

WestAfrica

INSIGHT

Keeping Track in 2019:

Votes, Fake News and
Security in West Africa



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

WestAfrica

INSIGHT

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CONTENTS

Editorial

4



Nigeria's 2019 Election: What Are We Missing?

5



Sall clears path for second term in Senegal

13



Whose Truth?

Disinformation and misinformation online in Nigeria

18



Building and sustaining partnerships

Mali's foreign policy ambitions

22

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EDITORIAL

Keeping track in 2019: Votes, Fake News and Security in West Africa.

This edition of West Africa Insight will look ahead to key issues and events set to play out in 2019.

In February, two of the region's countries will hold presidential elections. Voters will cast their ballots on 16 February in Nigeria. Ahead of the poll Matthew Page provides a comprehensive preview of important, yet overlooked, issues that are likely to define the process. In Senegal, where election day is scheduled for 24 February, Ousmane Diallo casts a look over the opposition candidates looking to challenge incumbent president Macky Sall.

In both elections social media is likely to be playing an important role. Reflecting on Nigeria, but with application to the region as a whole, Emmanuel Akinwotu explores the growing phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation and efforts underway to tackle it.

Finally, Kamissa Camara, the recently appointed Foreign Minister of Mali, outlines some of her hopes and expectations in the areas of security, development and regional collaboration for the country in 2019.





Nigeria's 2019 Election: What Are We Missing?

by Matthew T. Page

Vote buying. Thuggery. Rigged primaries. Logistical failures. Official misconduct. Ballot box snatching. Budget delays. Voter apathy. Intimidation. Turnout suppression. Inconclusive results. Bribed officials. These and many other challenges routinely undermine the credibility and smooth conduct of elections in Nigeria.

Even before the 16 February and 2 March, 2019 polls, which will see governors, senators, representatives, state houses of assembly and a president elected, many of these corrosive influences have already damaged and disrupted Nigeria's democratic process. Even the efforts of those diligent poll workers, intrepid journalists, passionate civil society advocates—and countless voters determined to protect their vote—may not be enough to ensure the election is sufficiently credible.

Yet looking beyond these nagging threats to Nigerian democracy, there are issues flying under the radar that are not

getting enough attention. Are some of the biggest threats to Nigeria's democratic development—already fairly uneven since 1999—being overlooked?

Understanding Nigeria's undulating democracy

To understand the importance of the 2019 elections to Nigeria's democratic story, it is worth looking back at polls held since the country's 1999 return to civilian rule. Over the past two decades, the integrity of Nigerian elections has been somewhat tidal—characterised by a pronounced ebb and flow. Starting with the 1998/1999 transitional elections that resuscitated the country's democratic institutions, democracy lagged through the troubled 2003 polls up until the shambolically rigged 2007 “election”.

The 2007 polls represented a democratic nadir. Following a failed attempt to secure himself an unconstitutional third term, President Olusegun Obasanjo sought to install a malleable successor via a stage managed vote. Observing that it was “programmed to fail,” a coalition of pro-democracy civil society organisations concluded, “we do not believe that any outcome of the elections can represent the will of the people. A democratic arrangement founded on such fraud can have no legitimacy.” Using fabricated and opaque tallies, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) nevertheless certified the results.

The 2011 elections marked an upswing in Nigeria’s democratic trajectory and restored domestic and international confidence in the country’s electoral institutions. New INEC chairman Attahiru Jega was a key figure in this upturn. Post-election violence was nevertheless severe: riots by disgruntled voters in northern Nigeria sparked ethno-religious violence that killed over 800, according to Human Rights Watch. In the run-up to 2015, INEC rolled out two key reforms aimed at enhancing the integrity and credibility of Nigerian elections: continuous voter registration and permanent voter identification cards that enabled voters to be accredited electronically at their polling unit.

By 2015, INEC had institutionalised Jega’s reforms. These significantly reduced many of the worst and most conspicuous forms of rigging evident on voting day. Though widely viewed by both Nigerians and outside observers as an improvement on 2011 and resulting in the first alternation of power between political parties since 1999, the 2015 polls were marred by instances of corruption by senior INEC officials, partisan use of state media platforms, and irregularities, such as underage voting in some northwestern states and inflated turnout in parts of the southeast and south-south.

Nigeria’s democratic tide now appears to be ebbing once again. 2018 off-cycle governorship elections experienced notable problems. In Ekiti State, vote buying by both parties was systematic. In Osun State, the excessive presence of security operatives cast doubt on the credibility of the result. Imposition, bribery, and misconduct marred the recent major party primaries as candidates battled to get their name on the various tickets ahead of 2019. Looking beyond elections, Nigerian democracy is languishing by a number of other important measures: press freedom, rule of law, and respect for human rights. The Economist’s

2017 Democracy Index ranked Nigeria among the least free democracies worldwide, pegging it only marginally higher than states deemed authoritarian—like Nigeria was before 1999.

Old wine in old bottles

The 2019 election is very much an antediluvian contest between two perennial candidates. To most Nigerians, President Muhammadu Buhari (age 75) and former vice president Atiku Abubakar (age 72) are well-known quantities. They first achieved national prominence in the 1980s before settling into supporting roles in the 1990s. Buhari served as head of the country’s Petroleum Trust Fund during the corrupt and oppressive Abacha regime (1993–1998). Atiku, meanwhile, was an acolyte of Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, a retired general who emerged as one of Abacha’s staunchest adversaries.

In the early to mid-2000s, both men established themselves as contrarian figures. Buhari became an evergreen candidate—2015 was the fourth time he had run for president—and Atiku as a headstrong vice president unwilling to serve as then-President Olusegun Obasanjo’s ‘spare tyre’. Both men worked to cultivate grassroots support among working class Nigerians but, unlike Atiku, Buhari shunned political horse-trading with the country’s ever-scheming political elites. This disdain for partisan dealmaking arguably hampered his 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential campaigns.

