

Klaus Pähler: Nigeria Stumbles on the Rocky Road to Democracy

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, the president (head of state and head of government at the same time), the vice president, the federal and state parliaments, and the governors of the 36 federal states have been elected.

Domestic and foreign observers agree that the elections were full of flaws and did not meet international or even Nigerian standards. Instead, they were marred by fraud, violence, and countless other irregularities caused by incompetence, and in some places, people were even prevented from casting their votes. In fact, this was to be expected.

Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar' Adua, the Governor of Katsina State in Nigeria's Islamic north, will be the next president; he won 24.6 million votes. Goodluck Jonathan, the Governor of Bayelsa State, which is situated in the oil-rich Niger Delta where acts of violence occur on a regular basis, will become his vice president. It is hoped that he will be able to ease the problems in the Delta.

Muhammadu Buhari, the country's former military ruler and ANPP candidate, came in second, and Atiku Abubakar, the current vice president and candidate of the AC, came in third. They obtained 6.2 and 2.6% of the 36 million votes, respectively. Given that 60 million of the 140 million people living in Nigeria were entitled to vote, the election turnout was somewhat less than 60%.

It is generally known that the country is facing numerous problems which are partly due to its history and partly to decades of bad governance. Although the electoral process is open to criticism, Nigeria will be able to live with its result. The president elect now has an opportunity to push ahead economic reforms as well as the fight against corruption, and he intends to use it. He is not prone to radicalisation or dictatorial behaviour, nor is he considered corrupt – which is very rare among Nigerian politicians.

That elections were held at all, that there will be a presumably orderly transition from one elected civilian government to another civilian government, however elected, and that neither a state of emergency was proclaimed nor the country overrun by a wave of violence are small but positive signs that – though stumbling – the black giant is moving in the right direction.