



A BELLWETHER ELECTION

Assessing Prospects and Trends ahead of the 2024 Edo Governorship Election

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CDD Briefing Paper

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Introduction

Upon arriving at Benin Airport, it quickly became evident to our team which of the 17 candidates could be leading the race for the 21 September Edo governorship elections. A drive from the airport, and through Benin City, confirmed our first impression that three political parties and their candidates dominate the landscape. Billboards and posters display the faces and colours of these three frontrunners, more so than any other candidate. The candidates of these three parties, who also topped the general elections, will be the most visible and heard throughout the campaign, each pursuing the position for different reasons and through distinct paths, as highlighted below.

Asue Ighodalo, a seasoned lawyer and businessman, has been nominated by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to succeed incumbent Governor Godwin Obaseki. Ighodalo's nomination appears to have been at the heart of the rift between Obaseki and Philip Shaibu, who was twice elected as deputy governor and sought to succeed his boss but has since been impeached. Although a Federal High Court in Abuja later declared the impeachment null, the state government has refused to acknowledge him in this post, and he has defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC). The party will be represented by Monday Okpebholo, a first-term senator who will be seeking to help the party regain a state house they lost when Obaseki was denied the party's nomination ahead of the 2020 elections. Olumide Akpata, the former president of the Nigerian Bar Association, is the nominee of the Labour Party (LP), which will seek to leverage on the impressive showing of their presidential nominee in the 2023 general elections.

All three candidates are relatively new to elective politics – Akpata and Ighodalo have not contested for office before and Okpebholo was only elected to the senate last year. This, alongside the expected impact of their various political patrons and rumoured 'godfathers', is expected to play a role in how the elections are conducted, and their subsequent outcome. This report explores these matters, alongside other issues such as zoning agitations, intra-party dynamics and the role that incumbency – at both federal and state level – will play in the elections. These findings were first developed from desk research and then reviewed through different key informant interviews conducted during the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) pre-election assessment visit to Edo state from 12 – 16 August 2024.

Edo is one of two states where off-cycle governorship elections are taking place in 2024. In Ondo, it will take place in November where. Ondo's election follows the death of the

incumbent governor, while Edo will see a new governor elected as the incumbent completes his full two terms in office. This election, as with any election, will affect the future and prospects of many citizens in the state. It will also help in pointing a direction towards how Nigerians are responding to the agenda of the Bola Tinubu administration and how they are interacting with partisan politics. This report seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarship of this period in Edo state and Nigerian politics, in general.

Background to the Elections



Fig 1 – Map of Edo State with Senatorial Districts and Local Government Areas

History of Edo State

Edo State is in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Edo traces its ancestral heritage to the ancient Benin Kingdom, whose monarchy still exists today. While the kingdom was renowned for its ancient metalwork structure, its famed walls and vibrant culture, like many other ancient African kingdoms, it soon fell under the might of the British colonial force. One disturbing historical fact about British colonialism in Benin Kingdom is a punitive massacre carried out by the British in 1897 in response to the ambush and killing of the deputy

commissioner for the Niger Coast Protectorate and an estimated 250 strong party. Additionally, the British sacked Oba Ovonramwen, the monarch, and exiled him to Calabar. When the throne was eventually occupied by Ovonramwen's son, Eweka II, it was largely weakened and subject to the authority of the state. Despite these incidents, the Oba of Benin remains a paramount leader of the Edo people. As one of the few thrones with a clearly designated heir and a single royal house, the undue influence that governors have had in choosing successors whenever a throne has become vacant is non-existent in Edo.

As a state, Edo traces its origins to the Western Region established at Nigeria's independence in 1960. The Western Region was further divided in 1963, when the Mid-Western Region was created and remained the same till 1976, when the region was renamed Bendel. In 1991, two states – Delta and Edo – were carved out of Bendel and have remained distinct states to date. The capital and largest city, Benin City, is the fourth largest city in Nigeria and home to the country's rubber industry.¹ It borders Kogi (North-Central) to the north, Anambra (South-East) to the east, Delta (South-South) to the south and Ondo (South-West) to the west. This proximity to three other geo-political zones has made Edo a major trading and cultural powerhouse, with its citizens going on to occupy prominent positions nationwide and its politics having an influence on the country.

As of the 2006 Nigerian national population census, Edo was ranked 24th of 36 states² with an estimated population of 3,233,366. In 2022, the state had an estimated population of 4,777,000. Edo is also the 22nd largest state by landmass in Nigeria.³ Administratively, it is divided into 18 local governments areas (LGAs) and three senatorial zones. As with many parts of the country, the distinction in determining political representation across these zones will play a major role in the outcome of these elections.

When citizens go to the polls on 21 September 2024, they will elect a governor from among the 17 party nominees in 4,519 polling units and 192 wards. It stands to reason that, going by the nature of recent election results, Edo can reliably prove to be a bellwether in determining how prevalent the three major parties from the 2023 general elections are ahead of a possible rerun in 2027.

¹ Britannica, [The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Benin City". Encyclopedia Britannica](#), 19 Jun. 2024,

² Nigeria Data Portal: [State Population, 2006](#)

³World Gazetteer: Nigeria: [Administrative Divisions \(population and area\)](#).

History of Edo Elections in the Fourth Republic

Historically, Edo state has been a reliably PDP state. The party won the state's presidential vote from 1999 to 2019 and also returned senators in all three senatorial districts from 1999 to 2011. Lucky Igbinedion was twice elected as governor to two terms from 1999 to 2007 and Oserheimen Osunbor won the 2007 elections to succeed him.

Edo State | Former Governors







1999 - 2007	Lucky Igbenedion Edo South		PDP
2007 - 2008	Oserheimen Osunbor Edo Central		PDP
2008 - 2016	Adams Oshiomhole Edo North	 	ACN/APC
2016 - 2020	Godwin Obaseki Edo South		APC
2020 - 2024	Godwin Obaseki Edo South		PDP

Fig 2 – Former Governors of Edo State

Osunbor's governorship ended when a court ruled that Adams Oshiomhole was the winner of the 2007 election. Oshiomhole's tribunal victory in 2008⁴ led to the state moving to an off-cycle status in the conduct of state elections and this also played a role in the birth of a political opposition strong enough to eventually remove the PDP at the federal level in 2015. Prior to that, Oshiomhole had developed goodwill⁵ and popularity in his capacity as the president of Nigeria Labour Congress (1999– 2007)⁶ and his everyman demeanour appealed to many citizens in the state. Oshiomhole was able to win a second term in 2012 and ensured that his preferred successor, Godwin Obaseki, was elected to succeed him in 2016. Both men, however, fell out ahead of the 2020 governorship elections, with some reports suggesting that Oshiomhole, who would eventually become the national chair of APC ahead of the 2019 elections, was keen on foisting his preferred choices for elective office. Obaseki defected to the PDP, alongside his deputy, Philip Shaibu, and was able to win re-election in 2020 as a PDP member.

