



POLITICAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS: 2020 ONDO STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

ELECTORAL HUB POLITICAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS 2/2020

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Introduction

The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a multidisciplinary strategic think-tank aimed at strengthening electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of data, critical and contextualized analysis as well as the provision of solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process using an interdisciplinary lens.

In line with the mission of the Electoral Hub to strengthen the electoral process, this pre-election analysis seeks to help stakeholders to understand the contexts in which the October 10, 2020 governorship election will be conducted in Ondo State.

This analysis contains an overview of the legal, socio-political and institutional factors and conditions that may affect the outcome of the election; the key actors and interest groups shaping events leading up to the election; the election management body and the electoral system; the threats and obstacles to a credible process; as well as the external and internal entities that can help strengthen and protect the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.

This analysis is based on unbiased research into the trends in previous elections and the tendency for relapse or change; the political and social dynamics currently within the country Nigeria in general and Ondo state in particular; as well as the perception of political observers and the electorate about the upcoming election.

This analysis should serve as a stakeholder's guide to the distribution of power, the range and interests of the various actors, and the formal and informal rules that govern the electoral process; and how all these can either make or mar the electoral process.

Constitutional and Legal Background

The conduct of elections in Nigeria is governed by the provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended). This legal framework for elections in Nigeria is still criticized as inadequate especially as an electoral reform bill was extensively debated on and passed by the National Assembly (NASS), yet assent was denied on four different occasions by the President.¹

The electoral bill, if assented to by the President, was expected to deal with issues that would enhance the credibility of electoral processes in Nigeria including: stiffer punishments for electoral officials involved in malpractice; electronic voting and electronic transmission of results; prohibition of arbitrary fees by the setting of maximum fees for all elective offices; and gaps in the law such as where a candidate dies after polls have begun but before the result was declared.²

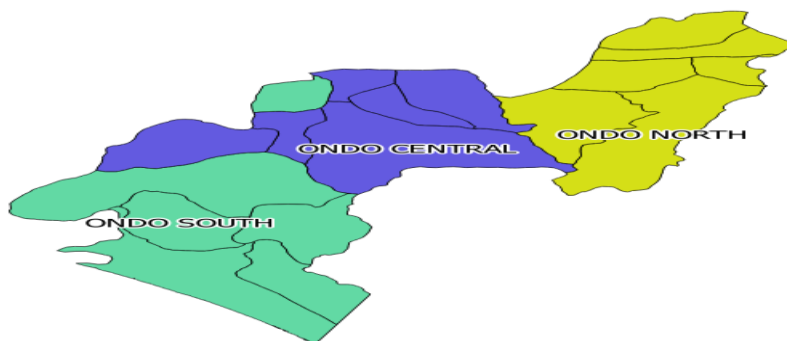
There is also clamour for legislative reforms in other areas including: out-of-country voting rights for Nigerians in the diaspora;³ affirmative action for marginalized groups like women and persons with disabilities; and early voting for the millions of Nigerians who are unable to vote on election days because of essential duties, e.g. poll workers, emergency workers, security agents, accredited observers and journalists.⁴

Without these reforms, the legal and constitutional framework remains questionable and inadequate. Consequently, issues of inclusivity, disenfranchisement and fairness will continue to dog the legitimacy of elections in Nigeria. This is a contextual aspect of the forthcoming Ondo governorship election which cannot be ignored.

Ondo State Electoral System

Nigeria runs a federal system of government where power is shared between the federal government, the 36 state governments and the 774 local governments. The responsibilities of each of these tiers of government are set out in the 1999 Constitution. The exclusive legislative list (Part I, Second Schedule) contains matters on which only the federal government can act, such as monetary issues, defence, and foreign policy. The concurrent legislative list (Part II, Second Schedule) contains matters on which both federal and state governments can act, including education, health, and infrastructural issues. The functions of local government councils are set out in the Fourth Schedule.

The representative body at the federal level is the National Assembly (NASS), which consists of the House of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house). As shown in the figures below, there are three senatorial districts, nine federal constituencies, eighteen local government areas (LGAs), 204 registration areas (RAs), and 3,009 polling units (PUs) in Ondo State. Candidates are put forward from each constituency to represent Ondo in the House of Representatives; from each senatorial district to represent Ondo in the Senate; and from each LGA to represent the local governments. Parliamentary elections (into both houses of NASS) occur every four years, while local government elections are set by state governments.



Senatorial Districts in Ondo. Source: Geospatial Solutions Expert⁵

SEN. DISTRICT	FED. CONST.	LGAs	RAs	PUs	REGD. VOTERS
ONDO NORTH	Akoko North East/ Akoko North West	Akoko North East	13	135	80,040
		Akoko North West	10	166	72,139
	Akoko South East/ Akoko South West	Akoko South West	15	168	101,842
		Akoko South East	11	76	35,747
	Ose/ Owo	Ose	12	126	69,087
		Owo	11	218	128,455
	3	6	72	889	487,310
ONDO CENTRAL	Akure North/ Akure South	Akure North	12	106	74,821
		Akure South	11	302	290,267
	Ifedore/ Idanre	Ifedore	10	151	75,257
		Idanre	10	112	82,449
	Ondo East/ Ondo West	Ondo East	10	74	50,496
		Ondo West	12	233	172,815
	3	6	65	978	746,105
ONDO SOUTH	Ije-Oluji/ Okeigbo/ Odigbo	Ile-Oluji/Okeigbo	10	157	73,051
		Odigbo	11	210	136,146
	Irele/ Okitipupa	Irele	10	132	66,959
		Okitipupa	13	246	110,572
	Ese-Odo/ Ijale	Ese-Odo	10	126	70,014
		Ilaje	12	271	132,189
	3	6	66	1142	588,931
GRAND TOTAL	9	18	203	3,009	1,822,346

Source: INEC⁶

At the state level, the government consists of the executive (headed by the governor), the legislature (House of Assembly), and the judiciary (High Court and Customary/Sharia Court). Governors, who are the heads of the executive arm, are elected directly for a four-year term with a two-term limit.

