

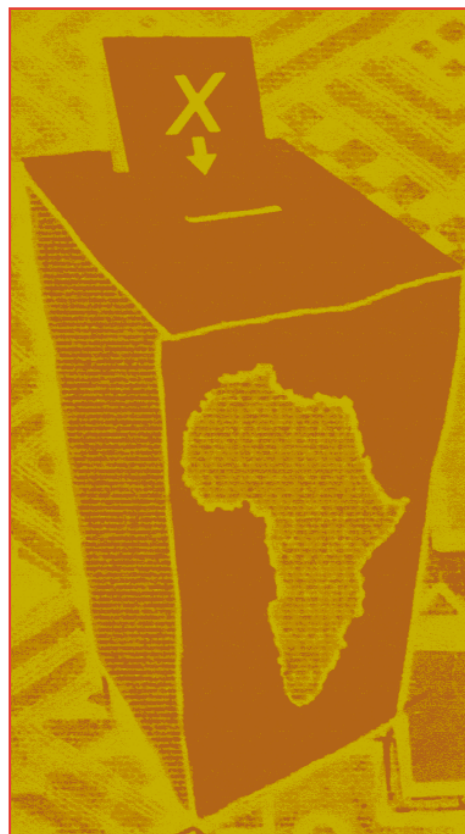


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# Elections in Africa – The Past Ten Years An Assessment

*WORKSHOP REPORT**Heather Deegan*

On 28 January 2003 the Africa Programme ran a workshop at Chatham House comprising two panels: one dealing with the critical issues in African elections that have emerged during the past decade; the other focusing on recent elections in *Kenya* (2002) and *São Tomé e Príncipe* (2002) together with a briefing on the forthcoming elections in *Nigeria* (2003). The second panel also considered the post-election crisis in *Côte d'Ivoire* (Ivory Coast, 2000-2001).



## KEY POINTS

- Reform of political parties necessary
- Need for cohesion of opposition groups
- Checks on the abuse of incumbency
- Better management of elections
- Improved voter education and registration
- Extended period for international monitoring/better post-election follow-up
- A precise meaning of 'free and fair' elections needs to be universally understood
- Poorly organized elections can create tension and division
- Cell phone/internet can counteract corrupt practices (Kenya)

## Session 1: Critical issues in African elections

The analysis of elections over the past decade was placed within the wider debate about democracy and its application in Africa. Although the panel rejected the contention that democracy in Africa was unsuccessful, agreeing that it could be a 'learned trade' over time, it was recognized that certain critical factors affect electoral efficacy and political reform. Around 100 elections had taken place in Africa between 1989 and 1994, in some countries for the first time. It was important to understand the dynamics of those early elections because if democracy was to grow it should develop at the local level, particularly in one-party or authoritarian states in which the general population often had very little interaction with national political processes or leaders.

One fundamental concern was the extent to which *opposition* groups in elections were cohesive and well organized. It was noted, for example, that 126 parties had contested elections in Angola and with the existence of so many parties the opposition was likely to be fragmented. In fact, the role of the *political party* was seen as the 'weakest link' in African democratization. Often parties had no constituencies or were ethnically based; equally, political programmes, interaction with the populace and financial transparency were non-existent. Internal party democracy was often unknown and many opposition parties actually disbanded between elections. Parties desperately needed reform and renewal but often the international donor community was fearful of directly involving itself in party development, preferring instead to fund NGOs which did not arouse accusations of political interference. However, wider democratic reform would not take place without changes to the structures and practices of political parties.

Closely connected to this issue was the question of party-state relations. In many countries the state is subsumed by the dominant party and elections simply become a focus for misuse of government expenditure. In some African states there are no rules on expenditure at all. This anomalous situation can result in the '*abuse of incumbency*', whereby dominant parties will attempt to change constitutional terms of office/control the media/outlaw political activity and engage in coercive or violent electoral campaigns. Ideally, these problems should be addressed by the African Union, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has introduced a parliamentary forum setting out political norms and standards. Unfortunately, however, not all SADC member states accept these guidelines.

