

STATE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA

IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability and integrity



STATE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA

IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Copyright © 2021. This project was undertaken by The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), with the support of Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). All rights reserved.

The Project and Printing of this Paper is supported by

OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR WEST AFRICA

OSIWA

Table of Contents

Foreword i
Acknowledgement ii
Acronyms iii
Executive Summary v

PART 1: BACKGROUND
Introduction 2
Historical Context 3
Legal Framework.....8

PART 2: STAKEHOLDERS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS
The Independent National Electoral Commission 12
National Assembly 17
Political Parties 23
Civil Society Organisations 28
Donor Agencies 32
Media 36

PART 3: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
The Electoral Process During COVID-19 42
Recommendations 45
Conclusion 52

APPENDICES
Appendix A: List of Interviewees 55
Appendix B: Table of Activities of Selected Stakeholders 57
Appendix C: Gallery 59

References 64

Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce to you this report on the *State of the Electoral Process in Nigeria in the Context of COVID-19* by the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD). The State of the Electoral Process is aimed at increasing understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the electoral process in Nigeria, improving stakeholder engagement and collaboration, and ultimately enhancing electoral integrity and credibility.

Through extensive desk research and in-depth interviews with electoral stakeholders, IRIAD has comprehensively documented the activities of stakeholders during the pandemic as well as the challenges they faced. The report showcases the many ways in which COVID-19 has affected the programmes and activities of electoral stakeholders in Nigeria. It also provides recommendations targeted at mitigating the impact of the pandemic on these stakeholders' activities in the future.

Elections under COVID-19 presented countries across the world with a unique problem: balancing the need for credible elections and containing the devastating public health crisis created by COVID-19 against the importance of the legitimacy required to govern effectively. With lockdown orders, curfews, travel bans, and suspension of public activities, virtually every sector of society was affected. These were unprecedented times that were never before witnessed in this generation. Having lived with the pandemic for almost two years now, this report comes at a critical time when countries around the world are searching for ways to adjust to the 'new normal'.

In Nigeria, the situation is no different. As the 2023 general elections (and the governorship elections in the interim) are fast approaching, electoral stakeholders must find innovative ways to conduct critical electoral work. The recommendations in this report can help them achieve that. Indeed, the report is not only relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic – the recommendations are useful for helping stakeholders respond to emergencies of any nature.

I therefore recommend this report to scholars and practitioners alike. It is useful for researchers who simply want to learn about the impact of COVID-19 on the electoral process in Nigeria, as well as practitioners who want to develop mechanisms to help them address the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Ultimately, I am confident that the recommendations in this report, if utilised effectively by stakeholders, will contribute to enhancing the integrity and credibility of our electoral process even during COVID-19 and beyond.

Mr Udo Jude Ilo
Head of Nigeria Office, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)

Acknowledgement

This report on the State of the Electoral Process is one of the major activities undertaken by the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD) under our programme titled "Safeguarding the Integrity and Credibility of the Electoral Process in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic". This research became necessary following the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic which threatened to undo the gains made in democratic consolidation over the years. We thought it critically to undertake a comprehensive research and documentation process to not only understand the specific ways in which COVID-19 disrupted the electoral landscape, but also provide recommendations on dealing with the pandemic in the near future.

The research process, while challenging and time-consuming, has been incredibly interesting and rewarding. Following hours of interviews, research and analysis, we are pleased to present this report to electoral stakeholders and the general public. However, our work would not be complete without recognising the efforts of those who supported this project by giving their time, energy, and resources.

We wish to thank the entire staff and management of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), without whose support this project would not have been possible. We are especially grateful to Ms Ayisha Osori, the former Executive Director of OSIWA, Mr Udo Jude Ilo, the Head of OSIWA's Nigeria Office, and Ms Catherine Angai, the Democracy and Accountability Program Manager at OSIWA. We are further grateful to the team at the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) for their support in managing the grant from OSIWA.

We also wish to thank our key informant interviewees – Professor Mohammad Kuna, Dr. Kole Shettima, Mr Aminu Idris, Mr Ifeanyichukwu Agoha, Agianpe Onyema, Dr Otive Igbuzor, Mr Kola Ologbondiyan, Mrs Lois Auta, Mr Seray Jah, Mr Wilson Manji, Ms Laolu Olawumi, and Mr Festus Owete – whose responses and insights contributed immensely to the richness of this report.

Finally, we wish to thank the project staff of IRIAD-The Electoral Hub for the time and effort they invested into this project, in particular Rukky Otive-Igbuzor, the programme manager who put the report together. It is our hope that the impact driven by this report will be more than enough compensation for the efforts of all staff, funders, and friends of the organisation.

Princess Hamman-Obels
Director, IRIAD-The Electoral Hub

Acronyms

A	Accord Party
AA	Action Alliance
AAC	African Action Congress
ADC	African Democratic Congress
ADP	African Democratic Party
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AIT	Africa Independent Television
APC	All Progressives Congress
APGA	All Progressives Grand Alliance
APM	Allied Peoples' Movement
APP	Action Peoples Party
BP	Boot Party
CBOs	Community-Based Organisations
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
CEOs	Chief Executive Officers
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CVE	Civic and Voter Education
CVR	Continuous Voter Registration
DDIN2	Deepening Democracy in Nigeria 2
DFID	Department for International Development
ECES	European Centre for Electoral Support
EMBs	Electoral Management Bodies
EMSC	Election Monitoring Support Centre
EPM	Elections and Party Monitoring Department
ERC	Electoral Reform Committee
EU	European Union
EU-SDGN	European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria
FBOs	Faith-Based Organisations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FEDECO	Federal Electoral Commission
ICCES	Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security
ICIR	International Centre for Investigative Reporting
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IRIAD	Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development
KDI	Kimpact Development Initiative