“Nigeria’s democratic tide now appears to be ebbing once again. 2018 off-cycle governorship elections experienced notable problems. In Ekiti State, vote buying by both parties was systematic. In Osun State, the excessive presence of security operatives cast doubt on the credibility of the result.”

With the 2013 formation of the All Progressives Congress (APC), a new opposition coalition, both men saw an opportunity to actualise their as-yet unsatiated presidential ambition. Perhaps because APC powerbrokers like former Lagos governor Bola Tinubu saw Buhari as more popular and more controllable than Atiku, the retired general edged out the former vice president to become the party's 2015 flagbearer. Unconstrained by strong ties to the APC, it is unsurprising that Atiku gravitated back into People's Democratic Party (PDP)—the party he was a member of during his tenure as vice-president—with the aim of challenging Buhari in 2019.

Despite their different leadership and political styles, Buhari and Atiku share an elite-centric, statist big-government that prioritises personal leadership qualities over policy vision. While both use the language of reform, they have not championed the kind of fundamental bureaucratic and economic change Nigeria desperately needs to unleash its great potential. Neither has outlined concrete policies they would put in place to help shrink Nigeria's bloated government structure, wean the state off petro-revenues, or partner more effectively with state governors to deliver public goods more quickly and affordably. Instead of rethinking how government works, they appear to believe that they can make it function by managing it more effectively.

Evidence for this stark assessment can be gleaned from the two candidates' skeletal campaign platforms. Buhari's 'Next Level' campaign manifesto largely promises to complete ongoing infrastructure projects and build on existing programs like the N-Power employment programme, household cash transfers and the Anchor Borrowers Scheme, the long-term success of which remains an open question.

Buhari's manifesto echoes—but is also less significant less ambitious than—his 2015 campaign promises. Of these, only seven out of 222 have been fully met, according to the Centre for Democracy and Development's Buharimeter assessment.

Similarly, the 'Atiku Plan' promises improved leadership and replicating the economic growth Nigeria experienced while he was vice president. One of Atiku's key promises is the creation of an empowerment fund to help small-to-medium sized enterprises. One small problem: Nigeria already has multiple such funds and an alphabet soup of agencies involved in disbursing them. Their impact has been minimised by policy failures, mismanagement and widespread corruption. It is unclear how funneling more money into these failed programmes would advance the complex task of providing transformative levels of assistance to Nigeria's millions of small business owners.

Undercard races: Governorships and Senate

Looking beyond the presidential contest, Nigerians will also elect 109 senators and 360 members of the House of Representatives on 16 February. Two weeks later, they will decide 29 governorship and hundreds of state legislative races. The remaining seven state governorships (Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Kogi, Ondo, and Osun) have, to varying degrees, been knocked off their quadrennial cycles by past court cases.



Nigerian Senate (Photo: Premium Times)

In the governorship races, the APC and PDP appear relatively evenly matched. Even though both parties are lumbered with unpopular incumbents—Cross River and Akwa Ibom for the PDP or Bauchi and Katsina for the APC—they likely will eke out second terms. Imo State—a nominal APC state in the PDP heartland—likely will flip, whereas PDP-controlled Gombe State will be a target of the APC. In Zamfara State, the APC risks losing a safe seat after squabbling between the party's national headquarters and state chapter left it embarrassingly unable to nominate its candidate before the INEC deadline.

The National Assembly appears on course to remain relatively evenly split between the parties and in many ways its own centre of political power beholden to the president, regardless of who wins. Although Buhari likely would have the frostiest relationship with it, Atiku's honeymoon with the next National Assembly would be unlikely to last very long either. Senate President Bukola Saraki—a relatively young, strategic and dynamic politician with an eye on the presidency, as demonstrated by his unsuccessful challenge to win the PDP presidential ticket for this election—probably will hold onto a job he has deftly used to make the legislature more independent of the executive. Both Atiku and Buhari will have trouble making good on their campaign promises without the support of Saraki and his senate colleagues.

From a policy standpoint, the personal integrity, and legislative skills of individual senators and representatives will matter too. Unfortunately for Nigeria's future prosperity and socioeconomic development, Nigeria's major parties have nominated some especially disreputable figures as gubernatorial candidates. This is especially problematic for the APC, which came into power on an anti-corruption platform.



Buruji Kashamu (*PDP, Ogun State*)

The eminence grise of eastern Ogun State, Senator Kashamu is a street-smart politician, but one with an extraordinarily chequered past. Kashamu has evaded attempts by U.S. law enforcement to extradite him to face federal narcotics charges. The hit Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* was reportedly inspired by the Chicago-based heroin ring Kashamu allegedly ran back in the 1990s.



Hope Uzodinma (*APC, Imo State*)

A sitting senator, Uzodinma has been charged by the Buhari government in Federal High Court for failing to declare his assets to the Special Presidential Investigation Panel for the Recovery of Public Property. He is also being investigated for failing to execute a \$12 million dredging contract the Nigerian Port Authority awarded to his company.



Jeremiah Useni (*PDP, Plateau State*)

A retired lieutenant general, Useni served as minister of the Federal Capital Territory—a position known for its self-enrichment opportunities—under Abacha. Soon after leaving office, the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) tried Useni for abusing his office and failing to declare dozens of assets. Undermined by prosecutorial failures and the defendant's delaying tactics, the CCT dismissed the case in 2015 but left the government free to charge Useni again.



Nsima Ekere (*APC, Akwa Ibom*)

A political godson of transport minister and former Rivers State governor Rotimi Amaechi, Ekere has controversially retained his position as head of the corruption-riven Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Critics argue that Ekere is leveraging his lucrative position to fund his campaign.



Ahmadu Fintiri (*PDP, Adamawa State*)

A former state house of assembly speaker, Fintiri is currently being prosecuted by the EFCC on charges he looted N2.9 billion (then worth about \$18.7 million) during the three months in 2014 he served as acting governor of the state.

For the Senate—a political ‘retirement home’ for former governors—both the APC and PDP have nominated some problematic personalities.