PDP has also reliably produced a considerable number of Edo's National Assembly delegation with eight House members in 1999, eight in 2003, eight in 2007, eight in 2011, eight in 2015, five in 2019, and one in 2023.⁷ While all senators from Edo South have been PDP members,

⁴ The Guardian: [Election tribunal gives Edo to Oshiomhole](#)

⁵ Vanguard: Oshiomhole @ 65: [From a dogged labour leader to a political machine](#)

⁶ Premium Times Nigeria: [Oshiomhole speaks on assault on NLC president](#)

⁷ ThisDay: [Edo Supplementary Elections: PDP Candidates Win Three State Assembly](#)

Edo North broke with this tradition, and elected an Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)⁸ senator in 2011 and an incumbent APC senator since 2015, probably owing to the influence of Adams Oshiomhole, the serving senator from the zone. Edo Central peculiarly had also formerly elected only PDP members, but following a contentious battle over different zones of the party angling to produce a nominee, APC was able to take advantage of the in-fighting to win the election - in what some analysts called a ‘protest vote’ against the governor.

Similarly, in 2023, Labour Party’s Peter Obi won the presidential vote in the state, despite a PDP governor and the emergence of two APC senators.⁹ This feat was attributed to several reasons going by key informant interviews conducted ahead of this year’s governorship elections. They range from, a more enlightened and educated electorate, a protest votes against the party of a controversial governor, and an unpopular president. A key question will be if this support can be translated to the party, which is fielding a strong candidate.

As citizens prepare to vote, some of these historical antecedents will either shore up support for a candidate or lead to a considerable overturn of results.

Recent Election Analysis

The three most recent elections held in the state could provide some analysis and pointers towards the state of play ahead of the elections.

Edo 2020 Governorship Election

Both major candidates, PDP’s Obaseki and APC’s Osagie Ize-Iyamu, had contested in 2016¹⁰ on the other party’s platform, which provided some irony to any partisan campaign rhetoric. Both candidates were also from Edo South, which meant that any expected voter base would be crossed out. This election also reinforced the voting strength of the Southern senatorial zone, as it produced 46.8% of all total votes cast in the election, compared to 35.3% in the Northern senatorial zone and 17.9% in the Central senatorial zone.¹¹ This data supports the previous strength that Edo South has had, especially in producing two two-term governors.

Obaseki stormed to re-election in 2020¹² with victory in 13 of the state’s 18 LGAs. Furthermore, he won all seven LGAs in Edo South and all five in Edo Central, with commanding leads in Egor, Oredo and Esan West, where he tallied at least 70% of the votes

⁸ ACN is a defunct party that folded into the current APC

⁹Business Day: [Obi beats Tinubu, Atiku with 331,163 in Edo](#)

¹⁰ Daily Post Nigeria: Edo Election: [APC candidate, Obaseki beats PDP’s Ize-Iyamu.](#)

¹¹ Stears Elections: [2020 Governorship election results.](#)

¹² AriseNews: [With All 18 LGAs’ Results Announced, Obaseki Wins 13, Ize-Iyamu 5.](#)

in those LGAs. Ize-Iyamu won five of the six LGAs in Edo North, a zone largely associated with Oshiomhole, who remains the major APC figure in the state. Despite this, Obaseki's ability to compete and reduce the margins in the vote-heavy Northern LGAs of Etsako West and Akoko Edo, would prove decisive in ensuring a comfortable re-election victory.

Nigeria 2023 General Elections

The presidential election result in Edo¹³ was largely divided along senatorial zones, with Peter Obi and LP carrying the vote in Edo Central and Edo South, while Bola Tinubu and APC won all LGAs in Edo North. This result saw PDP fail to win a single LGA for the first time in a presidential election since the return to democracy in 1999, in what was earlier stated to be a repudiation of the sitting governor.

Obi's victory was considered an upset, especially because of the established parties that were in power; PDP in the state and APC at national level. Obi's strength in Edo South also led to the party flipping a senate seat¹⁴ that had always been a PDP seat and gaining two federal representative¹⁵ seats. APC was able to take advantage of PDP's internal divide to flip Edo Central and retain Edo North, and as well, six of the state's nine federal representative seats. This meant that PDP, which has previously relied on the state, was left with a solitary federal representative seat.

Edo 2023 State House of Assembly Elections

The state house of assembly election result in Edo¹⁶ is the most recent election in the state, for which interviewees were keen to stress, was a more reflective state of the strength of the different parties. PDP won 12 of the 24 seats contested, with APC winning eight, LP winning one, and three being declared inconclusive.

Notably, there was no clear zonal sweep compared to previous elections. PDP candidates won four of the six seats in Edo Central, with APC winning the other two – which showed a stronger-than-expected APC showing, compared to the previous two elections. Likewise, despite a near impregnable grip on Edo North in the two preceding elections, PDP won three of the eight seats available, including both in Akoko Edo, while APC won the remaining five. Finally, Edo South proved difficult with three inconclusive seats, one LP win in Oredo, an APC win in Orhiomwon and PDP winning five of the ten seats in the zone.

¹³ Punch: [#NigeriaElections2023: Obi floors Atiku, Tinubu in Edo](#)

¹⁴ ThisDayLive: [LP Candidate, Imasuen, Wins Edo South Senate Seat](#).

¹⁵ Punch: [Edo PDP wins three assembly seats, APC claims one Rep seat](#).

