

## NIGERIAN ELECTIONS: USHERING IN A NEW ERA OF POLITICS?

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Nigerian former Gen. Muhammadu Buhari speaks moments after he was presented with a certificate to show he won the election in Abuja, Nigeria, Wednesday, April 1, 2015. Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat to Buhari, a 72-year-old former military dictator, who was elected in a historic transfer of power following the nation's most hotly contested election ever. (Source: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba.)

Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

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Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe arrives for the burial of a party cadre, Kotsho Dube, at the National Heroes acre, in Harare, Sunday, Dec. 7, 2014. Mugabe said on Saturday he will stay in power as long as he has strength in his body. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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## The Past as Comparison

Past Nigerian elections have been deeply flawed, with fraud and violence occurring frequently and to an alarming degree. The 2007 elections were described by some as a "sham" in which the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) committed [widespread fraud](#) to secure a commanding victory. The [2011 elections](#), considered by some to be the country's best managed, resulted in the deaths of more than 1,000 in combined pre- and post-election violence. While it is too soon to definitively adjudicate the conduct of the just-concluded 2015 elections, it is possible to examine the conduct of the pre-electoral period and Election Day itself.

## Violence Surrounding the Election

Much like previous elections, significant violence took place before, and on the day of, the 2015 elections. According to the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria, over the course of 50 days between December 2014 and January 2015, [at least 56 people were killed](#) in incidents related to the elections. This pattern continued through Election Day. Although there is yet no comprehensive estimate of the total number of fatalities that occurred in pre-election violence, if attacks in February and March continued at roughly the earlier pace, it is likely that the total number of fatalities was in the hundreds. The Cleen Foundation [released a report](#) shortly before the election alleging that hate speech was pervasive and providing examples of violence and intimidation that had taken place in many of the country's 36 states.

During the actual vote, extended by a day in some areas due to [technical difficulties](#), violence was perpetrated both by Boko Haram and by political party agents. Boko Haram [attacks](#) caused fatalities of at least 25 in the North East zone of the country. According to the chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, [at least 50 fatalities in total](#) could be attributed to the elections. Fatalities were recorded in nine states, injuries in an additional five states, and theft of election materials in at least six states.

In [Anambra State](#), All Progressives Congress (APC) politicians called for the election to be canceled, accusing the ruling party of hijacking ballots and manipulating the collation process. A polling center in [Akwa](#), also in Anambra State, was bombed early in the day, but voters returned later to cast their ballots. In [Enugu State](#), a polling station was bombed, but fortunately no one was injured. In [Bauchi State](#), a curfew was also imposed, leading to peaceful protests outside the offices



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of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). A man was reportedly [shot to death during protests](#) outside INEC offices on March 29. Election materials were [stolen](#) on the day of the election. Journalists were attacked in [Cross River State](#), and four election officers were [feared kidnapped](#). In Delta State, voting was suspended in [Udu](#) because the police said they could not guarantee voter security. A youth leader from the APC was beaten to death and his body set on fire in [Edo State](#). A member of the [deputy governor of Ekiti State's security team](#) shot and wounded a protester.

Rivers State was the site of significant election violence the week before the election, with reports of [arson, injury, and several deaths](#). The governor [announced a dusk-to-dawn curfew](#) ahead of the announcement of election results on March 31. Massive protests took place in [Rivers State](#) as the APC alleged that elections had been rigged. Protesters demanded a rerun. [Several deaths were reported](#) on the day of elections, and [INEC offices](#) were set on fire the day after the election.

Violence, however, did not affect all states equally, suggesting a pattern to, and motivation behind, its use. The South East and South South zones—PDP strongholds—were much more affected than states in the North West and North Central zones, where it is believed that the APC had significantly more support. For example, Kaduna State in the North West zone, where much of the 2011 violence occurred, was [calm](#) on Election Day, although [PDP offices](#) were set on fire on the eve of the election.

## Conclusion

Many were concerned before Nigeria's elections that violence could match or perhaps exceed levels of previous elections. Given the violent atmosphere in the months leading up to the election, this fear was not unfounded. The 2011 post-election violence erupted when the loser of that election, the current president-elect Buhari, refused to accept the outcome. This year, defying the expectations of many, President Jonathan [conceded defeat](#) while the electoral commission was still in the process of collating the results. Many hope this move will forestall serious post-election violence.

While the 2015 elections may be momentous and the overall outcome may be a cause for celebration, this election looks similar to most other Nigerian elections in terms of the violence that took place before the election. The outcome, while historic, should not overshadow the work that still needs to be done to curb election violence in Nigeria over the long term. Perhaps this election will prove the needed catalyst to effectively end the win-at-all-costs mentality associated with past elections.