Orji Uzor Kalu (*APC, Abia North*)

Kalu is currently standing trial on charges he embezzled N7.7 billion (\$61.6 million) in 2007 while governor of Abia State. Kalu recently stalled his trial—ostensibly to travel abroad for medical treatment—around the same time he launched his senate campaign.



Abba Moro (*PDP, Benue South*)

Moro is currently on trial for his role in the 2014 immigration recruitment scam that defrauded applicants and triggered stampedes at overcrowded venues that left several people dead.



Barry Mpigi (*PDP, Rivers South East*)

A sitting federal representative and former local government chairman, Mpigi has earned a reputation for using violence and intimidation as political tools. Having recently decamped from the APC, Mpigi likely will pull out all the stops to ensure he wins a senate seat.



Adamu Mohammed Bulkachuwa (*APC, Bauchi North*)

APC National Headquarters allegedly short-circuited the party's primary process in Bauchi in order to ensure Bulkachuwa won. His wife Zainab Bulkachuwa presides over Nigeria's second highest court. As Court of Appeal president, she oversees and assigns judges to serve on election tribunals nationwide—an apparent conflict of interest. Furthermore, Bulkachuwa allegedly accepted bribes to alter the outcome of an election tribunal she presided over in 2008, according to US diplomats at the time.



Istifanus Gyang (*PDP, Plateau North*)

Before winning a seat in the House of Representatives, Gyang was a protégé of former Plateau State governor Jonah Jang. The EFCC is currently prosecuting Jang for embezzling N16.7 billion (over \$100 million) in classified expenditures (also known as ‘security vote’) from state coffers. The official responsible for managing Jang's security vote? Istifanus Gyang, his Permanent Secretary for Security.

Although unsavoury political candidates exist the world over, the influx of subpar individuals into governorships and the Senate matters given the highly personalised nature of government decision making in Nigeria. Instead of putting forward reform-minded, policy-savvy candidates able to raise governance standards, the major parties serve as vehicles for a moneyed kleptocratic elites to reinforce their collective hold on power.

Civil society organisations and Nigeria's international partners—especially the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, European countries and its African neighbours—can play a role in reversing this trend. By calling out members of this category of politicians publicly and exposing their misconduct, they can erode the legitimacy that they covet. Likewise, the international community could target these individuals with travel and financial sanctions. Unfortunately, the failure of the U.S. State Department to follow through on the 2015 promise by then-Secretary of State John Kerry to slap visa sanctions sent a signal to Nigeria's more roguish candidates that they can rig, intimidate and bribe their way to victory in 2019 without international consequences.

INEC: In the eye of the storm

Every election cycle, INEC faces huge domestic and international pressure to organise and execute smooth and successful polls amid extraordinarily challenging conditions. Federal and state politicians, security personnel and saboteurs within INEC itself seek to compromise the integrity of its work. Relentlessly targeted by inducements, intimidation and political interference, INEC understandably struggles to conduct clean and credible elections at 120,000 polling units across a vast country with challenging operational logistics.

Adding to these perennial challenges, the Nigerian government has unnecessarily handicapped INEC in two ways. First, the National Assembly and the Presidency have failed to agree on amendments to the Electoral Act, dithering for almost a year and leaving INEC with just a few weeks to implement any revisions to the law. Second, the National Assembly delayed the release of supplemental election funds to INEC, undercutting its ability to operate effectively. Undoubtedly deliberate, these efforts by the legislature and executive to compound INEC's bureaucratic and budgetary woes may also have been designed to render its officials more receptive to bribes offered by incumbents seeking reelection.

Such bribes are a core component of Nigeria's high-dollar, cash-fuelled political process. Whether spent on mobilising voters, co-opting security personnel, mollifying traditional leaders or hiring thugs, cash is king. Campaign finance laws are routinely ignored. In 2015, the PDP spent nine times and APC three times the legal limit on their media campaigns alone, according to estimates made by the Centre for Social Justice. Many of these huge campaign expenditures—most sourced from the public purse vice grassroots donors—aim to manipulate electoral outcomes. They also make it much more difficult for new, non-traditional, or third party candidates, such as those belonging to the #NotTooYoungToRun movement—a group aiming to improve youth representation in politics—to compete against career politicians that have corruptly accrued significant wealth while in office.

Yet INEC, law enforcement agencies, the press, Nigeria's international partners and even voters themselves frequently turn a blind eye—or perhaps have become numb—to the profligate spending and unexplained wealth of major political parties and individual candidates themselves. Although it is difficult to stem the flow of illicit cash into politics, it is possible for INEC and its allies to insist that campaign spending should be transparent, its sources known and should abide by existing laws. If candidates and parties refuse to open their books, their campaign war chests should be assumed to be the proceeds of corruption.

Even under ideal conditions, INEC's task would be Herculean. Yet some of INEC's own missteps and problematic practices are rarely discussed by the commission's civil society partners and international supporters. This may be because they fear losing access to election officials or because even well-meaning critiques can be weaponised by politicians seeking to weaken or discredit INEC for partisan gain. Unless these shortcomings are addressed, however, the credibility of the 2019—and subsequent—elections will suffer. These under-the-radar issues include:

- ICT Vulnerabilities:** INEC relies upon an outdated, over-centralised, and easily penetrated information communications technology (ICT) apparatus to facilitate election operations, maintain voter records and biometrically accredit Nigeria's roughly 84 million voters. With few in-built redundancies and insufficient backups, INEC's sensitive cyber infrastructure rests in the hands of one man—the commission's ICT director—who insiders lament has become a potential 'single point of failure' in the event he were unable to fulfill his duties. Additionally, INEC's biometric voter card technology and electronic voter register appears to have been compromised. A new generation of tech-savvy political consultants are allegedly able to make perfectly cloned biometric voter identification from real voter data and cards from the same Chinese firm that supplies INEC. Perhaps only available to the wealthiest politicians, such cyber-rigging may nevertheless represent a new and virulent form of election fraud.
- Transparency of Results:** Since 2011, INEC has refrained from publishing detailed and complete official election results on its website. Although detailed results are sometimes informally disclosed to journalists,



researchers or civil society partners, they are not systematically made available to the public. INEC usually publishes only top-line, aggregated official results for major contests. E-Trac—a laudable 2015 effort to make results more transparent by publishing individual polling unit returns online—was shuttered only a few months after the election, ostensibly due to a dispute between the commission and one of its contractors. It is impossible to comprehensively assess the credibility of INEC-administered elections unless it publishes—and retroactively posts—state and local government area level results in a timely and transparent manner.

