



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

TOWARD A SECOND INDEPENDENCE: REPAIRING NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL COMMISSION, 2010–2011

SYNOPSIS

After three flawed national elections, the government of Nigeria faced strong pressure to reform its electoral commission before the 2011 vote. President Goodluck Jonathan appointed Attahiru Jega, a university vice chancellor with a civil society background, to chair the commission and lead reforms. With too little time to overhaul the commission, Jega brought in a small team of trusted advisers and drew upon a support network of civil society groups to extend the commission's reach. To build credibility, he promoted transparency both within the commission and toward the public, tapped new sources of publicly trusted election workers, created a new voter registry, reformed balloting procedures, and improved cooperation with political parties and government agencies. Despite logistical problems and an outbreak of post-election violence, observers validated the elections as the freest and fairest in Nigerian history.

Gabriel Kuris drafted this case study based on interviews he and Rahmane Idrissa conducted in Abuja, Kaduna, Lagos, and Zaria, Nigeria, in September and October 2011, and on an interview Laura Bacon conducted in Washington in November 2012. Case published December 2012. For a closer look at technical innovations in Nigeria's 2011 elections, particularly in electronic voter registration and the use of social media, see ["Rebooting the System: Technological Reforms in Nigerian Elections, 2010–2011."](#)

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in November 2009, over a year before the end of his term, Nigeria's elected president, Umaru Yar'Adua, lay incapacitated in a foreign hospital, leaving a power vacuum at the helm of Africa's most populous country. The Senate transferred presidential powers to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan in February 2010, but opposition lawmakers decried the move as illegal. As the crisis wore on, many Nigerians grew impatient with the government's lack of candor about Yar'Adua's health and lack of

progress on pressing issues like corruption, unemployment, and electricity shortages.

Protests erupted in major cities. Youths, who constituted nearly three-quarters of Nigeria's 168 million citizens, figured prominently in the movement.¹ "For the first time, we had middle-class young Nigerians on the street," said activist Amara Nwankpa, cofounder of an online youth network called Enough is Enough. On 16 March 2010, a thousand protesters organized by Enough is Enough marched on the National Assembly in

Abuja, Nigeria's capital. Armed guards stopped them at the gate. "We actually pushed down the barricade, pushed through the armed soldiers," Nwankpa recalled. "Young people were not afraid to be shot or to die; we were so angry, we just wanted to get our message through." And yet, the guards didn't shoot. Nwankpa said, "They looked at us and they told us, 'Listen, we understand what you guys are doing and we are with you.'" Public discontent crossed political and generational lines. As Yar'Adua's condition deteriorated, the national elections slated for January 2011 became the rallying point for those demanding change.

When Jonathan formally assumed the presidency after Yar'Adua died in May, he signaled his commitment to reform by passing previously stalled electoral legislation and by appointing as chair of the electoral commission Attahiru Jega, a political scientist known as an outspoken critic of the country's elections. In a 2010 May Day address before the Nigeria Labour Congress, a federation of unions, Jega had championed electoral reform, saying: "The reforms must bring about a credible and transparent electoral process with equally credible people to supervise these [processes]. Now more than ever before is the time to begin to get things right, and to stop repeating the terrible mistakes of the past."² A former leader of Nigeria's largest academic union and vice chancellor of Bayero University in Kano, Jega had demonstrated political and management skills. As a Muslim northerner appointed by a southern, Christian president, he also had the potential to bridge Nigeria's divides.

With less than a year to prepare, Jega took over an electoral commission dogged by public distrust, and he reoriented it toward transparency, collaboration, and innovation. He secured a constitutional amendment to postpone elections as a way to allow more time to prepare, compiled

a new voter registry from scratch, redesigned voting and tabulation processes, persuaded parties to agree to a new code of conduct, and brought together civil society organizations and security agencies to respond quickly and effectively to crises. Those preparations helped preserve the credibility of the electoral process despite logistical setbacks and severe outbreaks of sectarian violence after the polls closed. International and domestic observers called the 2011 elections the fairest and freest in Nigerian history.

THE CHALLENGE

Observers had criticized as severely flawed Nigeria's 2003 and 2007 elections, which the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) won by overwhelming margins. The European Union observer mission concluded that the 2007 election "fell far short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections."³ The Commonwealth Observer Group reported: "Significant numbers of polling stations opened extremely late. In many cases the secrecy of the vote was not assured. A number of violent incidents were reported, along with ballot stuffing and snatching. There were also incidences of underage voting."⁴ Problems cited included voter intimidation, flawed voter registries, shortages of voting materials, vote buying, multiple voting, ballot stuffing, and tampering with ballot boxes. Many incidents, especially at the state and local levels, implied the complicity of election officials.

Election-related violence claimed at least 100 lives in 2003 and 200 in 2007, with many more casualties believed unreported.⁵ Most violence occurred in the southern Niger Delta, whose oil was responsible for 80% of federal government revenue.⁶ By the 2011 elections, peace negotiations and the presidential ascent of Jonathan—a former Delta-area governor and member of the region's marginalized Ijaw minority—had reduced the risk of electoral

violence in the region. However, tensions rose to a boil elsewhere, heated by religious, ethnic, and geographic rifts.

Nigeria was a hodgepodge of peoples encompassing 500 languages, 250 ethnicities, and three major cultures: the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo. A religious fault line bisected the country between a mostly Muslim north and mostly Christian south. The two halves were balanced in population but had diverged socioeconomically under British rule, when the south became more urbanized and connected to global commerce. In 2010, southerners were twice as wealthy per capita as northerners and had more access to education, health care, and jobs.⁷ Such differences underlay riots and terrorist attacks in the contested middle belt between north and south. While Nigeria's long-standing federal structure granted states control over a wide range of laws and policies, all states depended on oil revenue distributed by the central government. That dependence raised the stakes of national elections. Since 1999, the PDP had won all national elections by dominating both sides of the religious divide through an unwritten agreement called *zoning*, which rotated the party's presidential and vice presidential nominations between a Muslim and a Christian every eight years.

When President Yar'Adua (a Muslim) died during his first term and Vice President Jonathan (a Christian) replaced him, the zoning arrangement broke down. Jonathan declined to step aside for a Muslim candidate, leading many Muslims to support the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), led by Muhammadu Buhari, a pious Muslim and former military ruler running on an anti-corruption platform. Even outside his northern base, Buhari's message resonated with citizens who saw little gain from the country's oil wealth and blamed graft for stalling development. If he solidified northern support and won over

anti-PDP southerners, Buhari had a chance to topple Jonathan.

Thus, the 2011 elections pitted north against south and Muslims against Christians more starkly than previous contests had despite a constitutional ban on overtly sectarian parties. PDP leaders struggled to hold power nationwide, while the governors and power brokers of the CPC in the north and the smaller, Action Congress of Nigeria in the southwest mobilized their own blocs of support. Voters were deeply engaged, and their enthusiasm threatened to boil into anger if they distrusted the process or its results. "It was obvious that this election was going to be much more difficult than previous ones in terms of violence," said Kole Shettima, a Nigerian political scientist who directed the MacArthur Foundation's Africa office. "Some political supporters were spoiling for war."

