

Article

# 5

**Nigeria's External Image  
and Global Responses to  
the Postponing of the 2019  
General Elections: A Preliminary  
Investigation**

---

Godwin Onuh Odeh, PhD<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This paper interrogates the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria and the attendant international responses it elicited. It noted that Nigeria's national elections had been similarly postponed in 2011 and 2015, respectively. However, the 2019 postponement attracted a lot of local and international attention given the growing political consciousness of the electorates, the timing of the postponement and global expectations. In other words, the postponement had far reaching effects on the nation's external image and drew notable responses because of the place of Nigeria in Africa's democracy and global politics. Based on preliminary investigation gleaned from reports, comments and opinions used as instruments to measure the effects of the electoral processes, the paper upholds that the postponement of the February 16, 2019 elections to February 23, 2019, just few hours to its commencement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on the basis of logistics and operations did not portray the nation well in the diplomatic community. Therefore, initial responses and comments from the International Elections Observation Missions, the United Kingdom and the United States appeared not to have properly gauged the quantum of damages done to Nigeria by the re-scheduling of the election dates as comments and responses seems to have, at best, been couched to douse tension and to avoid diplomatic blunder and row. The paper concluded that since the damage had been done, it was incumbent on the citizens, diplomats, scholars and INEC to redress the image of the country in the global community through citizenship diplomacy, good representations, writings that aimed at correcting the anomaly to project the country well in the diaspora and adequate preparation and conduct for the next elections.*

## Introduction

Nigeria currently practices presidential democracy modeled after the American style. During the First Republic, the nation practiced the parliamentary system of government fashioned after the British model.

---

1 Godwin Odeh, PhD, is of the Department of History, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria. He can be reached through email: goddyodeh@yahoo.com

For unverifiable reasons, policy makers and political operators switched from the British style to the American model. In adopting the American model, Nigeria is expected to conduct periodic elections after every four years to choose political leaders. Since the nation's return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has conducted four elections with one form of shortcoming or the other. Some of the noticeable defects, among others, include electoral malpractices and rigging, violence and shifting/rescheduling of polls. The challenges associated with these defects have constantly raised fundamental questions on whether Nigeria's democracy has really been modeled after the American style. Scholarly arguments tend towards the fact that Nigeria should have overcome force-able electoral lapses that have grave implications for the nation's external image. It is against this background that the paper undertakes a preliminary investigation of Nigeria's external image and responses to the postponed 2019 elections. The paper is structured into six parts namely, introduction; conceptual clarification; history of electoral politics in Nigeria; retrospective consideration of foreign influence and Nigeria's image; Nigeria's external image and responses to the postponement of the 2019 polls and; conclusion.

### **Conceptual clarification**

Periodic elections remain one of the fundamental ingredients of democratic practices. Globally, it feeds democracy and has always drawn serious attention of politicians and both domestic and international observers. Scholars have offered several definitions but few of them would be considered. Elections may be conceptualized as the technical means of allowing popular participation in governance by citizens who choose their representatives in line with the dictates of modern democracies (Ejumudo, 2013, p.50). The definition projects the citizens as key players in the process. The definition also subsumes elections as being "among the most ubiquitous of contemporary political institutions and voting is the single act of political participation undertaken by majority of adults in majority of the nations in the world today" ( Anifowose as cited in Odeh, 2015b, p.12).

Anifowose, further outlined other functions of elections as the means of:

- a. Recruiting politicians and public decision makers;
- b. Making governments;
- c. Influencing policy decision;
- d. Educating voters;
- e. Building legitimacy;
- f. Strengthening elites;
- g. Providing succession in leadership; and
- h. Extending participation to many.

It has also been argued that “free election creates sentiments of popular consent and participation in public affairs and provides for peaceful transfer of authority to new rulers when the time comes for the old rulers to go” (Mackenzie as cited in Wamakko, 2018, p.2).