¹⁶ Punch: [Edo Assembly election: PDP wins 12 seats, APC eight](#)

Edo State | Recent Election Analysis

ZONE	LGA	Edo Gov 2020	Nigeria 2023	Edo SH 2023
Central	Esan Central	PDP	LP	PDP
Central	Esan North-East	PDP	LP	APC, PDP*
Central	Esan South-East	PDP	LP	PDP
Central	Esan West	PDP	LP	APC
Central	Igueben	PDP	LP	PDP
North	Akoko Edo	APC	APC	PDP, PDP*
North	Etsako Central	APC	APC	APC
North	Etsako East	APC	APC	APC
North	Etsako West	APC	APC	APC, APC*
North	Owan East	APC	APC	APC
North	Owan West	PDP	APC	PDP
South	Ikpoba Okha	PDP	LP	PDP
South	Uhunmwonde	PDP	LP	PDP
South	Egor	PDP	LP	Inconclusive
South	Ovia North-East	PDP	LP	PDP, PDP*
South	Oredo	PDP	LP	Inconclusive, LP*
South	Orhionmwon	PDP	LP	APC, PDP*
South	Ovia South-West	PDP	LP	Inconclusive

*- Two seats

Fig 3 – Recent Election Results – 2020 Governorship, 2023 Presidential and 2023 State House Elections

These results, taken collectively, tell a different story, especially when the presidential elections are compared to the recent state House of Assembly elections. While LP's gain during the presidential elections should not be discounted, the ability of the state's PDP machine to prove competitive in opposition strongholds means its chances should not be overlooked ahead of the coming elections. Finally, while these results cannot be discounted and provide trends for probable voting patterns, if the axiom that, a week is a long time in politics, holds, it is therefore, the events that dominated the primaries and subsequent campaigns that should be considered a truer representation of the state's politics.

Election Context

To comply with the provision of Section 33 of the 2022 Electoral Act, which stipulates that a political party shall not be allowed to change or substitute its candidate whose name has been submitted except in the case of death or withdrawal, some political parties in Edo State conducted fresh primary elections to replace their earlier nominated candidates by the deadline of 15th April 2024. These political parties include Action Alliance (AA) and African Democratic Congress (ADC), who replaced their governorship candidates and their running mates. In addition, African Action Congress (AAC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Boot Party (BP) and New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) replaced the running mates of their candidates only. The National Rescue Movement (NRM) and Youth Party (YP) did not meet

the Independent National Electoral Commission’s (INEC) deadline¹⁷ for the nomination of their candidates on the INEC portal. The other 17 political parties concluded their primaries and uploaded their candidate's nomination forms by the deadline of 6:00 pm, 24th March 2024 before the portal automatically shut down. Therefore, seventeen (17) political parties will field candidates in the September 21, 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo state, with sixteen (16) male candidates and one (1) female candidate, further reflecting the limitations that women politicians have had in being candidates for elective office in Nigeria.¹⁸

Edo State | Governorship Nominees

PARTY	CANDIDATE	PWD	AGE	GENDER
Accord	Iyere Kennedy	NO	50	MALE
AA	Iseghohi Tom	NO	60	MALE
AAC	Udoh David	NO	37	MALE
ADC	Izedonmwen Osarenren	NO	47	MALE
ADP	Akhime Afeare	NO	37	MALE
APC	Okpebholo Monday	NO	53	MALE
APGA	Osifo Isaiah	NO	64	MALE
APM	Ugiagbe Sylvester	NO	45	MALE
APP	Areleogbe Osalumese	NO	56	MALE
BP	Osiriame Edeipo	NO	47	MALE
LP	Akpata Olumide	NO	51	MALE
NNPP	Azena Azemhe Friday	NO	44	MALE
PDP	Ighodalo Asuerinme	NO	64	MALE
PRP	Key Patience	NO	50	FEMALE
SDP	Anerua Aliu	NO	53	MALE
YPP	Okungbowa Ovbokhan	NO	40	MALE
ZLP	Akhalamhe Amiemenoghena	NO	43	MALE

Fig 4 – Updated list of Edo election governorship nominees

Obaseki-Shaibu Rift

The governor and his deputy fell out over the latter’s ambition to succeed the former as governor. Before their feud, Philip Shaibu first served as a state lawmaker and later as a federal lawmaker, a position he resigned from in 2015 to run with Obaseki on APC’s ticket in the 2016 governorship election, which they won, with the support of then incumbent governor, Adams Oshiomhole.¹⁹

Four years later, Adams Oshiomhole, who later became APC’s national chairman, denied Obaseki the party’s ticket²⁰ for a second term, forcing the governor to defect²¹ to the PDP. Shaibu defected to the PDP alongside the governor, a platform on which they both contested and won a second term in 2020. However, as Obaseki became insistent that his successor

¹⁷ Independent National Electoral Commission: [Publication of The Final List Of Candidates For The Edo State Governorship Election.](#)

¹⁸ Vanguard: [Edo guber: PDP, APC, LP, 13 others beat INEC deadline, nominate candidates](#)

¹⁹ Premium Times: [Shaibu speaks on his removal as Edo Deputy Governor.](#)

²⁰ Premium Times: [TIMELINE: Obaseki vs Oshiomhole: From political sweethearts to implacable foes.](#)

²¹ Punch Newspaper: [Oshiomhole became political bully as APC chair – Obaseki.](#)

would come from Edo Central, political interests were bound to clash, especially as Shaibu is an indigene of Edo North. He would later state that he felt “hurt and betrayed”²² that despite his political support and financial investment in their re-election, Obaseki preferred another person as his successor. On the other hand, Obaseki actively canvassed support for his preferred successor, a strategy that led PDP leaders in the three senatorial districts of the state to adopt Asue Ighodalo as the consensus candidate for the governorship position.²³

As issues between both men developed, there was actions carried out that appear designed to embarrass Shaibu. There was a well-documented snub in public during an event, before the later relocation of the deputy governor’s office from the Government House to another location in the state.²⁴ Finally, the state House of Assembly accused Shaibu of leaking state government secrets and committing perjury. Shaibu’s alleged offences were described as impeachable.²⁵ A seven-man investigative panel was set up by the Chief Judge of Edo State, Justice Daniel Okungbowa, to investigate allegations of misconduct against the deputy governor. Shaibu declined to attend a session of the panel to defend the allegations against him and, on 8 March 2024, he was impeached by the State Assembly.

