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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED SINGLE-DAY ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Executive summary

This report assesses the political, logistical, security, and governance implications of moving Nigeria's general elections to a single day —i.e., holding presidential, National Assembly, gubernatorial, state assembly, and (where applicable) local government elections on the same day. Proponents argue that single-day elections would cut costs, reduce prolonged electoral tension, and improve focus on governance. Critics warn of significant logistical strain on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), heightened security risks concentrated on one day, weakened local accountability, and potential distortions in voter choice and party competition. Comparative experience (notably India and academic studies of synchronized elections) shows potential benefits for administrative efficiency and reduced perpetual campaigning, but also risks to federal balance, representation, and election integrity if institutional capacity and legal frameworks are insufficient. In Nigeria's context, switching to one-day elections would require constitutional amendments, significant investment in INEC capacity and security coordination, strong dispute-resolution mechanisms, and safeguards to protect federalism and local representation.

Introduction

Nigeria currently holds primary elections on different dates, with presidential and National Assembly elections often separate from many state-level contests, and local government polls frequently scheduled at other times. Recent legislative proposals, including House bills and debates in 2025, have reignited discussions about consolidating all general elections into a single day to cut costs and reduce electoral fatigue. This report explores the political effects of such a change on governance and stability, analyzing administrative feasibility, electoral integrity, voters' behaviour, party politics, federalism, and security, and offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers.

Background and context

* Legal and institutional context: Nigeria's electoral cycle is governed by the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act. Altering the timing of presidential, gubernatorial, legislative, and local government elections would require careful statutory review and, in some cases, constitutional amendment. INEC is the official body responsible for conducting national and state elections.
* Recent debate: In 2024–2025, several bills and proposals (including HB.1630 / HB.1306) and discussions in the House of Representatives supported a single-day approach. The proposal received mixed reactions: some politicians and commentators praised potential cost savings and the end of staggered campaign cycles. In contrast, INEC officials and others raised concerns about the feasibility and security risks.
* Comparative practice: Other large democracies have considered or implemented synchronized elections (India's "One Nation, One Election" debates are the most well-known case study). The academic and policy literature presents both arguments for administrative

savings and concerns about the nationalization of politics and the erosion of subnational accountability. These lessons are valuable for Nigeria's multi-tiered federation.

Analytical framework: how single-day elections can affect governance and stability
To structure analysis, consider five channels:

1. Administrative capacity and election integrity: the ability of INEC to conduct a credible, secure, and timely process (registering voters, distributing materials, training staff, handling results, and managing complaints). Failing in any of these areas on a single day increases the risk of systemic failure.
2. Security: concentration of political activity and turnout on one day may raise the stakes for violent disruption or targeted attacks, but could also focus security resources more efficiently.
3. Political competition and representation: simultaneous elections can nationalize politics (voters use presidential coattails to decide local races), potentially weakening local accountability and reducing the diversity of electoral outcomes.
4. Governance cycle and policy continuity: fewer election days can decrease perpetual campaigning, allowing incumbents to govern with less interruption; conversely, synchronized turnover could lead to simultaneous widespread changes that hinder continuity.
5. Cost and administrative predictability: consolidated logistics lower nominal costs and reduce repetitive election-related expenditures; savings may be substantial, but must be weighed against the investment required to scale INEC's capacity for a single-day "mega-election."

Data analysis and evidence

1	Administrative evidence (INEC 2023 report & capacity indicators)	INEC's official post-election and operational reports highlight recurring logistical issues: staffing shortages at polling units, late arrivals of materials, BVAS (biometric) device failures, collation delays, and complaints management. The 2023 General Election report details these operational pressures and recommends strengthening institutions; it also suggests that holding multiple simultaneous contests on one day would worsen these strains unless capacity is greatly improved. In public statements, INEC officials have warned that conducting all elections on a single day "is not feasible" without significant reforms and resources. Implication: Without major investment in logistics, staffing, training, technology resilience, and contingency planning, one-day elections would raise the probability of system-wide disruptions (device

		failures, mass collation delays, and disputed results), which in turn raise the risk of post-election instability.
2	Security and conflict analysis	Nigeria's security situation varies widely and is heightened in many regions: insurgency in the northeast, banditry and kidnappings in the northwest, communal violence in parts of the Middle Belt, and separatist tensions in the southeast. Focusing electoral activity on a single date would concentrate both voter movement and security efforts this leads to two potential outcomes. Positive: Security forces can be focused on a single, well-funded operation, potentially reducing the total number of election days needing protection and decreasing long-term security fatigue in communities. Negative: A single "high-stakes" day encourages violent actors to disrupt the national schedule, and failures at multiple critical points could lead to nationwide political crises. Past elections show that when ballots and results are widely disputed, protests and legal challenges can destabilize governance afterward.
3	Political effects nationalization of politics and local accountability	Studies comparing elections in different countries, including India's proposal for simultaneous elections and research on synchronized elections elsewhere, show that when national and local contests happen at the same time, voters tend to vote along national party lines, creating "coattail" effects. This can concentrate power in national parties and weaken local parties or independent candidates, which reduces detailed accountability to voters on local issues. For Nigeria, where local governance capacity and state-level differences are significant, this could lessen the motivation for governors and assembly members to address local needs if outcomes are heavily influenced by presidential politics.
4	Governance continuity and policy implications	Fewer election cycles reduce recurring interruptions from campaigning and the constant preoccupation of ministers and post holders with reelection. This

