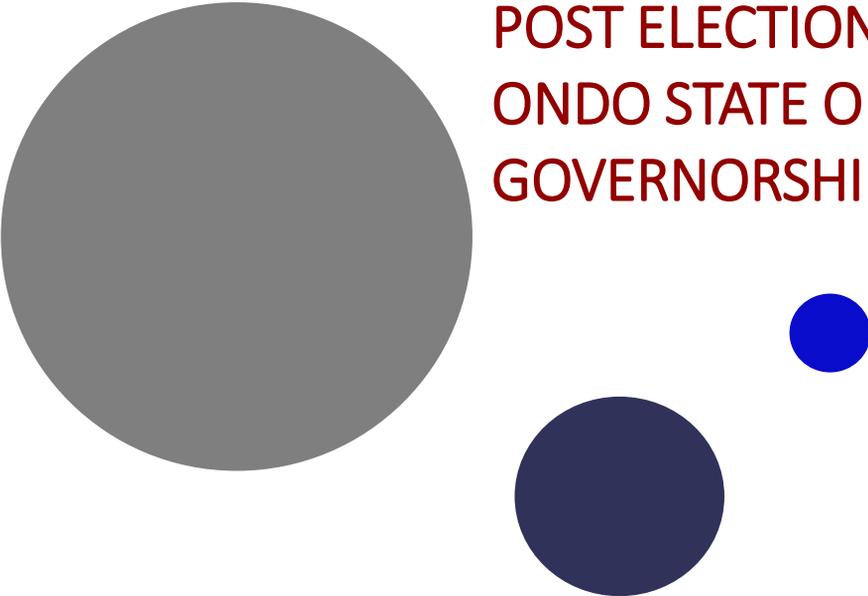




Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement



**POST ELECTION ANALYSIS: 2020
ONDO STATE OFF-CYCLE
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**

OCTOBER 2020 |

INTRODUCTION

On 10 October 2020 voters in Ondo State went to the polls to elect a governor in its off-cycle governorship election. Like the off-cycle governorship election in Edo State on 19 September, the Ondo State election was remarkable for (a) its widely-acclaimed peaceful conduct; (b) the issue-based focus of the campaigns; and (c) the improved and self-confident administration and conduct of the election by the Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC]. In particular the efficient and timely deployment of election personnel and materials that enabled the substantially hitch-free commencement of the elections and voting process, even in the difficult to access riverine areas of the state.

These dimensions of the election in Ondo State are noteworthy when set against the background of the typical hostile environment of competitive party and electoral politics in Nigeria; characterised by intra-party fissures and acrimonious inter-party disputes that are both capable of degenerating into violent conflicts before and on election day. But there remains a great deal of improvement to carry out in the management and conduct of election in the country.

This report by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) outlines its key findings from the October vote. It provides an account of CDD's major findings, derived primarily from field data gathered by CDD researchers and observers deployed across Ondo State ahead of and during the election. It highlights the extent to which INEC, poll officials, voters, security officials and other stakeholders in the political and electoral process complied with provisions of Nigeria's Constitution, Electoral Law, and related national legislation for the conduct of free and fair election in the country.