The constitution requires candidates for the office of governor to be citizens of Nigeria, sponsored by their party of membership, at least 35 years old, and possess the School Certificate or its equivalent. A two-round majoritarian system is used to determine the winner of governorship elections: the winner must have an absolute majority of the votes cast (50% + 1) and at least 25% of votes cast in at least two-thirds of all the local government areas of the state. If no candidate achieves this, the top two candidates with the highest number of votes compete in a run-off election until a winner emerges. In contrast to the first-past-the-post system that is used for presidential elections, this majoritarian system ensures that a candidate has the votes of a majority of the people. This guarantees a higher level of legitimacy and a greater mandate for elected governments.

The Nigerian electoral system by and large guarantees citizens the right to stand for public office; however, the regulation of candidature to political party sponsorship creates a constraint for those who might want to run for office independently. Though a constitutional amendment to allow for independent candidates has been proposed and has passed second reading in the lower house of NASS,⁷ the amendment process is still in the early stages and would certainly have no bearing on the electoral process in Ondo.

According to the 2019 voter register, there are 1,822,346 registered voters in Ondo State.⁸ However, this figure is not fully representative of the 2020 electorate, due to the announcement of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that they would not register new voters prior to the election because of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Moreover, out of the current registered voters in Ondo, about 372,888 of them will be disenfranchised because INEC is also unable to distribute PVCs due to the pandemic.¹⁰ This raises serious concerns about violations of people's right to vote.

Ondo State Geography

Two major geographical features about Ondo State are rivers and mountains. Falodun has noted the presence of “rivers, creeks and lakes in and around Ondo State with very prominent rivers”.¹¹ Some of the numerous rivers in the state are: Owena, Oluwa, Oni, Awara, Ogbese, Awo and Ose. One of the riverine areas in Ondo is Ilaje LGA. The Oluwa river, which has a coastline of about 80 km with about 50 settlements scattered around the river, flows through many communities in Ilaje.¹² Another riverine area is Ese-Odo, as two-thirds of the LGA is a maze of rivers, creeks and lakes.¹³

Falodun also notes that in Ondo, “the land rises from the coastal part of Ilaje, Ese-Odo and Okitipupa areas to highlands and steeply down at the Northern parts of the state”.¹⁴ Idanre LGA is one of the mountainous areas in Ondo State. The Idanre Hill, with several peaks and a flat surface about 3,000 feet above sea level, is a major tourist attraction.¹⁵ It has been listed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The geography of Ondo State is interesting to consider as it has an impact on election logistics, including access to polling units, delivery of election materials, transportation of election officials, and maintenance of election security. Some of the riverine areas are inaccessible by land, which makes transportation and access to polling units difficult. Problems also arise in terms of election security and the deployment of appropriate security personnel such as the navy to safeguard the areas within and around the rivers. Without adequate security, such areas could become breeding grounds for political thuggery and electoral violence.

With regard to mountainous areas, there could be problems related to the transportation of election officials and election materials. In particular, the mountains in Idanre prevent quick access to the LGA, as alternative routes have to be used to get there. All of these might result in longer time taken for transportation and therefore late arrival of officials and materials to polling

units.

It is therefore paramount to take the geography of Ondo State into account for election planning purposes. Adequate time should be given for longer transportation routes due to the mountains and rivers which prevent easy access. At the same time, adequate preparation should be made to safeguard the riverine areas like Ilaje.

Ondo State Electorate

Ondo State has an electorate with an ethnic composition largely from the Yoruba subgroups of the Akoko, Akure, Ikale, Ilaje, Ondo, and Owo.¹⁶ The coastal section is inhabited by Ijaw minority (such as Apoi and Arogbo), while a number of the Ondo State people reside in Oke-Igbo.¹⁷

As shown in the table below, Ondo State has an estimated population of 3.46 million, with 1,745,057 males and 1,715,820 females.

S/N	LGA	Population	Male	Female	Registered Voters
1	Akoko North East	179,092	92,456	86,636	80,040
2	Akoko North West	211,867	107,075	104,791	72,139
3	Akoko South East	82,443	42,175	40,268	101,842
4	Akoko South West	228,383	114,333	113,650	35,747
5	Akure North	130,765	66,526	64,239	74,821
6	Akure South	360,268	178,672	181,596	290,267
7	Ese Odo	158,256	75,812	78,444	70,014
8	Idanre	129,795	67,533	62,264	82,449
9	Ifedore	176,370	89,574	86,796	75,257
10	Ilaje	289,838	146,858	142,979	132,189
11	Ile-Oluji/Okeigbo	171,876	87,104	84,772	73,051

12	Irele	144,136	72,851	71,275	136,146
13	Odigbo	232,287	116,299	115,988	66,959
14	Okitipupa	234,138	117,594	116,544	110,572
15	Ondo East	76,092	38,851	37,241	50,496
16	Ondo West	288,868	141,759	147,109	172,815
17	Ose	144,139	73,119	110,206	69,087
18	Owo	222,262	112,056	110,206	128,455
TOTAL		3,460,877	1,745,057	1,715,820	1,822,346

Source: Ondo State Bureau of Statistics¹⁸ and INEC

Ondo State is one of the most educationally advanced states in Nigeria. It has the largest number of public schools, with over 880 primary schools and 190 secondary schools.¹⁹ It also has a free education policy for public primary and secondary schools in the state. There are many universities and higher institutions in Ondo State, including Adeyemi College of Education Ondo City, Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko, Federal University of Technology Akure, University of Medical Sciences Ondo, Ondo State University of Science and Technology, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic Owo, and Ondo City Polytechnic. It is therefore no surprise that majority of Ondo citizens live in urban areas (39%)²⁰ and are highly educated, with an overall literacy rate of 78%.²¹ Consequently, Ondo State is also one of the states with the highest number of professors in Nigeria.