LGA	Local Government Area
LP	Labour Party
NASS	National Assembly
NCDC	Nigeria Centre for Disease Control
NCC	Nigerian Communications Commission
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NEOC	National Electoral Offences Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NNA	Nigerian National Alliance
NNDP	Nigerian National Democratic Party
NNPP	New Nigeria Peoples Party
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
NRC	National Republican Convention
NRM	National Rescue Movement
NWC	National Working Committee
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PLAC	Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PRP	People's Redemption Party
PTCIJ	Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism
PVC	Permanent Voter Card
REC	Resident Electoral Commissioner
SEP	State of the Electoral Process
SDP	Social Democratic Party
TV	Television
UPGA	United Progressive Grand Alliance
VCC	Voters Code of Conduct
YIAGA	Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement
YPP	Young Progressive Party
ZLP	Zenith Labour Party

Executive Summary

In Nigeria, as in many other countries, the advent of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has drastically affected the electoral landscape, from pre-election activities such as voter registration, trainings, voter education, and campaigning, to election-day activities such as voting, election observation, vote collation and counting, and results transmission and declaration. It is important to understand the extent to which the programmes and activities of electoral stakeholders have been affected, in order to provide recommendations that will help to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in the near future.

Against this background, The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), engaged in this project titled "State of the Electoral Process (SEP)" with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). The SEP project involves producing a comprehensive report about the state of the 2019-2023 electoral cycle. Through desk research and in-depth key informant interviews with stakeholders, we analyse the impact of the pandemic on the electoral programmes and activities of six key stakeholders in the electoral process: the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Assembly (NASS), political parties, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), donor agencies, and the media.

We seek to answer three main questions through this project:

1. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the electoral programmes and activities of the stakeholders?
2. Who would have been best placed to intervene and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities?
3. How can the effect of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities be mitigated in the near future?

In response to our three research questions, we have found that:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected electoral stakeholders both positively and negatively. On the negative side, there have been increased costs, delayed or cancelled activities, decline in mental health, and reduced participation. On the positive side, there have been better use of technology, innovation, and increased efficiency.
2. Everyone, including the government, INEC, political parties, the media, CSOs, security agencies, and the general public, had a role to play in intervening and mitigating the impact of the pandemic.
3. In the near future, the effects of the pandemics on stakeholders' activities can be reduced by planning early, implementing already existing laws and policies, and adhering to COVID-19 protocols in the immediate term; passing electoral Bills that meet the integrity test, better integrating technology and innovation, forming collaborations and partnerships, and documenting best practices of COVID-19 mitigation in the short term; and establishing e-voting, reorienting CSO funding, and improving network connectivity in the medium to long term.

Ultimately, emergencies are inevitable occurrences that every society has to face every now and then. It is therefore, important for electoral stakeholders to prepare by developing mechanisms that can enable them respond quickly. The recommendations in this paper will enable stakeholders to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their work. It is our hope that these recommendations will be effectively utilised in order to ensure the integrity and credibility of the electoral process despite the pandemic.

Part 1

Background

Introduction

Regular free and fair elections are an indispensable feature of a representative democracy. According to the Kofi Annan Foundation, elections with integrity are based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality, and are professional, impartial, and transparent in their preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle.[1] This shows that for elections to be viewed as credible, they must involve, at the very minimum, free and equal participation of all eligible citizens as voters or candidates; clear and accessible information about when, where, and how the elections would hold; and an impartial body to manage the process of voting, collation, and announcement of results.

In Nigeria, as in many other countries, the advent of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has drastically affected the electoral landscape, from pre-election activities such as voter registration, trainings, voter education, and campaigning, to election-day activities such as voting, election observation, vote collation and counting, and results transmission and declaration. This has raised the issue of how to strike the right balance between upholding electoral integrity and credibility and ensuring public safety. At least 75 countries and territories across the world postponed their elections in search for the answer to this question.[2]

The COVID-19 situation undoubtedly affected different electoral stakeholders in varying degrees, and it is important to understand the extent to which their electoral programmes and activities have been affected, in order to provide recommendations that will help to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in the near future.

Against this background, The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), engaged in this project titled "State of the Electoral Process (SEP)". This project is one of the main activities under our larger programme titled "Safeguarding the Integrity and Credibility of the Electoral Process in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic", which is supported by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). The SEP project involves producing a comprehensive report about the state of the 2019-2023 electoral cycle. Through desk research and in-depth key informant interviews with stakeholders, we analyse the impact of the pandemic on the electoral programmes and activities of six key stakeholders in the electoral process: the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Assembly (NASS), political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs), donor agencies, and the media.

Research Questions

We seek to answer three main questions through this project:

1. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the electoral programmes and activities of the stakeholders?
2. Who would have been best placed to intervene and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities?
3. How can the effect of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities be mitigated in the near future?

Methodology

This paper employed a combination of *desk research* and *in-depth key informant interviews* with stakeholders. We interviewed eleven stakeholders, including department heads at INEC, a legislative adviser, a party official, CSO members, election experts in donor agencies, and an editor in a media agency (see Appendix A). In so doing, we ensured that we had at least one key informant in each of the six stakeholder groups: INEC, NASS, political parties, CSOs, donor agencies, and the media.

Our desk research involved literature search, review and critical analysis. We consulted a variety of sources, including the websites and verified social media handles of various electoral stakeholders, media reports, reports and publications from CSO groups, and online articles.

The use of both primary and secondary data contributes to the richness of this report, which includes illustrative quotes from stakeholders. Through these methods, this report on the "State of the Electoral Process in the Context of COVID-19" provides a comprehensive insight into the impact of COVID-19 on the activities of electoral stakeholders and the electoral process as a whole during the 2019-2023 election cycle.