Ideally, the conduct of free elections has always been the objective of democracies be they general elections, presidential, gubernatorial or senatorial. Therefore, one of the indices of measuring democratic maturity is the ability of a nation to conduct a free and fair election. So, the postponement, by a week, the 2019 general elections just about five hours to its commencement by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the electoral body charged with the responsibility of conducting elections in Nigeria, projected negative signals to the global world with regards to elections and democratic governance.

Historically, the phenomenon of election is traceable to the treaty of Westphalia (Peace of Westphalia, 1646-1648) which brought to the fore the issue of sovereignty as the basis for national and international politics (Odeh, 2015a, p.463). Following Westphalia’s development, elections became the major medium by which social pact or contract is expressed between States and citizens, and between the governors and the governed. The global

origin of elections made its practice in a contemporary nation state like Nigeria, draw attention and reactions from players in international politics. It was therefore, not surprising that the postponement of the 2019 polls riveted global attention on Nigeria, one of Africa's largest democracies.

### **Electoral Politics in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective**

The Hugh Clifford Constitution of 1922 encouraged elective principle in Nigeria. The constitution created the enabling environment for the formation of Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the first political party founded in 1923 by Sir Herbert Macaulay in Nigeria. (Odeh, 2015a, p.467). Afterwards, various major pan-ethnic groups morphed into political parties. There emerged the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun which later known as National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) formed in 1944, and consequently became an Igbo *defacto* party, *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a Yoruba union transformed to Action Group (AG) in 1945 and *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa*, an Hausa/ Fulani association became the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in 1945 (Elaigwu, 2003, p.42). These ethno-regional political parties were manned by ethnic and tribal champions anticipating the folding up of colonial umbrella and saw the need to fill the political vacuum that would be created by the departure of the whites overlords. The tribal political warlords led their parties along ethnic and religious contours that were constructed by colonialism. In the first general elections of 1959, none of the political parties had overwhelming majority. This necessitated the coalition of NPC and NCNC in 1960 but it was short lived due to the ethnically and regionally based nature of the parties (Odey, 2004, p. 53). The politics of the decades preceding independence may be defined as politics of anxiety; anxiety about not being in control and being arbitrarily subjected to the power-that-be. Given this state of affairs, issues and events that have to do with distribution of power were bitterly contested. The hangover of this politics seems to have subsisted to the present era. In these pioneering elections, there was no case of polls postponement as historical evidence would have one believe.

However, ethnic, religious, regional, political troubles and trauma appear to have accelerated and accentuated the collapse of the First Republic (Gudaku 2007, p.5). The military junta of 1966, which resulted to the death of numerous eminent Nigerians, dressed the stage for the civil war that was fought from 1967 to 1970. In retrospect, the elections of 1964 marred by rigging carried out by NPC members was replicated in the western election of 1965. The 1964 elections registered the first electoral violence in Nigeria. However, the election was neither postponed nor cancelled. The major political crises of the era was electoral malpractices and violent acts of thugs in the so called "Operation Wetie" in which a lot of atrocities such as murder and arson were committed (Falola and Oyebade 2010, p.91). The culmination of these events was that while UPGA's victory was announced over the Eastern Radio, NNDP's victory was announced over the Federal Radio in 1965 (Elaigwu, 2003, p.53).

In the Second Republic (1979-1983), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), brought Alhaji Shehu Usman Shagari (of the blessed memory) to power (Enyi 2006, p.162). In December 31, 1983, General Muhammadu Buhari, the flag bearer of All Progressives Congress (APC) and the declared winner of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections overthrew the democratic government ushered in by the 1979 constitution. Among the reasons advanced for overthrowing the Shehu Shagari led government was corruption and incompetence. Consequently, General Muhammadu Buhari's economic policies and draconian laws made the regime run into troubled waters. It is noteworthy that the elections of the Second Republic witnessed no postponement of elections. However, the nation's economic predicament since 2015 seems to make analysts ask if history would not repeat itself.