- **Financial Disclosures:** INEC is even less transparent about its financial situation and procurement decisions. Despite being Nigeria's second-largest government agency, INEC does not publish a detailed breakdown of its large annual budget, actual expenditures and contract awards at both the national and state level. Neither does INEC disclose its list of pre-qualified contractors—firms pre-cleared to bid on INEC procurement contracts—so civil society can screen them for links to politically-exposed persons. It is unclear if INEC undergoes an annual independent financial audit and if it does, those audits are not published. Likewise, senior INEC officials are not required to disclose their assets publicly.

Local civil society organisations and international partners can help advance Nigerian democracy by elevating these issues in their discussions with INEC leaders. Beyond lobbying for these improvements, INEC's allies could help enable their implementation by offering detailed procedural recommendations or specialised technical assistance. Domestic and international election observers could also emphasise organisational transparency to their assessments of INEC's performance during the upcoming 2019 election.

“Every election cycle, INEC faces huge domestic and international pressure to organise and execute smooth and successful polls amid extraordinarily challenging conditions. Federal and state politicians, security personnel and saboteurs within INEC itself seek to compromise the integrity of its work. Relentlessly targeted by inducements, intimidation and political interference, INEC understandably struggles to conduct clean and credible elections at 120,000 polling units across a vast country with challenging operational logistics.”

#NigeriaDecides: Prospective election scenarios

Set to be even more close-run and contentious than previous Nigerian election, the 2019 polls lend themselves to several potential outcomes, or scenarios:

- » **Clear first-round victory for either Buhari or Atiku:** In this scenario, the contest become less evenly matched as election day approaches, putting one candidate on track to win a plurality of votes in four of the country's six geopolitical zones. Support for third party candidates splinters or does not materialise. The winning candidate surreptitiously pads his vote total in his best states (to gain an outright majority) and in opposition strongholds (to ensure he garners the geographic spread needed to achieve a first round victory). Defeated candidates challenge the outcome, but fail to gain popular, political and legal traction barring widespread voting irregularities. Under strong international pressure, the runner-up implores their supporters to eschew violence.
- » **Head-to-head run-off:** In this scenario, third party candidates overperform expectations, siphoning votes from the two frontrunners. Buhari and/or Atiku underperform outside their core areas of support and thus fail to garner a wide enough vote spread to meet the criteria for a first round victory. After several tense days of tabulation, INEC confirms that a second round will take place jointly with state-level elections scheduled for 2 March. Undermined by logistical failures—some deliberate, some unintentional—and interference by security personnel, and other last-ditch rigging tactics, the run-off appears less credible than the first round. Even though several states lack credible and coherent results, INEC reluctantly certifies them and announces a winner. In doing so, however, it gives the losing candidate an opportunity to challenge the result—a multi-year legal process that almost certainly will be decided by the Supreme Court.
- » **Inconclusive result:** In this scenario, rigging, thuggery, civil unrest, or severe logistical failures preventing voting from taking place in all or large parts of multiple states in either the first or second round. Given the narrow margin separating the two leading candidates, INEC must hold re-runs in areas where polls were cancelled in order to determine the presidential result. Marred by irregularities, the outcome of these re-runs leaves it in the hands of the Judiciary to decide the election.

Of these scenarios, a head-to-head run-off seems the most likely at this juncture. An inclusive result is the scenario most likely to spark post-election violence and nudge Nigeria along the path to a national crisis. An inconclusive result could nevertheless open the door to a range of very improbable but highly destabilising outcomes such as the declaration of a state of emergency, a judicial annulment of the election or—in a worst case scenario—military intervention.

Ultimately, however, each of these scenarios capacity to beget violence and political instability depends on the extent to which it is the result of manipulation and malfeasance. In other words, a rigged first-round victory that forces a run-off could nonetheless provoke public backlash and even widespread post-election violence. Likewise, an inconclusive result that is resolved transparently and fairly by INEC and the judiciary could avert a political crisis.

*Matthew T. Page is co-author of **Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know** (Oxford University Press, 2018). He is an associate fellow with the Africa Programme at Chatham House and nonresident fellow with the Centre for Democracy and Development in Abuja.*


Further Reading

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- "Now The Race Looks Serious", Africa Confidential, 26 October 2018
- Onubogu, O & Hassan, I. 2018. "The Risk of Election Violence in Nigeria is Not Where You Think", United States Institute of Peace
- For updates follow ElectionMonitor.ng on the web and on Twitter @ElectMonitorNG.

A portrait of Macky Sall, President of Senegal, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is seated and looking slightly to the right. The background features the Senegalese flag with its green, white, and yellow vertical stripes and a green star on the yellow field.

Sall clears path for second term in Senegal

by Ousmane Diallo



A common saying in Senegal is that the electorate “does not vote for a candidate” but decides “to sanction, or not, the incumbent one”. The truth of this maxim was most apparent in the defeat of Abdoulaye Wade in 2012, during a campaign marred by accusations that he was seeking to position his son, Karim, as his long-term successor. The winner, Macky Sall, campaigned against this constitutional wrangling, claiming that he would bring “rupture”, “good governance” and “prioritise the motherland over the party”. But nearly seven years after his election, the same issues that were central to the 2012 elections remain key themes for opposition parties and civil society.