The Political Context

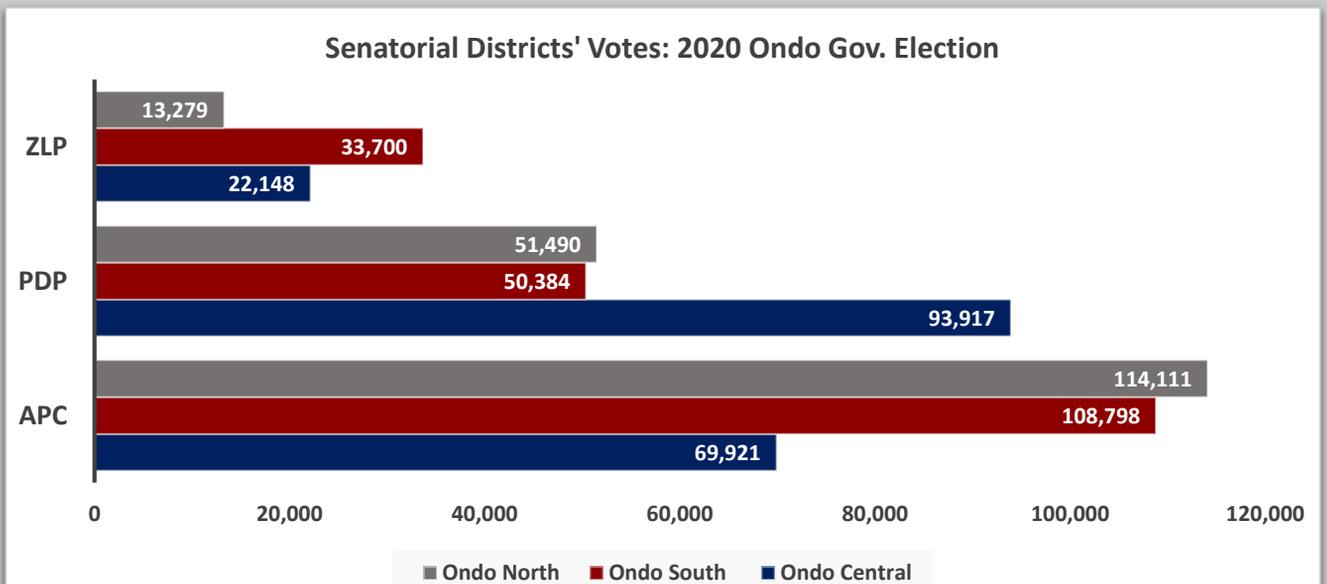
Unlike the trend in recent governorship elections in Ondo State, in which the political contest was fundamentally a two-party contest between the All Progressives' Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the political dynamics of the October 2020 elections in the state presaged a more competitive three-party contest between the APC, the PDP and the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP). The precipitating catalyst turning the contest into a multi-party one was the defection from the APC of the current Deputy Governor of Ondo State, Hon. Agboola Ajayi, who stood as the ZLP governorship candidate. The fissures generated within the APC and PDP by Hon. Agboola Ajayi's defection spawned a complex web of alliances, intrigues and political maneuverings. It created a potential third force, likely to have substantial votes off each of the two major parties, to effect the eventual outcome of the election. However, as the result of the election shows, this did not happen. The incumbent APC governor, Rotimi Akeredolu, secured a landslide victory, with the deputy governor finishing a distant third.

Table 1: Breakdown of results by major candidates

LGAs	APC	PDP	ZLP
AKORO NORTH EAST	16,572	8,380	3,532
AKORO NORTH WEST	15,809	10,320	3,477
AKORO SOUTH EAST	9,419	4,003	2,004
AKORO SOUTH WEST	21,232	15,055	2,775
AKURE NORTH	9,546	12,263	1,046
AKURE SOUTH	17,277	47,627	2,236
ESE-ODO	13,383	4,680	4,760
IDANRE	11,286	7,499	3,623
IFEDORE	9,350	11,852	1,863
ILAJE	26,657	11,128	4,405
ILEOLUJI/OKEIGBO	13,278	9,231	1,971
IRELE	12,643	5,493	5,904
ODIGBO	23,571	9,485	6,540
OKITIPUPA	19,266	10,367	10,120
ONDO EAST	6,485	4,049	3,221
ONDO WEST	15,977	10,627	10,159
OSE	15,122	8,421	1,083
OWO	35,957	5,311	408
Total	292,830	195,791	69,127

The Results

In its [background paper](#) released ahead of the election, CDD analysed the spatial distribution of votes at LGAs and senatorial districts' levels in the 2012 and 2016 governorship elections in Ondo State. The paper argued that "if the voting patterns in the previous elections remains the same, there is a possibility that APC party will "win big" in the Ondo North senatorial district, at the same time as competing well with the other parties in Ondo Central, and especially Ondo South, where Lucky Aiyedatiwa [deputy governorship candidate of APC] hails from." The paper further argued that although political parties continue to play a significant role in mobilising for vote, history of elections in Ondo State shows a phenomenon of bloc votes from senatorial districts where candidates of major party's hail. These projections align with the outcome of the 2020 governorship election in the state.