Structure of the Paper

The paper is divided into three parts:

- **Part 1** explains the background of the electoral process of Nigeria, including the historical context in which elections have been held, and the legal framework guiding elections.

- **Part 2** details the activities and programmes of the six key electoral stakeholders – INEC, National Assembly, political parties, civil society organisations, donor agencies, and the media – and how they have each been affected by COVID-19.

- **Part 3** analyses the impact of COVID-19 on the electoral process as a whole and provides recommendations for the future.

From this report, it is expected that linkages which highlight intersections, similarities, and gaps, would be used to encourage collaborations and build synergies across institutions, actors and thematic areas within the electoral space – all of which will contribute to enhancing electoral integrity and credibility.

Historical Context

The historical context of Nigeria is important in understanding peculiar features of Nigeria's electoral process and system today. This section outlines the historical context of Nigeria from the colonial period to the Fourth Republic, paying specific attention to how elections were conducted during these periods.

Colonial Peri od (1900-1960)

The city of Lagos was first colonised by the British in 1861. By 1900, the British had extended their control to the entire northern and southern protectorates. In 1914, both

protectorates were amalgamated to form Nigeria. The first general elections in colonial Nigeria were held in 1923 when four elective seats were introduced into the legislative council – three for Lagos and one for Calabar. This led to the formation of the first political party in Nigeria, called the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). Voting rights were limited to Nigerians who earned at least £100, had been resident in Lagos or Calabar for at least a year, and were above 21 years old. The term of legislative councillors was five years, so elections to the council continued to be held at regular intervals during this time period.

The final elections in colonial Nigeria were held in 1959. These elections were key to Nigeria's independence, and witnessed the participation of key figures like Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who were erstwhile premiers of the Eastern and Western regions respectively.[3] The 1959 elections witnessed electoral violence, although it was localised and limited.[4] There were reports of tampering with electoral documents, exercise of undue influence by the colonial masters, and use of thugs by politicians to intimidate political opponents.[5]

First Republic (1960-1966)

Following years of advocacy and growing nationalism within the people, Nigeria was granted independence in 1960, and later became a republic in 1963 with Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as the first President. In 1964, Nigeria had its first general elections as an independent republic. These elections were contested by two political alliances incorporating all the major parties: the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).[6]

However, the elections were conducted in the context of ethno-regional conflicts with widespread allegations of vote rigging.[7] There was a boycott by the UPGA in some constituencies, which led to the elections being postponed in those constituencies. Despite this boycott, the NNA still ended up with a majority of seats (63.5%).[8] Unsatisfied with the victory of the NNA, UPGA attempted to gain a majority in the Senate by gaining control of Lagos and the three southern regions through the Western Region Assembly elections in 1965. However, the NNA again won a majority of seats, amid allegations of vote rigging. This sparked a crisis within the Western Region in which an estimated 2,000 people died.[9]

The crisis within the Western Region in the aftermath of the 1965 elections was one of the factors that led to Nigeria's first military coup in January 1966.[10] This coup, led by Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, not only brought about the untimely end of the First Republic but also set the precedent for another coup in July of that year and again in 1975. These coups brought General Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Mohammed, and General Olusegun Obasanjo into power at different time periods.

Second Republic (1979-1983)

Following thirteen consecutive years of military rule, Nigeria returned to democracy under Obasanjo's administration in 1979. A new Constitution was drafted which provided for, among others, fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, the federal character principle, and universal adult suffrage. All of these were aimed at ensuring the stability of the country to prevent another return to military rule.

The 1979 elections which signalled the beginning of the Second Republic led to the victory of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. However, the elections were marred by allegations of electoral malfeasance which led to legal battles over the results.[11] Of particular note was the provision of the Electoral Decree which stipulated that for a candidate to be declared President, they must win 25% of the vote in

each of at least two-thirds of the states in the country. Since Nigeria had 19 states at the time, there was a question of whether two-thirds meant 12.67 states, in which case Shagari would be the winner, or whether the number of states should be rounded up to 13, in which case another election would have to be conducted with the two highest scoring candidates. This issue caused a post-election crisis that nearly disrupted what should have been a smooth transition of power.[12] However, the Supreme Court upheld Shagari's election, declaring that "two-thirds" should be given its literal meaning which is 12.67.[13]

Upon the completion of President Shagari's first term in office, another election was held in 1983. The 1983 elections, however, witnessed "serious irregularities and malpractices [...] which were sufficient to question the validity of the election results as a whole".[14] There was evidence of manipulation by Shagari's party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), over officials of the electoral management body, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO).[15] FEDECO also proved incompetent to handle the task of conducting elections, as there were blatant inaccuracies in the electoral lists it drew up.[16] In Oyo and Ondo States, there was violence which led to over 70 deaths.[17]

Against this context, another military coup occurred in December 1983, which brought Major General Muhammadu Buhari into power. General Ibrahim Babangida later became Head of State through another coup in

Third Republic (1993)

In the build-up to another transition from military rule to democratic rule, Babangida's administration conducted parliamentary and governorship elections in 1992. Subsequently, presidential elections were held in 1993. Only two parties created by the government – Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) – were allowed to contest these elections. The unofficial presidential election result suggested that Chief Moshood Abiola of the NPC won the elections; however, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) refused to announce election results despite several court orders.[18] On 23 June 1993, the Abuja High Court finally declared the election "null and void", and on the same day the government made an announcement cancelling the elections and suspending the NEC.[19]

In the aftermath of the election annulment, there were protests and strikes in the Western Region, as well as restrictions on the press by the government.[20] Against this context, General Babangida resigned and an interim national government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan was established. However, Shonekan was only in office for about three months, before another military coup led by General Sani Abacha in November 1993 truncated the Third Republic barely after it had started. Following Abacha's death in 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar became Head of State, and he ushered Nigeria's final return to democracy.