However, months after the impeachment, precisely on 17 July, 2024, the Federal High Court reinstated Philip Shaibu as the Deputy Governor of Edo State. Following this, on 21 July, 2024, Shaibu officially rejoined the APC.²⁶ This event allowed members of the PDP’s ‘Legacy Group’, a faction loyal to the since suspended national vice-chair, Dan Orbih, to similarly defect to APC. Among the prominent members that defected were two former Edo Assembly speakers, some governorship aspirants and others in the state.

Primaries

People’s Democratic Party (PDP)

The party screening committee cleared 10 aspirants out of the eleven candidates that participated in the party’s primary election.²⁷ The nomination form was sold for 30 million naira, while the expression of interest form was 5 million naira.²⁸ The party made the expression of interest form free for female aspirants and people living with disabilities (PLWD)²⁹

²² Premium Times: [‘I feel hurt, betrayed,’ Shaibu says of his support for Obaseki’s second term](#)

²³ Premium Times: [Edo 2024: More PDP leaders adopt Obaseki’s preferred aspirant.](#)

²⁴ ThisDay: [Obaseki Moves to Remove Deputy’s Office from Government House](#)

²⁵ Sahara Reporters: [Breaking: Edo Assembly Impeaches Deputy Governor Shaibu.](#)

²⁶ Channels: [UPDATED: Court Reinstates Shaibu As Edo Deputy Gov, Assembly Appeals Judgement.](#)

²⁷ Punch News: [PDP clears 10 aspirants for Edo gov primaries.](#)

²⁸ ThisDay: [Ighodalo, Shaibu, Others Pick N35m Edo PDP Governorship Forms.](#)

²⁹ Punch: [PDP closes Edo form sale, rakes in N235m from 11 aspirants](#)

Asue Ighodalo, largely believed to be the preferred pick of Governor Obaseki, emerged as the governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) after Hon. Omosede Igbinedion stepped down for him during the election in the interest of the party.³⁰ The announced result was contested, especially since nine aspirants, led by Deputy Governor Philip Shaibu, rejected the ward congresses³¹ where ad-hoc delegates who would vote for the governorship candidate were elected.

On 4 July, 2024, the Federal High Court declared the 22 February primary election invalid, citing the unlawful exclusion of 378 delegates who were supposed to vote, in violation of the law.³² The court identified gross violations of the 2022 Electoral Act³³, PDP's own guidelines, and the party's constitution³⁴ during the primary election in Benin. Additionally, the court stated that the evidence presented by the PDP was inadequate and lacked proof, revealing that the returning officers had manipulated the result sheets. The plaintiffs successfully established their case against the defendants through the exhibits tendered, leading to the court's decision to annul the primary election that had produced Asue Ighodalo as the governorship candidate.

After the feud, PDP selected the Secretary to the State Government, Osarodion Ogie, as the running mate to its Governorship Candidate, Asue Ighodalo. Meanwhile, the family of philanthropist and cleric, Rev. Matthew Okpebholo, has thrown its weight behind Ighodalo, who is set to defect to PDP.³⁵ The Okpebholo family has become a force to reckon with in determining who gets what in Esanland and, to some extent, Edo State, even though he is not known to belong to any political party.

The primary election outcome deepened internal divisions within the party. Philip Shaibu and his supporters aligned with the APC's candidate, Monday Okpebholo, to oppose the former party's candidate.³⁶ They integrated their structures into Okpebholo's campaign, citing the state government's marginalization of their constituents and supporters. Consequently, the party suspended Shaibu, Ogbeide-Ihama, and Orbih. The defections and internal crises have sparked mixed reactions within the party and among observers, raising concerns about the party's prospects in the September election.

³⁰Vanguard: Edo 2024: [Ighodalo emerges as PDP governorship candidate](#)

³¹ThisDay: [Furore Over Edo PDP Ad-hoc Delegates' Election](#)

³²Punch: [Court declares Edo PDP governorship primary invalid](#)

³³PLAC: [Electoral Act, 2022](#)

³⁴INEC: [PDP Constitution](#)

³⁵NajiaNews: [Edo: Ogie Emerges As Ighodalo's Running Mate, APC Members Set To Join PDP](#)

³⁶Business Day: [Edo guber: PDP contending with internal foes](#)

All Progressives Congress (APC)

The party sold its expression of interest form for 10 million naira and its nomination form for 40 million naira. However, aspirants living with disabilities and female aspirants are only required to pay for the expression of interest form, while the nomination form is free for them³⁷

The party pruned down the number of aspirants seeking the party's ticket and submitted its report, indicating that it had cleared 12 out of the 29 aspirants who campaigned and participated in the primary election.³⁸ The cleared aspirants included Clem Agba, Senator Monday Okpebholo, Lucky Imasuen, Anamero Dekeri, Osagie Ize-Iyamu, Gideon Ikhine, Col. David Imuse, Maj-Gen. Charles Airhiavbere, Oserheimen Osunbor, Dr. Blessing Agbohmere, Dennis Idahosa, and Dr. Ernest Umakhihe. However, three candidates, including its 2020 governorship nominee Osagie Ize-Iyamu, Lucky Imasuen, and Ernest Umakhihe, withdrew before the primary election.

The party's primary election was eventually canceled, as three aspirants were declared winners by different party stakeholders.³⁹ While Hope Uzodinma, governor of Imo State and chair of the party's state primary election committee, declared Dennis Idahosa the winner of the exercise with 40,453 votes, the committee's returning officer, Stanley Ugboaja, declared Monday Okpebholo the winner with 12,145 votes; simultaneously, the local government returning officers, led by Ojo Babatunde, announced Anamero Dekeri as the winner of the contest, having polled 25,384 votes.⁴⁰

This controversy led to a re-run of the party's primary election. It was reported that Uzodinma allegedly declared a winner while collation was ongoing.⁴¹ A re-run election was subsequently held, and Okpebholo was declared the winner of the APC primary, emerging as the party's flag bearer for the 21 September Edo State governorship election.⁴²

Responding to the result, Idahosa described the re-run election as a 'selection' rather than an 'electoral' process, as the ruling party wanted the world to believe.⁴³ This also led to Oshiomhole's cool response to the outcome of the primary and Okpebholo's selection. As the party deliberated and reviewed how best to proceed, it later reached out to Idahosa as the