Removing Rivals

During his first two years in office Sall attempted to curtail poor governance by making politicians, businessmen and public officials more accountable and by limiting the influence of marabouts, local Islamic clerics, who have historically been influential in the political process. The reactivation of the *Cour de Répression de l'Enrichissement Illicite* (CREI, Court for the Repression of Illicit Enrichment) in 2012, an entity first established by President Diouf in 1982, before going into abeyance, was met with enthusiasm. The indictment of Karim Wade, on corruption and graft charges in April 2013, was bold, but the CREI's decision to put the burden of proof on the accused to prove their innocence was problematic. Gradually it became clear that the court was not acting independently in its activities. It targeted the political rivals of Macky Sall and left alone politicians, accused by audit institutions of mismanagement and graft, who rallied to support the president.

President Sall's acknowledgment that “many cases were under his elbow” - that he ultimately decided who would be prosecuted - furthered cynicism towards the CREI. In April 2014, Karim Wade failed to prove his innocence and his civil rights were suspended until a payment of FCFA 138 billion fine (US\$239.8 million) was made. This was an unjust judgment tailored to exclude a potential

“During his first two years in office Sall attempted to curtail poor governance by making politicians, businessmen and public officials more accountable and by limiting the influence of marabouts, local Islamic clerics, who have historically been influential in the political process.”

challenger from the political scene. What could have been an opportunity for Senegal's judicial institutions to showcase their independence, became further proof of their politicised nature and infeedation to the executive.

Concerns over the subservience of the judiciary to the executive re-emerged in 2018 when the Mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Sall, was sentenced to five years in prison on embezzlement and forgery charges. Mayor Sall, an ally of Macky Sall in 2012, became a potential threat after the victory of his municipal coalition in 2014, against one led by the then-Prime Minister, Aminata "Mimi" Touré, revealed his electoral appeal. His swift downfall, following allegations of misuse of municipal funds, along with the revocation of his eligibility to seek elective posts, should be viewed as the "legalistic" execution of a potential challenger to the president in the February 2019 election.

Khalifa Sall lost his challenge against his conviction at the Supreme Court on 3 January 2019, increasing the likelihood that his candidacy will not be validated. Karim Wade also remains excluded from the presidential race following his 2014 conviction though he remains politically active from exile in Qatar. Wade's departure was part of a deal struck in 2016 between the ruling government and main opposition *Parti Démocratique Sénégalais* (PDS), within which Wade remains influential having been anointed as their presidential candidate before his 2014 conviction. The terms of this extra-legal agreement are unknown, but

it is understood that Karim Wade must not set foot in Senegal, until after the 2019 presidential elections. The PDS and Wade argue that Macky Sall has essentially "banished" a citizen from his homeland for political reasons. The possibility of Wade returning to Senegal before the election, breaking the terms of the agreement in the process, is high and will likely lead to clashes.

The dark horse: Ousmane Sonko

Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade have been unable to unite around their plight at the hands of the Sall presidency. A tentative coalition between them during the 2017 parliamentary elections failed to materialise due to differences over who would lead the national list. Instead Ousmane Sonko has emerged as a leading government critic as the political prospects of Karim Wade and Khalifa Sall have dwindled. A former tax inspector in the Ministry of Finance, Sonko became a public figure in 2016, after denouncing fiscal exemptions provided to businesses associated with the president and his family, saw him fired from government for a "failure to abide by his duty of confidentiality" as a mid-level government official. He subsequently became an MP in July 2017 and is a credible voice on economic and tax matters.



Ousmane Sonko (Photo: www.ndarinfo.com)

Sonko's most stinging critique targeted the opaque nature of an oil exploration license grant, brokered in 2014 between Petro-Tim Senegal and KOSMOS Energy, a Dallas-based company. When Petro-Tim Senegal ceded 90% of its shares to KOSMOS, valuing them at FCFA 300 billion (US\$518.6 million), they did not pay the 30% fiscal duties owed to the state; an illegal exoneration. Aliou Sall, Macky Sall's younger brother, was one of the main executives of Petro-Tim Senegal. In its responses to Sonko's accusations, the government correctly stated that oil companies were exempt from taxation during the exploration phase (per the 1998 Petroleum Code), but this has failed to change citizens' growing perceptions of nepotism and corruption in the country's emerging oil and gas sector.

Sonko's strong criticism of corruption and his bold proposals to reform the state and the structure of the economy has increased his profile. Yet Karimists and Khalifists remain adamant their candidates will be able to compete and have not built avenues for a strong coalition around Sonko and his *Pastef-Les Patriotes* (PLP). Despite a common critical discourse on the governance of Macky Sall, and on the necessity of safeguarding the fairness of the upcoming elections, the opposition is unlikely to unite under the same flag during the 24 February polls.

Citizen sponsorship

Citizen sponsorship has been a big point of discussion in the pre-electoral period. A feature of the electoral code since 1991, it has previously been applied only to independent candidates who do not have the backing of a registered political party. But in April 2018 the government generalised the citizenship sponsorship clause, making it applicable to all candidates. Previously, independent candidates had to receive 10,000 signatures from registered voters to become eligible, but the new amendment requires all presidential candidates to collect at least 52,000 signatures, across seven of the country's 14 regions, in order to be eligible. Each voter is only allowed to endorse one candidate.

Parliamentary debates over this amendment to the electoral code saw concurrent protests by political opposi-

tion and civil society groups in April 2018, but they did not prevent its passing. There are serious concerns over the intent of the amendment, with the opposition arguing that it is designed to exclude potential candidates from running. Officially, the government argues that citizen sponsorship will rationalise the political scene by weeding out minor players intent on "selling" their endorsement, tackle the growing number of political parties and bring down the cost of organising elections.

Beyond the political debates over its intent, concerns also focus over the ability of current institutions to handle and verify in a timely fashion all signatures collected. 98 candidates applied for the official forms on the day they were released in July 2018. The invalidation of candidates on the basis of their failure to meet signature requirements is likely to cause judicial litigations that can mar the fairness of the upcoming presidential elections. As of January 2019, only five candidates - President Macky Sall, Karim Wade, Khalifa Sall, El Hadj Issa Sall and Ousmane Sonko - out of the 27 who submitted lists to the constitutional court, have met the citizen sponsorship requirement. Several candidates whose lists have been invalidated by the Constitutional Court, have denounced the verification process and decried the possible existence of multiple voters' lists.