Legitimate outcomes of elections are critical in democratizing states but on occasion political leaders and parties enter the electoral process with the expectation that they alone will win. Such an attitude can create conditions of low participation and competition, often resulting in a popular or opposition boycott of the whole electoral process. Studies in the 1990s revealed that a correlation existed between open and representative electoral competition and higher rates of participation. Inevitably, of course, the 'winner takes all' approach to elections excludes many, and consequently, calls are made for greater emphasis to be placed on negotiation with other political groups/NGOs/stakeholders, as well as respect for and appropriate engagement with the voters. However, such an approach is only likely to be adopted if there is a good level of democratization within the country. In other words, is there political activity beyond electoral periods? Is criticism of the government possible? How free are the media? Can civil society operate openly and freely? In short, the character of the wider political environment is critical when analysing elections.

A crucial factor in African states is the great disparity between poverty for the many and the extreme wealth of a few. Although there is no direct correlation between an increase in a country's GNP and growing political reform (cf Angola, Nigeria, Zimbabwe), there is widespread acknowledgment that the social impacts of extreme poverty – namely, poor education, disease and illiteracy – combine to hinder the process of democratization. Also, such negative factors prevent the emergence of an enlarging middle class that could be instrumental in underpinning democratic trends.

One central area of discussion was whether or not *electoral systems and management* procedures affect the outcome of elections. Since the 1990s much attention has been focused on electoral systems and their appropriateness to a given country. More generally, the wider African continent has encompassed many different systems: namely, First Past the Post (FPTP), List Proportional Representation, Two Rounds and the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP). The MMP system, which is essentially one of overall proportional representation, established through the use of a separate national ballot paper and a number of 'compensatory seats', has been considered in South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Its attraction for incumbent parties is that the constituency system is retained, thus ensuring local patronage, while at the same time allowing for a fair reflection of party strength among the electorate. In fact, the MMP system was suggested as a solution to the political and constitutional crisis in Lesotho after the 1998 parliamentary elections, when the clear win of the major party was challenged by opposition parties on the grounds of electoral mismanagement. That

example underlined the difficulties created by a 'winner takes all' structure that can act as a catalyst for conflict because there is so much at stake (as in Zanzibar 2000, Côte d'Ivoire 2000 and Zimbabwe 2002).

Consequently, electoral structures and procedures are required that can help prevent election-related conflicts. Electoral administration and management should ensure the legitimacy and impartiality of the electoral process. Issues such as the selection of candidates, primary elections, the level of technical assistance and voter identification were all crucial to 'electoral governance'. Although it was acknowledged that elections were not simply a matter of management and that politics and culture could be just as significant in determining a country's electoral environment, two factors emerged as critically important: *voter registration and voter education*. It was essential that people registered to vote because in a number of African elections unregistered voters are not included when turnout rates are calculated. In Lesotho only around 70% of potential voters registered to vote. Countries with sophisticated systems, such as South Africa, do offer technical assistance to less efficient states, although even in South Africa, four million people have yet to register to vote. If voter registration does not operate properly, the whole point of holding elections is undermined.

Yet non-registration is not only a result of system incapacity; it also reflects unwillingness on the part of the voter. This raises the related issue of voter education, which is essential in nurturing and motivating the electorate. However, it needs to be more than simply informing voters where and when to register. Voters require greater information on the consequences of not registering and the possibilities for change which the ballot implies. But sometimes weaknesses within Electoral Commissions, inefficiency or inadequacy of administrative personnel, or just plain overall incompetence meant that voter education could be poor and largely ineffective. It was apparent that voter education and registration would continue to be of concern in electoral management.