³⁷Daily Post: [Edo 2024: APC sells Expression of Interest, Nomination forms at N40m](#)

³⁸This Day: [APC Clears 12 Edo Governorship Aspirants, Set for Primary](#)

³⁹Punch: [Uproar as Edo APC gov primary produces three 'winners](#)

⁴⁰The Point: Edo 2024: [Confusion as three candidates emerge from APC](#)

⁴¹Punch: [Uproar as Edo APC gov primary produces three 'winners](#)

⁴²INEC: [Timetable And Schedule of Activities For The Edo And Ondo State Governorship Elections](#)

⁴³Punch: [Ganduje ignores Idahosa, presents certificate to Okpebholo](#)

deputy governorship nominee in place of Omoregie Ogbeide-Ihama,⁴⁴ a PDP lawmaker from Oredo who was later suspended for anti-party activities.⁴⁵

Labour Party (LP)

The party fixed the cost of its expression of interest and nomination forms for the 21 September off-cycle governorship election in Edo State at 30 million naira. The expression of interest form was set at five million naira, while the nomination form was 25 million naira. Meanwhile, female aspirants were exempted from paying for the expression of interest form but were required to purchase the nomination form.⁴⁶

Over 30 aspirants contested for the party's flag in the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election. Olumide Akpata, the former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) who recently joined the party soon emerged as the candidate to beat in the primaries.⁴⁷ Some reports highlighted his donation of SUVs to party structures and his significant financial contributions, which reportedly unsettled some other aspirants as an attempt to 'buy the nomination'.⁴⁸

The intra-party division within LP also affected the state's primaries. Akpata was declared winner of the primary handled by the Julius Abure-led faction, notably defeating Ken Imasuagbon, another former PDP member, and Sunny Eromosele who were both well fancied.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the Lamidi Apapa-led faction returned Anderson Asemota and Monday Mawah as the governorship and deputy governorship nominees.⁵⁰

Themes

As with every election, there are several major themes that are expected to play a major role in the outcome of the elections. We have identified the following as key in the Edo election: the preparedness of the election management body; identity and zoning; godfatherism and individuals; intra-party dynamics; incumbency; and insecurity.

⁴⁴ The Sun: Edo: [Okpebholo's choice of Ogbeide-Ihama as running mate unsettles PDP](#)

⁴⁵ Vanguard: [Edo 2024 Oredo PDP expels Ogbeide Ihama for anti-party activities](#)

⁴⁶ Premium Times: [Edo Poll: Labour Party fixes N30m for nomination, expression of interest forms, adopts indirect primaries](#)

⁴⁷ Channels: UPDATED: [Ex-NBA President Akpata Wins LP Gov Primary For Edo](#)

⁴⁸ Vanguard: Edo 2024: [Akpata, LP clears air on controversy trailing vehicle](#)

⁴⁹ The Cable: ['We've selected best for Edo' — Abure hails Akpata over LP primary win](#)

⁵⁰ Vanguard: [Apapa's faction sends Asemota's name to INEC](#)

Election Management Body Preparedness

Ahead of the elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is set to train 794 Civil Society Organisation (CSO) officials. The commission held a meeting with political party leaders on 13 May, 2024, and had a similar meeting with the media, and security agencies on 15 May, 2024, and 16 May, 2024, respectively.⁵¹ The Commission conducted Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) to enable eligible voters to register for the election from 27 May to 5 June, 2024, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m including weekends, and also allowed for the picking of uncollected Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) in Edo state.

Taking into consideration the shortness of time remaining before the governorship elections, INEC decided to conduct the registration at the ward level and at the state headquarters, instead of local government offices and at a few designated centers as was the case during the 2020 election and the 2023 general elections. This means there were 192 ward registration centers in Edo State in addition to the state INEC office in Benin City.⁵² As provided by Section 19 of the Electoral Act 2022⁵³ INEC displayed the register for claims and objections by citizens for a period of seven days (one week) from 12 June, 2024. The display took place in all the 192 wards across the State. The register was also made available on the INEC website: <https://cvr.inecnigeria.org/register>.

At the end of the period for claims and objections, the Commission further cleaned up the register using the Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) to pave the way for the addition of a new list of voters to the existing register.⁵⁴ INEC then announced the statistics from the CVR which showed that a total of 269,992 new voters were registered in Edo and Ondo states respectively.⁵⁵ Breaking the data, INEC stated that 129,246 (47.87 percent) of the registered voters were male, while 140,756 (52.13 percent) were female.

The majority of the registered voters (182,541 or 67.61%) are youths (18-34 years). In terms of occupation, 95,463 or 35.36% are students while 1,588 (0.59%) are Persons with Disability (PWDs). In addition, 24,454 requests for the replacement of PVCs, 74,493 applications for voter transfer, and 8,314 for information updates were received. However, the final figures will be published on a state-by-state basis after the period for claims/objections and ABIS.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Channels: [INEC To Train 794 CSO Officials Ahead Of Edo, Ondo Governorship Elections](#)

⁵² ThisDay: [Edo, Ondo Guber: INEC to Commence CVR Exercise May 27](#)

⁵³ PLAC: [Electoral Act 2022](#).

⁵⁴ INEC: [Publication Of Preliminary Register of New Voters For Claims And Objections In Edo And Ondo States](#).

⁵⁵ ThisDay: [Guber Polls: INEC Registers 269,992 New Voters in Edo, Ondo](#).

⁵⁶ INEC: [Publication Of Preliminary Register of New Voters For Claims And Objections In Edo And Ondo States](#).

As part of INEC's strategic efforts, the commission organized a workshop for reporters, producers, and air personalities intending to enhance voter education in Benin-city, this was to ensure that citizens are well-informed about the electoral process and their civic responsibilities as well as help in combating misinformation and disinformation before, during and after the poll.⁵⁷

However, there are concerns about INEC's level of preparation and its commitment to timely communication with the public in Edo and Ondo states. In Edo State, prospective voters trying to collect their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) faced challenges in terms of identifying their collection points. This has raised concerns about INEC's crisis communication as the two states of Edo and Ondo countdown to their elections.

For starters, because there has been no change to the Electoral Act, since a 2022 amendment, there is no new policy or guideline being carried out by the Commission. As a result, these are all routine and generally expected activities. However, there has been no clarity in terms of how the Commission intends to address logistic-related issues encountered during the 2020 governorship elections, especially related to difficult physical terrains.