Civil service is an important occupation for many Ondo residents. This socio-economic context is a crucial determinant of election success, as policies regarding civil service will have a huge impact on public support. In this light, various candidates have sought the support of civil servants during their campaigns. The APC candidate, incumbent governor Rotimi Akeredolu, recalled how his administration promoted at least 23,720 civil servants in

Ondo.²² The ZLP candidate, incumbent deputy governor Agboola Ajayi, also promised to restore good governance and reform civil service for employment opportunities for residents.²³ This shows how the composition of the electorate affects political campaigns.

Political Environment

Ondo State was created on 3 February 1976 from the former Western State. It originally included what is now Ekiti State, which was split off in 1996.²⁴ Akure is the capital of Ondo, it is bounded in the North-West by Ekiti State, West-Central by Osun State, South-West by Ogun State, South-East by Delta State and in the South by Atlantic Ocean.²⁵

The 2020 off-cycle governorship election in Ondo is the sixth governorship election in Ondo State since Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which began in May 1999. Like the Edo election held recently on 19 September 2020, the Ondo election scheduled for 10 October 2020, will occur in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the possible implications of the pandemic is a low voter turnout. A recent survey shows that 48.1% of residents believe the pandemic will affect voter turnout.²⁶ Ondo State already records less than half of registered voters exercising their franchise on election days. In the 2012 governorship election, only 38% of registered voters participated,²⁷ while the 2016 governorship election had an even lower turnout with just 35% of registered voters participating.²⁸ During the presidential election of 2019, the turnout in the state was just 32.4%.²⁹ This raises concerns about the extent to which the pandemic might decrease turnout further.

Ondo also held its local government election during the pandemic on 22 August 2020. There have been mixed reports about the conduct and turnout for the local government election. The election was described as peaceful and the turnout impressive by the incumbent state governor.³⁰ However, other reports have stated that there was low turnout due to voter apathy, as well as incidences of violence and voting irregularities.³¹ The voter apathy may be as a result of a boycott of the election by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP).³² The boycott also raises questions of legitimacy of the election in which the incumbent governor's party, All Progressives Congress (APC), won the Chairmanship of all 18 local governments areas in the state.

The political environment in Ondo is further complicated by the actions of the federal government in the state. On 29 September 2020, just eleven days to the election, President Muhammadu Buhari approved the refund of billions of naira to Ondo and four other states for federal road projects executed by them. Ondo State is set to receive ₦7 billion from that money. This move has been criticised by members of opposition parties in the National Assembly, who asked that the approval be delayed until after the election.³³ However, they were outvoted by majority senators. This move by the federal government just prior to the election might be seen as the use of federal might to support the incumbent governor, who also belongs to the APC like Buhari, in the forthcoming election.

Internal strife within APC

The incumbent deputy governor, Agboola Ajayi, defected from the APC to the PDP on 21 June 2020 after falling out with the incumbent governor, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu.³⁴ On 6 July 2020, the Secretary to the Ondo State Government, Ifedayo Abegunde, also resigned from the Akeredolu administration.³⁵

Premium Times reports that Abegunde had opposed Akeredolu's second-term ambition, and had consequently shunned government activities in the weeks preceding his resignation.³⁶ Indeed, in an interview Abegunde alleged that Akeredolu did not win the 2016 election, but Abegunde and some other unnamed persons "made it possible for him to become governor", thereby suggesting that the 2016 election was manipulated.³⁷ In reaction to this claim, Akeredolu called on security agencies to probe the allegations made by Abegunde.³⁸ In the same vein, Abegunde retracted his earlier statement, declaring that while APC won the election, it was not Akeredolu that won – it was the party stalwarts, including himself, that won the election for Akeredolu.³⁹ These accusations and counter-accusations from Abegunde and Akeredolu reveal the internal strife within the APC.

On 18 September 2020, the Senior Special Assistant on Political Matters in Ondo South senatorial district, Andrew Ogunsakin, also resigned his appointment from Akeredolu's government, to support Ajayi.⁴⁰ An analyst,

Jide Ojo, has suggested that the defection of Ajayi, Abegunde, and other key party members may cost APC a lot. He suggested that if the party does not reconcile itself, they might lose members again to PDP as it happened in Edo State, where as many as 20,000 people defected to PDP before the election.⁴¹

Internal strife within PDP

Ajayi's defection to PDP was spurred by his ambition to gain the governorship ticket in that party. This meant that he ran against Eyitayo Jegede, who had also contested for governor under PDP in 2016. The arrival of Ajayi in PDP divided the party and those who were loyal to Jegede.⁴²

Another issue driving division in PDP was the issue of zoning. Candidates from Ondo North and Ondo Central senatorial districts have spent longer periods of time occupying the position of governor as compared to those from Ondo South. As a result, some felt that it was the turn of Ondo South to produce the next governorship candidate. In this light, two key figures in the PDP, Solomon Bitire and Daisi Mafimisebi, wrote to the PDP National Chairman in January 2020, arguing that the next governorship candidate should come from Ondo South.⁴³ Jegede is from Ondo Central, while Ajayi is from Ondo South. Proponents of the next governor coming from Ondo South therefore favoured Ajayi over Jegede.

However, in the end Jegede won the primaries, which led Ajayi and his supporters to defect again to the ZLP. This divided the PDP further.

Attempts at unification

Following the internal strife within APC, Akeredolu began to make attempts at unification by reaching out to some of the aggrieved members of his party. In July, he made peace with some of the other aspirants who contested the governorship ticket of the party.⁴⁴ In response, the co-contestants promised to support his second term bid so that Ondo state will remain an APC state.⁴⁵

In PDP, Jegede has also made attempts at unification by meeting with other contestants for the governorship ticket in his party, and urging members to

unite together with a view to winning the election.⁴⁶

These attempts at unification by the different parties may help to de-escalate intra-party tension and thus increase their chances of succeeding at the election.

Blurring of partisan lines

The partisan politics in Ondo was very evident when, on 4 September 2020, Akeredolu presented official cars to only members of the state legislature who supported a botched impeachment plan of Ajayi.⁴⁷ The planned impeachment was believed to be influenced by Akeredolu.