Fourth Republic (1999-date)

In 1999, Nigeria finally returned to democratic rule through the elections that occurred that year. The 1999 Constitution came into force, and this Constitution, which has been amended four times to date, has been the legal framework guiding the country. Since the 1999 elections, five additional elections have been held at regular four-year intervals: in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019. These elections were all marred by violence and electoral irregularities, albeit to varying degrees.

The electoral violence and other malpractices were particularly evident in the 2007 general elections, which were described by many observers as the worst they had ever seen in Nigeria.[21] Even the newly elected President, Umaru Musa Yar'adua, acknowledged that

there were several shortcomings in the elections that brought him to power.[22] This led President Yar'adua to set up the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) in 2007, under the leadership of Justice Uwais, to make recommendations on electoral reform.

On the recommendation of the ERC, some electoral reforms were introduced, including the following:

- to improve the independence of INEC, section 156 of the Constitution was amended to state that INEC members cannot be members of political parties;
- section 84(8) of the Constitution was amended to state that the recurrent expenditure of INEC, in addition to salaries and allowances of the Chairman and members, would come from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation rather than the executive;
- section 160(1) of the Constitution was amended to state that INEC could make its own rules and regulations without the interference of the President;
- section 228 of the Constitution was amended to give more powers to INEC to monitor internal democracy within parties;
- Professor Attahiru Jega, a well-known activist perceived by many to have integrity, was appointed as the Chairman of INEC;
- INEC introduced a new biometric voter registration system;
- INEC improved the security of election materials by introducing serial numbering and colour-coding of ballot papers and boxes;
- INEC established the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) to promote synergy across the security agencies involved in elections; and
- INEC started the recruitment of National Youth Service Corps' members as ad-hoc staff, and university academics as Returning Officers on election day.[23]

Against, this context, the 2011 elections were conducted. Although these elections were not perfect, they were judged to be better than previous elections, having "relative credibility, transparency, and fairness".[24] Following further reforms by INEC including a thorough clean-up of the voter register and the introduction of permanent voter cards (PVCs) and electronic card-reading machines, the 2015 elections were even better.[25] Observers in 2015 judged the elections to be one of the most credible elections in Nigeria, having "relatively little violence or voter fraud".[26]

Unfortunately, the 2019 elections witnessed a step back from the progress made in the preceding years. According to the EU's election observation mission, "the elections were marked by severe operational and transparency shortcomings, electoral security problems and low turnout".[27] Reports show that about 626 people were killed during the 2019 election cycle alone, starting with campaigns in 2018.[28] As shown in table 1 below, only about 35% of voters turned up for the 2019 elections. This was the lowest in Africa and about half the almost 70% figure for the presidential elections in 2003.

S/N	ELECTION YEAR	ELECTION TYPE	TURNOUT
1	1959	Parliamentary	79.5%
2	1979	Parliamentary	32.3%
		Presidential	35.3%
3	1983	Parliamentary	38.9%
4	1999	Parliamentary	40.7%
		Presidential	52.3%
5	2003	Parliamentary	49.3%
		Presidential	69.1%
6	2007	Presidential[29]	57.5%
7	2011	Parliamentary	28.7%
		Presidential	53.7%
8	2015	Parliamentary	43.7%
		Presidential	43.7%
9	2019	Parliamentary	32.1%
		Presidential	34.8%

Table 1: Voter Turnout in Nigeria, 1959-2019. Source: International IDEA[30]

Conclusion

From this historical overview, it is evident that electoral violence and other malpractices in Nigeria date back to the colonial period, particularly during the 1959 general elections. Since then, virtually all elections have seen violence and irregularities in one form or another. This long history of electoral violence and malpractices in Nigeria has led to political instability, sometimes paving the way for military coups as in 1966, 1975, 1983, 1985, and 1993. All these show that without peace and security, the essential function of elections to uphold representative democracy cannot be met.

Furthermore, the frequent military coups throughout Nigeria's history have hampered the development of democracy in the country. This has contributed to a high level of corruption,[31] weak democratic institutions,[32] negative election mindsets,[33] lack of public trust in the system,[34] and voter apathy.[35]

Some reform efforts aimed at improving the electoral process of Nigeria have been made, particularly in 2010 on the recommendation of the ERC. However, these reforms have not been sufficient. As discussed in the next section, key issues including electronic voting, political party structure and operations, and punishment of electoral offenders remain to be addressed. With Nigeria having only 22 years of uninterrupted experience with democracy since 1999, it is important to take into account the historical context of elections in the country in order to institute reforms aimed at improving the electoral process. In turn, this will have a positive effect on the work of stakeholders in the electoral process.

Legal Framework

The main laws regulating elections in Nigeria are the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended). These laws also empower INEC to make subsidiary legislation to guide the conduct of elections. This means that rules, regulations and guidelines produced by INEC also form the legal framework guiding elections in Nigeria.

1999 Constitution of Nigeria

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria has a host of provisions relating to elections. Some of them are as follows:

- section 40 guarantees the right to form or belong to any political party;
- section 153(f) establishes INEC as a federal executive body, with its composition and powers set out in Part 1 of the Third Schedule to the Constitution;
- sections 222-225 regulate political parties, including their formation, rules, and finances;
- section 285 establishes election tribunals and sets out the time for determination of pre-election matters and election petitions;
- various sections provide for the qualifications for election, grounds for disqualification, and tenure of office for elective positions such as the President, the Governors, members of the House of Representatives, Senators, and members of the State Houses of Assembly.