The Third Republic (1991-1993), was aborted by President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and it ended in the June 12, 1993 saga. The presidential election of the time was said to have been won by the late Chief M.K.O Abiola, the flag bearer of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In the views of many scholars and political analysts, the military regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida did not have any tangible reason for annulling the election that

was considered one of the freest and fairest elections in Nigerian history ( Odeh, 2015a, p.468). The granting of the posthumous honour of the Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR) to the late Chief MKO Abiola by President Muhammadu Buhari, in 2018, has cleared doubts on the winner of the election although the award has been subject to a lot of political interpretations paramount among which the campaign strategy theory for 2019 elections loom-large. In the 1993 elections, there was no postponement of elections. However, the major political strategy of the regime was a prolonged delay and rigmarole which ended in its eventual abortion.

The Fourth Republic was inaugurated on May, 29, 1999. General Abdulsalam Abubakar (retired), who assumed power upon the death of General Sani Abacha in office, handed over power to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the presidential flag bearer of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the winner of the election. Despite the yearning for democratic governance, and widespread apathy by politicians and electorates in the exercise there was no postponement of the election in 1999. In 2003, Obasanjo was re-elected under the same party in elections adjudged to be very fraudulent (Adibe 2015). Though considered full of irregularities, the poll was not postponed. Obasanjo handed over power to his anointed candidate, Musa Yar'adua in 2007, through what appears to be a questionable election under PDP. Musa Yar'adua openly declared that the election was far below average using the yardstick of global best practices. The election date was not postponed. The death of Musa Yar'adua in 2010 ushered into power, his Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Dr. Jonathan was expected to complete Yar'adua's tenure and step aside for the North to assume leadership of the country till 2015 on the basis of rotational presidency between the north and the south. However, since power is hardly handed over to people freely or on a platter of gold, he contested and won the 2011 elections. In the elections, the date fixed for voting was not postponed as done in 2015 and 2019 general elections, respectively and it did not attract wide publicity probably because of the degree of political consciousness of the electorates and global expectations. The reason why it was postponed for two days or

so was late arrival of materials in some states of the federation. Attahiru Jega, the former INEC Chairman notes:

The unanticipated emergency we have experienced with late arrival of results sheets in many parts of the country; the result sheets are central to the elections and their integrity... The Commission has taken the difficult but necessary decision to postpone the National Assembly elections to Monday, April, 4, 2011 (Jega ascited in Baiyewu, 2019, p.25).

In 2015, the poll was postponed by INEC from February 14 and 28 to March 28 and April 11, respectively of the same year solely for security reasons. As earlier noted, the outcome of the elections brought the APC government of President Muhammadu Buhari to power. The victory of APC was historic because the opposition got to power, at the national level, for the first time in the history of Nigerian electoral system. From 1999 to 2015, Nigeria's political space had been dominated by the PDP as there was no formidable opposition party to wrestle power from its hand, hence the political slogan, "It is still the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)"(Egwemi,2013, p.86). The postponement of the 2019 general elections few hours to its commencement attracted uproar and created crisis of confidence about INEC among politicians, political parties and the electorates. Besides the national crisis, the postponement of the polls on the ground of logistic challenges, poor weather and burning of electoral materials particularly the permanent voters' cards in INEC Offices in Abia, Anambra and Plateau States as announced and referred to by Professor Mahmood Yakubu, the INEC Chairman on Channels Television on the February 16, 2019 at about 2:45 am created international image crisis for Nigeria. This shall be further explored in the latter part of the paper.

### **Foreign influence and Nigeria's External Image: A Retrospective Analysis**

Politics at the international level, takes cognizance of the existence of other nations because the well being or survival of people and States depends



on the well being of others. Thus, there is a robust history of Nigeria's external image and diplomatic relations. However, this paper's focuses on contemporary times. There is a direct correlation between Nigeria resources and her eventual conquest and colonization. Prior the Berlin Conference of 1884, John Beecroft had already laid solid foundations for British consistent interference in the politics of the interior of Nigeria. Historical documentation cited Beecroft was the Presiding Officer (PO) of the election of the new King of Calabar following the death of King Archibong of the Old Calabar in 1852 (Odeh, 2015c, p.16). This marked an instance of external influence on Nigeria arising from the portrayal of the country abroad by explorers and merchants during the early phase of the British colonialism.

