



New Allegiances, Familiar Faces A Preview of Edo's 2020 Gubernatorial Election

As Edo State voters prepare to head to the polls for the 19 September gubernatorial election, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) is closely monitoring the democratic process. CDD's observation of the electoral process in Edo State, which is also informed by the guidelines of Nigeria's electoral regulatory body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), will provide citizens, the media and other stakeholders with an objective, non-partisan assessment of the voting environment. The analysis will span the pre-election period, election day and the post-election period. The 2020 Edo State gubernatorial election is the first major election that INEC will conduct since the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). In addition to the disruption of lives and livelihoods, the pandemic holds significant implications for the electoral process. Edo State has recorded 2,311 COVID-19 cases, with NCDC data indicating that there are currently 335 COVID-19 patients in the state, with 84 deaths confirmed so far.

Key trends of the Edo State Pre-election Report

- **INEC's proactive and balanced response.** INEC put forward the "INEC Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19". The policy provides a robust set of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the election process. The challenge facing the policy will be its implementation. The ability of INEC to manage the additional logistical requirements and the likelihood that staff recruitment may be adversely affected by ad-hoc staff being understandably reluctant to work during the pandemic, notwithstanding the usual risks of election violence, are all factors to be carefully managed. Citizen non-compliance with the COVID-19 protocol may also constitute itself as a serious challenge for INEC in implementing the policy.
- **Potential complications.** There is a need for INEC to immediately start strategically thinking about how they intend to implement the policy during the election. For instance, if a voter shows up at a polling unit without a face mask, how should ad-hoc staff respond to the situation without disrupting the elections?
- **Campaign Activities.** Campaign rallies, consultation with partisan supporters, and canvassing of votes are some of the activities, which have dominated the electoral landscape. At the centre of the slide in the credibility of the process is the desperation by political parties to capture power, and by extension, the apparatus of the state, through manipulation or outright subversion of the election process.
- **Dearth of issue-based campaigns.** Instead of issue-based campaigning the political parties and their candidates have largely focused their messaging around praising their preferred candidate, while impugning the character of the opposing party candidate. This focus on personalities, instead of the core issues of governance, has overshadowed the real debate about what programmes and policies should be implemented to make life better for the people of the Edo.
- **Abusive Actions.** Since the start of the campaign there has been rampant defacing or outright destruction of campaign billboards. The trend, as documented by CDD observers on the ground, is that in PDP strongholds, APC campaign billboards are targeted and defaced, while in areas with larger concentrations of APC supporters, PDP campaign billboards are defaced.
- **Coercion to withdraw.** APC supporters have also reported to CDD's observers that they are being coerced to withdraw their support for their preferred candidates through threats to revoke long held land allocations.
- Another noticeable trend in the pre-election period is that after clashes by the foot soldiers, the leading political actors, especially party spokespersons and campaign council leaders who should be urging calm and suing for peace continue to stoke tensions by making further inciting claims to validate the actions of their supporters. After the 25 July clash, both APC and the PDP campaign teams immediately issued statements to justify the actions of their supporters and blame the other side for the violent, which left 10 people with gunshot wounds.
- **Stockpiling of SMLW.** Our observations and interactions have suggested that there is a stockpiling of small arms and light weapons in the state.
- For more information, please see full [report](#).