The 1999 Constitution has been amended four times: the first to third amendments were in 2010, while the fourth amendment was in 2017. The 2010 amendments were made following the report of the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) set up in 2007 to make recommendations on issues for electoral reform. These amendments had various provisions on electoral issues, including those aimed at improving the independence and efficiency of INEC. The 2017 amendment covered a number of issues, the most popular being the reduction of the age limit for running for presidential elections from 40 to 35, and National Assembly and State House of Assembly elections from 30 to 25.

The ninth National Assembly is currently undergoing a constitutional review process to amend the 1999 Constitution further. In connection with this process, several Bills aimed at improving the electoral process of Nigeria have been put forward, including:

- the National Electoral Offences Commission Bill 2019, which is aimed at establishing a National Electoral Offences Commission to investigate and prosecute electoral offenders;
- the Independent Candidacy Bill which is aimed at removing the requirement of membership of and sponsorship by a party to contest elections; and
- a Bill to create additional special seats for women in the national and state legislatures.

These Bills, if passed during the constitutional review process, have the potential to promote the principles of representation and accountability in the electoral process of Nigeria.

Electoral Act 2010

The Electoral Act 2010, which repeals the earlier version of the Act passed in 2006, was also passed following the report of the ERC. It provides a comprehensive framework for the conduct of elections in Nigeria, and is divided into nine parts:

- Parts I and II deal with the establishment, functions, staff, etc. of INEC.
- Part III deals with the national register of voters and voter registration.
- Part IV deals with the procedure at election, including timing, postponement, announcement of results, candidates, election materials, and polling.
- Part V deals with political parties.
- Part VI deals with elections to area councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).
- Part VII deals with electoral offences and penalties.
- Part VIII deals with determination of election petitions arising from elections.
- Part IX deals with miscellaneous issues, including persons disqualified from acting as election officers, secrecy of ballot, trial of offences, delegation of INEC's powers, and interpretation of the Act.

The Electoral Act was amended in 2010 to provide for adequate time for INEC to issue notices, receive nomination of candidates from political parties,[36] and ensure the proper conduct of political parties. In 2011, a minor amendment was further made to the Act to reduce the time within which INEC shall stop voter registration before any general election from 60 days to 30 days. The third amendment to the Act was in 2015. This amendment provided for tenure of office of the Secretary to INEC, power to issue duplicate voter cards, power to determine voting procedure, and other related matters.[37]

Since the 2015 amendment, the process of reviewing the Electoral Act has continued. The latest initiative by the National Assembly involves passing a new Electoral Bill to repeal and replace the 2010 Act. This Bill, which has now been passed by both Chambers of the National Assembly, is aimed at improving INEC independence and efficiency, improving political party structure and operations, and making provisions for electronic voting, among others. However, the Bill has failed to sufficiently address the issue of electronic transmission of results, as discussed later in this paper.

INEC Regulations and Guidelines

INEC is empowered by both the Constitution and the Electoral Act to make subsidiary legislation guiding the conduct of elections. In this light, INEC issued the 2019 regulations and guidelines for the conduct of elections.[38] These regulations apply to general elections, by-elections, re-run elections and supplementary elections.

The 2019 regulations deal with a variety of issues relating to elections, including eligibility to vote, voting locations, polling staff and qualifications, appointment of polling agents, accreditation and voting procedure, smart card readers, persons with disabilities, vote counting, collation and transmission, over-voting, and access to voting locations.

In light of COVID-19, INEC also issued a policy on conducting elections in the context of the pandemic.[39] This policy set out guidelines that INEC staff as well as voters should follow

to ensure that election-day activities are conducted safely. Some key points from the policy are:

- redesigning of polling units to allow for social distancing;
- use of tags and twines to prevent overcrowding;
- a two-tier queuing system (one outside and one inside the voting area) to allow for social distancing;
- adjustment of polling time to begin at 8:30 am and close at 2:30 pm to allow additional time to set up polling units in a COVID-compliant way;
- compulsory wearing of face masks at polling units and collation centres;
- periodic disinfection of chairs, tables and work areas, as well as adequate ventilation at polling units;
- provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other safety materials for polling staff;
- clustering of collation centres where feasible to reduce exposure of people to COVID-19; and
- allowing only one polling agent of a party on the ballot into the collation hall.

Conclusion

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, the Electoral Act 2010, and INEC regulations and guidelines provide a comprehensive legal framework guiding elections in Nigeria. Proposed reforms aimed at establishing a National Electoral Offences Commission, improving INEC independence and efficiency, establishing independent candidacy, improving political party structure and operations, creating special seats for women, and establishing electronic voting all have the potential to improve the electoral process of Nigeria. However, a key outstanding issue is the electronic transmission of results, which the Electoral Bill so far has failed to address. As the 2023 elections are fast approaching, it is critical to ensure not just a timely but also a quality passage of these Bills affecting the electoral process, in order to prevent last-minute changes to the law that could affect INEC's preparation and ultimately undermine the integrity of the entire process.

Part 2

Stakeholders in the Electoral Process

The Independent National Electoral Commission

Background

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the main Electoral Management Body (EMB) in Nigeria. Established by section 153(1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended), INEC is charged with the following functions as stipulated in the Constitution and the Electoral Act 2010:

- organise, undertake and supervise all presidential, governorship, and national/state parliamentary elections;
- register political parties;
- monitor the organisation and operation of political parties, including their finances, conventions, congresses, and party primaries;
- arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties, and publish a report on such examination and audit for public information;
- arrange and conduct voter registration, and prepare, maintain and revise the voters register;
- monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties;
- ensure that all Electoral Commissioners, Electoral and Returning Officers take and subscribe the Oath of Office prescribed by law;
- delegate any of its powers to any Resident Electoral Commissioner;
- conduct civic and voter education;
- promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes; and
- conduct referendums.[40]

INEC consists of a Chair and twelve other National Commissioners who are appointed by the President upon confirmation of the Senate for a term of five years, renewable once only. Each state and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) also have a Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) who is similarly appointed by the President. The REC also serves for a term of five years, renewable once only.