Since Nigeria attained independence in 1960, many western nations have, in one way or the other, been involved in political developments in the country. Put differently, since political independence, Western countries have continued to influence Nigeria's ruling class. The nature of external influence on Nigeria has led to calls that she must acknowledge her neocolonial status and reject it. She needs to stop surrendering her decision making on financial and credit policies and political organization to the west. The process of accepting and implementing programmes; the submission and supervision of her economic policies; planning and performance by foreign agencies; the issuing of reports on the fidelity of the country's plan to foreign objective; the pilgrimage of officials of government to the headquarters of west converge to the fact that neocolonialism is the highest stage of imperialism (Odeh 2015c, p.53).

Recently, Asian countries joined the league of western powers in steering the affairs of the nations because of their economic relevance. Series of military coups and crises that culminated into Nigeria's bloody civil war (1967-1970) have implications for the nation's international image. Thus, the first generations of Nigerian political leaders were conscious of the nation's external image and cautioned against foreign friends and enemies. According to Dr, Nnmadi Azikiwe:

I make this suggestion... it is better for us and for our admirers abroad that we should disintegrate in peace and not in pieces. Should the politicians fail to heed to this warning...the experience of the Democratic Republic of Congo will be a child's play if it ever comes to our turn to play such a tragic role (Azikiwe as cited in Ashafa, 2008, p.455)

During the Nigerian civil war external powers were involved were partisan because international system and international law allowed it. Great Britain, for instance, was accused of complicity in the abortive coup that resulted in the assassination of General Ramat Murtala Mohammed in 1976 (Fawole, 2003, p.117). In the 1980s, due to General Muhammadu Buhari's tough posture and his attempt to undertake a comprehensive review of Nigeria's relations with Britain in what he described as insensitivity of Britain to the nation's economic woes and highhandedness, the regime earned bad publicity around the world, especially the case of government seizure of the British Caledonian jumbo jet en route London and the detention of 221 passengers and 22 members of the crew (Fawole, 2003, p.143). Buhari's military regime appeared to have been sending negative signals on Nigeria's external image to the international community and therefore precipitating a setback to her relations with the world, particularly the great powers.

As a result of the waning popularity of Buhari's government, General Ibrahim Babangida took over power in 1985. As soon as he became the Head of State, General Babangida adopted the economic policies of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in line with the dictates of the west as one of the strategies for repairing the external image of Nigeria that had been battered by General Buhari's regime. Babangida's adoption of the economic policies as well as the promise to hand over power to civilians received the approval of US government. However, rather than follow through with the hand over agenda, the regime embarked on an endless rigmarole. Some of the endless activities include banning of political activities; banning of certain categories of politicians; constant alteration of transition dates

(from 1990 to 1992, January 1993 to August 1993) and the change in the rule of the political game. All these affected Nigeria-US relations. The public statement disapproval of the United States Director of Foreign Service, Mike Brien, in Lagos, that US would not look kindly at any pretext to frustrate the transition programme made Gen. Babangida's regime to expel Mike Brien. In quick response, the US government immediately recalled its military attaché from Lagos and expelled Nigeria's Ambassador in Washington. The US also stopped military assistance to Nigeria and introduced stringent measures for obtaining US visas (Fawole, 2003, p.172). Although Gen. Babangida left office in August 26, 1993 and an interim government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan was set up, the challenges in Nigeria-US relations had degenerated and completely nosedived during the regime of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). General Abacha's execution of international environmentalist Ken Saro-wiwa and his eight kinsmen of Ogoni extraction on November 10, 1995 despite international plea for clemency further alienated Nigeria from the international community as she became a pariah nation. The Commonwealth of Nations suspended Nigeria, European Union imposed several sanctions on the country and the United Nations Organization passed resolutions against her. America and Britain, her traditional friends imposed sanctions on her too. Nigeria therefore, became isolated internationally (Dauda, 2005, p.101; Orngu, 2015, pp.109-110). The sudden death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998 and the emergence of General Abdulsalam Abubakar did not immediately change, for the better, the international community posture towards Nigeria. However, Nigeria's frosty relationship with the international community began to thaw as the latter openly demonstrated a genuine transition programme carried through by General Abdulsalam Abubakar. Gen. Abubakar's regime handed over power to democratically elected government on May 29, 1999. General Abdulsalam Abubakar kept to his words when he said: "I do not have any ambition to be a head of state. I did not make a coup, and I believe that so far I have convinced the Doubting Thomases that we are serious" (Fawole, 2003, p.223). His handing over to a civilian administration went a long way in ameliorating the stance of international community towards Nigeria. Unfortunately, the wound his