However, Ajayi and his supporters' defection to PDP, and then ZLP, seems to blur the clear partisan delineation in the state's polity. He is believed to still have some supporters and associates in the APC and the PDP after spending some time as a member of both parties.⁴⁸ Another issue that slightly blurs the partisan lines is the issue of zoning, as alluded to earlier. Some politicians from the southern senatorial district are trying to give traction to the clamour for a governor from their district which is also Ajayi's district.⁴⁹

Ultimately, the political environment in Ondo is one that is very partisan, yet these clearly defined party lines may be threatened by those who remain loyal to Ajayi but did not decamp with him from APC or PDP, and the more nuanced clamour for inclusive governance by some from the southern senatorial district.

Contesting Political Parties

Political parties are indispensable to the electoral process in Nigeria as membership of one and sponsorship by same is a requirement for running for political office. The politicking in the build-up to the governorship elections in Ondo has been relatively eventful with a lot of inter-party and intra-party politicking.

Candidates have been presented by seventeen of the eighteen duly registered political parties for the Ondo governorship election. The candidates and the parties are as follows:

G	CANDIDATE	PARTY
M	Rotimi Adeleye Akindejoye	Accord Party
M	Joshua Oluwafemi Adewole	Action Alliance (AA)
M	Adeleye Adekunle Peter	African Action Congress (AAC)
M	Adelegan Adedapo Oluwaseyi	African Democratic Congress (ADC)
M	Martin Kunle Olateru-Olagbegi	Action Democratic Party (ADP)
M	Oluwarotimi Akeredolu	All Progressives Congress (APC)
M	Olowoloba Dele	All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)
M	Aminu Akeem Olanrewaju	Allied Peoples Movement (APM)
M	Adesanya Olaoluwa	Action Peoples Party (APP)
M	Okunade Taiwo	Labour Party (LP)
M	Ojajuni Joseph Eniola	New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP)
M	Funmilayo Jenyo Ataunoko	National Rescue Movement (NRM)
M	Eyitayo Jegede	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
M	Babatunde Francis Alli	Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)
M	Fasua Peter Oyeleye	Social Democratic Party (SDP)
M	Ojon Dotun	Young Progressive Party (YPP)
M	Agboola Ajayi	Zenith Labour Party (ZLP)

A noteworthy point is that there is no woman or person with disability (PWD) among these governorship candidates, and there are only three women running for deputy governor. This raises questions about the extent to which the parties in Ondo are inclusive and representative.

Out of the seventeen candidates, most observers believe that the frontrunners are Oluwarotimi Akeredolu of APC, Eyitayo Jegede of PDP, and Agboola Ajayi of ZLP. Both PDP and APC have a strong national presence while ZLP won only one seat in the Ondo legislature last governorship election cycle. PDP also won two of the three senatorial seats in the last election. However, the fact that the incumbent governor has associates in both PDP and APC make him a force not to be ruled out.

No party has political dominance in Ondo as different parties have produced governors. Alliance for Democracy (AD) (now defunct) produced the governor from 1999-2003; PDP from 2003-2008; LP from 2008-2016; and APC from 2016 till date.

It is interesting to consider how the candidates for this election emerged, and the interplay across the three main parties. In APC, eleven out of the twelve governorship aspirants rejected indirect primaries, arguing that it favours the incumbent governor.⁵⁰ It is therefore no surprise that incumbent governor Akeredolu was the only aspirant who did not reject indirect primaries. A few days to the primaries, four of the aspirants stepped down and expressed support for Akeredolu. Despite the aspirants' expressed desire for direct primaries, APC decided to hold indirect primaries instead, which saw Akeredolu win in all the state LGAs, with 2,548 votes.⁵¹ The conduct of APC's primaries reveal the resentment among other aspirants, such as Isaac Kekemeke, who were unfairly sidelined in the process. Kekemeke expressed regret at the conduct of the primaries, noting that the process was "unfair" and "aimed at producing a predetermined result".⁵² However, Akeredolu's attempts at unification have helped to ease these tensions.

There were also some questionable issues during PDP's primaries, such as the arrival of seventeen unknown delegates in addition to the initial 2,000 meant to vote in the election.⁵³ Many of the aspirants claimed not to know

the seventeen delegates, which led the Chairman of the election and other committee members to disallow those delegates from voting.⁵⁴ In the end, Jegede defeated Ajayi by 231 votes. This spurred Ajayi's defection to the ZLP on 14 August 2020, barely six weeks after he had defected to PDP.⁵⁵

Having failed to receive the governorship ticket of PDP, Ajayi asserted that "the members of state executive committee were hostile, biased and unbelievably compromised".⁵⁶ In response, PDP criticised Ajayi's defection as a sign of desperation in his political journey.⁵⁷ Following Ajayi's move to ZLP, the then-governorship candidate for ZLP, Rotimi Benjamin, withdrew his candidature in line with section 35 of the Electoral Act 2010, in favour of Ajayi. According to Benjamin, he made this voluntary move in a bid to increase the party's chances of winning the election.⁵⁸

However, there have been issues in the ZLP following Ajayi's defection. It has been reported that Ajayi has failed to independently raise funds to finance his campaign, to the extent that he could not erect enough billboards and print posters across the 18 LGAs.⁵⁹ This led to disillusionment within the party and by 14 September 2020, over 2,000 members had defected from the ZLP to the APC to support Akeredolu.⁶⁰

These developments within the contesting parties are reflective of the defections common in Nigerian politics. For instance, in the build-up to the recent Edo election, Godwin Obaseki and his supporters defected to the PDP following his fallout with Adams Oshiomhole and his subsequent failure to secure the governorship ticket in the APC.⁶¹ Commenting on the tendency for candidates to defect prior to elections, Prof Patrick Utomi of the National Consultative Front has referred to political parties in Nigeria as "special-purpose vehicles", there only to propel people into power.⁶² This problem is made worse by the fact that independent candidates are not allowed to contest in Nigerian elections, so candidates necessarily have to join parties to get into power. The independent candidacy bill which has been proposed by NASS might help to solve this problem.