The current INEC Chairman is Professor Mahmood Yakubu, who was re-appointed for a second term in 2020. Each of the twelve INEC National Commissioners is responsible for supervising three states.

Activities and Programmes

To understand the activities and programmes of INEC, we interviewed some of the department heads at the Commission. We also undertook desk review of secondary sources, including INEC website, INEC verified social media handles, and reports from CSO observer groups.

Two main elections were conducted by INEC in 2020: the Edo State governorship elections, and the Ondo State governorship elections. Some parliamentary by-elections were also conducted in December 2020. The following were the main activities/programmes of INEC in the pre-election, election, and post-election phases:

1. Assessment Visits

To ensure readiness for the elections, the INEC Chairman and Commissioners paid assessment visits

to the INEC offices in some local government areas. These visits included meetings with the electoral officers in the states. They were carried out to assess their state of preparedness and ensure that they were adequately prepared to conduct credible elections.

2. Trainings

In preparation for the elections, INEC also recruited and trained thousands of ad hoc staff to ensure that they were well prepared to conduct polling.[41] In addition to training on normal election activities, INEC also trained these staff on COVID-19 protocols to follow on election day.

3. Stakeholder Engagement

Furthermore, INEC conducted visits and advocacy meetings with stakeholders including political parties, CSOs, the media, security agencies, women and youth groups, and traditional and religious leaders. These meetings helped to ensure that each stakeholder group was equipped to perform their role in the electoral process. With regard to parties specifically, INEC's Elections and Party Monitoring (EPM) department developed a checklist in collaboration with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to enable parties keep a record of their activities and measure themselves to see if they are performing.[42]

4. Voter Education

INEC also conducted voter education to encourage people to vote on election day. For this purpose, they used online platforms and infographics. For instance, the Commission launched an online campaign on 28 August, using well-known artists and actors to encourage the youth to vote peacefully and adhere strictly to INEC's policy on conducting elections during the pandemic. A video titled "Heal the Land" was released as part of the campaign, starring celebrities such as Ali Nuhu, Uti Nwachukwu, Emmanuel Ikubese, Helen Paul, M.I., Tuface Idibia, and Funny Bone.[43]

INEC also designed a Voters Code of Conduct (VCC) to inform voters of how to vote safely during the pandemic. This was presented in the form of hand bills and posters (pictured below) and a YouTube video.

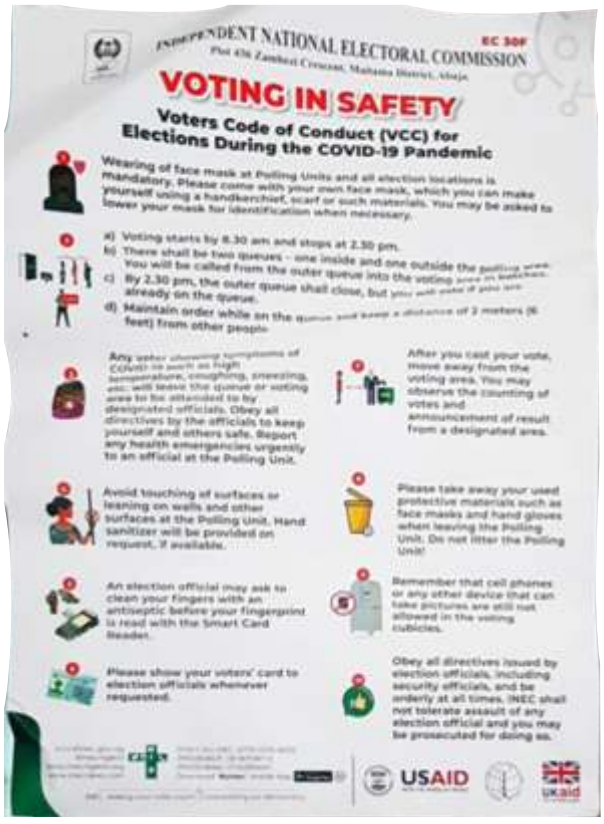


Figure 1: Voters Code of Conduct

In addition to the general VCC, INEC created a VCC for Ondo State and shared it widely on its social media platforms.



Figure 2: Ondo Voters Code of Conduct[44]

In addition to infographics and social media engagement, INEC also held public lectures to promote public engagement with the electoral process.

5. Election-Day Activities

Election-day activities include voter accreditation, voting, vote counting, collation, announcement, and declaration of results. Due to the pandemic, INEC developed a policy on conducting elections during the COVID-19 pandemic.[45] This policy provided for social distancing in polling units, adjustment of polling times, use of face masks by voters, and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other safety materials for polling staff. These guidelines therefore meant that election-day activities were conducted differently due to the pandemic, although it must be noted that the COVID-19 protocols were not strictly enforced in all polling units.

Added to normal election-day activities was also the electronic



transmission of results through INEC's introduction of the online results viewing portal on 6 August 2020.[46] This portal was used during the Edo governorship elections, the Ondo governorship elections, and the parliamentary by-elections. INEC officials were able to upload result sheets on the portal using Z-pads (tablets), which allowed citizens to track the results of the election in real time, regardless of their location. This is commendable, as it improved transparency and confidence in the process.

6. Other Day-to-Day Activities

Other day-to-day activities include meetings and other office tasks by

members of the Commission to aid in the conduct of their programmes. Due to the pandemic, INEC reduced the number of people who were physically present at work in order to reduce the risk of the virus spreading. For the few who were still going to work physically, protective equipment such as hand sanitisers, face masks, and thermometers were provided.[47]

Impact of COVID-19

From the above, it is clear that nearly all of INEC's activities and programmes in this electoral cycle have been conducted differently due to the pandemic. This has had some noticeable impacts, both positive and negative, as discussed below.