predecessor inflicted on the nation's external image could hardly be fully healed during the short period of a year or so of the General Abdulsalam's regime.

So, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) that commenced the fourth republic in 1999 inherited a distressed external image. The administration quickly adopted the old strategy of shuttle diplomacy to remarket the nation to the international community. The relevance of his trips abroad cannot be overemphasized. Among other things, it was:

To seek support for the country's nascent democracy; to reconcile Nigeria with the international community following its pariah status during the previous military regime, to brief the international community about government's on-going efforts aimed at economic recovery and political reconciliation; to invite investors to participate in the nation's economy; to seek assistance for the recovery of nation's stolen funds; to seek relief, cancellations and reduction of debt burden and to seek support for Nigeria to represent in the envisaged enlargement of the UN Security Council (Egwemi as cited in Adejo,2004, p.45)

The above was the thrust of the foreign policy of the administration up to 2007 and most of the objectives were achieved to some extent. By the time President Musa Yar Adua and Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan came on board in 2007, the residual of military mess on the nation's external edifice had been significantly cleansed. However, there were internal socio-economic and political challenges that often tarnished the nation's image abroad. Paramount among the challenges is the conduct of periodic elections and official corruption which always drew international attention.

To salvage Nigeria's numerous problems, political parties adopted various strategies to gain domestic and international favour. There were often clash of interest among political parties in their efforts to shop for votes. In 2015, for instance, the PDP accused the former president of United States, Barak Obama of supporting APC during the elections. Conversely, in

the 2019 elections, APC accused western powers of supporting the PDP (Falana 2019, p.20). Essentially, both political parties directly or indirectly engaged the services of the western nations in their efforts to demonstrate that they have the wherewithal to solve Nigeria's problems. So whenever elections are conducted and foreign observers from the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), international civil society organizations converge, the stakes go up on the nation's external image. In other words, the avalanche of global witnesses underscores the fact that elections are not exclusive affairs of independent states including Nigeria. It is against this background that elections in present times attract international responses. Thus, all the processes leading to the conduct of the 2019 elections and particularly its postponement at the last minute impacted negatively on the foreign image of Nigeria. This will be further discussed in this paper.

### **Nigeria's External Image and Global responses to the shifting of the 2019 polls: A Preliminary consideration**

The postponement of the 2019 general elections had a lot of international implications for the Nigerian state. First, it created the problem of external image for the country. The event portrayed, to the world, a nation that could not manage its internal affairs, effectively. A scholar commented on the consequence of the postponement thus:

...portrayed us as a country ...that cannot manage its affairs properly...smaller countries like Ghana, Niger and Senegal conducted their elections without a hitch and look at the negative image this ( the postponement of the 2019 general elections... *Emphasis Mine*) has given us in the international community, as if we are not serious (Dauda, as cited in Baiyewu, 2019, p. 25).

The postponement of the general elections about six hours to its commencement was not entirely new in Nigeria's electoral process but it

further exacerbated the already poor image of the country for Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. However, considering the size of Nigeria in relation to relatively smaller countries like Ghana and Senegal, the challenges posed by logistics cannot be discountenanced but the underlying question is that the postponement remained a bad outing for Nigeria and the INEC given the duration of about four years or so at its disposal to prepare for the 2019 election.