The graph above shows that the candidate of APC, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu won overwhelmingly in his senatorial district, Ondo North, with 114,111 votes, while he also gathered the highest number of votes, 108,798, from Ondo South. Votes from these two senatorial districts constitute 76.1% of the total votes cast for the candidate in the election. It is also more that the total votes cast for the PDP candidate, Eytayo Jegede (195,791 votes).

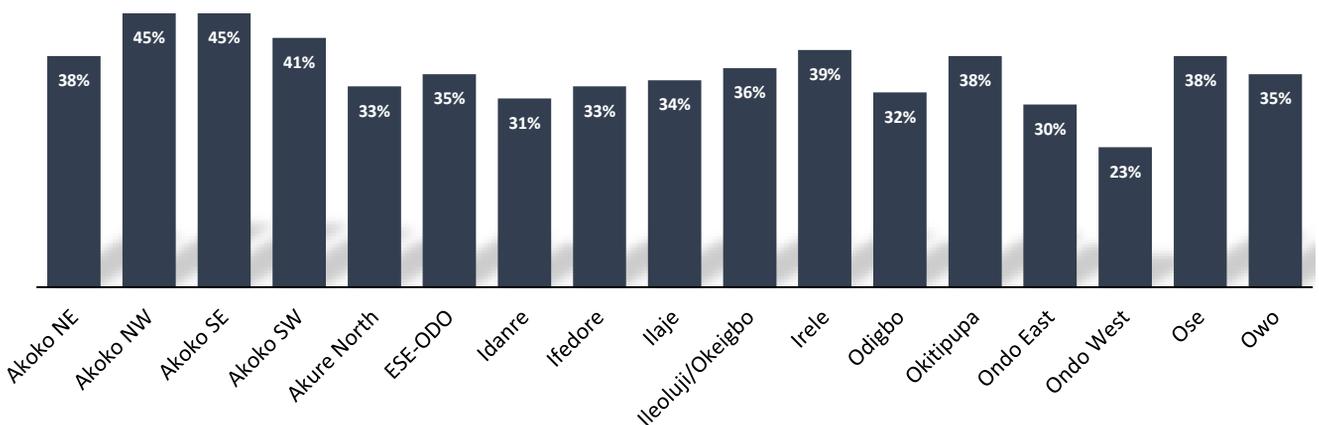
Voter turnout

Turnout rates have progressively declined since 2012; a trend that continued in 2020.

Election Year	Registered Voters	Voter Turnout
2012	1,638,950	38.10%
2016	1,647,673	35.20%
2020	1,822,346	32.70%

