

Nigerian vote leaves country deeply divided

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20 April 2011

President Goodluck Jonathan's victory in the Nigerian election has left the country deeply divided as he moves to open up the economy more completely to the oil companies.

Jonathan won 22.5 million votes, 57 percent of the votes cast. His rival Muhammadu Buhari won 12.2 million, 31 percent of the vote.

Jonathan's majority is sufficient to avoid a second round. But his vote is predominantly in the south of country, while Buhari has taken the majority of votes in the north. Riots broke out in the north as soon as the results were declared.

Supporters of former military ruler Buhari claimed that the vote was rigged in Jonathan's favour. Observers from the European Union and the Commonwealth rejected the allegations and declared that the presidential poll was the fairest in the country's history.

United States Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Johnnie Carson, who was visiting Nigeria, welcomed Jonathan's election and congratulated the Independent National Electoral Commission for its conduct of the vote. "I do so, on behalf of the government of the US and my boss, Hillary Clinton," he said.

Many people died in riots that shook the north of the country. Mosques, churches and houses were set alight. The number of dead is not yet known. "A lot of people have been killed but early reports are still coming in," a Red Cross official told the Reuters news agency.

The northern state of Kaduna was said to be under 24-hour curfew, after rioters burnt the residence of the vice-president and stormed a prison releasing the inmates. "In Kaduna we have seen dead bodies lying by the road," Umar Mairiga of the Red Cross said.

Displaced people have fled to military camps, he added. "Two thousand people have been displaced at one military camp alone."

Jonathan has appealed for unity. "We must quickly

move away from partisan battlegrounds," he said. "Nobody's political ambition is worth the blood of any Nigerian." But the reality is that a great deal of blood has already been shed and more is likely to be in the days to come.

Violence erupted immediately in the north, but the south is no more stable. Akwa, Ibom and Delta states have seen brutal government repression in recent months. Ballot snatching was reported from Delta during polling and bombings left 13 people dead. Security has been tightened in Lagos in anticipation of the riots spreading to the southwest.

A leading politician told the magazine *Africa Confidential*, "Blood will flow."

Jonathan came to power last May. He was vice-president and assumed power when President Umaru Yar'Adua died. The Obama administration backed him against opposition from supporters of Yar'Adua, who attempted to maintain their hold on power.

Nigeria is the second largest sub-Saharan economy after South Africa. Some 90 percent of government revenue comes from the oil industry. The contest for the presidency was in large measure a struggle over control of Nigeria's oil wealth and its distribution among different sections of the elite.

Britain fostered regional, tribal and religious divisions when it was the colonial ruler, leaving an enduring legacy of communal antagonisms.

Jonathan is a Christian Ijaw from the south of the country. Most of Nigeria's post-independence rulers have been from the northern states. Jonathan is the first president to come from the Delta region, which produces most of the country's oil wealth. The communal tensions created by British imperialism and rivalry over the country's natural resources led to civil war in 1967-70 when the south-eastern provinces seceded to become the Republic of Biafra.

The oil companies have given strong backing to

Jonathan. He is regarded as representing a break from the past, when a large portion of the industry's profits found its way into the overseas bank accounts of corrupt northern generals who dominated Nigerian political life. The Nigerian stock exchange rose on Jonathan's election. Economist Alan Cameron of stockbroker CSL was upbeat. "We will see a lot of investors come back to Nigeria," he said.

"Jonathan's decisive win will ease investor concerns," said Samir Gadio, sub-Saharan analyst at Standard Bank. Among the first companies to announce investment plans was the drinks company Diageo, which intends to put £230 million into its Nigerian operations.

Jonathan is expected to restructure the oil industry in the interests of the major corporations. His identification with the Delta is seen as being particularly useful to the oil companies, which have been hit by a long running insurgency there. Personnel have been kidnapped from offshore platforms and pipelines have been targeted, often bringing production to a halt. Last year rebels agreed to disarm in return for a dubious promise of economic and social development in the region.

High oil prices may enable Jonathan to buy off the political elite in the north. But as far as the oil companies are concerned, the violence in the north is a peripheral concern since their facilities and the main industrial areas of the country are in the south. The north is becoming increasingly marginalised, both economically and politically.

Nigeria ranks fifth among oil exporters to the US and ninth in terms of world production. It is believed to have immense untapped potential, particularly in deep-sea oil reserves and natural gas. But production has stagnated for years. One of Jonathan's main tasks will be to enact the Petroleum Industry Bill, which has been pending since 2008. It is intended to restructure the entire oil and gas industry. Foreign oil companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobil, Total and Chevron are currently obliged to operate in joint ventures with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company. But the oil giants have become increasingly hostile to the constraints this system imposes on their profits. A major natural gas collection project worth \$80 billion has been left on hold until the companies get legislation that will guarantee their profits and limit state control

of the industry.

Sebastian Boe, a political analyst at IHS Inc., said the bill "represents a sweeping overhaul of the country's lucrative oil and gas industry, establishing new regulatory structures and fiscal regimes."

Jonathan is continuing the process of opening up the Nigerian economy to international investment under way since the end of the military regime in 1999. Since then the gulf between rich and poor has widened. It is estimated that 54 percent of the 150 million population of Nigeria lives on less than \$1 a day. Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world at 800 per 100,000 live births. Educational provision is poor, leaving some 22 million Nigerians illiterate.

The oil industry generates an income of more than \$35 billion a year for the Nigerian state, yet Nigeria is ranked at 80 out of 108 countries on the UN human development scale. Its population is poorer than those of Rwanda and Malawi, countries that have far fewer natural resources. Life expectancy is only 49 years for men.

The restructuring of the economy demanded by Western governments and the major corporations can only deepen social divisions. Nigeria has seen a wave of strikes and protests in recent months. State universities were closed by a prolonged strike. High school students have protested against rising fees. Workers in the electricity industry threaten to strike from May Day against privatisation.

The *Financial Times* was careful to alert its readers to this aspect of the post-election violence. It quoted a resident of Kano, who described the way in which the houses of the northern political elite had been targeted in the rioting. "The palace of the emir of Kano and the Ladima, Gijjani Hashim were torched," he said, "It's as if a class war has broken out."



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