Second, off-cycle elections are expected to receive more attention because of the isolated timeline outside of general elections, but this has not translated into policies being reviewed or amended accordingly. Questions around the efficacy of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the utility of the INEC Result Viewers portal (IREV) have not been fully addressed and will definitely require legislation and policy amendment to address.

Finally, and perhaps most pertinently, most of the themes we have identified speak to the wider challenges of an expanding electoral architecture. What role does an INEC play in effectively managing judicial involvement in elections? Or pushing for stronger legislation that deals with electoral malpractice or increasing information disorder in elections? As discussions arise ahead of the appointment of the next chair of the Commission in December 2025, there should be wide-ranging interaction in terms of how to ensure INEC is fit for purpose as Nigeria's elections progress.

⁵⁷ INEC: [Responsibility of Observers](#).

Identity and Zoning

Perhaps more than any other factor, zoning is expected to play an outsized role in the way Edo citizens go to the polls on 21 September. This is due to a concerted effort, particularly by the two establishment parties, to address an imbalance in the nature of elected governors.

Since 1999, Edo Central has only held control of the state house for the 18-month term of Oserheimen Osunbor between 2007 and 2008. Edo North, through Adams Oshiomhole's two terms, has held power for eight years and Edo South, through both Lucky Igbinedion and Godwin Obaseki, is expected to hold it for 16 years. As a result, ahead of the campaign season, there was a clear effort to restore 'parity' by ensuring an elected governor from Edo Central. This line of thought influenced Philip Shaibu, who is from Edo North, and played a key role in the emergence of both Asue Ighodalo and Monday Okpebholo. This is also expected to affect Olumide Akpata who is from Edo South, the same zone as the incumbent, and will likely struggle due to expected sympathy votes from other parts of the state projected to head central zone. He is also expected to face protest votes against his candidacy as a result.

Another major aspect of identity is the sense of belonging constituents ascribe to candidates. During interviews and discussions, participants shared a recurring opposition attack line against PDP's Ighodalo about his inability to speak the local language. This line of attack was used by Oshiomhole during a recent television interview.⁵⁸ Others also highlighted that both Ighodalo and Akpata, who are respectively Lagos-based lawyers and counsel in major law firms, have not provided any dividends or support to their states. An interviewee particularly noted that despite being chairman of the board of Sterling Bank, there was no branch of the bank in Ighodalo's senatorial zone. This was reckoned to reflect poorly on his antecedents and gave his critics the basis to share the narrative of an outsider seeking to reap where he did not sow.

Despite the informal zoning arrangement, the contest for votes across the different zones will still be competitive. A recent interview by Oshiomhole, where he referred to Esan people as being full of 'witches and wizards' and that being the reason why Ighodalo doesn't stay there, didn't go down well with some citizens who might take it out on APC's nominee.

⁵⁸ News Express: [Oshiomhole's comments on Ighodalo divisive and embarrassing — Dele Momodu](#)

Godfatherism/Individuals

Nigerian politics has become increasingly dominated by individuals over parties, but during the 2020 governorship election, it appeared that Edo sought to push back against that narrative. Then, in an attempt to counter Oshiomhole's insistence in removing a governor he had endorsed and campaigned for, the statement 'Edo no be Lagos' went viral. This statement was made in reference to a report that Bola Tinubu, then national leader of APC and a former governor of Lagos State, had moved to block the second term ambition of Governor Akinwunmi Ambode (2015 – 2019) because he did not like his actions.⁵⁹ Obaseki's campaign was able to effectively utilise this phrase to show a distinction and promote a campaign that Edo voters do not back godfathers.

A defining characteristic of these elections is the relatively recent entry of the candidates into elective politics. Neither Akpata nor Ighodalo has sought or held elective office before, despite serving on different state committees. Okpebholo, who is a serving senator, has spent barely over a year in his first elective position. This is why the prominent experience of two governors is expected to play a key role in the campaign.

Ahead of the elections, Oshiomhole reportedly preferred Dennis Idahosa, the lawmaker representing Ovia South/West-Ovia North/East in the Federal House of Representatives, with the fear that his candidate failing would result in his lack of interest in the race.⁶⁰ As a result, many citizens have considered the Okpebholo/Idahosa ticket as a stalking horse for Oshiomhole's ambition to control Edo State. Furthermore, Okpebholo has been accused of being as a reluctant campaigner, with many interviewees sharing examples of his reticence to speak owing to an alleged inability to effectively communicate in English compared to the two frontline lawyers he is competing against.⁶¹ This has reinforced a prevalent notion that Oshiomhole and the party worked to sideline more prominent candidates in exchange for choosing a pliant and deferential nominee.⁶²

While Ighodalo is not considered a direct 'godson' of the governor, his lack of political expertise is expected to see him lean considerably on Obaseki. This means that Ighodalo will have to deal with the controversies the governor has courted, in both establishment parties. The major issue that is being addressed is the rumoured court case between⁶³ Obaseki and the Oba of Benin, over the soon-to-be/recently returned Benin artefacts looted during the punitive

⁵⁹Premium Times: [Lagos 2019: Tinubu dumps Ambode, formally endorses Sanwo-Olu](#)

⁶⁰Independent: [Crisis Brew in Edo APC over Oshiomhole's Endorsement of Preferred Candidate](#)

⁶¹Punch: [I don't need 'big grammar' to fix Edo, says Okpebholo](#)

⁶²This Day: [Edo APC Guber: Who is Oshiomhole Working For?](#)

⁶³ThisDay: [Oba of Benin, Enigies' Case: Edo Govt Warns against Disruption of Court Proceedings](#)

massacre of 1897.⁶⁴ While the palace sought the items, as it would be the possession of the Oba, Obaseki began developing a modern museum to house them and reportedly went to court to insist on the state's ownership of the items. This perception has been poorly received as the Oba remains a much-loved and much-respected institution in the state. If this impression is allowed to fester, it will definitely affect Ighodalo's chances.