Furthermore, the defections reveal deep inter-party and intra-party rivalry. Accusations and allegations have flown around from rival candidates and

their supporters, as well as fellow governorship aspirants within the same party. While there have been attempts at internal unification within parties, there is also a need to keep tensions down across opposing parties so as to ensure a peaceful election.

Main Political Actors

Oluwarotimi Akeredolu is the incumbent governor and is running on the platform of the APC for a second term. He was initially thought to be faced with an uphill task of winning the primaries but events unfolded otherwise and he clenched his party's ticket. His party's political footing is thought to have been further solidified with their victory during the local government election.

Akeredolu has however been criticised for nepotism and involving his relatives in governance. This was one of the reasons cited by Ajayi for their falling out.⁶³ Similarly, a group, the Indigenous People of Ondo, rejected Akeredolu's list of members of the COVID-19 committee, which included his son as the secretary, and his in-law's company, SIAO, as the auditing company.⁶⁴ These allegations of nepotism might affect public support for his re-election.

Eyitayo Jegede is running on the platform of the PDP. He ran on the same platform four years ago and lost to the incumbent. However, PDP is thought to have gained more popularity after winning two out of the three senate seats in the 2019 general elections. The fragmentation in APC caused by the falling out of Akeredolu and Ajayi is viewed as an increase in the winning chances of the PDP.

However, following Jegede's success in PDP's primaries, some expected that he would choose Ajayi as his running mate to increase the duo's chances of defeating Akeredolu.⁶⁵ Instead, Jegede chose Gboluga Ikengboju as his running mate. By running on different platforms, Jegede and Ajayi have further divided support, thereby weakening their individual positions.

Agboola Ajayi is the incumbent deputy governor and candidate for the ZLP, who got the party's ticket after the winner of the primaries relinquished his position to him. He is believed to have been instrumental to the victory of the

incumbent governor four years ago when he was chosen as his running mate. There was a failed attempt to impeach him after he left the APC and he is believed to still have elements of support within the APC and PDP.

Dr Olusegun Mimiko is the former Ondo State governor and the current national leader of the ZLP. He is believed to be a strong person of influence in Ondo State, and various actors in the PDP and APC have met with him to induce his support for their respective candidates. Among these actors is the current Oyo State governor, Seyi Makinde, who met with Mimiko twice within 42 days, pleading with him to forgive and support Jegede.⁶⁶ However, Mimiko is currently supporting Ajayi's campaign, following the latter's defection to the ZLP.

According to a top PDP chieftain, former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar is eyeing the South-West for his running mate in the 2023 presidential election, and it is believed that both Mimiko and Makinde are interested in this position.⁶⁷ The PDP chieftain pointed out that Mimiko is interested in Ajayi getting more votes in order to prove his political worth to Atiku, while Makinde is sponsoring Jegede to use the election as the litmus test for the 2023 presidential election.⁶⁸ Therefore, beyond the governorship candidates, the election is also going to be "a test of might between Mimiko and Makinde".⁶⁹

Indeed, even Akeredolu has said that the outcome of the election would determine the chances of the South-West in the 2023 presidency.⁷⁰ It is therefore believed that the visit of the APC national leader, Bola Tinubu, to Akure and his meeting with Ondo Monarchs were more than a meeting to canvass votes for Akeredolu, but rather a subtle campaign for his own presidential campaign in 2023.⁷¹ In this light, the conduct of some of the political actors in the upcoming Ondo election is strongly linked to prospects for the 2023 presidential election.

Security

There have been some security concerns regarding the 2020 governorship election in Ondo. There have been counter-accusations of “stockpiling firearms for the disruption of the peaceful conduct of the election” from opposing politicians.⁷² A group, Ondo Youth Initiative, had accused Ajayi of stockpiling arms and training a militia group to be deployed during the elections. However, a spokesperson for Ajayi counter-accused the APC by quoting a prominent APC member and former aspirant for the governorship candidature, who was caught on camera saying he would use members of the Nigerian Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) to attack the PDP’s interests, and insinuating the use of federal might by the APC against the PDP.⁷³

The statement by the APC chieftain attracted a rebuke from a young monarch in Ondo, the Regent of Ibulesoro. The monarch said his statements were a threat to the peace and she asked that he apologize to the people of Ondo.⁷⁴ The APC chieftain responded by writing a letter clarifying his statement and saying his words were misconstrued. He also made a commitment to a violence-free election.⁷⁵

However, it is possible that some LGAs that are particularly violence-prone, such as Ilaje and Idanre, will see election violence. Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI), in its pre-election analysis, identified these LGAs as part of the hotspots in Ondo with a high likelihood of election violence.⁷⁶ In Ilaje, six persons lost their lives to a violent attack that occurred in 2015.⁷⁷ Prior to the Ondo local government elections in 2020, APC members were also allegedly attacked by hoodlums in Ilaje.⁷⁸ In Idanre, also prior to the Ondo local government elections, there was a violent attack on the secretariat of the SDP by thugs armed with cutlasses, axes, and stones.⁷⁹ This attack led to seven persons sustaining varying degrees of injuries, as well as SDP campaign posters and billboards being destroyed.⁸⁰ In response, the SDP withdrew from the election. These developments reveal how thugs in these

LGAs use acts of violence to intimidate opposing parties and in some cases prevent them from pursuing their political ambition.

In September alone, incidents of election-related violence have intensified as election day draws closer. Oba-Akoko town in Akoko South West LGA has also been particularly violent. On 16 September 2020, bullets were fired at Jegede's campaign train at Oba-Akoko by suspected political thugs. Jegede has described this incident as an attempt to assassinate him before election day.⁸¹ On the same day in Oba-Akoko, at least six persons sustained varying degrees of injuries while about five vehicles in the campaign trains of both APC and PDP were vandalised, as supporters of the two parties clashed.⁸² Both PDP and APC threw accusations and counter-accusations regarding the clash.

