

Overview of Key Issues in the Pre-Election Period for the July 16, 2022 Osun State Governorship Election

Introduction

The second of two off-cycle governorship elections for 2022 will be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Osun State, on July 16, 2022. The election is the seventh in the state since the return of the current democratic dispensation in 1999. Following a Court of Appeal verdict, on 26 November 2010, Osun's elections moved from the general election cycle to an off-cycle polls. Rauf Aregbesola served two terms (2010 - 2018), and was succeeded by Gboyega Oyetola, who now seeks a second term as governor. The July 2022 Osun State gubernatorial elections will be the second to be conducted under the amended Electoral Act, 2022. There are 1,955,657 registered voters for the coming elections, which is a vast increase from the 1,246,915 voters that decided the 2018 elections and records a 36% increase in voters registered.

Voters in Osun State go to the polls for Saturday's governorship elections to either re-elect an incumbent governor, who is a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC) or change control of the state to any of the fifteen opposition parties, led by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who produced a former governor of the state (2003 - 2010). However, a major difference in this election is the strength of third party candidates and the possible impact it might have on the electoral results. In 2018, the Social Democratic Party, represented by Iyiola Omisore, was a prominent candidate and won several Local Governments in the populous Ife area. Omisore has since moved to the APC and, as a result, the CDD EAC observes that of the other party candidates, none is able to command a significant level of support to avoid an APC or PDP win. The CDD-EAC notes that there are 15 political parties fielding candidates for the election. None of the governorship candidates and six of the deputy governorship candidates are women, just as the age range of the candidates indicates a low participation of the youth.

Following on from a successful exercise during the June 2022 Ekiti State governorship elections, the CDD-EAC will be closely observing the electoral process with the objective of collecting data to support evidence-based analysis of key aspects of the Osun State governorship election. Similarly, the CDD-EAC will also host a fake news hub for the purpose of tracking and countering fake news and misinformation as it affects the election.

Pre-Election Observations

Based on the observation of the CDD EAC in the pre-election period, the following are the key trends, which will play a major role in the successful conduct of the polls:

Review of INEC's preparedness

Voter turnout will affect the legitimacy and acceptance of the Osun 2022 elections. As at 10 July 2022, INEC reported that only 1,479,595 million of the 1,955,657 registered voters had collected their permanent voters cards (PVC). This equates to 76% of voters registered and

the low number led to INEC extending the deadline for collecting PVCs to 14 July - two days before the elections. INEC's preparations for the election extends to the resources deployed and areas outlined for the election. 5,305 BVAS machines have been deployed to cover 3,763 polling units across the 30 Local Governments in the state. The CDD-EAC will observe if the number is sufficient to ensure that voting is carried out efficiently and if any technical difficulty is dealt with promptly. The CDD-EAC also notes that because of the increased size, number of polling units, LGAs and registered voters, the Osun elections provides a sterner test of INEC's capacity, when compared to the June 2022 Ekiti governorship elections.

Finally, the CDD-EAC notes the need for a re-run in the 2018 Governorship elections. This incident led to some concerns about the result because of the PDP candidate's defeat, after leading the first day of the poll and the small margin between the two candidates. Ahead of the 2023 elections, the CDD-EAC hopes that the conduct of the Osun governorship election will raise no doubts of INEC's ability to conduct free, fair and credible elections.

Use of Technology by INEC

The CDD-EAC notes that the 16 July 2022 Osun State Governorship election is significant because it will be the last preliminary election as the INEC prepares for the 2023 general elections. The election also reaffirms precedence that has been set under the Electoral Act 2022 concerning guidelines and regulations for the conduct of elections. The CDD-EAC commended the progress recorded during the Ekiti elections by INEC and election stakeholders. Highlighted areas include the high rate of officials arriving at polling units on time and the high usage of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) - which resulted in quick accreditation numbers and brief issues in relation to the review of issues raised. This led to the prompt release of results via the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV). However, Ekiti's elections were still marred by incidents of vote buying, violence and a few instances where voters were allowed to cast their votes without being authenticated by the BVAS. The CDD-EAC remarks that consolidating on the progress made, and addressing the areas for improvement, will be key for the credibility of the process.

Emphasis of zoning over issues

The CDD-EAC is concerned about the lack of an issue-based campaign by the major candidates. In the build up to the 2022 elections, a major area of consideration is zoning - since 1999, both Osun Central and Osun East senatorial zones have produced governors, while Osun West has not done so. The PDP candidate, Adeleke, is from the Osun West zone has based a campaign on representation via this zoning principle.

Incidents of Violence and Insecurity

The CDD-EAC also expresses worry about recent instances of violence, such as the report that gun men recently attacked the home of the Labour Party's candidate, Yusuf Sulaimon Lasun. The home of the Accord Party candidate, Akin Ogunbiyi, was set on fire and the PDP has reported that police officers arrested some of their members without cause in Osogbo, as well as in Ije-Ijesha and Etioni in Ori Ade and Atakumosa Local Government Areas

respectively. Although 13 of the 15 political parties participating in the gubernatorial election in Osun state signed a Peace Accord on the 13th of July 2022, there is need for a proper security analysis that will map out hotspots of violence. This is pertinent as the state is notorious for cultism and street gangs that can easily be appropriated for violence especially during the ongoing ASUU strike. With current security realities, the Osun election will require a greater deployment of security personnel. It is hoped that the recent signing of the peace accords by the governorship candidates will ensure that their supporters refrain from violent activities regardless of the result of the polls.

Impact of National politicians

The Osun election is not just the last dress rehearsal before the 2023 general election but also hosts a number of national figures that can influence the conduct and outcome of the election. The presidential candidate of the ruling APC, Bola Tinubu, is from the South-West geopolitical zone, while the former interim national chair of the party, Bisi Akande, is a former governor of the state. Likewise, the PDP has shown more interest in the Osun election, when compared to the Ekiti governorship polls. Dr. Iyorchia Ayu, the national chair and Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate alongside other PDP governors have attended rallies in Osun. This has raised fears that there might be an increase in vote-buying and the use of security forces to intimidate the opposition and voters.

Voter Inducement

Despite the 2022 Electoral Act, the spate of vote-buying has not reduced. This was evident in the Ekiti governorship election and likely to be worse in the Osun gubernatorial election. In 2018, three men were arrested for vote-buying by police officers and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) recorded instances of PDP agents partaking in such activities. CDD-EAC observers during the June 2022 Ekiti Governorship Elections noted several instances of vote buying and calls for stronger monitoring by INEC.

Fake News and Misinformation

An increasing aspect of concern is the prevalence of fake news, misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric. These issues can lead to incidents of violence and reduced voter turnout depending on the impact. An instance during the June 2022 Ekiti Governorship Election was the report that a frontline candidate had withdrawn and endorsed another. While CSOs and the CDD strived to circulate the fact that this was not the case, the impact on votes cannot be ascertained. The CDD-EAC has deployed resources to track any instance of fake news so that prompt verification can be carried out as necessary.

Lastly, the CDD-EAC hopes that all critical stakeholders in the election process, from INEC to traditional leaders and relevant security agencies, work together to ensure a credible election in Osun. CDD-EAC observers will be on ground to provide real-time information and data that will inform subsequent reports.