The role of *international observers* was scrutinized and although it was accepted that they were desirable, their stay in a country was often very limited. They were accused of exhibiting an almost Pavlovian response to elections, being conditioned to attend the election for a short period and then leave the country, and it was felt that if they were to have any purchase on the electoral process they required more time and better post-election follow-up. The concentration on observation can be a problem, and international observers do sometimes prematurely declare an election to be 'free and fair'. Local monitors from civil society and NGOs could be encouraged, thus building

much-needed electoral capacity within a country. Yet the term '*free and fair*' was often interpreted differently in certain circumstances, so various observer missions, e.g. international and regional ones, made contradictory assessments of election processes. Moreover, events could change very quickly in a post-election environment, particularly when a domestic political climate was fluid. Invariably, quite apart from considerable uncertainty as to how the international community should react, it was tremendously difficult to remedy the impact of a flawed election in countries riven by violence and religious/ethnic division. The question was posed: in circumstances of religious/ethnic violence and animosity should elections be avoided altogether?

## Session 2: Elections in focus

The first session of the workshop raised themes and issues that had emerged during the past decade of elections in Africa and that provided a framework for the appraisal of recent elections. The second session focused on empirical case studies which are of topical interest and especially highlight the concerns raised in the first session. Of particular interest were the elections in Kenya (2002) and the indications they provided of democratic enhancement within the country. The elections in São Tomé (2002) were somewhat different in that they raised essential concerns about the efficiency and probity of electoral practices. Both case studies offer contrasting experiences of electoral processes and illuminate the differences between African states. The pre-election summary on the situation in Nigeria provides a telling account of political division and religious/ethnic rivalry, while the devastating account of Côte d'Ivoire's post-electoral lapse into chaos is charted with judicious authority.

## KENYA

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS 2002

	%
<b>Emilio Mwai Kibaki</b> (National Rainbow Coalition)	62.2
<b>Uhuru Kenyatta</b> (Kenya African National Union)	31.3
<b>Simeon Nyachae</b> (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy–People)	5.9
<b>James Orendo</b> (Social Democratic Party)	0.4
<b>David Ng'ethe</b> (Chama Cha Uma)	0.1

Source: *Daily Nation*, December 2002.

An in-depth report by the Africa Programme on the Kenyan elections is published separately<sup>1</sup> but this

section highlights some important features of the elections. President Daniel arap Moi retired in a very different society from that which existed a decade ago. Although economic performance is still sluggish, with a negative growth rate in real terms, in the political sphere, and contrary to received opinion, democracy has become securely entrenched. Newly elected President Kibaki will not be able to return to the autocratic order that characterized certain periods of Moi's rule. The print media are far more outspoken, the government's monopoly over the electronic media has been broken, civil society is well established and local NGOs are respected. Equally, professional organizations are establishing closer ties with rural citizens and the power of the Provincial Administration is waning.

The 2002 elections were deemed to be the most free and fair to date, yet the turnout was down to 58%. The reason for this anomaly lay in problems with the electoral register, in that an estimated 1.2 million deceased voters were still registered. When this irregularity is taken into account the real turnout rate was 87%. Yet this institutional weakness should not mar the considerable progress the Kenyan Electoral Commission has made in moving away from an often chaotic approach to one that is far more meticulous.

Some believe the ruling party, KANU, threw the 2002 election away chiefly because it chose the wrong candidate. President Moi had been persuaded that Uhuru Kenyatta could heal the bitter divisions between the Kikuyu, Kenya's largest ethnic group, and the Kalenjin. The presumption was that older voters would flock to Kenyatta, in memory of his father, but this was not to be the case. KANU, widely regarded as the most democratic party because it has a broadened constituency beyond its ethnic base, lost because of splits within KANU and a realignment of the opposition National Alliance for Change (NAK) into an effective united political force. As the election approached it seemed that KANU, sensing it could not win, practically gave up trying; it certainly reduced its campaign expenditure.