Responsibility for managing elections in those challenging conditions fell to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), an autonomous body created under the 1999 constitution. The flawed 2003 and 2007 elections, as well as corruption scandals in procurement and staffing, had tarred the commission's reputation.⁸ "Nigerians did not believe the commission did a good job of conducting elections," said INEC spokesman Kayode Idowu. An opening for change came in April 2010, when President Jonathan removed Maurice Iwu, the election commission's chair, months before his five-year term ended. Iwu had been unpopular with the public and was blamed for mismanagement and erratic behavior, such as falsely claiming he had discovered a cure for the Ebola virus.⁹

With the approval of the Council of State, an executive advisory body, Jonathan nominated Jega to chair the commission; the Senate confirmed the nomination on June 29, 2010. The chairmanship of the electoral commission was a powerful and

prominent position that made Jega both a public symbol and an institutional driver of change. Jega said, “I felt greatly honored that my country wanted me to contribute in dealing with the challenges of conducting free, fair, and credible elections.”

Because of Jega’s reformist reputation, civil society leaders welcomed his appointment. Clement Nwankwo, a longtime civil society activist and founder of the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, called it a “pleasant surprise,” explaining, “While the president was under pressure to appoint a chairman with credibility, the fear was that he wouldn’t appoint someone whom he didn’t know well.” Nwankwo, a frequent past critic of INEC, had confidence in Jega’s leadership. “I knew that Jega was honest about delivering credible elections,” Nwankwo said. “Overall, people respected him and his integrity and felt he was doing things right.”

The public also welcomed Jega’s appointment as representing a clean break for INEC, greeting the decision with “euphoria,” according to the *Guardian*, a leading Nigerian newspaper.¹⁰ “Jega represented change, and people were willing to give him a chance,” said Nwankpa of Enough is Enough.

However, that confidence carried public expectations that outpaced the short time frame and institutional constraints Jega faced. “On one hand, he had very high expectations, coming from the public,” said the MacArthur Foundation’s Shettima. “At the same time, he was dealing with an institution he had inherited that had its own traditions . . . [and a] reputation for corruption, for bureaucracy, for doing the wrong thing historically.”

The elections, scheduled only six months away, consisted of three separate polls for the National Assembly, the presidency, and state governments. Jega had to muster the resources and goodwill at his disposal to ensure all three elections would be credible and peaceful. Election

administration success required legislative support, a solid voter registry, safeguards against fraud (especially at subnational levels), efficient and accountable distribution networks for ballot materials, a secure voting environment, and party commitments to accept the final results or challenge them legally. “In some ways, this election was supposed to be a second independence for Nigeria,” Shettima said. “We had had difficult experiences in the past, and if we wanted to lay a foundation for the future there was a sense we had to get this right.”

FRAMING A RESPONSE

“I felt when contacted that I had adequate preparation to be able to do the job,” Jega reflected in 2012. “I knew it was going to be a difficult job, but with the benefit of hindsight, I think I underestimated the challenges.” Born in 1957, Jega had agitated for democracy during decades of military rule. With a doctorate in political science from Northwestern University in Chicago and a seat on the Electoral Reform Committee convened by Yar’Adua from 2007 to 2008, he was familiar with both the technical and political sides of election preparation.

Jega saw several legislative goals as preconditions for fair elections. The first was to convince the National Assembly to provide INEC with a budget ample enough to cover the costs of building a voter registry from scratch. The second was for the National Assembly to enact the Electoral Reform Committee’s recommendations, including the creation of a separate INEC fund that would free the commission from having to secure presidential approval of its budgetary requests. The third was for the government to delay elections so as to give INEC a few more months to prepare—a move that required amending the constitution.

In the arena of election management, Jega aimed to earn public credibility by reforming INEC to make it more effective and more

transparent. The strategy hinged on two critical decisions: First, he decided to leave the commission staff largely intact but imposed strict expectations regarding transparency and integrity. Second, he buttressed INEC's credibility and boosted its capacity by tapping the support of more-trusted institutions, like civil society groups and universities.

Both of those moves meant putting aside the deep, top-to-bottom reforms that many argued INEC required to gain public trust. However, two constraints made such thoroughgoing reforms prohibitive: The first was the short time frame. When Jega stepped into office, just a little over six months remained before the January election date. If the 2011 elections were successful, Jega would gain more time as well as the political capital to pursue serious changes. The second was that despite his autonomy to shape INEC's policies and staffing, Jega lacked absolute control within the organization. The 12 other national commissioners, as well as the 37 resident electoral commissioners who directed INEC's state offices, were appointed and removed by the president—subject to Council of State consultation and Senate confirmation. The terms of appointment cast doubt on the impartiality of those colleagues. “There was a question as to how many of these other commissioners were prepared to accept the changes that needed to happen,” said Nwankwo.

Radical reforms risked alienating those commissioners. The commissioners could not overrule Jega's decisions, but they had formal and informal powers plus access to privileged information they could use to undercut Jega's policies if they felt antagonized by his leadership. Shettima, who served as an informal adviser to Jega, explained: “Jega is a very cautious person, who understands the dynamics of running a very large organization that he inherited and had no time to fundamentally change. . . . He was always very conscious of both his abilities and his limitations, of what he could do without

demoralizing the staff, without rocking the boat, while at the same time realizing his goal of credible elections.”

Jega's decision to avoid making major shifts in INEC personnel was controversial. According to INEC spokesman Idowu, the commission's staffers were “at least 80 to 90% the same” as the ones who had conducted the 2007 elections. To opposition supporters and some civil society leaders, it was naïve to expect those staffers to earn the public's trust. Abubakar Siddique Mohammed, a political scientist who directed the Yusuf Bala Usman Research Centre in Zaria and trained election monitors in northern Nigeria, said that opposition politicians urged Jega to ask that members of the INEC staff be reassigned within the civil service, but Jega refused, arguing they had not been proved guilty of any crimes. “Jega took his team and grafted it onto INEC with its old structure and old staff used to old habits,” Mohammed said. “If you have a [surgical] graft, you have to do something. You have to take antirejection pills. Otherwise, your body will reject it. INEC is extremely corrupt, and Jega refused to see that and try to fight it.”

However, Jega relied on several strategies to manage INEC's staff. First, he set rigorous standards of lawfulness and transparency without reference to the commission's past. Jega explained, “We made it very clear to the staff of INEC that when we came in as a new commission, we were going to do things the right way, as expected of us, to comply fully with the laws and rules and regulations.” Second, he tried to inspire his staff by leading by example, “by being true to our words, by doing what we said.” And third, he introduced what he called “checks and balances.” He said, “We created, I believe, a context for doing things right and for ensuring that there is appropriate reward or punishment depending on how people conduct themselves.” To make these incentives as rational and appealing to staffers as possible, Jega listened to staff concerns, tried to

improve their working conditions, and tried to ensure that their compensation reflected the risks they undertook in a tense environment.

Jega also did not depend exclusively on INEC's staff to deliver credible elections. Rather, he looked to outside organizations to buttress INEC's weak points and compensate for shortages in resources or capabilities. He called on institutions relatively well regarded by the public and to which he had personal ties, including universities, domestic and international civil society organizations, and the National Youth Service Corps, a compulsory service program for college graduates. Personnel from those entities would manage voter registration and balloting, tabulate votes, serve as election monitors, and promote voter education. While informal and ad hoc, such coordinated support programs addressed urgent concerns relevant to the election.