On 20 September 2020, seven suspected political thugs armed with dangerous weapons were arrested in a PDP-branded vehicle in Ifon, Ose LGA.⁸³ Again, PDP and APC threw allegations at each other. PDP asserted that this was proof of an arms build-up by APC to implicate opposition parties, while APC accused PDP of thuggery and called for an investigation into their campaign activities.⁸⁴

Additionally, on 22 September 2020, suspected political thugs allegedly loyal to the APC were accused of carrying out an attack on Ajayi's campaign office.⁸⁵ In response, APC said ZLP was merely trying to attract attention. In fact, they alleged that ZLP orchestrated the attack on themselves just to drag APC into issues with them.⁸⁶ These violent incidents raise concerns about the potential for violence at the election.

The Nigeria Police Force had in an Election Security Threat Analysis identified the arming and movement of political thugs, use of inciting statements during political campaigns, misinformation and disinformation aimed at heating-up of the polity, and deliberate efforts at delegitimizing government institutions involved in the electoral processes as the indicators that point to the likelihood for violence in the election.⁸⁷ The Inspector General of Police (IGP) also announced on Monday, October 5, 2020 the deployment of 33,783 personnel to provide security for the election during a

stakeholder meeting with parties, traditional rulers, election observers. This would be 30,933 conventional police personnel and 2,850 special agents. According to the IGP, the 33,783 police personnel would be complemented by 3,500 personnel from other security agencies.⁸⁸

Security agencies play a huge role in forestalling electoral violence in Nigeria. However, they are very often accused of being complicit and used in the perpetuation of electoral violence. Ondo is one of the states in the south-west region, which just constituted a regional security outfit called Amotekun. The incumbent Governor has been urged by an opposition party, AA, not to use Amotekun against opposition parties or to influence the electoral process,⁸⁹ as this could have disastrous consequences. Both the Nigerian Army and Police have given assurances of adequate security during the election,⁹⁰ and it is hoped that they will live up to this promise.

Efforts at Mitigating Violence

As noted earlier, a young monarch in Ondo, the Regent of Ibulesoro, intervened following an incensing statement made by an APC chieftain.⁹¹ Following this intervention, the chieftain retracted his statement and committed to maintaining peace. This is reminiscent of the Oba of Benin's intervention in Edo, which contributed to maintaining peace in the state.⁹² These actions are commendable, as the monarchs are in a position of authority and therefore have the power to effect change.

There has also been intervention by civil society organisations (CSOs). For example, on 16 September 2020, the Society for Neighbourhood Peace and Development (SONPED) urged all stakeholders to work towards achieving a peaceful electioneering process.⁹³

Furthermore, INEC, in a webinar titled “Edo/Ondo Elections: The Imperative of Safety Consciousness and Conflict Sensitivity in Media Coverage and Reportage”, explained that electoral officers and security agencies under the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) have been trained on maintaining security on election day.⁹⁴ It is hoped that the security agents will adequately perform their role of safeguarding the electoral process and keeping violence to a minimum.

The INEC Chairman, Prof Yakubu, has also explained that all seventeen candidates contesting in the election will sign a peace accord before the election.⁹⁵ This is highly commendable, given the success of the peace accords signed prior to the 2020 Edo election. It would be desirable for other election stakeholders to get involved and further promote peace, in order to reduce the likelihood of violence at the election.

Civil Society Organisations

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are key stakeholders in political and electoral processes in Nigeria. Their support and contributions to the overall enhancement of the electoral process is immeasurable: in research, voter education, advocacy for electoral reform, capacity building of key institutions and many other areas.

As the election in Ondo approaches, CSOs have already been active participants in the electoral process. Some of the CSO support and contributions towards enhancing the electoral process include:

a) Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)

CDD has been one of the of the most active CSOs working to ensure a credible, peaceful and safe election amid the rising tensions in the state and the global COVID-19 pandemic. For example, CDD reopened its Election Analysis Centre (EAC) to serve as a one-stop-shop for rigorous analyses of the electoral process. The EAC provides accurate and real-time analyses of events pre-election, on election day and post-election. CDD's analyses are grounded in historical facts and data spanning the 1999-2016 governorship elections.⁹⁶

CDD has also been monitoring and dispelling misinformation and disinformation which have the propensity to disrupt the electoral process through its "Fact Checker" publications on social media.⁹⁷ This will enable the electorate, including those in Ondo, to make proper and informed decision.

For the Ondo election, CDD organized a roundtable on 27 August 2020 which brought together civil society actors across the 18 LGAs in Ondo to discuss lessons learned from the Ondo local government elections and make recommendations on what different stakeholders, including political parties, security agencies, INEC, CSOs, and the media can do to make the governorship election free, fair, and credible.

b) CLEEN Foundation:

CLEEN Foundation has conducted a Security Threat Assessment to support stakeholders, especially the Independent National Electoral Commission and security officials, by providing empirical data for the deployment of manpower and other resources for the election.⁹⁸

The foundation will also recruit, train and deploy volunteers to all the LGAs in Ondo to observe, document and report in real time, security incidents and threats during the election. The foundation will collate, analyse and disseminate the findings to relevant stakeholders before, during and after the election.⁹⁸

The foundation plans to use the Tella Human Rights Monitoring Application developed by electoral stakeholders as a standardized tool for assessing election-related security threats. Tella is an ICT-based human rights platform for mapping of security risk factors through real-time observation, documentation and analysis of accredited observers' reports on the conduct of security officials during elections.⁹⁸

c) Policy and Legal Advocacy Center (PLAC)

PLAC convenes and hosts the Nigeria Civil Society Situation (NSCSR) room: a coalition of more than 70 CSOs which maximize their various resources for information sharing, anticipation of problems during elections and responding rapidly when they occur.⁹⁹ NSCSR has been carrying out pre-election observations and recommendations for the Ondo election and will continue during the election and post-election periods. NSCSR also supported the governorship debate hosted by Channels TV¹⁰⁰.

d) YIAGA Africa

YIAGA Africa, through its Long-Term Observers (LTOs) in every local government of Ondo, has been making pre-election assessments of the conditions in the state. In August, YIAGA stated that it will deploy over 600 observers to monitor the Ondo election.¹⁰¹ YIAGA will also carry out an important survey to empirically gauge the opinions of the electorate on the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the campaign environment.