1. Delays

A major effect of the pandemic was that it resulted in delays to elections. Section 26 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) empowers INEC to postpone any election in the event of emergencies. In line with this, in March 2020 INEC issued a statement revealing that the by-elections would be postponed because of the "health emergency occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic".[48] This meant that INEC's timelines for its activities were affected.

2. Financial Costs

One of the main impacts of COVID-19 on INEC was higher financial costs. For example, the manuals used to train staff during the 2019 general elections could no longer be used. This meant that more money had to be used to revise and reproduce a special COVID-19 edition of the training manual.

In terms of the actual trainings, INEC also adopted alternative strategies to make trainings safer. Apart from the mandatory wearing of face masks and social distancing during trainings, INEC also made provisions for step-down trainings (this implied training more trainers), reduced the number of participants for each training, and increased the number of venues. While these measures all helped to ensure that trainings were safer, they also implied higher costs:

> the resources that would be used to train 100 people would have tripled or quadrupled in the sense that a lot of persons and finances are being deployed.[49]

In the quest to reduce physical contact, the training department also collaborated with the ICT department to conduct some virtual trainings on Zoom. Again, this had its own financial implications:

> IT is not cost effective. We need to procure the equipment, upload materials, protect the content in terms of virus, and people trying to hack.[50]

From the above, it is clear that the training department in INEC was innovative in adapting its training methodology, delivery, and organisation to comply with COVID-19 protocols. However, this had clear financial costs relating to production of new manuals, Zoom costs, and so on.

Another way in which COVID-19 had financial costs was in terms of procurement of COVID-19 protective equipment, such as face masks, hand sanitisers, and thermometers. These materials were used for virtually all of INEC's activities: meetings with stakeholders, trainings, election-day activities, and office engagements.

3. Limited Reach

Another impact of the pandemic was that INEC had limited reach since most of its voter education efforts had to be online. Although public lectures were also held in addition to the

online campaigns, due to the health risks of holding large public lectures physically, INEC had to make these lectures virtual, with only a few staff physically present while others joined online. This meant that the lectures were not as elaborate as they used to be.[51]

4. Disenfranchisement

The COVID-19 pandemic also led to the disenfranchisement of thousands of Nigerians. INEC typically conducts voter registration prior to elections, but due to the pandemic the continuous voter registration had to be stopped and the Commission relied on the 2019 voters register. Also because of the pandemic, the distribution of uncollected Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs)[52] had to be suspended. The result was that in Edo State, as many as 483,868 registered voters were unable to collect their PVCs, and in Ondo State this number was 372,888.[53] This level of disenfranchisement may have contributed to the particularly low turnout levels at the elections: 32.8% in Ondo and 24.53% in Edo.[54] Apart from already registered voters who were unable to collect their PVCs, new voters were also unable to register during these elections because the continuous voter registration process was also stopped. In this way, the pandemic had the negative effect of disenfranchising the citizens by preventing INEC from conducting voter registration and distribution of PVCs.

5. Use of Technology

The impact of the pandemic on INEC was not all negative. One positive effect was that it forced INEC to adapt to the new realities and innovate in unprecedented ways by using technology to aid the conduct of its activities. This was demonstrated through the use of a virtual situation room that allowed INEC Commissioners and Directors to track the elections virtually and give rapid responses to issues. INEC was therefore able to reduce the risk of spreading the virus by adopting an online alternative, while also ensuring that the integrity of the election was not compromised. Similarly, where possible online alternatives were used for pre-election activities. For example, INEC introduced a party candidate nomination portal, an election observer accreditation portal, and a media accreditation portal, all of which minimised physical contact.[55] This level of innovation is commendable and should be continued even after the pandemic is over.

6. Higher Efficiency

In terms of the day-to-day activities, the pandemic appears to have also had a positive effect. An interviewee notes:

> One positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it helped to increase the quantity and the volume of work, in the sense that people were able to work from home at any time irrespective of physical absence from work.[56]

Through the ICT Department, the Commission provided a platform and link for Zoom meetings which departments did not have to pay for. The Zoom meetings not only increased the number of deliberations, but also allowed people to record the proceedings of meetings. For minutes takers, this made their work easier and richer. In this sense, the pandemic had a positive effect, as it forced the Commission to innovate in a way that improved the quality of these day-to-day activities.

Conclusion

INEC's normal electoral activities have inevitably been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The conduct of pre-election activities (e.g. assessment visits, trainings, stakeholder engagement, and voter education), election-day activities (e.g. accreditation, voting, vote counting, collation, announcement, transmission, and declaration of results), and other day-to-day activities in the office of the Commission, had to be adapted to take into account the risks posed by the virus. The Commission was impressively able respond to change by using virtual alternatives where possible and using protective equipment during physical engagements. While this led to higher costs and disenfranchisement of some Nigerians during the elections, it also had the positive effect of technological innovation in the Commission and higher efficiency in day-to-day activities. These positive features should be sustained even when the pandemic is over, in order to further improve the quality of INEC's work.

National Assembly

Background

The National Assembly (NASS) is the legislature at the federal level in Nigeria. Established by section 4(1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended), NASS is bicameral in nature, with a lower house called the House of Representatives and an upper house called the Senate. The House of Representatives consists of 360 members with each state represented in proportion to its population, while the Senate consists of 109 members with each state represented equally. Each member of the National Assembly is elected for a four-year term using the first-past-the-post system.