On balance, the elections were interesting for a number of reasons. First, despite the widening of KANU's constituency, and perhaps inevitably, a relationship existed between ethnicity and voting patterns in certain areas. Second, and significantly, a candidate who campaigned openly against female genital mutilation, in a very conservative district, actually won the seat, and is now an MP and member of the government. Third, the availability of *cellular phones* militated against corrupt practices (in Ghana and Senegal), with EU observers witnessing a greater depth of involvement because of the ease of telephone

communication. Political organizations were transformed by being constantly and immediately in contact as events occurred. Equally, observers could promptly publish on the *internet* any electoral irregularities or incidences of coercion. Clearly, technology and improved levels of communication already play important roles in calibrating electoral registration and results, but now they can help facilitate the improvement and transparency of electoral practices in Kenya and elsewhere.

## SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS 2002

	%
<b>Fradique de Menezes</b> (Ação Democrática Independente ACI)	56.3
<b>Manuel Pinto da Costa</b> (Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe)	38.4
<b>Carlos Tiny</b>	3.3
<b>Victor Monteiro</b>	1.0
<b>Francisco Fortunato Pires</b>	0.6

Source: Ação Democrática Independente = Independent Democratic Action.

### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2002

	%	Seats
<b>Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe</b> (Liberation Movement of São Tomé e Príncipe, MLSTP)	39.6	24
<b>MDFM-PCD</b> - Force for Change Democratic Movement - Partido de Convergência Democrática-Grupa de Reflexão (Democratic Convergence Party-Reflection Group)	39.4	23
<b>Uê Kédadji</b> (UK)	16.2	8

Source: Ibid.

São Tomé e Príncipe (STP) gained independence from Portugal in 1975. Coups and counter-coups characterized the years up to 1990 but then a new constitution was established providing for opposition parties and multi-party elections and restricting the presidential period of office to two terms. The new constitution was approved in a referendum of the total electorate of 61,000 in 1990. The Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé e Príncipe (MLSTP-PSD) has dominated government since 1994 but it has not held the presidency and a parliamentary majority simultaneously. During the past nine years there have been two 'opposition' presidents, first Miguel Trovoada and more recently his nominated successor, Fradique de Menezes.

Although STP is the second smallest state in Africa with a population of only 137,000, it has come into international focus because of its offshore oil deposits. Notwithstanding the country's constitutional reform in 1990, it is readily recognized that electoral bribery is widespread. In part, this is connected to the existence of political parties which exercise clientelist relationships with the electorate. Local, national and foreign patronage is largely blamed for the crisis in the country's politics. Parties tend to be based on individuals rather than a wider constituency and in a society in which there is much poverty, vote-buying has become commonplace. President Menezes has acknowledged that since the introduction of multi-party politics, vote-buying has occurred. All parties engage in the practice and voters have become used to the arrangement. 'Everybody likes money!', proclaimed one voter.<sup>2</sup>

The President himself was accused of vote-buying in one very peculiar case in the town of Folha Fede, close to São Tomé city. Voters barricaded a road against members of the National Electoral Commission who were to set up a ballot station, on the grounds that the infrastructure for their basic living conditions, e.g. running water and electricity, was in need of repair. The boycott worked: the President responded immediately. On election day, he visited the town and promised the electorate of 508 that he would personally ensure their demands were met. This action provoked outrage among opposition politicians who claimed the President was unfairly extending his election campaign.

The 2002 elections were attended by about twenty foreign observers from Angola, Nigeria, China, the United States, Cape Verde, Portugal, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon. Some local analysts claimed the large number of Nigerians in the team was no coincidence and that this reflected the close relationship between the governments of Nigeria and São Tomé through petroleum deals. However, Angola, another major African petroleum producer, was also involved in the observation. The team of observers declared the elections free and fair, claiming they had witnessed no cases of vote-buying. Not a single member mentioned the débâcle at Folha Fede, and critics maintain that the observers appeared uninterested in probing the electoral process. One observer from the Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria, an organization not without problems itself, perceived her role in a particular way: 'My job involved going around the polling booths seeing ... how they were opened. I have never seen a peaceful and fair election like the one I have seen here. ...