A cadre of leaders in academia and civil society formed the core of that support network. "When Jega was made chairman of INEC, he wanted a few people around him whom he knew, to advise him, as an honorary advising group," said Nwankwo.

Jega recalled: "I had discussions with people who made recommendations, and I looked at their CVs, and I did interviews, and on the basis of that, made a selection. There was no time to advertise. . . . I needed people who were trustworthy, people who were competent and effective and had integrity." He brought six staff into his office for formal roles within the commission, such as Okey Ibeanu and Mohammad Kuna, social science professors who became his chief technical adviser and special assistant, respectively. "Two years down the line, it is clear that these people have added tremendous value in the organization," reflected Jega in 2012. "Obviously initially there were all sorts of suspicions and concerns and worries, but I think over time, people have come to appreciate that these are patriotic Nigerians who are here to

help improve INEC and who have given their best in the process."

Jega also frequently leaned on external advisers, like Nwankwo, Shettima, and Jibrin Ibrahim of the Abuja-based Centre for Democracy and Development. Each adviser brought specialized expertise and personal connections in national or state government. Nwankwo, for example, advised Jega on constitutional issues and legislative drafting.

Beyond this inner circle, Jega reached out to civil society organizations, arguing that laws delineating INEC's roles and responsibilities permitted the commission to coordinate outside support.¹¹ For example, Shettima's MacArthur Foundation office and the United Nations Development Programme funded special assistants to provide administrative and technical support for Jega's office. The former protestors of Enough is Enough embedded within INEC headquarters to manage INEC's online communications. "When Jega was appointed, we saw an opportunity to work with him," Nwankpa said. "We were looking for a partnership with INEC and with other civil society groups, to work together and in the same direction."¹²

Most of the financial support for such programs came from international donor agencies. While the support was not secret, Jega was careful to convey the commission's independence and rarely met privately with foreign agencies. "Even though Jega was reformist and clearly well intended, he was operating in shark-infested waters," said Jans-Peter Dyrbak, a governance adviser with Britain's Department for International Development. "If he started to meet [foreign officials], it could be misconstrued very easily."

At a wider level of support, Jega tapped the youth corps to provide the hundreds of thousands of ad hoc staff necessary to manage voter registration and polling. Likewise, Jega looked to university professors and administrators to handle

vote collation, tabulation, and reporting. This took responsibility for hiring ad hoc personnel out of the hands of state and local INEC offices so as to reduce the opportunity for graft and political favoritism.

At the widest circle of support, Jega tapped the electorate, encouraging all voters to monitor local polls and help safeguard their votes. Nyimbi Odera, Jega's technical adviser, said Jega wanted to "make every person a point of security." Public participation would improve the electoral process and increase voters' stake in it. Voters who felt invested in the process would be more willing to report malfeasance, to accept election results, and to shun violence.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

Preparations for the 2011 elections included passing legislation, managing permanent staff, training temporary staff, conducting voter registration, drafting a code of conduct for political parties, opening communications with civil society and media, designing election-day procedures, coordinating security, and, last, arranging election-day logistics. With time short, movement on all of those fronts proceeded simultaneously from August 2010 to March 2011.

Securing time and resources

INEC needed legislative support to gain the sufficient time, funding, and financial independence needed to manage the election. Although the People's Democratic Party controlled the presidency and the legislature, Jega included all parties in his lobbying to ensure that electoral reform was viewed as a nonpartisan issue with broad backing. In August 2010, he invited to a consultative meeting the leaders of all 63 parties that had qualified for public funds. The meeting was facilitated by the International Republican Institute (IRI), a U.S.-funded democracy-promotion organization. "This event was incredible," said an IRI official who helped

arrange the conference. "The party leaders showed tremendous respect toward Jega. It was during Ramadan"—the Muslim holy month—"and they sat through without taking any breaks. Jega sat patiently and took in all their questions, complaints, and criticisms. Then he responded to them, explaining the commission's position."

Days after the meeting, the National Assembly passed the 2010 Electoral Act, which implemented some of the Electoral Reform Committee's recommendations, such as speeding the resolution of election petitions and increasing the competitiveness of party primaries. Jega's appeal to the party leaders helped persuade legislators to grant INEC financial independence by creating a separate fund to free the commission from having to secure presidential approval of its budgetary requests. The legislature also agreed to release the commission's funds early, in a lump sum, to give the commission budgetary flexibility and greater negotiating leverage with vendors. The legislature granted INEC an operating budget of 87.7 billion nairas (\$550 million), which was close to Jega's request and 65% more than its 2007 budget of 54.5 billion nairas (\$342 million).

Jonathan endorsed Jega's proposals in order to bolster his own reformist credentials, and the president's backing helped speed approval by the legislature dominated by his party, the PDP. "Jega was the biggest image maker for the Jonathan administration," said Shettima, "so they were willing to give him all the support he needed to do his work. They realized it was in their own interest." PDP support for fair elections helped armor the party against the opposition's anti-corruption message, thereby limiting the CPC's efforts to build its popularity outside its northern base. Thus, Jonathan gained politically by backing Jega even when he disagreed with him. "INEC made many decisions that PDP was not happy about," Shettima said. "But the president never spoke against those decisions. He left it to the PDP as a party to speak against them." Likewise,

Jega kept the ruling party at arm's length, striving to appear nonpartisan.

Jega needed unified support to postpone the election. At the party conference, he had told party leaders that without more time, he could not deliver credible elections. "He used the event to really push forward for an extension on the election timeline," said the IRI official. While not politically controversial, the extension required the National Assembly to pass Nigeria's first constitutional amendment under civilian rule. An initial constitutional amendment promoting electoral reforms had passed in June 2010 but had been invalidated by a court in November after a controversy over the president's role in the process. In August, the legislature amended the 2010 Electoral Act to include electoral reforms and a more flexible election schedule, but some of its provisions came under fire and deliberations continued. Finally, in late December, two new constitutional amendments and two amendments to the 2010 Electoral Act passed in the National Assembly.

The president signed the amendments in early January 2011. The new legislation required the electoral commission to prepare a voter registry by March and hold elections by April. The three-month postponement pushed elections close to May 27, when newly elected officials would take office, leaving little room for error.

Although the commission achieved its legislative goals, the process was lengthy, convoluted, and distracting. Nwankwo conceded: "The preparations were rushed, and we didn't get the electoral acts passed until late 2010. Even then, there were amendments made right until close to the elections."

Some saw other motives behind the legislative tangle. "The National Assembly capitalized on the need for a new electoral law to insert many clauses that Jega did not ask for," said Mohammed, director of the Usman Research Centre. With several versions of draft legislation

circulating, it was at times difficult for Jega and his civil society supporters to pin down desired reforms. Initial legislation contained controversial provisions INEC disagreed with, such as one allowing parties to replace candidates even after the vote count had concluded. Even though the final legislation avoided such egregious loopholes, the law failed to include the Electoral Reform Committee's more contentious recommendations, including depoliticizing the appointment of election commissioners.

Enforcing transparency and accountability

To raise standards of integrity and performance among INEC staffers, Jega emphasized transparency, leading by example, and checks and balances.