Intra-Party Dynamics

Intra-party dynamics will also play a major role in the outcome of the election. APC appears to be fairly united, with the choice of Oshiomhole's preferred nominee as running mate helping to alleviate concerns that the party would head into the contest divided. Conversely, PDP already headed into the campaign season even more divided, owing to the impeachment and court manoeuvring of the erstwhile deputy governor, Philip Shaibu, and his subsequent defection to APC.⁶⁵ Shaibu has since gotten a court judgment returning him to the deputy governorship, but Obaseki's administration has refused to recognise him and this resulted in a shooting at the airport that many have rightly cited as a reason to worry about the insecurity dimensions of these elections.

This division within the party means that Ighodalo would need to work on uniting the party's different factions in order to ensure unity ahead of the elections. During the last elections, PDP was embroiled in a battle between loyalists to Obaseki and those to Dan Orbih, the recently suspended national vice-chair (South-South) of the party.⁶⁶ As a result, separate primaries were held and while members of the Orbih camp were originally recognised, Obaseki's loyalists were eventually selected after a court intervention. Interviewees highlighted that this was particularly divisive in Edo Central and led Mike Onolememen, the Orbih-camp pick for the senatorial race, to support Okpebholo before his eventual defection from the party. After the primaries of the party were concluded, Orbih made statements criticising Ighodalo and stating that the state needed someone who would give citizens 'a sense of belonging'.⁶⁷ In response, the party suspended him and Orbih has since vowed to work against Ighodalo's ambitions.⁶⁸ The loss of several party stalwarts has contributed to the impression that, despite currently controlling the governor's mansion, the scale of opposition to Obaseki might impact on Ighodalo's chances.

⁶⁴SYMFONI: [Oba Of Benin Warns Obaseki: You Cannot Have Financial Plans About Our Artefacts](#)

⁶⁵ Channels: [Philip Shaibu Defects To APC](#)

⁶⁶ The Nation: [Edo guber poll: Wike loyalist, Dan Orbih suspended from PDP exco.](#)

⁶⁷ Punch: [Youth leader tackles Orbih, Shaibu over anti-Ighodalo stance](#)

⁶⁸ThisDay: [Finally, PDP's Hammer Falls on Dan Orbih](#)

Likewise, post-elections, the leadership of Labour has been the subject of controversy, especially with several court battles over factional leadership. Peter Obi's seeming reticence to take a more active role in driving the party's agenda and management appears to have caused some disillusionment among his supporters and this will no doubt affect the expected 'Obidient' support that Akpata and his allies would have been relying on. According to key informants, the Obidient movement in the state appears divided into four groups – a first camp supports Ighodalo and PDP, another backs Okpebholo and APC, a third aligns with Akpata and LP and a fourth remains within LP but is actively opposes Akpata, believing he had not earned the right to serve as their nominee. Citizens expect Obi to attend a mega rally ahead of the elections, but there has been some concern that while LP was a fairly unknown entity before the general elections, it has not exactly acquitted itself in the year since. Its representatives have not been as impactful in opposition at the federal level, while interviewees stated that Neda Imasuen, the LP senator representing Edo South, is relatively unpopular and has been disappointing to date. Finally, some raised the point that they expected Obi to eventually defect to PDP or another platform to actualise his presidential ambitions, which would render voting an LP governor moot and useless.

A recent development was the endorsement of Okpebholo by five political parties on 31 August 2024.⁶⁹ The National Rescue Movement, the Alliance Peoples Movement, the Zenith Labour Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Action Democratic Party candidates endorsed the APC candidate. While the support is not expected to make any tangible difference, in a close election such support could prove to be consequential.

Incumbency

Edo is expected to be the most keenly contested of all off-cycle elections held to date under the Tinubu administration, because of the strong possibility of a change of party control. This is expected to manifest through two aspects – the perception of the respective government (federal and state) and the expectation of federal might.

Like many states in the federation, there were #EndBadGovernance protests in Edo in August 2024, in response to ongoing economic challenges and socio-political discourse.⁷⁰ In the year since Bola Tinubu assumed office as president in May 2023, the removal of the fuel subsidy and multiple foreign exchange windows has resulted in a difficult economic terrain for the country's middle and lower class. This has also not coincided with expected foreign

⁶⁹ Punch Nigeria: [Edo poll: Five political parties back APC candidate](#)

⁷⁰ PM News Nigeria: [EndBadGovernance: Peaceful protest in Edo](#)

investment and a reduction in government finances – Tinubu has actually appointed and overseen the largest government cabinet in Nigerian history, with the commensurate retinue of aides and appointees expanding the size of government.⁷¹ The announced implementation of the Stephen Oronsaye-led⁷² committee white paper on the review of ministries, departments and agencies has not been followed through with, while intra-party divisions and the optics of another nepotistic government appointing prominent officials from a particular part of the country has brought negative comparisons with the predecessor Muhammadu Buhari administration.⁷³ Opposition parties have not exactly been strong at presenting a credible and feasible alternative, but interviewees were clear that while Edo indigenes were not exactly enamoured with the Buhari presidency – notably not voting for him despite his two campaigns being led by former governors of the state as party chairs – there was a bit more optimism around Tinubu owing to his well-documented performance as governor of Lagos. As a result, the disappointment stemming from his current performance has added to this sense of disillusionment.

However, while citizens have blamed the current state of affairs in the country on the APC government, and are likely to factor this considerably in voting, there is still some animosity against the PDP government of Godwin Obaseki. There were comments around the handling⁷⁴ of the removal of the deputy governor, handling a conflict with the palace over the return of the Benin Bronzes, and effectively managing expectations by an administration that has appeared to act above conventional patrimonial political precepts. Interviewees were split between praising a government that has sought to modernise governance and appeal to better investment and structures, while also addressing the clear challenges that Obaseki has had in being an effective politician.⁷⁵ Interviewees rated Obaseki higher than contemporary governors in other states, but less than Oshiomhole in performance and connection with the grassroots.

These two impressions, of relatively unpopular administrations, will play a part in how citizens decide to interact with the candidates of their parties. While some might assume that this should mean Akpata and LP will have a relatively straightforward ride, the perception of a poor performance by the opposition parties, including LP's Edo Senator Imasuen, means that all are still affected by a general dismissal of the elected elite.

⁷¹ Adekaiyoja, A. (2023) [Too big to Fail? Evaluating the Tinubu Cabinet](#).