There were no policemen or soldiers pushing people around, asking them to do this or that.' When asked about the boycott at Folha Fede, she claimed not to be aware of the problem. In any case, she maintained, these were issues that STP had to resolve, adding that 'lapses happen here and there'.<sup>3</sup> The National Electoral Commission also held that the President's visit to Folha Fede did not constitute a continuation of his electoral campaign, but the results suggested otherwise.

On 5 March, two days after the elections, the apportionment of seats in the National Assembly was split 23:23:9 to the MLSTP-PSD, MDFM-PCD and Ue Kedadji. Five days later, after Folha Fede's recalcitrant electorate eventually went to the polls, the results shifted. The MLSTP-PSD gained an extra seat, pushing their total to 24, whereas Ue-Kedadji lost one seat. During the interim period the leader of the MLSTP-PSD, Manuel Pinto da Costa, had visited the presidential palace. The elections were, in a sense, a prelude to subsequent events: in December 2001, President Menezes and the nine existing parties signed a Regime Pact that advocated the formation of an all-party government after the elections, in order to guarantee political stability for the coming era of oil wealth. Although Patricio Trovoada was not permitted to stand as candidate for the Ue Kedadji, the Pact was embraced largely because, as one commentator asserted, nobody wanted to be outside the government when the first petrodollars arrived. On 8 April 2002, the country's first government of national unity, composed of all parties represented in parliament and with eleven ministers and two secretaries of state, was duly installed.

Inevitably, the jockeying for power continues within the government of national unity but it is the wider political environment that causes real concern – an environment in which, if votes are not directly bought by parties for cash, they are purchased through the provisions of *banhos* (baths) where people, predominantly poor, are provided with drinks, food, entertainment and small amounts of money in exchange for their electoral support. This venal system corrupts the whole democratic framework as it degenerates into a situation in which party supporters participate in electoral campaigns not because of party loyalty or personal conviction, but only in exchange for money. This is the real underbelly of the electoral experience in São Tomé e Príncipe, a country where elections are monitored by international and regional observers and duly declared to be free and fair.



## CÔTE D'IVOIRE

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2000	
(37.4%, boycotted by RDR and PDCI)	%
<b>Laurent Gbagbo</b> (Front Populaire Ivoirien)	59.4
<b>Robert Guéï</b>	32.7
<b>François Wockie</b> (Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs)	5.7
<b>Théodore Mel</b> (Union des Démocrates de Côte d'Ivoire)	1.5
<b>Nicolas Dioulou</b>	0.8

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS DECEMBER 2000	
	Seats
Assemblée Nationale (33.1 %, boycotted by RDR)	225
<b>Front Populaire Ivoirien</b> (Ivorian People's Front, FPI)	96
<b>Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire</b> (Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire) PDCI-RDA	94
<b>Rassemblement des Républicains</b> (Rally of the Republicans, RDR) Boycotted	5
<b>Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs</b> (Ivorian Workers' Party, PIT)	4
<b>Union des Démocrates de Côte d'Ivoire</b> (Union of Democrats of Côte d'Ivoire, UDCI)	1
<b>Mouvement des Forces de l'Avenir</b> (Movement of the Future Forces, MFA)	1
<b>Non-partisans</b>	22
<b>Vacant</b>	2

Source: Commission Nationale Electorale (CNE).

There can be no better example of the consequences of a flawed electoral process than that of Côte d'Ivoire. Ten years ago the country was no more or less divided religiously or ethnically than, say, Ghana or Kenya, yet whereas those countries have achieved progress in levels of democratization, Côte d'Ivoire has regressed. This is particularly significant because of its regional influence and the impact religious tensions have on neighbouring countries. Political divisions have crystallized around religious identity: Islam in the north and Christian in the south. The failed military coup of 2001 has precipitated wide-scale lawlessness, with brigands looting and attacking on such a scale that tens of thousands of local Christians have fled. It is only ten years since President Houphouët Boigny died after ruling the country for 33 years. His regime was regarded as relatively inclusive: he encouraged immigration and passed laws that enabled immigrants to integrate. Equally, he was able to diffuse regional and ethnic resentment through largesse, persuasion and co-option. While maintaining close economic and military ties with France, the country grew to become Africa's most successful agricultural commodity-based economy.