To be transparent, Jega insisted that INEC publicly communicate its decisions and welcome outside criticism and contributions. INEC spokesman Idowu said: "Jega made one thing clear: that we would not be on the defensive. . . . We are going to do things openly and transparently. If we do things wrong, we will be sincerely wrong and we will not defend it." Emblematic of such openness was Jega's July hire of Idowu, a journalist whom he did not know personally but who described himself as "among the army of critics" of INEC. Idowu helped upgrade INEC's media center and ensure frequent press access. For the first time, INEC published online its procurement contracts, bidding processes, and other internal records.

The principle of transparency extended to the top. Jega strictly adhered to internal rules and refused to shift blame for mistakes. "Jega would not pass the buck," Idowu noted. Jega worked to win over skeptical staffers by holding frequent staff meetings to solicit input, encourage initiative, and resolve disagreements in the open.

Informed by staff feedback, Jega used what he called a *carrot-and-stick* approach to keep staffers in line. As positive incentives, Jega

refurbished and expanded office spaces, introduced insurance plans that included both permanent and temporary staff, and persuaded the National Assembly to pay hazard allowances to field staffers exposed to security risks. “With regard to punishment, obviously we try to be very strict in terms of compliance with rules and regulations, but we subject everything to due process,” Jega said. “There is no arbitrariness. We don’t just fire people. We take them through the process. They have the opportunity to defend themselves. But once it is established and there is evidence that somebody has done something wrong, we do not hesitate at all in taking the appropriate sanctions that are permissible under the rules and regulations.”

With that mix of incentives, Jega found that most of his staff met the high expectations he set. “Even though there were some bad eggs that had given INEC a bad name,” he said, “the majority of the people are honest people, hardworking people, trying to do a very difficult job; and all they needed was adequate motivation and direction and support.” Jega also credited his fellow electoral commissioners for working “very, very closely with me to be able to give that leadership to the staff.”

Hiring ad hoc staff

Like most electoral bodies, INEC relied on an army of temporary workers for both registration and balloting. In the past, state INEC offices had generally hired local teachers and low-level public servants through an opaque and ad hoc process vulnerable to corruption and political influence. Jega replaced such workers with members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), professors, and university administrators. While not immune to corruption, such individuals were publicly perceived as less tied to local politics, more independent from state INEC staff, and generally better educated.

To staff Nigeria’s 120,000 polling places, Jega turned to the NYSC, a compulsory national service program for college graduates aged 30 and under. Established in 1973 to promote national unity and development after the 1967–70 civil war (Nigerian-Biafran War), NYSC members worked for one year in schools, hospitals, and public projects outside their home states. In a 2008 by-election in the state of Kogi, the electoral commission had successfully deployed corps members as poll workers; and the Electoral Reform Committee urged INEC to use them more widely. Jega had served on the NYSC’s governing board and knew its potential. Serving outside their home states, corps members became removed from local politics. They had a reputation for patriotism and professionalism and could project an image of competence and change at the polls. As explained by Mary Danabia, an NYSC deputy director who managed the corps’s electoral work: “The corps members would not be lobbied, because they didn’t know anybody. They would just go in, provide their service, and get out.”

The nationwide deployment of approximately 240,000 NYSC members—two per polling place—was a massive undertaking. To guide the process, the leaderships of the electoral commission and the NYSC negotiated a memorandum of understanding at an IRI-supported workshop in November 2010. INEC assumed responsibility for logistics, equipment, and safety; and the NYSC managed its members. The commission paid corps members for their service and financed their training, housing, and transportation. (The commission’s hard-won fixed budget facilitated such expenditures.)

The two sides set up a bilateral committee to implement the agreement. They ran a seminar to educate high-level NYSC leaders about conducting mass trainings in every state. Training sessions in December covered voter registration,

and a second round in March covered elections, finishing only days before the first scheduled vote. The electoral commission drafted and printed codes of conduct, handbooks, and guidelines for corps members, assisted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). “We worked on their conscience and their minds to push them to do their best. And the trainings developed useful skills,” said Danabia. While their participation disenfranchised the youth corps members, because they could not vote while manning polls and because the law did not provide for absentee voting, Danabia believed the youth corps members were proud of their frontline roles in the democratic process.

To tabulate and report votes, Jega tapped local universities. He recruited university vice chancellors to serve as high-level returning officers who would collate and announce results, as well as professors and lecturers for lower-level positions. INEC established liaison with universities to find volunteers whom they trained and paid for their service. “I wanted to give my contribution to the democratic process,” said Abdullahi Zainawa, a lecturer at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, who served as a ward collation officer in Kaduna State. “In almost all the states, the returning officers and collation officers were recruited from universities, because the INEC chairman said it would help credibility of the elections.” Relatively well paid and secure in their jobs, the university officials and professors were publicly perceived as less susceptible to political patronage.

Initially, many INEC employees were wary of such outsiders and viewed the latter’s deployment as a signal of distrust. In discussing cooperation between the NYSC and INEC, Danabia said: “At the headquarters level, it was very smooth; but we met challenges at the state level. Eventually, they came to understand we were helping them out.” The corps members and professors were dependable and professional, which eased the burden on local INEC staff.

In addition, according to Shettima, Jega assuaged staff concerns by “selling the outside assistance not as a punitive measure against those who are already there but as a way of protecting them from being vilified and abused by the Nigerian public.” High-visibility outside help was ultimately intended to aid local staff by reducing both the incidence and the perception of corruption.

Building a new voter registry

Voter registration posed an early test for both INEC and youth corps members. “For Nigerians,” Shettima said, “the litmus test for the election was to change the voter registry.”

The registry used in 2007 had been riddled with flaws. Entries included Hollywood actors and fictional characters. Many eligible voters were not on the list because they had not registered before or their previous registrations had been mishandled. In July 2010, just after he took office, Jega publicly committed INEC to build a new voter registry from scratch—against the advice of those who said the effort was impractical and favored the subcontracting of voter registration to firms with relevant expertise.

The legislative postponement of elections from January to April gave the commission about three additional months to overcome the technical and logistical hurdles of voter registration. In what technical adviser Odero described as “one of the largest IT [information technology] projects Africa has undertaken,” the commission designed hardware and software for a direct-data-capture machine that recorded voter information electronically, including photographs and fingerprints. Volunteer programmers created their own open-source software and engineered hardware solutions to meet local needs and keep costs down. INEC acquired 132,000 such machines and deployed them to all polling places nationwide. NYSC members stationed at those nationwide polling places used the machines to

register 73 million voters from 15 January to 9 February 2011. (For a deeper look at how INEC managed voter registration, see Innovations for Successful Societies case study *Rebooting the System: Technological Reforms in Nigerian Elections, 2010-2011.*)

Besides creating a credible voter registry and building voter confidence, the voter registration exercise revealed bottlenecks with the potential to hamper election-day logistics. One major problem arose in the distribution of polling places, each of which was intended to serve a population of 500. The allocation had been based on a contested political delineation exercise in 2006, already obsolete in the fast-growing country. A new reallocation of polling places could be divisive in a country in which both Muslims and Christians claimed a popular majority. Sidestepping that issue, INEC opened subunits within overcrowded polling places, leaving the overall structure of wards and polling places intact. The new subunits were identical to other polling places, but their votes would be collated and tabulated together rather than separately. That work-around enabled the commission to avoid legislative changes.