The delay and the ultimate postponement dampened the spirit and enthusiasm of foreign investors and Nigeria incurred a serious economic loss. One of the indices of measuring Nigeria's economic growth is the inflow of revenue through foreign exchange earnings which often times gain appreciable growth through the exchange rate around election time. Unfortunately, the postponement coupled with the attendant nationwide tension discouraged investors. In the words of Larose: "the likelihood of violence is now higher than before. And we have seen some effects on the markets" (Larose as cited in Asu, 2019, p.33). The cancellation of the initial date of the election negatively impacted on the nation's economy. In short, in Port revenue alone, Nigeria is documented to have lost N1.8 Billion due to the change of the election date. Nwani noted that:

On the day the election was postponed, Nigeria lost \$6 million... Apart from the actual cost to the economy, the maritime sector is an international sector and whatever happens in Nigeria affects the rest of the world. It will have impact on the performance of ships that are leaving and coming into Nigeria. The delay (that is in the general elections ... *Emphasis Mine*) is bound to affect the exports and import goods. Most of our exports are meant to be delivered on schedule, otherwise they will go bad and the buyer will reject them (Nwani as cited in Okon, 2019, p.36)

In international trade, Nigeria incurred a very heavy loss just as the nation recorded deficits in the local trade as a result of national standstill in every area of human endeavour due to the stand still caused by the

postponement of the elections. Analysts reported that Saturday, February, 16, 2019 remained a day in which the Nigerian people did not undertake any productive pursuit although petty traders opened shops here and there; the volume of trade was hugely insignificant. (I. Onumiya, February, 17, 2019). In all, local economic activities also suffered greatly as a result of the postponement in the date of the polls.

There were serious and often negative responses from international observers, other nations and individuals to the postponement of the elections. The first global reaction to the postponement came from International Elections Observation Missions that had already been on ground in Nigeria for the exercise. The joint statement of the heads of the Observation Missions reveals:

While we note that this decision has caused disappointment for many, we call on all Nigerians to continue to remain calm and supportive of the electoral process as INEC works to implement its new time line... We urge INEC to use this time to finalise all preparations and ensure that the new election dates are strictly adhered to. We encourage INEC to provide regular update information to the public on its preparation in the coming days and weeks to enhance confidence in the process (Statement of Heads of Observation Mission as cited in Latu-Sanft, 2019, retrieved from [thecommonwealth.org](http://thecommonwealth.org)).

Signatories to the above were, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia and leader of ECOWAS Observation Team, Hailemariam Desalegn, the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia and leader of AU Observation Team, Jakaya Kikwete, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania and leader of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Rupia Banda, former President of Zambia and leader of Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa Mission Team, Maria Arena, a Belgian member of the European Parliament and leader of the EU Election Observation Mission, Festus Mogae, former President of Botswana and Vaira Vike-Freiberga, former President of Latvia and leaders of National Democratic



Institute / International Institute Election Observation Mission, Boubakar Adamou led the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation observation team and Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Director of African Political Affairs and UN Special Representative of the Secretary- General for West Africa and Sahel. The response of the international election observation mission remains largely pacifying and diplomatically couched since their ultimate aim is peaceful conduct of the election. More so, it would amount to diplomatic blunder to overtly utter unfavourable comments in an unpleasant situation particularly while in a foreign land. However, it ought to be categorically stated that the postponement caused serious disappointment to the international community despite the civil language in which it was couched.

Given the historical and political relevance of the United Kingdom and the United States to Nigeria and electoral practices, respectively, the two countries responded to the sudden postponement of the elections dates. United Kingdom states:

The British High Commission supports the joint statement made by the heads of the international observer missions on the postponement of the 2019 Nigerian elections. We recognise the frustrations of many Nigerians, including those involved in the delivery, supervision and observation of the election and those who travelled to exercise their democratic right. We urge the Nigerian people to come out to vote next weekend in the re-scheduled elections (Laing, 2019, retrieved from [vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com)).