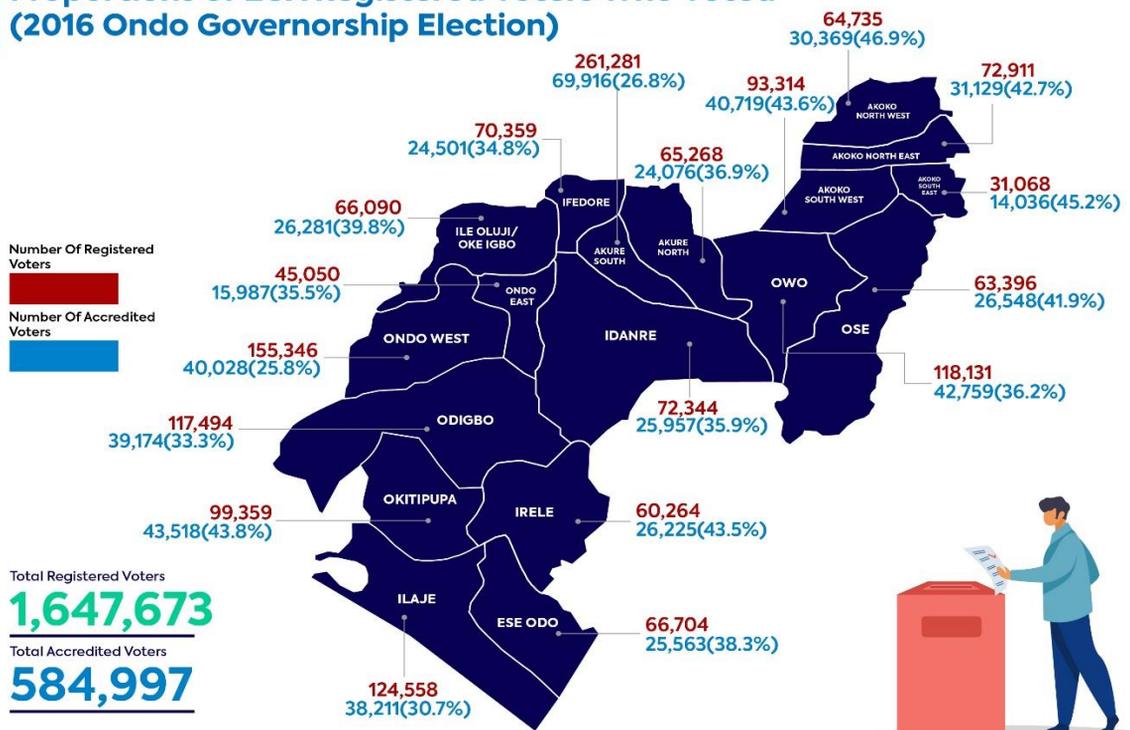
While the declining state of voter turnout can be attributed to many factors, the rain that started at the early phase of the accreditation and voting process may have discouraged people from coming out to vote. Analysis of turnout out LGA level paints a more nuanced picture. 11 of the 18 LGAs recorded turnout of between 34.7% and 44.6%; higher than the average turnout of 32.7% in the election. The 7 LGAs with low turnout rates are Akure South, Akure North, Ondo East, Ondo West, Idanre, Odigbo and Ifedore.

Ondo 2020 Election: % of Voter Turnout by LGAs



Analysis of turnout rates at LGA level in the 2016 governorship election further shows that Ifedore, Akure South, Odigbo and Ondo West LGAs have consistently maintained low turnout rates, slightly below the average rate of 35.2% recorded in the election. Also, as shown below, the 