Another problem the registration process revealed was the difficulty of coordinating the delivery of updated materials to remote areas. Learning from experience, the NYSC decided that in order to facilitate both security arrangements and the distribution of balloting materials for the actual elections, youth corps members would sleep overnight in the local government centers where vote tabulation took place. Those centers, mostly schools and INEC offices, were usually close to polling places, although some were still hours away.

Bringing the parties together

Earning the trust of the 63 registered political parties was essential to the fairness and safety of the elections. Even though party leaders routinely disclaimed responsibility for past

violence by their supporters, many used rhetoric that tacitly encouraged violence. Carl Dundas, a Jamaica-born elections expert with more than a decade of experience in working on Nigerian elections, called such rhetoric “widespread and vicious.” The electoral commission had to contain such behavior without undermining freedoms of speech and assembly.

Because INEC was a frequent scapegoat for partisan frustrations, the commission had often taken a defensive or skeptical posture toward the parties. Jega reversed course and opened frequent and direct communications with the parties, inspired by the experiences of other countries such as Ghana. Meetings with parties started with the August party retreat, continued with consultative meetings across the country, and then folded naturally into the Inter-Parties Advisory Committee (IPAC), a preexisting but underused forum for party relations with INEC. “IPAC was placed on an improved footing at the retreat,” Dundas said.

Jega used IPAC to seek party input on major reforms before the reforms became public, including electronic voter registration and the modified open-secret-ballot system. “That input has always been very, very useful,” Jega said. “It helps to overcome rumors and suspicions and fears and to assure political parties of our neutrality and . . . get their buy-in into some of the reform processes we have introduced.” In airing party concerns early and providing a channel for Jega to explain his policies and respond to concerns, IPAC helped move partisan disputes from the media to the conference room, cooling tensions.

Months of IPAC meetings built enough rapport between the parties and the commission to attempt a more ambitious reform: the creation of a meaningful party code of conduct. In 2003, opposition parties had rejected such a code, believing the PDP would not abide by its terms. In 2007, all major parties had agreed to a code, but it “had a number of gaps,” according to

Dundas, its primary drafter. In February 2011, after voter registration ended, the parties met with INEC leaders at a two-day retreat to improve the code.

The resulting code was stronger and more specific than its predecessor, although it still lacked enforcement provisions. The agreement obliged parties to avoid hate speech, to communicate respect for the electoral commission, and to refrain from releasing unofficial vote counts. Parties committed to accept the election results and to take any complaints to the courts. They agreed to involve more women and youth in political activities, and they agreed that incumbents shouldn't use state resources for their reelection campaigns.

In mid-March, two weeks before the first scheduled election, the parties met to sign the final document. Initially, the PDP (and 13 minor parties) balked, pointedly walking out of the meeting. The PDP argued the code was biased against incumbents and redundant with existing electoral laws and the internal rules of its party constitution. The parties lashed out at Jega in the media, but he calmly worked behind the scenes to restore PDP support. Days later, the PDP signed the document—under intense media, civil society, and international pressure. Eventually, nearly all parties acquiesced, surpassing the three-quarters majority the code required.

Deepening ties with civil society groups

With so many civil society groups participating in electoral preparations, Clement Nwankwo's Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre dedicated a civil society situation room to share election information and coordinate activities. Conceived in conversations with Dyrbak in June 2010, the situation room began small, with "election hot-spot analyses, brown bag lunches, anything that could bring groups together," in Dyrbak's words. Dyrbak stressed the importance of sidestepping the disputes that had divided

Nigerian civil society so the group could find the core of "indisputable common interest." By November, a civil society meeting group had begun to take shape.

By mid-January, when voter registration began, the situation room took physical form in PLAC's offices. A core of five or six stalwarts of civil society—including Nwankwo, Shettima, Ibrahim of the Centre for Democracy and Development, and Dayo Olaide of the Open Society Institute of West Africa—served as informal-discussion leaders. These individuals gave the situation room behind-the-scenes influence given their public reputations, grasp of Nigerian law and politics, and personal relationships with Jega and international agencies.

At any given time, representatives from 10 to 30 civil society groups worked in the situation room. "We had regular meetings with different actors, public events with the heads of security forces, the head of NYSC, etc.," Nwankwo said.

Leaders from INEC often took part, as did journalists. "The openness played to their benefit," said Dyrbak, and attracted reporters from the British Broadcasting Corporation and Al Jazeera.

Besides coordinating activities, the situation room gave Nigerian civil society a single strong voice. The group maintained a blog and issued joint press statements. The situation room publicly criticized leading politicians, judges, and security officials, as well as INEC itself.

The situation room funneled civil society concerns straight to Jega's ear, as Nwankwo and other core members were in Jega's inner circle of advisers. "We started the situation room because Professor Jega needed input from civil society so that he could get a real feel for what the situation is on the ground and know what Nigerians think," Nwankwo said. Jega attended many meetings to update civil society partners on election preparations. "He was quite open to these interactions," Nwankwo said. For example, after the national security adviser questioned the right

of voters to linger at polling stations and document the vote count with their mobile phones, the situation room publicly challenged that adviser and set up a meeting with Jega to affirm that the national security adviser “didn’t have any role in the election beyond what INEC had assigned to it,” Nwankwo said. When logistical lapses and security threats emerged in April, the civil society situation room provided Jega with critical advice.

Coordinating security

A nonprofit alliance, the National Association for Peaceful Elections in Nigeria, continually monitored each state for early symptoms of electoral violence. In an influential report published in January 2011, the group predicted a “high risk of electoral violence” in 17 of 36 states.¹³ The potential for violence nationwide demanded a strong and fluid security response.

In January 2011, Jega established the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security as a forum for regular meetings between the electoral commission and all security agencies, ranging from the armed forces to the police, to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency. In the past, interagency security coordination had been irregular and mostly bilateral. Such an ad hoc approach hampered collaboration on intelligence, contingency planning, and crisis response. A consultative committee would lead to a more united response. “INEC and all the agencies came together and mapped out how to deal with security situations,” Shettima said.

Initially, some security agencies saw the process as an intrusion on their independent authority, but the efficiency gains of coordination soon became apparent. “The security agencies saw that it worked,” said Idowu. “In the past, security agencies sometimes worked at cross-purposes, with some rivalry between them, because there

were no defined roles. The agencies saw that this made them more effective. They warmed up to it.” The committee proved so useful that the agencies continued it even after the elections.

The security committee enabled security agencies to share resources in unprecedented ways. For example, INEC initially wanted each polling place to be manned by three security personnel, on average, a figure that would outstrip police capabilities. Pooling resources, the security agencies were able to man each polling place with an average of two personnel. “Normally, the worry is that a visible security presence may be disruptive in an electoral process,” said Jega. “In Nigeria, we found that a visible security presence may actually be reassuring to the electorate and make them comfortable to come out and vote.” Security cooperation also facilitated logistics. The army, navy, and air force cooperated to transport materials and personnel securely to and from remote locations.

To coordinate its crisis response, the electoral commission created its own situation room in the weeks leading up to the election. The situation room was open to media and civil society observers, and youth volunteers from Enough is Enough were on hand to communicate decisions instantaneously through social media outlets and mobile phones. Civil society also had a preventive security role, as exemplified by March violence mitigation workshops held in northern Nigeria by nonprofit West Africa Network for Peacebuilding.

