what's going on in Nigeria. That's obviously a very positive thing. And people are thinking about democracy in Nigeria. But it does highlight what I view as this, this disconnect and the problematic policy tradeoffs that have been made in in recent years. That's reached a low point, I think, during the Trump administration. But it did begin during the Obama administration and is now only starting to defrost and change a little bit during the Biden administration.

We have seen some positive signs. I will readily admit, you know, the Biden administration has come out with an anti-corruption strategy that in theory should be a clear framework for more robust approaches to elite corruption in Nigeria. We haven't really seen that be operationalized yet by the embassy or by the State Department. But, but there's at least a framework there and, and a direction of travel that's been mapped out by the administration. And I think instead there's been a real, like I said, small C conservative approach to bilateral relations with Nigeria, a real focus on maintaining access to, to top Nigerian officials, ramping up military assistance, and frankly, a focus on brokering these unprecedentedly large arms sales to Nigeria, US arms sales to Nigeria.

I think the U.S. reaction to some of these pretty earth-shattering gross human rights violations sort of moments and, you know, whether that be the Zaria massacre or the Lekki massacre or the recent revelations about the Nigerian army's forced abortion program, I think generally these reactions from Washington have been quite anemic, and sort of met with finger wagging that the Nigerian elites have, have easily brushed off. There hasn't been a lot of follow up to Washington's calls for accountability from the Nigerian government, and they seem to move on and forget about these incidents quite quickly and sort of the relationship reverts back to normal fairly rapidly.

So I think, you know, bottom line is Washington needs to really think about the long-term effect of these of these policy tradeoffs. It's unclear what the short-term gains have been, but the long-

term cost is quite clear, and that's sort of a damage to the broader U.S. strategic interests in Nigeria. Those are, of course, peace and security, socioeconomic development, good governance, climate resilience, more trade and investment, and of course, just broader political stability. I'll leave it there.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Thank you. Big topic, very short amount of time. Philip.

**Philip Ademola Olayoku:** Okay. So let's talk a little bit on Obi's longevity and secession, I think that's quite important for me. I think Obi came out too late. I think if Obi come out earlier, there might, it may have been you know, by far the leading candidate, that is the thing. And this is not the first time there was Moghalu in the last election, but where is Moghalu today? So for you to sustain a movement, it must be ideologically driven, that's the thing. And secession is like a fact of history. Secession is not, the talk of secession will not go away. But the reality of secession itself is subject to some historical unravelings. The fact is that the Igbo are divided when it comes to the issue of secession. It depends on the side that, not even Igbo, even Nigerians, even [inaudible].

But as long as these socio-economic challenges are in place, as long as there's some bit of exclusion for people within this political arrangement that we have, the question of how people try to cope with these realities, either just by asking out or trying to integrate themselves within the system will always be there. Yeah, let me just not, you know, drag us beyond the point.

**Vanda Felbab-Brown** Well, wonderful. Thank you very much, Philip, I appreciate your brevity and succinctness what is a huge topics and I would be just thrilled to continue the conversation with all three of you. We will do so whether through Brookings or in person in Nigeria or elsewhere, hopefully soon. In the meantime, let me give enormous thanks to Professor Philip Ademola Olayoku, Mr. Matthew Page and Ms. Cynthia Mbamalu for their enormous insight and for all of their work to make Nigeria a better governed, more inclusive place in different ways.

And most importantly, very many thanks to all our participants for joining us today. The video will be posted on the Brookings website in a few hours, and you can return to it. And thank you for all the very many questions you submitted. I did my best to bunch them into topics, but among the tens of questions, I was obviously not able to cover all of them. But don't despair. Please join us next time and we will be able to take more of your questions then. Thank you.