However, it was during Houphouët's rule that his

own Baoulé clan and the Akan group, of which it is a subset, came to believe they were the country's natural leaders. Since the President's death the institutions of state have proved too weak to withstand the dual strains of a bitter power struggle and economic collapse. As early as 1994, Houphouët's successor, Henri Konan Bedie, began tinkering with the electoral laws and electoral register. The following year the opposition boycotted the elections and in 1999 Konan Bedie was deposed in a military coup. Côte d'Ivoire's brief flirtation with democratization resulted in acrimony, disillusionment and estrangement. The consequences of military rule were dramatic and rapid: a total breakdown of the rule of law, in part a consequence of divisions within the military itself.

Elections were held again in 2000, and during these 14 out of 19 presidential candidates were eliminated. Two-thirds of the population abstained from voting. Massive street protests brought down the military government of General Guéï, in favour of his only serious rival, Laurent Gbagbo. Many of his supporters, who represent only around one-quarter of the electorate, died in the streets in the attempt to bring him to power. But the period of his rule has been in many ways as repressive as that of the military, with Gbagbo replacing legitimacy with fear. As a result much of the northern population identifies with the rebel cause, although its objectives remain obscure. Laurent Gbagbo and Konan Bedie have now become unlikely allies, depending on their ethnic or religious identities for influence. Yet both politicians are becoming hostage to the more unpredictable ambitions of growing numbers of armed young men. President Gbagbo's impotence was underlined when in a television address he called on rioters and rebels to go back to work. Most of them do not have any work.

The flaws in the Ivorian electoral process have been fairly self-evident. They involved flagrant manipulation of the electoral laws and the voting register. In fact, prior to the elections the constitution was changed so that only individuals both of whose parents were from Côte d'Ivoire could stand as candidates. For the outside world the question of how to address the consequences of a flawed election after it has taken place is challenging. What does the experience of Côte d'Ivoire teach us? The lesson seems to be that *elections, if badly organized, can create great tension and conflict.*

## NIGERIA (forthcoming elections April 2003)

The 2003 elections, due to be held on 19 April, represent a critical and historic step for Nigeria in that they will be only the second elections held by an incumbent elected government since independence.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 1999	
	%
<b>Matthew Olusegun Fajinmi Aremu Obasanjo</b> (People's Democratic Party)	62.8
<b>Samuel Oluyemisi Falae</b> (Alliance for Democracy/All People's Party)	37.2

Source: CNN/International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 1999		
	%	Seats
House of Representatives		360
<b>People's Democratic Party</b> (PDP)	56.4	215
<b>All People's Party</b> (APP)	31.2	70
<b>Alliance for Democracy</b> (AD)	12.4	66
Senate:	%	109
<b>People's Democratic Party</b> (PDP)	57.1	66
<b>All People's Party</b> (APP)	30.6	23
<b>Alliance for Democracy</b> (AD)	12.4	19

Source: *Europa World Year Book*, 1999.

The country has experienced ten years of civilian rule (from 1960 to 1966 and 1979 to 1983), the other years being spent under military rule. When General Abacha died in mysterious circumstances in 1998 and Major-General Abubakar assumed power, elections were promised. They were duly held in 1999 and former General Olusegun Obasanjo was elected President. The 1999 elections were fraught with difficulties, with accusations of blatant vote-rigging, fraud and violence. Sections of Western opinion, keen to embrace Nigeria's transition to civilian rule, overlooked the electoral misconduct and have been broadly supportive of President Obasanjo. However, Nigerian electoral monitoring groups and civic organizations concluded that in parts of the country 'violence was a dominant feature'.<sup>4</sup> Some prominent Nigerians claim that one reason for the problems surrounding the 1999 elections was that the country has never had a democratic transition, unlike, say, South Africa, whose post-apartheid government evolved after four years of negotiations and transitional structures. Nigeria lurched into constitutional change and elections only 11 months after the death of General Abacha. Now Nigeria is feeling the lack of an appropriate process of democratic and institutional adjustment and its people harbour fears as to whether democracy can ever take root in the country. Consequently, the conduct of the 2003 elections will be under close scrutiny.