30.7% turnout rates in Ilaje LGA was far below the average turnout rate recorded in the 2016 election. The election had a turnout rates higher in 13 LGAs than the average rate of 35.2%, including Akoko North East, Akoko North West, Akoko South East, Akoko South West, Akure North, Ese-Odo, Idanre, Ile-Oluji-Okeigbo, Irele, Okitipupa, Ondo East, Ose and Owo LGAs.

Proportions of LGA Registered Voters Who Voted (2016 Ondo Governorship Election)



KEY REFLECTIONS

INEC's performance

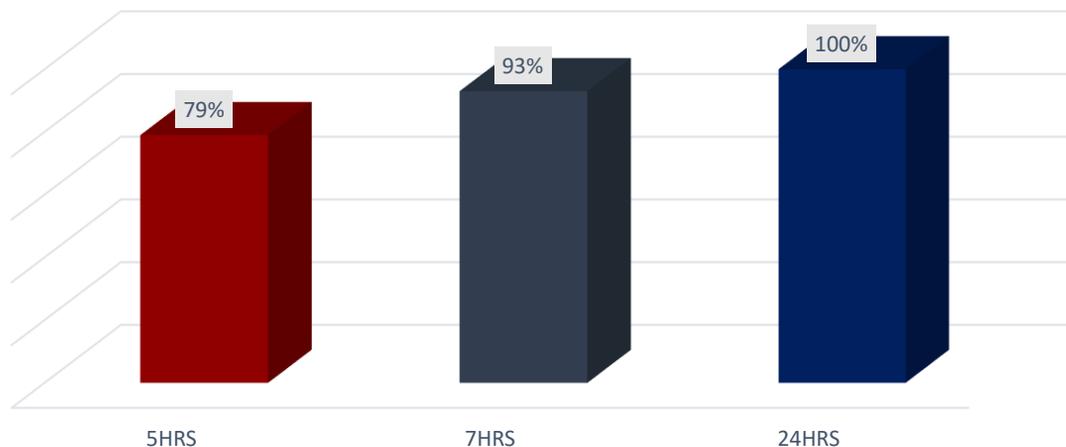
INEC deployed election officials and materials to all polling units in a timely and efficient manner to enable the accreditation and voting process start and end, as scheduled in most polling units, including those in the riverine areas. Smart card readers functioned well and when there were hitches, they were quickly rectified by technicians on stand-by duty.