The US, on the other hand, responded thus:

US Embassy fully supports the joint statement by the heads of ECOWAS and other International Election Observation Missions on the postponement of the February 16 Nigerian elections. We join in encouraging all Nigerians to ensure a free, fair, peaceful and credible election by supporting the Independent National Electoral Commission while it



finalizes electoral preparations this week and by voting in peace together on February 23 ([vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com)).

The major powers and international observation missions' responses may have partly been influenced by the international engagement benchmark sets by the Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister, Geoffrey Onyeama. Gleaning from past experiences, the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs notes that:

We welcome, very much, your engagement, we appreciate very much the support of all countries in this process, we acknowledge how important your engagement and also in 2015 to help us to deliver probably one of the previous elections. We welcome international observers to the country and all other friends and media fully engaged, but what we are concerned about, has sometimes been just the way the engagement has been communicated...And we have expected and hope that you will also be impartial and just help observe to see if the election will be free and credible and not give any sense of indication that they might be preferences (Onyeamaas cited in Ikuomola, 2019, p.7)

It is likely that the above address might have influenced foreign comments and responses to the postponement of the elections but the postponement did not favourably project and portray the image of Nigeria abroad. Consequent reports written years after the election was conducted revealed utter disaffection of the global community to the postponement of the 2019 elections. In the view or opinion of several scholars in the diaspora, it is only in Nigeria that elections are postponed on the election days (personal interactions on 16 February, 2019). Nigeria may not be the only country where election postponement has occurred; other instances of this need not be used to justify the political episode. The crucial issue is how to analyze the postponement and repair Nigeria's image before other countries, organizations and individuals across the globe that refrained from making comments and responses. This remains a very huge task

for diplomats, scholars and social engineers. Since there is no permanent friend and foe in international politics, it should also follow that there is no permanent image in global community. As noted in preliminary investigations deciphered from reports, comments and public opinion used as instrument for measuring the effects of the electoral processes, there were clear indications that the external image of the country was negatively impacted by the postponement of the elections. However, there is no need to despair because the country's image can be reconfigured through track-two (citizen) diplomacy; conventional diplomacy; and other forms of international engagements but particularly through commendable outing of INEC in the 2023 election so that the blemish caused by the postponement of the elections of February 16, 2019 can be removed in the global community.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has laid the historical background to foreign influence in Nigeria and its external image in modern times. It argues that the external image of the country was badly battered during the military era. However, since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has continued to suffer from one external image problem to another, namely; official corruption, terrorism, poor conduct of periodic elections, among others. These have always drawn unfavourable comments from the international community. From all indications, the citizens, foreigners and observers were shocked at the last minute-postponement of the 2019 election on the excuses of logistics and ancillary challenges. The excuses raised the fundamental questions of what INEC had done in terms of preparations for the said elections in the last four years or so. It further argued that local and international economies suffered setbacks from the incidence and that it cast a serious pall on the nation's external image. It is the findings of this paper that elections had been previously shifted in Nigeria in 2011 and 2015, respectively, however, the negative publicity and the significance of the 2019 election-postponement is rooted in the growing political consciousness and the

eagerness of the electorates to exercise their democratic rights; the timing of the postponement and the expectations of the international community given the place of Nigeria in Africa's democracy and global politics. It concluded that the postponement of the February 16, 2019 general elections to February 23rd, 2019 on the basis of what appears to be flimsy excuses of logistics and weather challenges given by the Independent National Electoral Commission did not portray the nation well in the eyes of the international environment. As a result, it is only optimists that would expect such an incident to garner favourable external responses. While the damage had been done, it is incumbent on INEC to deploy confidence building by adequately preparing for the 2023 polls and ensuring it avoids unnecessary lapses so as to convince the world of Nigeria's preparedness and commitment to election conduct and ultimately re-represent Nigeria in a better light to the comity of nations.

## References

Adejo, A.M.,(2004).Reducing Diplomacy to Tourism: Nigeria's International Relations since 1999. *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, (6),1,41-48.