The election will be run by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which is charged with registering voters and political parties, setting up rules, monitoring and auditing the political parties' operations and campaigns. A total of 120,000 polling stations will be set up for the estimated 59.4 million

voters. The INEC is already being criticized for being rather too close for comfort to President Obasanjo in that all its commissioners are members of his party, the PDP. The organization has also called for considerable government funding. In October 2002 it requested N19.8 billion (cUS\$155 million), and in December 2002 a further N35 billion to complete voter registration. By January 2003 it had demanded another N28 billion. Whereas the INEC is blaming any inadequacies in registration on a lack of funding, critics suggest that it is really a result of the organization's inefficiency. Certainly, the whole issue of voter registration abuses in the country's 36 states became apparent in September 2002 and the federal government was forced to admit the process had been plagued by 'serious malpractices'. Although Nigerian people turned out to register, officials allegedly withheld voter registration cards in order to prevent voters from registering at all, sometimes selling them on to politicians. In certain sensitive areas, such as Rivers State in which the Ogoni people live, Human Rights Watch reported that instead of INEC-trained staff supervising the registration process, members of major political parties had taken over and were turning people away.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the iniquities of the country's institutional capacity are deep societal fissures. Unhealed religious divisions, coupled with the violent clashes between Muslims and Christians following the establishment of full Islamic *sharia* law in northern states, point to an electoral campaign that potentially could be mired in violence. Also, the fact that candidates have hired private militias hardly reduces fears of unrest and indicates a political landscape that is tense and fraught. As one commentator asserts, elections in Nigeria can literally be a matter of life or death. Whereas ethnicity has been relegated to the background, religion is the major concern, particularly as the elections will coincide with Muslims celebrating three years of *sharia* rule. Yet certain prominent figures see some causes for hope. First, a survey conducted among the population in the northern states revealed that people had not expected events to turn out the way they have done under the impact of *sharia* law. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the memories of presidential candidate Muhammad Buhari's previous period as head of a military government are not good. Consequently the Emirs in northern Nigeria, who exercise considerable influence over the local electorate, support President Obasanjo, who is a Christian.

More parties have been formed for this election but few have programmes or policies. It is generally considered that the politicians have become a clique more concerned about their own interests than those

## NIGERIA'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2003

<b>Muhammad Buhari*</b>	All Nigeria People's Party
<b>Olusegun Obasanjo*</b>	People's Democratic Party
<b>Emeka Ojukwu*</b>	All Progressive Grand Alliance
<b>Olapade Agoro</b>	National Action Council
<b>Gani Fawehinmi</b>	National Democratic Party
<b>Ike Omar Nwachukwu*</b>	National Democratic Party
<b>Jim Nwobodo</b>	United Nigeria People's Party

\* Former General

of the wider public. Certainly, many citizens have all but lost faith in Nigerian democracy, mainly because of bad experiences of former elections and attempts at civilian government. It is, therefore, essential that voters trust the electoral process and view it as free and fair. Although critics maintain that free and fair is exactly what the elections will not be, Nigerians need to know what a 'free and fair' election actually means. For example, there may be an orderly procession of voters at the polling stations but that does not indicate that the elections were free from fear. It is in this regard that the international community must play a role. It is important for Nigeria that the world is watching the process and is interested in the post-election environment. Traditionally, the focus of attention and one hallmark of democracy has been the election day itself, but what of the period between elections when democracy does not seem to be apparent and the international community shifts its attention elsewhere? NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, although instrumental in encouraging democratic practice, may not be able to achieve its ambitions. However, the fact that it was launched at all is seen as significant.

There is little doubt that the process of democratization in Nigeria will be slow and painstaking but whichever government assumes power, critical issues will have to be addressed:

- Observation of the rule of law
- The objective of peaceful coexistence
- Building the entrepreneurial and productive capacity of the population
- Improved governance, transparency and accountability of politicians
- Better delivery and improved management of public services.