Generally, the collation process at the various collation centres went on well and results were uploaded without delay on the INEC Result Viewing Portal. As in the case of the Nassarawa State Constituency Election and the Edo Governorship Election, the immediate uploading of results improved the transparency of INEC's result management process, in preempting attempts to introduce changes or alterations at other levels of collation, beginning from the ward or Registration Area (RA) level. The uploading also enabled stakeholders to track the progress of result uploads and project the outcome of the election before the final declaration. In the case of the Ondo election, the results were processed within about 5 to 8 hours of the close of polls.

CDD recommends that, going forward, INEC should continue to enhance not only the results management process, but also the electoral process in general. Towards this end, it will be important to begin focusing on the need for the replacement or upgrade of equipment such as the SCRs, or, look for better, multifunctional equipment that can encompass the entire process from the registration of new voters through to the processing of results.

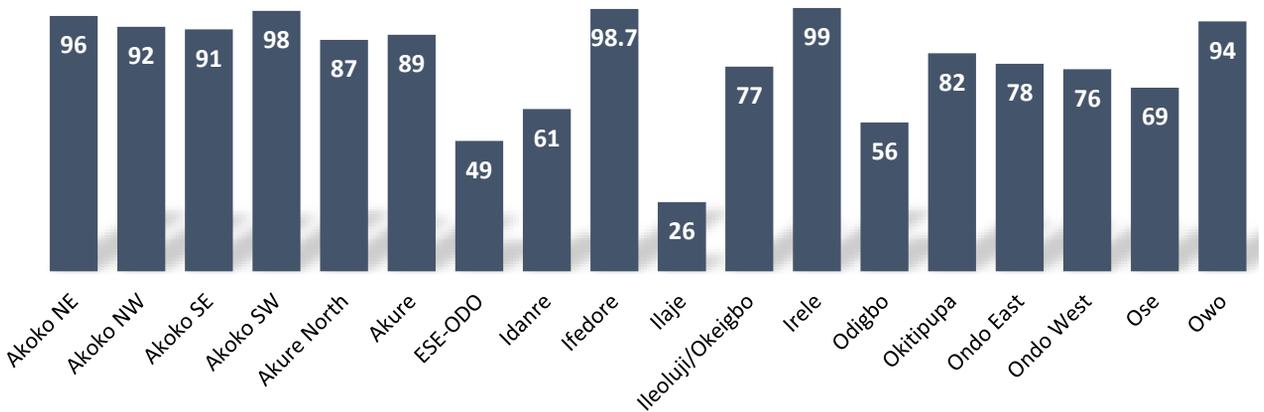
The INEC Result Viewing Platform

Ondo 2020 Gov. Election: IRev Upload



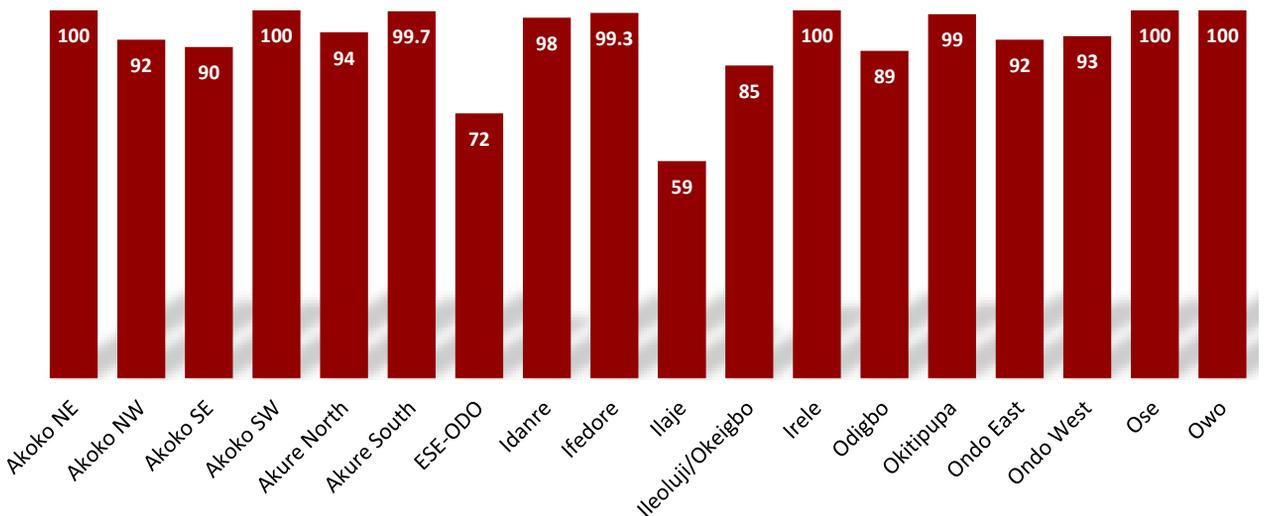
During the election, CDD researchers observed the upload of results, using the Zip files, on the platform to enable Nigerians view results of polling unit in real time as voting ended on election day. There was a high level of compliance by Presiding Officers in the 3,009 polling units across Ondo State to the directive to upload completed Form EC 8A on the INEC Result Viewing (IRev) platform. The graph above shows that 5 hours after the voting ended, results have been uploaded in 79% of the existing polling units. This increased to 93% after seven hours, with all forms uploaded within 24 hours.