In principle, citizen sponsorship is not a bad idea but the fact that it is being trialed in a high stakes presidential election with concerns about the capacity to process the data collected efficiently and securely, is a worry. Beyond the litigation issues, civil society groups such as Le Forum Civil and Amnesty Senegal have rightly highlighted the potential nefarious uses of the personal data collected in the form, and the consequences for vulnerable citizens of not "sponsoring" the "right candidate".

Managing elections

Concerns regarding voter suppression remains high as the election nears, with a substantial number of voters still not having received the new biometric voters' card. Ahead of the July 2017 parliamentary elections only 67.5% of cards were effectively distributed, excluding many first-time voters who did not have an old voters' card to use in its place. The opposition has faulted the

Minister of the Interior, a member of the ruling party, for the “calamitous” parliamentary elections. On election day there were reports of polling units and centres with insufficient ballot papers and instances where voters could not find their names on the electoral register. Opposition parties alleged that this voting day confusion was in fact an act of deliberate sabotage by the government, given that it happened mostly in communes where the opposition was strongest - Dakar, Thiès and Touba - and where 53% of the electorate reside.

On a more positive note the government has made accessible through a web portal, the electoral register, allowing citizens to verify their registration. But with the electoral commission composed of the same appointed officials that oversaw the 2017 parliamentary vote and dependent on the government for its resources, there are concerns about its credibility to manage the process impartially. Opposition parties continue to stress the need for a neutral person to be appointed as Minister of Elections: a position that was decisive in overseeing the country's two most recent political changes of ruling party - 2000 and 2012. But President Sall's refusal to delegate oversight and management of the elections to a neutral individual, a point reiterated in his New Year address, will impact on the perceptions of the fairness of the 2019 elections.

Senegal decides: 2019 and beyond

Senegal's newly discovered natural resources and renegotiating its relationship with France are likely to be key issues for the winner of the 2019 election. The economy grew at 7.2% in 2017 whilst the poverty rate has been reduced by between 4% and 7%, since 2011 according to World Bank data. Yet, these gains are still not trickling down to the majority of the population; the education and health sectors continue to struggle, as the fruits of the growth are reaped mainly by foreign businesses. While Abdoulaye Wade diversified Senegal's economic partners during his 12-year presidency, Macky Sall's first term saw the return, in force, of French businesses in sectors such as logistics and international transport, oil, and, increasingly, in retail. Recent campaigns against the French/Euro-guaranteed FCFA and against the

French retail business Auchan are illustrative of growing popular disaffection.

But wider popular protests against the government have not been sustained in the run up to the 2019 elections as they were before voters went to the polls in 2012. Efforts to generate civic activism around the citizen sponsorship requirements have been sporadic. With the exclusion of his two main opponents, and a fragmented opposition, Macky Sall looks set to be re-elected when Senegalese voters head to the polls on 24 February.

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Whose Truth?

Disinformation and misinformation online in Nigeria

by Emmanuel Akinwotu

In early December, some three months before Nigeria's elections, President Muhammadu Buhari publicly dismissed claims that had gone viral on social media in the preceding months that he had died and been replaced by a lookalike called "Jubril from Sudan". Numerous versions of the rumour had spread online, with the most popular claiming Jubril had undergone a facelift operation and adopted the allegedly dead president's appearance. The claim originated from a video shared on social media in October 2017 of a speech by Nnamdi Kanu, a pro-Biafran secessionist leader. Kanu offered no evidence for it but it became a trope among his supporters and then more broadly for critics of the president. Buhari has spent more than five months of his term on medical leave for an illness he has admitted was severe but has so far refused to disclose. The trajectory of the claim provides an illuminating snapshot into the dynamics that help fuel misinformation in Nigeria and in what ways Nigerians propagate and are vulnerable to it.

What began as a conspiratorial claim has amplified in an increasingly politicised environment. Social media posts making the claim have been shared or viewed more than 500,000 times with Facebook and WhatsApp the key misinformation platforms. It became a talking point in several newspaper columns, with commentators speculating on the scientific possibilities of cloning a human being. Opposition politicians sought to capitalise on the rumours for political gain. Bishop David Oyedepo, the founder of Winners Chapel, one of the largest and most influential pentecostal megachurches in the country, told his congregation that some of the evidence he'd seen of the claim was convincing - despite the fact that the article he cited was satire - and that if the president did not address it, it would become even more persuasive. While many people dismissed it out of hand, Oyedepo spoke for many who seemed to give it serious consideration.

Several elements of a perfect misinformation storm were at play, stripping the absurdity from the claim until it became a partially valid proposition. The lack of government transparency around Buhari's health status and his increasingly rare media appearances in Nigeria furthered uncertainty around his well-being. Even for those who do not believe the president is a clone, the claim taps into a wider and prevailing sense that in regards to the president, all is not as it seems. The current reach of misinformation is of significant concern, not just for the elections but more generally, within Nigerian public life.

Shared spaces

Facebook is the most widely used social media network in the country and possibly the fastest growing according to the platform's own figures, with 26 million users, up from 16 million in 2016. WhatsApp has 17 million users in Nigeria. According to an April 2018 report by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), 100 million Nigerians are using the internet. But NCC data reveals little about the intensity and breadth of its use, regionally and demographically. For example, we do not know how widely WhatsApp is used in rural areas, where access to verifiable information may be more difficult and where misinformation, spread on WhatsApp, may be more dangerous.

WhatsApp is a communications app, not a social media network, but it functions like one, with groups of up to 256 members, a key and widely used feature. Because it is both an encrypted tool used for personal communication and a go-to application for sharing news and gossip to more personal contacts, information shared on WhatsApp can be more disarming, potent and spreads faster than conventional media. Online hoaxes spread with alarming regularity. A photo, apparently depicting Nigerian soldiers after an attack on a military base in November, was shared on Twitter and Facebook by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the main opposition in Nigeria, alongside a statement condemning the attacks. But the picture was subsequently shown to have been taken from a Kannywood film.