YIAGA also intends to observe the elections and conduct a Parallel Voter Tabulation (PVT) based on statistical sampling of polling units to verify election results.

e) Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI)

Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) carries out extensive work in relation to elections in Nigeria, including trainings, advocacy meetings with stakeholders, and voter education. For the Ondo election, KDI in partnership with the National Endowment for Democracy and INEC, met with state youth party leaders to build consensus on their roles to promote peace in the forthcoming Ondo election 2020.¹⁰²

KDI also publishes an Election Security Risk Assessment (ESRA) of the Nigeria Election Violence (NEVR) Report prior to elections. This is an in-depth pre-election assessment of factors that could give rise to electoral violence in forthcoming elections. The NEVR Report for Ondo indicates that there were 40 cases of potential for violence between June and August 22, 2020.¹⁰³ KDI therefore recommends, among others, intense peace advocacy, capacity development for political leaders, sensitization of citizens, engagement of key stakeholders, and effective planning to mitigate violence.¹⁰⁴

These and other CSO-led programmes and activities are expected to enhance public confidence, accountability and the transparency of the electoral processes. CSOs should further adopt the recommendations of the roundtable convened by CDD, which include: continually advocate for peaceful, fair, and credible elections; join INEC in educating voters and electoral officers; and start voter education early, rather than at the peak of elections.¹⁰⁵

Role of INEC

INEC is the Electoral Management Body (EMB) that will oversee and conduct the governorship election in Ondo. Managing this off-cycle election has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. INEC is expected to deliver a credible election process amid a public health emergency and security concerns. The Ondo election would be the second major election (after the Edo State governorship election) to take place under the guise of the global coronavirus pandemic and the INEC has had to take precaution to ensure the safety of the voters and electoral personnel. On 23 September 2020, INEC Chairman, Prof Mahmood Yakubu, expressed the Commission's readiness to ensure that the Ondo election is free, fair and credible.¹⁰⁶

In September, INEC held a series of meetings with different stakeholders in preparation for the Ondo election:

- a) The INEC Chairman, some national commissioners, the technical team and some directors visited INEC's head office in Akure, Ondo State. This meeting was held with electoral officers in Akure to assess their state of preparedness ahead of the Ondo election.



INEC Meeting in Akure. Source: INEC Nigeria¹⁰⁷

- b) The INEC Chairman chaired a meeting of the Inter-Agency Consultative

Committee on Election Security (ICCES) in Akure on 24 September 2020. This meeting was held to discuss critical security issues relating to the governorship election.



ICCES Meeting in Akure. Source: INEC Nigeria¹⁰⁸

c) INEC commissioners held a meeting with the media in Akure on 24 September 2020. During this meeting, the INEC Chairman also showed journalists the new Smart Card Readers sent to the Ondo State office to replace the ones burnt in the fire incident of 10 September 2020.



INEC Meeting with the Media. Source: INEC Nigeria¹⁰⁹

d) INEC held an Election Monitoring and Support Centre Red Zone Implementers' Workshop in Akure on 2 October 2020. This meeting was held to discuss how to ensure free, fair, and credible elections in Ondo.



Election Monitoring and Support Centre Red Zone Implementers' Workshop. Source: INEC Nigeria¹¹⁰

The Commission has maintained an electronic voter register and will carry out electronic verification and accreditation of voters using Smart Card Readers. According to INEC, on voting day there will be a two-tier queuing system at the polling unit – one outside and the other in the voting area. Voters will be brought into the voting area periodically to prevent overcrowding.¹¹¹ INEC will use tags and twines to ensure crowd control and maintenance of social distance.

INEC also introduced a dedicated online portal which will enable Nigerians to view the election results in real time to enhance the transparency and increase the accountability of the election. Results would be uploaded to the dedicated result viewing portal through Zpad (tablets). The Commission revealed that it would deploy over 17,000 ad-hoc staff members for the Ondo election.¹¹²

However, the EMB has also been criticized as being in need of more transparency; in need of better management of logistics; and in need of better technology to enhance its conduct of elections.¹¹³ To deliver credible elections amid the current pandemic, INEC will have to adopt recommendations made by CDD's roundtable on the Ondo election:¹¹⁴

- Conduct a comprehensive security risk assessment to identify areas with high risks of security challenges.
- Intensify voter education as this is key to getting election process right.
- Ensure that all sensitive and non-sensitive election materials arrive the polling unit on time.
- Sensitize its own staff, because during the last local government election, most of Ondo State Independent Electoral Commission staff were compromised. The bad eggs within the system should be flushed out.
- Take responsibility for taking proper care of their ad-hoc staff, including provision for the day's meal on election day.
- Take into consideration challenges that have been presented due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in regard to making greater efforts to protect elderly persons and the vulnerable ones.
- All contents produced – videos, messages, banners, and flyers – should be translated to Nigeria's local languages for easy assimilation by the citizenry.
- Set up a Memorandum of Understanding for a peace pact by all political parties and their candidates.
- Provide needed support for people with disabilities (PWDs) and the aged to be allowed to vote first. Educational material should also be made available for the PWDs.