		could enhance medium-term policy implementation. However, synchronized turnover might lead to simultaneous leadership changes across federal and state levels, complicating coordination (for example, if many governors and the president change at once), which could slow down urgent policy responses during transitions. International evidence indicates that benefits for policy focus only arise when transitions are orderly and institutional handover processes are strong.
5	Fiscal implications	Advocates emphasize savings from consolidating logistics, security, voter education, and civil service disruption. Media and legislative estimates project significant reductions in direct electoral costs. However, these estimates often overlook the upfront investment needed to expand election infrastructure, technology, and staffing to reliably manage a one-day mega-election; the overall fiscal benefit thus depends on whether capital and institutional upgrades are viewed as one-time investments or ongoing costs. Accurate quantification requires INEC's costing models and scenario analysis.

Political stability scenarios (likely outcomes)

1. Best-case scenario: phased reform coupled with capacity building INEC is well-resourced, legal issues are resolved, and security planning is coordinated leading to successful elections with higher voter turnout, reduced overall tension, and genuine cost savings. Governance benefits include fewer electoral distractions and moderate improvements in policy continuity.
2. Likely transitional case: Partial implementation with gaps logistical failures in some states, localized violence, widespread collation delays, many legal challenges leading to contested results and temporarily weakened legitimacy for key offices.
3. Worst-case: Systemic failure on election day widespread procedural collapse, large-scale disenfranchisement in some areas, mass protests and court challenges that threaten public order and hinder governance operations for months.

The distribution between these scenarios depends primarily on political will for thorough planning, constitutional clarity, and resourcing of INEC and security agencies.

Recommendations
For policymakers, political parties, INEC, and civil society:

1. Do not rush legal changes. Any move to a single day must be preceded by a transparent legal process (constitutional amendments where required), stakeholder consultations (state governments, parties, civil society, security agencies), and clear timelines.
2. Build INEC's operational capacity first. Develop a multi-year INEC capacity plan with independent auditing that includes voter register modernization, redundant biometric systems, logistics hubs, large-scale recruitment and training, and an upgraded collation platform with tamper-evident safeguards. Pilot consolidated contests at a subnational level (e.g., synchronize state assembly and local government elections in one state) before a national roll-out.
3. Security planning: national operations with local sensitivity. Develop security frameworks that concentrate resources on Election Day while also addressing local intelligence, community policing, and rapid response. Pre-election risk assessments should be public and regionally disaggregated.

4. Enhance dispute resolution and transparency. Speed up reforms to strengthen judicial capacity for electoral petitions, including improvements in case management and the expansion of specialized electoral benches. Improve results publication with machine-readable, real-time tallies and ensure access for domestic and international observers.
5. Protect federalism and local representation. Introduce safeguards to preserve subnational accountability: improve civic education that emphasizes local issues, consider ballot designs that reduce coattail distortions (e.g., split ballots, separate collation streams), and strengthen state electoral institutions where appropriate.

6. Cost realism and phased financing. Prepare a full cost benefit analysis comparing short-term upgrade costs with medium-term savings. Consider donor and multilateral technical assistance for a bounded transition program, but avoid overreliance on external funding for core sovereignty functions.

7. Public engagement and outreach. Conduct nationwide civic education campaigns well before any changes; showcase pilot successes and foster public confidence in systems (technology, security, adjudication).

Conclusions
Holding Nigeria's general elections on a single day offers administrative savings and ends repetitive election cycles that distract from governance. However, the political impact on governance and stability is mixed: benefits such as a shorter campaign season, cost savings, and the potential for more transparent governance are real but depend on certain conditions. The main risks administrative overload, security vulnerabilities, the centralization of local politics, and potential widespread disenfranchisement are serious if institutional capacity, legal clarity, and security coordination are not fully developed. Evidence from other cases underscores that synchronization is a systemic reform (not just an administrative change) and must be pursued through phased institutional strengthening, transparent stakeholder involvement, and legally

sound dispute-resolution mechanisms. If conducted responsibly, synchronized elections could benefit Nigeria; if rushed, they could undermine the stability that elections are supposed to reinforce.

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