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Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe arrives for the burial of a party cadre, Kotsho Dube, at the National Heroes acre, in Harare, Sunday, Dec. 7, 2014. Mugabe said on Saturday he will stay in power as long as he has strength in his body. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

## Succession Battle Fuels Party Divisions

As outlined in [previous editions](#) of *Africa Watch*, ZANU-PF's succession battle came to a head in the run-up to the party's congress held from December 2 to 7, 2014. Over the past several years, two main candidates had emerged as front-runners in the race to replace Mugabe: Mujuru and Emmerson Mnangagwa, the former Justice and Defense Minister. Given her support in the party structures at the grassroots level, Mujuru was seen as the front-runner until recently. During a fierce bout of party infighting between the Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions in April 2014, Mugabe reasserted himself and scolded both Mujuru and Mnangagwa, [declaring](#) that it is "terrible even to have your name mentioned as leader of a faction. It is shameful... But why should it [succession] be discussed when it's not due? Is it due? I'm still there."

In the lead-up to the party congress, Mugabe's wife also [entered](#) the fray as a political player in her own right in the succession struggle, viciously attacking Mujuru in public, [allegedly](#) for coveting the presidency and conspiring to overthrow Mugabe. Mujuru denied the allegations. At the congress, Mugabe was expected to resolve the issue of his successor by finally naming a replacement or stepping aside. Neither happened. Two days after the congress, on December 9, 2014, Mujuru, along with [17](#) ZANU-PF ministers and deputy ministers who were accused of supporting her, were fired from their government and party positions. A handful of officials from this group were later expelled from the party, including Mutasa and Gumbo. Although Mugabe neither announced a successor nor stepped aside at the congress, his naming of Mnangagwa as Mujuru's replacement (both as the party's number two and vice president of Zimbabwe) ostensibly put Mnangagwa in the driver's seat on the issue of succession. In the process; however, Mugabe's actions also deepened splits in the party.

## Mutasa and Gumbo Court Cases

In the wake of the party congress, some elements within the Mujuru faction are publicly standing up to Mugabe in an unprecedented and confrontational fashion, as illustrated by Mutasa and Gumbo's court cases. Mutasa, a former minister of state security in the president's office, was most recently ZANU-PF's secretary for administration, while Gumbo, formerly the minister of economic development, was most recently the party's secretary for information. Both were long-standing ZANU-PF stalwarts. In their suits, they claim that their expulsions from the party were illegal according to the ZANU-PF constitution, and they are [challenging](#) the "unlawfulness and unconstitutionality of certain appointments and decisions that were made and of certain constitutional amendments that were made during the party's congress." In his filing,



Mutasa [maintains](#), “the manner in which allegations were made against myself and Vice-President Mujuru, allegations that included malicious and defamatory contentions, clearly infringed our right to human dignity.”

After the court cases were filed, Gumbo [spoke](#) on splits within the party: “It is clear that there are now two Zanu (PF)s, which means the party has effectively split. There is the illegal Zanu (PF) that was established at congress in 2014 and is led by Mr. Mugabe. Then there is the popular and legitimate Zanu (PF) that people wanted Mai (Joice) Mujuru to lead after congress.” Other former ZANU-PF loyalists have also spoken out publicly against Mugabe and the party. Jabulani Sibanda, former chairman of the influential War Veterans Association, who was expelled from the party in November 2014 for allegedly slandering the president, claimed last week that ZANU-PF is highly corrupt and to blame for the country’s economic crisis. He [told](#) a local newspaper: “Before we accuse [opposition leader Morgan] Tsvangirai or any foreigner of hurting our country let us look at ourselves. We have failed as a government and we are now even failing as a party, and as a result the revolution is being liquidated in the process.”

## Conclusion

Zimbabwe’s ruling party continues to feel the fallout from decisions made during and after the 2014 party congress. While Mugabe again demonstrated his firm grip on the party and succeeded in keeping everyone guessing about his eventual replacement, his hard-line actions around the congress also deepened fissures in the party. Mugabe is unlikely to lose in court to Mutasa and Gumbo because the judiciary in Zimbabwe is seen as partisan, favoring ZANU-PF. That said, Mutasa and Gumbo’s lawsuits, by keeping the party’s factionalism in the headlines and airing the party’s dirty laundry, could prove to be a thorn in Mugabe’s side down the road.

Mugabe appears to be taking the cases seriously. He responded to news of the court cases by [questioning](#) the competence of any judge who would agree to preside over “that kind of nonsense” and asserted, “We would want to see which magistrate would sit to hear that case. Then we will question their educational qualifications.” Unless ZANU-PF is able to bring Mujuru back into the fold (which seems unlikely but is not impossible as Mujuru herself has [not](#) yet been expelled as a member of the party), the splits within ZANU-PF, combined with the dire state of the economy, could significantly weaken the ruling party in the lead-up to elections in 2018.

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