While less violent than previous campaign seasons, the first months of 2011 brought isolated attacks that tested security measures, including bombings of campaign rallies, raids on police posts storing ballots, and candidate assassinations. On April 8, the eve of the first election, a bomb exploded in an INEC office in Suleja, an hour north of Abuja, killing at least six people, including one youth corps member. Jega

immediately flew to Suleja and held a press conference to reassure the public that the commission was committed to ensuring corps members' safety. "When things go wrong like that, the commission had to show itself as a responsible partner," said Idowu. The commission worked with security agencies to increase election-day security, but the bombing shattered any illusion of electoral peace.

Enlisting voters as monitors

For election-day procedures, the electoral commission modified the open-secret-ballot system INEC had used in the 1993 presidential election, during which voting and accreditation were made all-day affairs to discourage multiple voting. The system also turned voters into poll monitors by permitting them to observe vote counting and tabulation at their polling places.

"The persistent problems . . . which bedeviled previous elections were that people were moving from one polling unit to another [when] voting," Jega said. "We felt that we have to minimize the possibility of people moving around our polling units."

The modified open-secret-ballot system kept voting as an all-day activity but separated the accreditation and voting processes. At 8 a.m., the polls opened for mandatory voter accreditation. Poll workers dyed accredited voters' left cuticles with indelible ink. At noon, accreditation ended, polling staff explained the voting process, and voters assembled into queues. At 12:30 p.m., poll staffers counted the queues and officially closed them. Anyone not waiting in a queue at that point forfeited the right to vote. When voters received their ballots, their right cuticles were marked with indelible ink. After turning in their completed ballots, voters were permitted to join other

observers at a distance of 30 meters outside the polling place.

After all voters had cast ballots, poll workers welcomed citizens closer to watch the vote count. Returning officers then publicly posted results. Jega said, "It enabled people to be present and to see the result in their own polling unit and added credibility to the process." INEC even invited citizens to photograph results sheets and send the pictures to INEC electronically. INEC hoped to use the pictures to compile a parallel vote count, but that effort proved impractical.

The ballot boxes and results sheets were picked up by ward collation officers, who delivered them to local government officers at the INEC local government collation center. Security escorts traveled with the collation officers when necessary. Again, citizens were encouraged to observe. At the local government collation center, officers tabulated the results from the local wards and submitted the totals to the returning officer, who submitted them by telephone to the state INEC office. Official election monitors were allowed inside some of the centers to observe the collation process, although ordinary citizens were barred for security reasons. By this point, early in the morning after election day, Jega broadcast the national collation process on television and personally announced the final results. "INEC designed the system well to ensure that the books balanced—like an accountant's," Mohammed said. "It took time, but people were patient."

This system took advantage of high voter motivation to turn ordinary voters into agents against fraud. "Previous experience showed that when people cast their ballot and leave, a lot of doctoring happens at the level of collation and transmission of results," said Jide Ojo, an IFES program manager who trained INEC staff in the

new system. “Civil society believed that if people were encouraged to stay and police their votes, it would help ensure transparency.”

In the weeks leading up to the election, Jega publicly clashed with the national security adviser and the inspector general of police, who worried that allowing voters to use cameras and mobile phones at polling places would compromise the anonymity of the process and inflame violence. Not only did Jega allow voters to carry phones, but he also actively encouraged them to photograph the counting process and the final results sheets, to circulate the photos online, and to send them to the commission to help detect fraud. Civil society groups sided strongly with Jega and worked to educate voters to monitor the polls. Without legal basis to override the electoral commission on this issue, the security chiefs backed down.

Parties and civil society groups, too, organized formal vote monitoring efforts. The Nigerian Bar Association teamed up with the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria and other nonprofits to form Project Swiftcount, a nationwide voter protection and election observation effort that conducted a parallel electoral count on a globally unprecedented scale to detect fraud.

INEC also introduced several technical counterfraud measures. Each ballot box was transparent, tamper resistant, and marked with a unique serial number. Ballot papers had been printed abroad to limit supply, marked with serial numbers, and, for the first time, color coded by state. State-designated ballots prevented interstate ballot smuggling. The commission worked with the Federal Road Safety Commission to track the trucks that transported ballot materials so it could detect any unauthorized diversion or detainment. To remove logistical choke points that also created opportunities for fraud, INEC decentralized the distribution process for ballot

materials from local headquarters to wards. INEC planned to distribute nonsensitive materials directly to wards a week before balloting; and all materials, 24 hours before balloting.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Despite the commission’s careful planning, serious logistical problems emerged early on the first scheduled day of balloting, the legislative election of Saturday, April 2.

In past elections, the commission had contracted the printing of ballot materials to numerous domestic contractors, which often subcontracted the work. This “made the system in the past very vulnerable to abuse,” according to Idowu, because the contracts were difficult to keep track of and party operatives had many ways to get extra ballots. To cut down on ballot fraud, the commission in 2011 directly contracted the printing of ballots to several different foreign suppliers in controlled quantities. The ballot materials were contracted to be delivered shortly before the election, due partly to delay and partly to fears that if they sat long in state INEC offices, they would be vulnerable to tampering.

Although most of the materials arrived on time, there were not enough results sheets. On the eve of the election, the contractor insisted the missing results sheets would arrive within hours and blamed the delay on planes redirected to deliver relief supplies for the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of March 11.¹⁴ The materials did not arrive in Abuja until hours after the polls opened for accreditation on election day. Through the interagency security committee, the military had mobilized to quickly distribute the materials across the country, but it was too late. Poll workers had sent voters home, disappointed and confused. “In the past, the commission would have gone ahead with the elections,” Idowu said. “There were suggestions to ignore the official results sheets and use something else, some

improvised sheets, the security of which could have been easily breached, so we could not have guaranteed the authenticity of the results. The chairman said no. If we pledged we would make this election credible, then we have to do it. There's no point in going ahead. So he came out and told the country, 'We are sorry; we are calling off the elections.'" Hours before voting was set to begin, Jega delayed it indefinitely.

Early-morning field reports of nationwide shortages of election materials, beyond the missing results sheets, reached Jega's ears through the civil society situation room. Jega investigated within INEC and confirmed the lapse. "The Department of Logistics had the rare opportunity to tell the chair the truth: that the materials were not there," said Umar Usman, head of the department. "In the past, the commission had taken decisions without being mindful of the department's concerns. This time around, the chair listened and then consulted the stakeholders."

After a tense midday meeting with President Jonathan and his security advisers, during which the president reportedly rejected Jega's offer of resignation, the commission announced the election would be put off just two days, to Monday.¹⁵ Jega's advisers lobbied him hard to postpone the elections further. "If we didn't go to him then, he would have postponed the elections only by a few hours, which would have been a disaster," Nwankwo said. On Sunday, the commission pushed the elections back a full week to Saturday, April 9. Both the presidential and gubernatorial elections were pushed back a week as well.

"Rescheduling the election once it had started was one of the most difficult decisions I've ever had to make," Jega reflected in a November 2012 speech. "We hope that we will never have to make that kind of decision ever again."¹⁶

Jega took public responsibility for the delay, a move that Nwankwo called "an act of courage."

However, Nwankwo blamed INEC's procurement office, above all, for the lapse.