Ondo 2020 Election: IReV Upload, 5HRS After

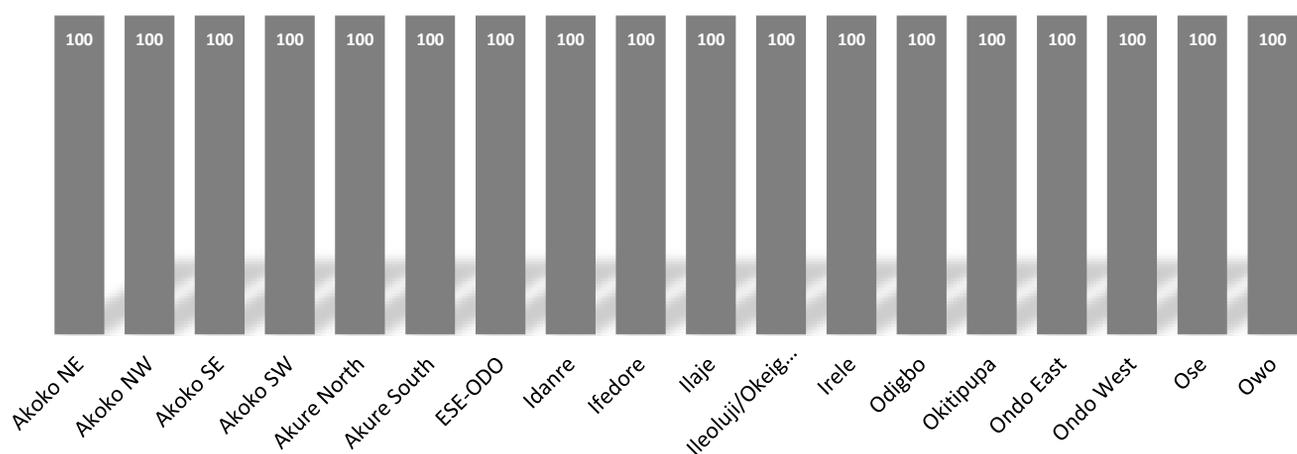


Further analysis reveals that except for Ilaje LGA, where results from just 26% of the PUs were uploaded after five hours, not less than 13 LGAs recorded upload of over 70% of their election results on the IReV platform, in the same time period. The riverine nature of Ilaje and lack of accessibility to internet may have been responsible for the low rate of upload. Also, as shown below, Five LGAs (Ose, Owo, Akoko North East, Akoko South West, and Irele) had 100% of their results uploaded on the platform seven hours after the declaration of results. The application of technology to enable viewing of election results in real time demonstrates INEC’s commitment to strengthening transparency in the management of election results.

Ondo 2020 Election: IReV Upload, 7HRS After



Ondo 2020 Election: IReV Upload, 24HRS After



Disregard for COVID-19 Protocols

Compared to the Edo election, INEC made improved efforts to implement and enforce the COVID 19 protocols. In some polling units, infrared thermometer, methylated spirit and hand sanitizer were used. However the use of two-tier queue system for accreditation and voting was not adhered across observed polling units. Some voters used face masks but in general there was complete disregard for this provision of the COVID 19 protocol. CDD has reached the conclusion that the blatant disregard for COVID-prevention protocol is a societal problem caused by the belief that the virus is non-existent or not as serious as it is widely claimed to be.

Issues Based Campaigns Despite Threat of Fake News

A positive feature of the election was its issue-based focus, marking a departure from the politics of personality cult and sectarian-communalism that had tended to characterise and define previous election in the state. The people of Ondo State displayed a strong determination to task the candidates and their parties to task on their programmes for the social development, human security, and industrial development of the state, as exemplified through the focus on school fees and maternal health policy, as major election issues. Another governance issue that featured in the election was about the promotion of the rights of women and the child- girl, in view of the alleged scrapping of the free maternal care (Abiye) programme introduced by previous state government, and the consequential rise in the cost of healthcare for expectant mothers. If sustained the trend bodes well for the nurture and development of a political culture of democratic accountability and robust popular engagement in the governance of the state.

Vote buying

At several other polling units, CDD observed a consistent pattern of vote buying, involving vote buyers who used various devices to evade the watch of security officials and election observers. CDD observers documented attempts by political actors to outspend one another by making available large sums disbursed to community leaders for onward distribution to voters. CDD observation showed that whereas in the past the *modus operandi* was to distribute cash discreetly at points close to the polling unit, the new tactic is to create outposts where voters can go to collect cash after showing evidence that they voted for the preferred candidates of the vote buyers.

It was alleged by those the CDD observers spoke with about vote buying at polling units on election day that bulk sums ranging from N150,000 to N600,000 were earmarked for each polling unit across each LGA were handed over to popular figures, especially youth groups to share among voters in their areas.

Another vote buying tactic used was to make electronic cash transfers to the voter after proving he or she voted for the preferred candidate of the vote buyer. CDD observers reported that party agents largely stayed away from coordinating vote buying. In Ward 11, Polling Unit 021, Akure South LGA, CDD observed that political parties designated someone, who is not a party agent, but appears to be neutral to direct voters to an outpost where cash could be distributed. In several instances, disagreement between vote buyers and sellers resulted in altercation. CDD observers reported tension at Oke Aro, Polling Unit 6, when the money for the vote buying was insufficient, thereby upsetting a voter who had cast his ballot for the buying party. In polling unit 005, Akoko South, observers reported that party agents openly induced voters. CDD observers similarly noted instances where voters on their own displayed their ballots to assure a particular party agent they had cast their ballots for the preferred candidate of the agent.