Offline disinformation tactics, online

Advocacy pressure groups, formed on religious, ethnic and regional lines, have long been a feature of Nigeria's media landscape. News reports in which a particular group urges a politician to run for office or take a course of action are typical. Many journalists who routinely publish such reports have their suspicions that such groups are fabricated or propped up to seem more

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 **26 Million**
Users in Nigeria

 **17 Million**
Users in Nigeria

100 Million
Internet Users

significant than they are. Often this is done at the behest of politicians who benefit from the perception that their desired actions are actually a response to public demands. These practices have adapted to online media, supported by networks of bots, social media accounts and influencers.

Reports that LGBT groups had endorsed Atiku Abubakar, the PDP presidential candidate and main challenger to Buhari, went viral online, originating from seemingly coordinated posts on Twitter, Facebook and websites. In October, the claims were then published in *The Vanguard* and *The Nation*, two widely circulated national newspapers. Yet these groups are almost certainly fictitious, with no evidence to suggest that they actually exist and no knowledge of them among established gay rights advocates in Nigeria. Nonetheless this has not stopped ten of thousands of social media posts sharing statements from the article appearing online. The claims, possibly coordinated by political rivals, exploit a perceived weakness in Abubakar as a candidate; that he is culturally liberal and out of step with many more culturally conservative northern Nigerians. A same sex marriage prohibition law, signed in 2014, curtails gay rights in Nigeria, where hostility to sexual minorities is widespread. Perceived advocates for gay rights are unlikely to gain significant political support.

Fighting misinformation

According to the Nigerian government, hundreds of social media accounts purporting to represent government officials have been reported to Facebook and Twitter. They say that social media networks have grown more responsive to shutting down fake accounts, with the majority of those reported now removed but that there has often been a significant delay before action is taken. In the run up to the election numerous accounts purporting to represent Abubakar's campaign have flourished on Facebook, offering financial rewards for sharing campaign content or offering scholarships to the school Abubakar founded, American University of Nigeria.

But social media platforms are also responding with fact-checking initiatives of online content. Facebook

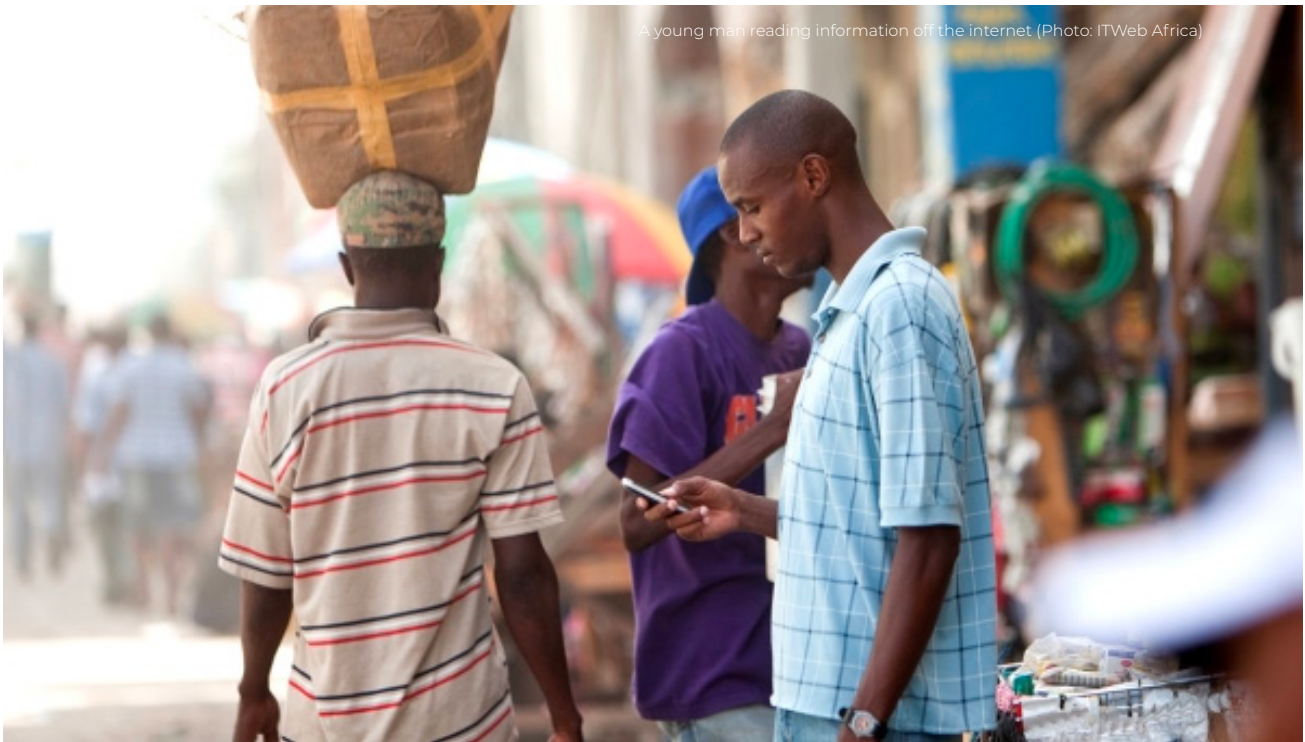
has a "third-party fact-checking programme" which is now active in 18 countries. In October 2018, the programme launched in Nigeria, in partnership with Agence France-Presse and Africa Check. The social network-funded fact-checkers review stories and posts that have been picked up by Facebook's automated system for detecting false information or flagged by users. The fact-checkers sift through highlighted articles and posts, reviewing them as either false or partially false on the basis of contradictory or a lack of evidence, often by writing an article or blog post. The roles are a significant step in tackling online misinformation as fact-check blogs checking false claims online, theoretically, will appear to Facebook users who see articles that the fact-check blogs have reviewed.