The last-minute delay in elections made international headlines and led to public calls for Jega's resignation. For example, Roland Ewubare, executive secretary of Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission, demanded that Jega "step down immediately in the national interest," saying that Jega had "created a national fiasco of monumental significance."¹⁷ CPC presidential candidate Buhari accused the PDP of maneuvering to exploit the crisis to replace Jega with a more pliant commissioner. Conspiracy rumors circulated.

"That week was very tense," Dyrbak said. Fortunately, he added, "there were enough voices out there able to calm down the hotheads."

With an extra week to prepare, the commission redoubled its efforts. The April 9 election went smoothly. No major logistical problems were reported, security problems were few, and the results were announced promptly. National euphoria over the success of the election quickly eased tensions. "I think it was worth the postponement, because at the end of the day we had all the materials on time and the election was conducted without much rancor," Usman said.

Nevertheless, the commission's credibility suffered. "To me the delays are a great howler," said Dundas. "When you can't start an election on time, that is telling you of a weakness that needs to be examined and remedied so that it will never, never happen again."

Exactly a week after the legislative election, balloting ran smoothly for Nigeria's presidential election. However, hours after the polls closed, tensions began to rise, especially in the north, where modest legislative gains had buoyed CPC supporters. Abdullahi Zainawa, a ward collation officer in Kaduna, explained, "The voters had many suspicions that the votes would be tampered with, and the police had to provide very tight security because of threats." Before dawn, as

rumors spread that Jonathan would win, violent riots broke out in several northern states, particularly Kaduna and Bauchi. All major party leaders and candidates condemned the violence and agreed to respect the code of conduct and pursue fraud claims in court. But the violence had complex roots, and the parties claimed they had little ability to halt it.

In most states, like Bauchi, the clashes were mostly political, between PDP supporters and CPC supporters. In Kaduna, a religiously divided northern state, the riots began within the Muslim community. CPC-supporting youths targeted the property of PDP-aligned political and religious elites, whom they accused of corruption and fraud, including Vice President Mohammed Sambo and the Emir of Zazzau, a traditionally revered religious authority. The riots forced traditional mediators, like the emir, to flee. Rumors of clashes between Muslims and Christians sparked interethnic massacres. Neighborhoods were wiped out, mosques and churches razed. Mohammed, director of the Usman Research Centre, said he believed that political operatives had paid agitators to inflame the initial targeted riots, to obscure political grievances, and justify crackdowns. “It was a class war that was deliberately transformed into ethnoreligious conflict afterward,” he said, “Various factions of the government used money to turn the situation into the north against the south.”

Muslim refugees at a Kaduna camp for internally displaced persons reported that their Christian neighbors had made coordinated and premeditated attacks that killed hundreds. Their assailants justified the raid as revenge for a 2002 anti-Christian riot, but interviewees said they believed the attacks were intended to clear Muslims from southern Kaduna to form a breakaway state.¹⁸

Security forces were delayed by militant roadblocks and, according to some reports, the slow actions of state leaders, but within days,

military patrols had suppressed the violence and enforced 24-hour curfews in Kaduna and Bauchi and a few other northern states. Over 800 people were estimated to have died,¹⁹ although further investigations revealed casualties possibly numbering in the thousands. The Red Cross declared that 74,000 people became internally displaced.²⁰ At least a dozen youth corps members were killed.

Through the interagency security committee, the electoral commission and security agencies coordinated a rapid response to the violence. The gubernatorial elections scheduled to take place a week after the presidential polls proceeded mostly on schedule. INEC pulled NYSC members out of hot spots, and security increased nationwide, including in the south to prevent anti-Muslim retributive violence. Jega communicated candidly to the nation about the crisis as it unfolded, and he explained countermeasures. Such candor helped INEC and the security agencies avoid the media’s heavy criticisms they had received during previous outbreaks of electoral violence.

For longer-term policy responses, Jonathan appointed a Presidential Investigation Panel on Post-Election Violence led by Sheikh Lemu, a northern Muslim scholar. The federal and state governments compensated families of NYSC casualties with money and scholarships.

ASSESSING RESULTS

Approximately 73 million voters registered for Nigeria’s 2011 elections. In the presidential election—the high-water mark of voter participation—38.2 million valid votes were cast, representing 54% of eligible voters. The validity rate was 96.8%. One sign of improvement was a 50% drop in petitions challenging election results—to 733 from 1,475 in 2007—despite the increase in the number of parties and the greater number of competitive elections. Another sign of improvement was that INEC was able to declare all election results within 48 hours, whereas in

previous contests, results had sometimes been delayed by many days.

International observers were quick to certify the elections as free and fair. The final report by the European Union Election Observation Mission, for example, said, “In the face of stringent time constraints, hampering logistical and operational challenges, and various adversities, INEC nevertheless managed to organize the 2011 elections, guaranteeing overall effective exercise of voting rights to Nigerian citizens.”

Others disputed that conclusion. Mohammed, who had trained election observers in Kaduna state and collected many reports of fraud and abuse, said: “It was shocking to me that the observers gave the election a blanket seal of approval.” Although he did not dispute the results, Mohammed said, “We observed irregularities, and to say it is free and fair is rubbish.” He argued that international observers had downplayed problems as a way to highlight Nigeria’s relative success in comparison with previous elections in the country.

Those involved with implementing the elections were cautiously optimistic. Dundas, who became Nigeria’s country director of IFES after the elections, said: “Lots of technical issues need to be cleaned up, but the election was several notches up on the scale of credible elections. A lot of that was due to the chairman and his commitment to running credible elections largely in line with best election practices.”

Idowu of INEC said: “The elections were not perfect. They were not a benchmark but a starting point. The country hit the nadir in 2007, so you have to get up to this point as a springboard for future improvement.”

The modified open-secret-ballot system—unique to Nigeria—was mostly a success. Jega said: “It has helped us deal with our problems. . . . A few people are saying it is too cumbersome, it is time-consuming, but nobody doubts the fact that

it is credible and it ensures that the results are transparent and credible.” Furthermore, initial concerns that the time-intensive process would anger Nigerians proved overblown. “People actually turned it into a festive occasion,” Jega said.

Yet some critics observed that the open-secret-ballot system was not always strictly enforced. Ojo of IFES, who observed voting in multiple polling places, said: “Some officials allowed people to vote hours after the queues were supposed to be closed if counting hadn’t started. This opened up opportunities for fraud and multiple voting.” Ojo said he felt that separating accreditation from balloting—having voters register in the morning and vote in the afternoon—confused and discouraged voters. “You had a lot of people who registered but never came back for balloting, particularly in rural communities,” he said. “In farming season, rural people cannot spend the whole day in an election.”

The impact of the party code of conduct was hard to gauge. Although party leaders adhered to it publicly, their followers often did not. “Unfortunately, the parties are not terribly disciplined,” Dundas said. “Their members didn’t really subscribe to the spirit of the code.”

Dyrbak of DFID said the code’s impact was small but still tangible. “It played a role, at least when the parties were in front of each other,” he said. “If it made a 1 or 2% contribution to reducing violence, then it still made a difference.”

The 2011 elections boosted the credibility of INEC domestically and internationally.

By maintaining open communications and engaging the electorate in securing the balloting process, the commission earned both the goodwill of the public and understanding over its missteps despite initial high expectations. Jega held on to his chairmanship, which was set to expire after the 2015 elections, as calls for his termination subsided.