On a more positive note, CDD observers noted that in several polling units' voters pushed back against vote buying by individuals seeking to induce voters to vote for the preferred candidates of the agents

This was documented in Idanre (Ward 3, PU 6; Ward 8, PU 1,2 and 3; and Ward 5 PU 1), where voters generally rebuffed and rejected the inducement, and declared their determination to vote for candidates of their choice. The vote-buying attempt was not without some drama: there was a debate over the attempted inducement---some involved in the debate urged voters approached to sell their votes but to vote their should vote their conscience, while others disagreed. In the end, most of the voters rejected the money offered and chased the voter buyers away from the polling unit. It is noteworthy, according to the report of the CDD observers the offer and the debate over it happened in the presence of security personnel.

Fake observes

Another trend observed by CDD in the Ondo Governorship election was the presence of fake observers, who were neither accredited by INEC nor trained to engage in non-partisan observation. CDD investigations showed that the role of these fake observers was to muddy the waters and conflate the messaging about key processes in the election being disseminated by genuine observers.

Skewed media access

There was disproportionately more political advertising by the APC than by any other party. This was particularly evident in the display of public billboards and campaign posters, and through advertisements and features on the state television and radio in the major towns and urban areas of the state. In addition, some parties alleged that advertisements paid for by them were not aired or were turned down by state-owned media. It was also alleged that the only media organisations accessible to the opposition in the state during the elections were the privately-owned Breeze FM, Crest FM and sometimes Adaba station.

Impunity

A culture of impunity drives some of the more unwholesome micro-level, state-wide political and electoral behaviour, such as vote buying and skewed media access summarized above. It sadly also reflects a broader macro-level or national anti-democratic

political culture that is spawned by a combination of the low level of human development in the country, despite provisions of Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, institutional weaknesses, and serious erosion in professionalism in the country's public life—all of which are aggravated by the lure of crass materialism and the commodization of politics at the state and national levels in the country. Failure to arrest, prosecute and convict criminal electoral behaviour, such as vote buying and other forms of electoral corruption encourages and thereby vicariously rewards and perpetuates a vicious cycle of electoral criminal behaviour from election to election.

This partly explains the finding of the CDD during the 2020 Ondo election that law enforcement officers, election officials and the general public tended to look the other way in the face of glaring acts of impunity, such as vote buying and related shades of electoral malfeasance near or at polling sites on Election Day. Indifference to such impunity, leading to failure to bring those who engage in it to book creates the impression that such acts are immune from prosecution, being above the law.

The skewed media access highlighted in this report is another indication of the impunity that drove the Ondo elections. Reflecting a broader abuse of the power of incumbency for partisan electoral advantage, the action of state-controlled media in not granting equal access to all political parties is an infringement of the electoral law that the National Broadcasting Commission has allegedly been reticent to enforce, vicariously encouraging its violation from one election cycle to another, depending on the party in power.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the 2020 governorship elections in Ondo was largely peaceful there remain potential dark clouds that portend ill winds for the conduct of credible elections not only in Ondo State but also in Nigeria. Competitive party and electoral politics in Ondo, as in Nigeria generally, continue to be plagued by huge deficits in intra-party democracy and the marginalization of women and youth. To this must be added the impunity exhibited in vote buying, even in the presence of the police and security agents. The paradox of the election is the cohabitation of an issues-based election that is also characterised by vote buying.

CDD is hopeful that INEC and relevant stakeholders in the state will come together to address the dark spots and, doing so, brighten the prospects for the conduct of not only peaceful but also free and fair elections in Ondo. Drawing lessons that can be used to enhance democracy and development in Nigeria as a whole.

In this respect the CDD recommends as follows:

- ❑ immediate enactment of legislation to establish an Electoral Offences Commission to deal with the rising incidence of vote buying and other forms of electoral corruption and offences;
- ❑ the creation of a civil society network of volunteers at polling units dedicated to monitor and discourage vote buying on election day;
- ❑ party reform to make the country's political parties reflect the democratic culture of accountability, transparency, inclusion and participation in their internal decision-making structures and nomination processes for elective public political offices;
- ❑ INEC should continue to enhance not only the results management process, but also the electoral process in general. Towards this end, INEC should begin the replacement or upgrade of equipment such as the SCRs, or, indeed looking for better, multifunctional equipment that can encompass the entire process from the registration of new voters through to the processing of results.

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