The Facebook third-party fact-checking initiative is a sign of growing proactivity from social media networks but the scale of the problem is extensive. Thousands of copycat social media pages of established news sites exist online. While some are easy to detect others are not, with similar logos and style of posts, tricking many users who view them as established news sites. When on the verified page for organisations such as Channels TV, the largest broadcaster in Nigeria, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter often suggest pages that are in fact copycats of other news sites and regularly post misinformation.

Making sense of it all

In the last few weeks the two main presidential campaigns of President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar have accused each other of both spreading fake news online and of coordinating disinformation campaigns. It is possible that both are right. Since the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in 2014 galvanised support for the Chibok schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram, leading to prolonged criticism of the then government which subsequently lost presidential elections for the first time since the end of military rule, the political class have been increasingly aware of the power of social media.

Even when misinformation is corrected, the correction often does not travel as far as the original claim, creating a perverse incentive. The particular types of misinformation and disinformation which spread in



A young man reading information off the internet (Photo: ITWeb Africa)

Nigeria exploits weaknesses in Nigerian institutions and public life that make the challenges of tackling them difficult to fix. The ability of citizens to spot misinformation is therefore increasingly important. Reverse search tools by Google, Bing and others are useful ways of finding out the origins of images shared online. Posts claiming to quote a politician can often be verified through their official correspondence, using verified social media pages. Articles claiming a politician said something which are not true, often do not provide context for when or where they said it.

“Reverse search tools by Google, Bing and others are useful ways of finding out the origins of images shared online. Posts claiming to quote a politician can often be verified through their official correspondence, using verified social media pages”

Emmanuel Akinwotu is a fact-check reporter for AFP

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Building and sustaining partnerships

Mali's foreign policy ambitions

In conversation with

Kamissa Camara

Minister of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation of Mali

Photo source: <http://www.acl870.com>

Q. You are the youngest minister of President Keita's current government having been appointed Mali's Minister of Foreign Affairs in September 2018. In your first few months in the position what have you identified as the key foreign policy issues you want to address?

Mali has gone through a series of severe socio-political and security challenges since 2011. As Mali's foreign minister, my job is to defend the interests of Mali and of Malians abroad. A key foreign policy issue I will have to address during my tenure surrounds bringing back stability to Mali by attracting investors. Mali has had a steady and stellar GDP growth rate of over 5% per year since 2013. This demonstrates our resilience to shocks and a high absorption capacity; returns can be strong both within our borders and in the sub-region.

Bringing back stability to my country by promoting a regional approach to the security of the Sahel region notably through the G5 Sahel and the operationalisation of the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel is another key issue

I will be working on. Looking further ahead, reclaiming Mali's place as a key regional and continental actor when it comes to policymaking is an aspiration I hold.

Q. In discussing insecurity in Mali with Bloomberg in September 2018 President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita said that "what's happening in Mali doesn't only concern us here, but the global community". With France's continued military intervention, a strong UN peacekeeping presence and the G5 Sahel there is already a strong regional and global involvement. How can you sustain and build on these partnerships moving forward to bring greater peace and stability, not only to Mali, but to its neighbours?

All these partnerships are complementary to one another and are aimed at providing greater peace and stability in Mali and across the Sahel. Building on these partnerships and making them sustainable mainly depends on how effective and efficient the transfer of knowledge and capacity to our national armed forces is. Mali will

continue to push for a training and equipment component in all military assistance programmes, including the European Union Training Mission in Mali.

Q. French President Emmanuel Macron has shown a concerted interest in the continent as a whole. In August 2018 he said that “the future of the world will largely be played out in Africa”, he has set up a Presidential Council for Africa and made several visits to West Africa. How is Mali looking to engage with existing and new bilateral partners and what are the key areas you see for cooperation?

Mali exists today thanks to the solidarity the international community has shown towards us, in particular France. Our presence in regional and intercontinental organisations will continue to play a big part in our diplomatic efforts. As for our bilateral relations, Mali is looking to increase its cooperation with countries we have previously had limited interactions with. We are looking to cooperate with countries from the Middle East and South Asia, as well as our traditional allies, on defense, agriculture, scientific research and education.

Q. You were quoted in the Financial Times in September 2018 (before you became Minister) as saying “we want a strategic relationship [with China]. Not just you build us a bridge and we’ll give you money”. What does that strategic relationship look like to you? And are you confident that you’ll be able to ensure Chinese support for this relationship?

A strategic relationship is by principle flexible, it responds to the needs of both parties and their basis of cooperation is strictly based on mutual interests; whether those are economic, political or security concerns. Mali’s strategic relationship with China is, and will continue to be, multifaceted. China has shown great commitment to the African continent and is already demonstrating leadership in major infrastructure projects such as the Eastern Africa railroad project. They have shown a willingness and ability to provide customised support to African countries, adapted to the individual country’s needs and absorption capacity.

Q. In your roles prior to joining government you were a central part of the creation and running of the Sahel Strategy Platform. A platform that brought together a wide array of key stakeholders to discuss security and cross-border challenges. How important is this sort of dialogue, debate and discussion to addressing some of the key insecurity and development challenges facing the Sahel?

Dialogue is key to any initiative that entails security or development. Being in government provides me the space to give a high-level platform to these issues. Given my role as coordinator of Mali’s international aid and international cooperation, I have, and will, continue to ensure dialogue is maintained with and among our different international partners operating in Mali and in the Sahel for better coordination as well as regular institutionalised sharing of lessons-learned.

Q. Regional and continental institutions have an important role to play in ensuring democratic standards are upheld across Africa. Given Mali’s democratic tradition - although one that has been challenged in recent years - and your own personal background how much emphasis will you be placing on encouraging credible democratic processes in Mauritania, Senegal and Nigeria - all of which have presidential elections scheduled for 2019 - in discussion with fellow foreign ministers?

As Mali’s foreign minister, I work in close collaboration with the foreign ministers of the region, while being careful not to interfere in internal politics. Institutions like ECOWAS and the African Union have been champions of ensuring peaceful democratic processes and we will continue to work with and through these institutional bodies during electoral processes in 2019 and beyond.

Hon. Kamissa Camara is the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali

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