Adibe, J O., (2015). *The 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: The Issues and Challenges*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/2/meia/research>.

Ashafa, A M.,(2008).The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970: Historicizing the International Dimension. In A M. Adejo, (ed) *The Nigerian Civil War: Forty Years After what Lessons*, (pp-451-472).Makurdi: Aboki Publishers,(Historical Society of Nigeria publication series).

Asu, F., (2019).Election delay dampens foreign investors' appetite-Report" in *PUNCH*, Thursday February, 21,33.

Baiyewu, L., (2019). INEC and the History of Election Postponements in Nigeria. *PUNCH*, Thursday, February, 21,25.

Dauda, S., (2005). Western Hostility, International Isolation of Nigeria under the leadership of General Sani Abacha and its Effects on her Foreign Relations: An Analysis. *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, (6), 2, 97-104.

Egwemi V.,(2013), Issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria: An Introduction. *Issue in the 2011 General Elections Nigeria, Lapai Democracy Series* 7,1-12.

Egwemi,V,. (2013).It is Still the Peoples Democratic Party(PDP): Some Comments on Political Parties and the 2011 Elections in Nigeria" in *Issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria*, 86-104.

Ejumudo., K B.O, (2013). Independent National Electoral Commission and the 2011 Elections in Nigeria. *Issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria Lapai Democracy Series* 7, 2013,.50-68.

Elaigwu, J.I., (2003). The Challenge of Nation Building in the 21st Century: The Nigerian Experience. *Lecture Series, Unijos, Alumni, Abuja Chapter*,

Mefor (ed), Jos, Psycom Press ,42.

Enyi, J.E., (2006). Democracy, Political Participation and Representation: The Challenge of Development in Igede Land. *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities* (7), Makurdi, Aboki Publishers,147-171.

Falana, F., (2019).Foreign Interference in the 2019 Election (1). *PUNCH*, Thursday, February, 21,20.

Fawole, W A., (2003). *Nigeria's External Relations and Foreign Policy under Military Rule (1966-1999)*, Ile-Ife: OAU Press.

Gudaku, B.T., (2007) *Agony of Crises: A Challenge to National Development and Integration in Nigeria*. Jos, Fab Educational Books.

Ikuomola, V,(2019), "Fed.Govt draws line for foreign countries on polls" in *THE NATION*, Thursday, February, 21, 7.

Latu-Sanft, J., (2019). *International observers react to postponement of Nigerian elections*, retrieved from, [thecommonwealth.org](http://thecommonwealth.org).

Odeh, G.O., (2015b).*The 2015 Historic Presidential Election in Nigeria: A Contribution to African Revolutionary Frameworks*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press.

Odeh, G.O., (2015c).*The 1914 Amalgamation of Nigeria as a precursor to Integration a t a crossroads: One Hundred years after*. Makurdi: Gwatex publishers.

Odeh, G.O. (2015a). Historicising National Elections and Their implications on National Security and Integration in Contemporary Nigerian State: A Centenary Discourse.*International Journal of Arts and Sciences*,(8)4, 461-472, CD-ROM, ISSN:1944-6934,University publication.net.

Odey M.O. (2004). History and National Integration.*FASS, Journal of the Faculty of Arts Seminar Series Benue State University*,(2), Makurdi Starix Books, 49-61.

Okon, A. (2019). Polls Delay: FG Lost N1.8b in port revenue. *PUNCH*, Thursday, February, 21.

Orngu, C.S. (2015). A Chronological Synthesis of the Military Factor in the Shaping of Nigeria's Foreign Policy, 1966-1999. *POLAC International Journal of Humanities and Security Studies*, Maiden Edition, 96-116.

Falola, T., & Oyebade, A.O., (2010). *Hot Spot: Sub Sahara Africa*, U.S.A: Greenwood.

UK, US back postponement of elections. *Vanguard*. Retrieved from, [vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com).

Wamakko, A.M., (2018). *The G-5 and the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: Personalities, Ideas and Resources*. Lagos: Bahiti and Dalila Publishers.