Nigeria faces a great challenge in April 2003. Nobody wants to predict the outcome of the elections and some suggest they may not take place at all. If, as one commentator asserted, Nigeria 'gets away with the elections', the country must be prepared for the long haul of constitutional, institutional and democratic reform.

## Assessment

The workshop accentuated a number of issues that found resonance in the case studies, highlighting the fact that, however much democracy is encouraged within Africa, by the international community, by NGOs working on the ground and by political practitioners, there are pernicious elements within states that can undermine the process. Elections, a milestone on the road to democracy, are problematic for a number of reasons, one of which is the *nature of political parties*. Political parties are critical to the electoral process but it is clear that concerns about funding, policy formation, programme development, support, religious/ethnic rivalry, corruption and the lack of internal democracy are having an impact on elections in a number of countries considered in this workshop (as in São Tomé, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria). Artificially created parties, with no constituency of support, are deleterious to the conduct of elections. Yet parties such as Kenya's KANU party can and do have support beyond ethnic and traditional boundaries. The role and function of the political party in African elections needs to be addressed because weaknesses, malfunction and corruption within the party system leach into the wider political environment.

The related issue of *opposition cohesion* is particularly important during elections because a fragmented opposition with little or no direction can undermine an electoral process. When opposition groups do unite, provide a purposeful approach and attract electoral support, they can campaign effectively and also may win the election (as in Kenya). However, in less encouraging political climates, the opposition is destined to be simply that: eternally the opposition, never in power. It is here that *abuse of incumbency* can emerge. When political leaders form cliques, apportion power and appropriate political authority (as in São Tomé, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire), bribery and corruption can soon become part of the political terrain. In these circumstances, *better management of elections* is proposed as a means of delivering accurate elections results. National Electoral Commissions within countries may be weakened by poor structures, inadequate training of personnel or administrative inadequacy (as in São Tomé, Côte d'Ivoire). Yet some electoral institutions can evolve (as in Kenya), while some may be able to improve over time (for example, Nigeria).

Whatever the experience of African states, the efficiency of electoral institutions is essential to the conduct of elections. Yet improved *voter education and registration* is also paramount. In countries where disillusioning experiences of previous elections have the potential to alienate the electorate, voter education is particularly necessary to inculcate a



feeling of engagement and commitment. Yet for nations with diverse and differentiated polities, voter induction may be needed to provide a means of demonstrating that elections need not always be corrupt, controlled and violent exercises. Education apart, there is no doubt that voter registration must be scrupulous and beyond manipulation.

Elections are rightly regarded as critical components of the democratization process and much attention is focused upon them. *International and regional observers* are dispatched to cover and assess their outcomes. Yet more attention needs to be given to the wider political environment outside the election

period. Although there are guidelines on exactly what '*free and fair*' elections means, in practice there appears to be considerable misunderstanding.

The workshop identified appalling levels of electoral abuse, e.g. money for votes, distortion of electoral registers and mismanagement. At times, in certain countries, the political environment could be so debilitating that it was felt elections could be a source of further conflict and tension. Yet the workshop also recognized elements of 'good practice' together with the acknowledgment that new technology and *cell phones* can play an increasingly important role in ensuring electoral behaviour is transparent.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A special paper on the Kenya elections 2002 by David Throup, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC has been commissioned.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in a special report for the Africa Programme at RIIA by Lara Pawson, 'An Overview of Democracy in São Tomé e Príncipe: Legislative Elections in 2002'.

<sup>3</sup> BBC World Service interview, 3 March 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Cf *Nigeria at the Crossroads*, Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper 2003; Civil Liberties Organization, *A CLO Report on the State of Human Rights in Nigeria*, 1999 Annual Report.

<sup>5</sup> *Nigeria at the Crossroads*.

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If you are interested in forthcoming events or research by the Africa Programme contact:  
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