INEC can also adopt recommendations for a similar off-cycle election in Edo State in September 2020. These include:

- Intensifying its training of ad-hoc staff to understand the new measures for COVID-19 prevention and their implementation at the polling unit level.¹¹⁵
- Reinforcing a firm understanding of the role of their staff as impartial agents in the conduct of the election.¹¹⁶
- Commencing voter education that clearly communicates the procedures for conducting the polls during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹⁷¹¹⁵
- Collaborating with the Presidential Task Force and State Task Force

to ensure strict compliance with all public health and safety protocols.¹¹⁸

- Requiring polling officials to undergo COVID-19 testing before and after the election.¹¹⁹
- Taking concrete steps to dispel the perceptions that it lacks the requisite independence, impartiality, and professionalism to conduct credible elections by proactive disclosure of election-related information, consistency in the application of electoral guidelines, and conducting a transparent collation process.¹²⁰
- Liaising with the relevant security and health agencies to guarantee a safe and secure environment for polling officials and voters on election day.¹²¹

A major issue that could have affected INEC's ability to organise the voting process is the recent fire incident at its head office in Akure, Ondo State, which led to the destruction of over 5,000 card readers. As discussed above, INEC in a meeting with journalists stated that it has replaced these card readers with new ones from other states. However, the fact an INEC office has caught fire at least three times in 2020¹²² is still a cause for concern. In this context, both ADC and PDP alleged that the fire incident is an act of arson by APC, as an attempt to undermine the credibility of the forthcoming election.¹²³ In a context where card readers usually experience technical problems at elections, this loss of these card readers has the potential to affect election credibility even further. Bringing smart card readers from other states can only be a temporary solution; it is hoped that these burnt card readers would be replaced as soon as possible.

Election Observers

Electoral observation is an integral part of democratic and electoral processes. Observers play important roles in enhancing the transparency and credibility of elections and, in the acceptance of election results.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the acceptance of observers is evidence of the openness of the electoral process. Observers' election assessment also legitimizes elected administration.

INEC has approved 53 domestic observer groups and 6 international observer groups.¹²⁵

The international observers are:

- British High Commission
- Embassy of The United States
- European Union
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems
- International Republican Institute
- National Democratic Institute

The domestic observers are:

- Advocacy for Quality Leadership & Health Foundation
- Advocates for People's Right and Justice
- African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development
- African Initiative for Sustainable and Positive Development
- Christian Association of Nigeria
- Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD)
- Centre for Credible Leadership and Citizens Awareness
- Centre for Democracy and Development
- Centre for Positive Change and Civic Responsibility
- Centre for Strategic Conflict Management
- Centre for the Sustenance of Civil Rule in Nigeria
- Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA)
- Citizens Rights and Leadership Awareness Initiative

- Citizens Rights for Peace and Good Leadership Initiative
- CLEEN Foundation
- Coalition of Democrats for Electoral Reform (CODER)
- Election Monitor
- Global Development Centre for Rescue Mission in Nigeria
- Global Policy Advocacy and Leadership Initiative
- Grassroot Development and Peace Initiative
- Grassroots Empowerment Initiative for Positive Change and Development
- Ilimi Wal Hikma Islamic Foundation
- Inclusive Friends Association
- Initiative for Youth Transformation and Positive Change
- Intercontinental Leadership Initiative
- International Peace and Civic Responsibility Centre (IPCRC)
- Justice, Development and Peace Makers' Centre, Osogbo, Osun State
- Kimpact Youth Development Initiative
- National Committee of Patriots
- Nessaction
- New View Global Initiative for Youth and Women Development
- Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre – PLAC)
- Nigeria Progressive Women & Youth Development Initiative
- Noble Coordinators Forum for The Advancement of Ethics and Values
- Organisation of Justice for Equity Sustenance Pan African Leadership League
- Patriotic Women Foundation
- Progressive Youths Development Initiative Reclaim Nalja
- Sustainable Initiative for Nurturing Growth (SING)
- Waterlight Save Initiative
- Women Arise for Change Initiative
- Womenfest for Better Life Living Initiative
- Voice of Africa Women for Human Dignity
- YIAGA Africa Initiative
- Youth Initiative for Better and Great Nigeria
- Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution

- National Council for Women Societies (NCWS) Nigeria
- National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, National Assembly
- National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies National Orientation Agency
- Police Service Commission
- Action Aid Nigeria

Reports from observer groups are usually viewed as credible records of the conduct of elections.

Conclusion

From observations of the current dynamics in Ondo State, it can be inferred that:

- The legal and constitutional framework is in need of reform;
- There is a high risk of disenfranchisement due to INEC discontinuing its voter registration and PVC distribution process;
- The geography of Ondo, including the presence of mountains and rivers, has to be taken into account for election planning purposes;
- The importance of the civil service within the Ondo electorate has an impact on political campaigns;
- There is internal strife within the parties, although attempts have been made at unification;
- There are seventeen contesting parties: two are the dominant political parties and one without a nationwide presence is fast emerging as a third force in that locale;
- There is a lack of female and PWD representation in the candidates;
- The conduct of political actors in Ondo is strongly linked to prospects for the 2023 presidential election;
- There is reasonable suspicion of plans for violent activities that may undermine public safety and security;
- There is hope that CSOs and observers, both local and foreign, will help ensure credibility and integrity; and
- While the EMB overseeing the election can be commended for its stakeholder engagement, online results viewing portal, and electronic voter registration and accreditation, it is still in need of institutional and systemic modifications.

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**INITIATIVE FOR RESEARCH,
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About the Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub (E-Hub), an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (**IRIAD**), is a multidisciplinary strategic think-tank which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. It is conceptualized to complement the roles and activities of the different institutions, stakeholders and drivers of the electoral process and governance. The Electoral Hub's aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of data and critical analysis supporting the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving the electoral governance architecture and democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in contextual analysis for solutions and rooted in the principles of justice and equity

Our core values are knowledge-exchange, inclusion, justice, equity, transparency and accountability.

Contact

IRIAD- The Electoral Hub

C/o 1 Sankuru Close, Maitama

Phone: +234 8077222801 and +234 9092068680;

Email: info@iriadev.org and electoralhub@gmail.com

Social Media Channels

Twitter: @electoralhub; Instagram: @electoralhub; Facebook: Electoral Hub

Website: <https://electoralhub.iriadev.org>

