

## **ABSTRACT**

### **TAKING BACK OUR DEMOCRACY? THE TRIALS AND TRAVAILS OF NIGERIAN ELECTIONS SINCE 1999**

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This paper raises critical questions about the nature and depth of democracy in Nigeria (Africa's most populous country) by interrogating the post-1999 elections. It also explores the challenges posed to democracy in Nigeria by the subversion of elections by a dominant political class, but often in the face of struggles by the people to deepen democracy. By providing an analysis of the cooptation of the democratic project by a squabbling, but nonetheless hegemonic elite united around its quest for power over an oil-rich state, it suggests that since the watershed elections of 1999 that returned power to 'elected' civilians after decades of military authoritarianism, a post-military political elite have largely taken democracy 'away' from the people—through a host of devices, including the manipulation of electoral processes as underscored by local and international election observer reports. It would also appear that the ambivalent attitude of the international community towards such flawed elections—ranging from symbolic but feeble protests to tolerance have been an overlooked factor in perpetrating 'elected' dictatorships. The paper seeks explanations as to why the democratic transition so far has neither led to a real transfer of power to the people nor the consolidation of the procedures of equitable democratic governance. The paper ends on the note of examining the prospects of Nigerians organizing to 'win' back the right to chose—that elections ideally offer, and chart an alternate course to a popular form of democracy.