⁷² Abiodun, T. E., Oyekanmi, A. A., Olayinka, R. I., & Oyewole, I. A. (2024). The Steve Oronsaye's Report And The Viability Of Effective Public Service Reform In Nigeria. *Journal Of Political Discourse*, 2(1), 35-44.

⁷³ ThisDay: [Group Accuses Tinubu of Nepotism After Replacing Sacked NSIP Coordinator with Yoruba Man](#)

⁷⁴ Punch: [Obaseki's estranged ex-deputy pledges loyalty to Benin monarch as tongues wag over controversial court case](#)

⁷⁵ Punch: [Don't allow Obaseki take custody of 1,130 stolen artefacts. Oba of Benin urges FG](#)

This leads to the second factor - an expectation that a Tinubu administration struggling with popularity in the North will seek to consolidate southern votes by moving for a fairly competitive state using federal might. Elections in Nigeria are still concentrated at the centre, with key stakeholders such as security personnel and electoral officials appointed by agencies that are under the presidency. Already, interviewees cited the viral video in which Tinubu was seen, reassuring party faithful of a definite victory in Edo, and a recent reassignment of police commissioners as a sign that the administration is seeking to ensure it can control the outcome of the election and stymie opposition moves.⁷⁶ There were also reports that funds could be redirected to ensure vote trading, especially during an economically challenging period. While this was not restricted to APC, with some mentioning instances of PDP and even LP campaigners paying for rally attendance or forcing the use of campaign material in markets and other state government-run facilities, there was a large acceptance that APC would be in a better position to act on this if it was inclined to use this to campaign. This was buttressed by the fact that the candidate's campaign weaknesses appear to preclude any natural support for his and the party's campaign.

Many believed that such antecedents were likely under a Tinubu administration which was led by a seasoned politician compared to the 2020 elections where Buhari, a more detached and admittedly non-partisan leader, was not likely to affect the outcome to benefit his party. If this is the case, then it might require significant voter turnout and enthusiasm for any of the other candidates to negate this impact.

Insecurity

The recent shooting⁷⁷ of a police officer at the Benin airport was frequently cited as a clear example of the challenges citizens will face in feeling safe enough to go out and 'risk' voting. Off-cycle elections have historically been better managed because of the ability of security agencies to focus and devote resources to a single or set of states. Edo is expected to have a fairly similar approach, especially considering how keenly contested the election is.

Interviewees repeatedly raised concerns that security might be an issue because of the proliferation of arms and the presence of different militia groups as a result of ongoing insecurity. Some mentioned the presence of herders attacking farmlands and farmers creating groups to deter such activities. Others cited the presence of cultism and clashes between rival

⁷⁶ Pulse: [Edo 2024: New police commissioner told to uphold integrity ahead of polls](#)

⁷⁷ Channels: [Policeman Killed During Shaibu's Homecoming In Edo](#)

groups as a reason for communities to try and develop vigilante groups to deter against activities. Politicians are also expected to try to mobilise thugs to help guard their votes and counter opposition strongholds in different parts of the state.

Managing the security situation also falls under the spectre of ‘federal might’ and the likelihood of clashes between supporters of the major viable parties. There were also repeated concerns that any abuse of power by these structures is unlikely to be properly investigated and that resolution would likely be minimal. As a result, there is a valid concern that the fear of attacks might lead to low turnout.

Conclusion

A recurring statement during all interviews and discussions was a sense of pride over how cosmopolitan and intellectual Edo voters are. Interviewees cited Peter Obi’s relative strength in the 2023 elections, despite the presence of a clear campaign structure and party legacy, as a reason why the state’s electorate looks beyond vote trading and overt partisan loyalty. Some cited Ikpoba Okha, Oredo and Egor – all relatively close to Benin and home to large voter bases – as possible areas for an Akpata or Ighodalo, owing to their lack of historical political antecedents, to triumph owing to their more intellectual disposition and ability to speak convincingly. But, as this report has sought to explain, there are more factors in play in reviewing the possibility of an election outcome. Regrettably, most of the discourse has not been issue-based and instead focused on zoning and the identity of candidates. Even more recently, Oshiomhole was criticised for responding to a campaign statement by Betsy Obaseki, wife of the incumbent governor. While she praised the PDP nominee for having a wife, and highlighted the importance of having a woman in the state house, Oshiomhole responded by highlighting the Obaseki’s lack of children.⁷⁸ The fact that strong analyses around the performance of the president and the state governor has played a small role in the election discourse shows that there is a still strong personality domination of politics, even in a state that has sought a distinction in its political approach.

Off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi in November 2023 resulted in incumbent parties’ victories, with two of the three states electing governors to second terms. But many could justifiably have reasoned that the Tinubu government, which was barely half a year in post, was not as big of a factor in how citizens went to the polls. When Edo citizens go to the polls, there is the real possibility of the state switching hands, while there is also the strong factor

⁷⁸ Pulse: [Oshiomhole faces backlash over comment on Obaseki’s wife’s childlessness](#)

of the Tinubu government's performance with over a year in post. It will also provide a strong case for necessary legislation changes, especially as Edo, Ondo (November 2024) and Anambra (likely November 2025) will mark the last three elections under the current INEC leadership and will help make the case for what the next chair will meet. It will be a strong message for parties and the government in terms of who a state, where three parties can lay claim to significant victories in recent elections, has decided to reward with its votes.

While reviewing interviews and desk research, it was observed that barely any analysts expected a run-off election. This could be explained as many analysts expecting a fairly considerable victory for any of the three major candidates and the likelihood that either of them could achieve the necessary $\frac{1}{4}$ of the vote in 12 (two-thirds) of the 18 local governments in the state. While the zonal analysis suggests this is feasible for each candidate, albeit with varying challenges, the dynamics could shift if a run-off occurs, potentially relegating one party or candidate into a kingmaker position.

Lastly, this analysis has been made with the assumption and hope that the conduct of the elections is free and fair. A statement used, borrowing from a popular local Christian refrain, was that 'what Nigerian politicians cannot do does not exist'. Some cited that the lack of enthusiasm following the 2023 general elections as a possible deterrent to citizens voting. Yet the level of political engagement and activity shows a heightened level of political participation and interest. If this can be successfully channelled into an efficient and peaceful election, it could help set a new standard for Nigerian elections.

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