However, distrust lingered in the north over allegations of ballot fraud, election-related violence, and the resultant security crackdown. Many northerners blamed Jega for those problems, passing along insulting parody songs about him over mobile phones and nicknaming an annual eye infection outbreak after him. Nigeria's deepening north-south rift remained a threat to future elections. However, INEC's capacity to respond to such broader, systemic causes was limited. "It's a big menace that the political elites are still not willing to accept the outcome of the elections, but that's not the fault of the commission," said Ojo.

A related issue that overwhelmed INEC's capabilities was the prosecution of electoral offenders. INEC prosecuted over 200 offenders after the 2011 elections, far more than had been prosecuted in previous elections but still, Jega said in a November 2012 speech, "a drop in the ocean if you consider the number of offenders."²¹ In the voter registration process alone, INEC found 870,000 likely instances of fraud, far outstripping the capacity of INEC's small legal team. Jega suggested an alternative means to judge and penalize offenders, such as a specialized tribunal.

The PDP suffered losses nationwide but kept its parliamentary majority. Jonathan won 58.89% of the popular vote and 23 of 36 states as well as Abuja. While the opposition CPC proved unable to expand his northern base of support, the PDP's lock on power weakened, along with its party discipline, loosening its political dominance.

REFLECTIONS

Despite the overall success of the 2011 elections, serious logistical problems and evidence of some local-level fraud showed the risks of Attahiru Jega's strategic decision to leave most of the Independent National Electoral Commission's staff intact and postpone structural reforms until after the vote. Some observers, especially in the north, criticized Jega for being overly timid and

wasting an opportunity for deeper change. Abubakar Siddique Mohammed said Jega should have pushed for more-ambitious reforms—including depoliticization of the selection of electoral commissioners and state INEC leaders—by publicly challenging the government either in court or in the court of public opinion. Even if such a challenge had provoked a constitutional crisis, said Mohammed, "The National Assembly would have been running for dear life. Jega would have put them on the spot. He could have used that crisis to move the situation forward." In contrast, Jega took a less risky, more conciliatory approach, aiming to build trust and consensus among INEC personnel, politicians, and the public as a base for future reforms.

Not all of the innovations introduced in Nigeria's 2011 elections would necessarily fit well in other contexts. For example, voters in other countries could reject the time commitment required by the modified open-secret-ballot system. Jega said: "It is inconveniencing to many, particularly elite voters, . . . but we said it is a price that has to be paid for an improved electoral system." INEC's reliance on outside institutions such as the national youth service corps, universities, and civil society could also apply poorly to other contexts. However, Jega had strong faith in the importance of international knowledge-sharing, hosting in Nigeria a March 2012 conference of 25 African election management bodies. "Certainly there is a lot to learn from one another and to adapt or adopt in improving our processes," he said.

Civil society leaders, journalists, and officials nationwide saw civic education as the ultimate response to electoral corruption and violence. "What we need is *civic* education more than *voter* education," said Kole Shettima, director of the MacArthur Foundation Africa office.

"We assume citizens know what to do in building a good democracy," said Amara Nwankpa of Enough is Enough. "Citizens don't,

especially when they have never experienced a good democracy before.” Two years after he organized protest marches, Nwankpa worked to engage Nigeria’s youth in civic affairs for greater impact.

In the short term, those involved in the elections saw lessons for preventing future violence. “If better intelligence-gathering capabilities were put in place, possibly they’d be able to preempt this violence,” said Jide Ojo of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

Mary Danabia of the National Youth Service Corps conceded, “We put in a lot of thought to security *before* and *during* the elections, but not enough thought to *after* the elections.” Despite its casualties, the corps’s involvement in the elections was generally acclaimed. The corps planned to reprise its role in future elections, with more-careful security preparations.

INEC spokesman Kayode Idowu said the challenges ahead for the commission included instilling a culture of reform and integrity independent of Jega’s leadership. “All the efforts of the commission now are oriented toward conserving the modest gains of the April elections and making sure that subsequent elections are way better than in the past,” he said. “Toward that end, the commission has tried to institutionalize best practices in the operations of INEC so that credible elections are not linked to individual

personalities, but become a norm.” Within months of the conclusion of the 2011 elections, INEC had begun pursuing further reforms such as streamlining operations through internal reorganization, implementing a system of continuous voter registration, developing an absentee-voting system, and promoting new legal mechanisms for punishment of electoral offenders.

Jega saw engagement as key to consolidating INEC’s progress and moving forward: “We need to engage the political parties more, to have more dialogue, more meetings, keep building trust and confidence. We need to engage civil society organizations more. We need to engage the legislators more—both for continuous change to the legal framework and for funding [for] all those things that we really need to do.”

Still, Jega stressed the progress Nigeria had made. In a July 2012 lecture in London, he said: “Things have been so bad for so long and Nigerians are so anxious to have a totally reformed process, that we . . . tend to throw away the baby with the bathwater. The remarkable improvements that have been recorded in the 2011 elections, compared with the past, have not satisfied Nigerians’ expectations of a perfect electoral system. And I think to some extent, that explains what we saw in the postelection violence. But . . . it is for us to keep on improving and raising the bar rather than allow it to go down.”²²

Endnotes

¹ In 2011, approximately 70% of Nigerians were younger than 30 years of age, according to the United States Census Bureau International Data Base, <http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/country.php>. Nigeria’s population at the time of the 2011 election was widely reported as 155 million, but estimates released by Nigeria’s National Population Commission in October 2011 showed the population had reached 167.9 million. *Damilola Oyedele, “Nigeria: Population Now 168 Million, Hits 221 Million in 2020,” This Day, 27 October 2011, http://allafrica.com/stories/201110271089.html.*

² Quoted in Funmi Komolafe, “Attahiru Jega, the new INEC Chairman (Profile),” *Vanguard*, 9 June 2010, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/06/attahiru-jega-the-new-inec-chairman/>.

- ³ Nigeria Final Report of the European Union Election Observation Mission, General Elections April 2011, <http://www.eucom.eu/nigeria2011/home>.
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- ⁶ Will Connors, “Delta Farce: Nigeria’s Oil Mess,” *Wall Street Journal*, 21 September 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125331370878424233.html>.
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- ⁸ See, e.g., Chuks Okocha, “Nigeria: 200 Staff Involved in Electoral Bribery Scandal, Not 31, Say Suspects,” *This Day*, 10 May 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200905110522.html>.
- ⁹ “Nigerians Welcome Sacking of Election Head Maurice Iwu,” BBC News, 29 April 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8650764.stm>.
- ¹⁰ “INEC and Its New Chairman,” Editorial opinion, the *Guardian*, 2 June 2010.
- ¹¹ For example, Section (F) of Part I of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution empowers INEC to “organise, undertake and supervise all elections” and “arrange and conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote.” INEC argued that the terms *organize*, *supervise*, and *arrange* implied that INEC could use outside personnel to exercise its powers.
- ¹² For more information on the pioneering use of social media in Nigeria’s election, see case study by Innovations for Successful Societies “Rebooting the System: Technological Reforms in Nigerian Elections, 2010–2011.”
- ¹³ Chika Charles Aniekwe and Joshua Kushie, “Electoral Violence Situational Analysis: Identifying Hot-Spots in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria,” National Association for Peaceful Elections in Nigeria, January 2011.
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