According to the Constitution, the National Assembly is charged with the responsibility of making "laws for the peace, order and good government of the Federation or any part thereof".[57] The areas on which the National Assembly alone can legislate on are set out in the Exclusive Legislative List. They include:

- accounts of the Government of the Federation, and of offices, courts, and authorities thereof, including audit of those accounts;
- arms, ammunition and explosives;
- aviation, including airports, safety of aircraft and carriage of passengers and goods by air;
- awards of national titles of honour, decorations and other dignities;
- bankruptcy and insolvency;
- banks, banking, bills of exchange and promissory notes;
- census, including the establishment and maintenance of machinery for continuous and universal registration of births and deaths throughout Nigeria;
- citizenship, naturalisation and aliens;
- construction, alteration and maintenance of federal roads;
- copyright;
- state creation;
- currency, coinage and legal tender;
- customs and excise duties;
- elections to any office excluding local government councils; and so on.[58]

The areas on which both the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly can legislate are set out in the Concurrent

Legislative List. They include antiquities and monuments, archives, taxes, electoral law, electricity, statistics, education, electricity, education, health, infrastructural issues, agriculture, and so on.[59] The Constitution provides that where the law enacted by a State House of Assembly is inconsistent with a law made by the National Assembly, the latter shall prevail.[60]

In the 2019-2023 electoral cycle, the Speaker of the House of Representatives is Honourable Femi Gbajabiamila, while the President of the Senate is Senator Ahmed Lawan.

Activities and Programmes

To understand the activities and programmes of NASS in this electoral cycle, we interviewed a legislative adviser. We also undertook desk review of secondary sources, including NASS verified social media handles, media reports, and reports from CSO groups. The main activities of NASS in this electoral cycle have been electoral and constitutional review. Other activities such as meetings, engagement with stakeholders, public hearings, and other day-to-day activities were also held in furtherance of the electoral and constitutional review process.

1. Electoral Review

Since the 2015-2019 electoral cycle, NASS has gone through a long process of reviewing and amending the Electoral Act 2010. In 2018, the amended Electoral Bill went through the normal law-making process in the Assembly, as described below:

> There is a Bill and it is first read at the floor of the Senate [or the House of Representatives], and after the first reading there is a second reading. The second reading is referred to a Committee, after which it goes to public hearing. From public hearing, it comes back to the House for the third and final reading where they do clause by clause consideration [...] then it goes to the other chamber for concurrence and after concurrence it is passed to the President to assent.[61]

However, the President refused assent to the 2018 Bill principally because it was too close to the 2019 elections.[62]

Following the 2019 elections, the process of drafting, amending, and updating the Bill continued. The updated Electoral Bill passed second reading in the Senate in November 2019.[63] However, the entire process was forestalled due to COVID-19 as pandemic-related issues became at the forefront of NASS's agenda. Eventually, the process of reviewing the Bill continued and in December 2020, a public hearing was held.

The 2021 Bill has now been passed by both houses of the National Assembly, with a slightly different version in each house. Some of the issues addressed by the Bill are: early release of INEC funds, political party structure and operations, and use of technology in elections (smart cards readers and electronic voting). However, the issue of electronic transmission of results has not been sufficiently addressed by the Bill. In the version of the Bill passed by the Senate, INEC can only transmit results electronically if the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) adjudges the national network coverage to be adequate and secure, and the National Assembly gives approval.[64] This issue has generated a lot of backlash from CSOs, opposition lawmakers, and the general public,

who are concerned by the erosion of INEC's independence.

2. Constitutional Review

Another activity that NASS has engaged in is constitutional review. On 22 April 2021, the Office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the House Committee on Women Affairs, in collaboration with the National Democratic Institute, organised a two-day retreat on 'Achieving Gender Equity in the Constitution Review Process'.[65] On the same day, a Bill to alter the provisions of the Constitution and create additional special seats for women in the national and state legislatures was read in the House of Representatives for the first time. This constitutional review process has the potential to significantly improve the electoral process by promoting principles such as gender equity and inclusion.

Other issues that are being considered in the constitutional review process are, among others, the federal structure and power devolution, local government autonomy, fiscal federalism and revenue allocation, establishment of state police, adjudication of election and pre-election matters, electoral reform, political parties, independent candidacy, socio-economic rights, residency and indigeneship, immunity, timeline for assent of Bills and the Appropriation Bill, and state/local government creation.

3. Other Day-to-Day Activities

In furtherance of the electoral and constitutional review process, NASS has engaged in activities such as meetings, engagement with stakeholders, and public hearings. For example, in December 2020 a public hearing for the amended Electoral Bill was held, in early 2021 a retreat at Transcorp Hilton was held for legislators,[66] in May 2021 public hearings on constitutional review were held in the six geo-political zones of the country, and in June 2021 a national public hearing on constitutional review was held in the FCT.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had noticeable impacts on NASS, both positive and negative, as discussed below.

1. Legislative Agenda

Given NASS's role as the national legislature in Nigeria, it had a primary responsibility to make laws addressing the pandemic. This meant that the legislative agenda became occupied with interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic, as highlighted in figures 3 and 4 below. One of the laws made by NASS to address the pandemic was the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill 2020. This Bill and other interventions by NASS helped to directly and promptly address issues raised by the pandemic. Indeed, NASS was particularly commended for its swiftness in passing the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill, which passed first, second and third reading in the House of Representatives in one day.

Nevertheless, the dominance of pandemic-related interventions had a negative impact in the sense that the normal legislative agenda of NASS was affected. This meant that Bills which had already been put forward previously, including the National Electoral Offences Commission (NEOC) Bill 2019 and the Electoral Bill 2020 were delayed. Although the Electoral Bill has now been passed, the NEOC Bill has not yet been passed. This is particularly concerning, given that the 2023 elections are fast approaching.

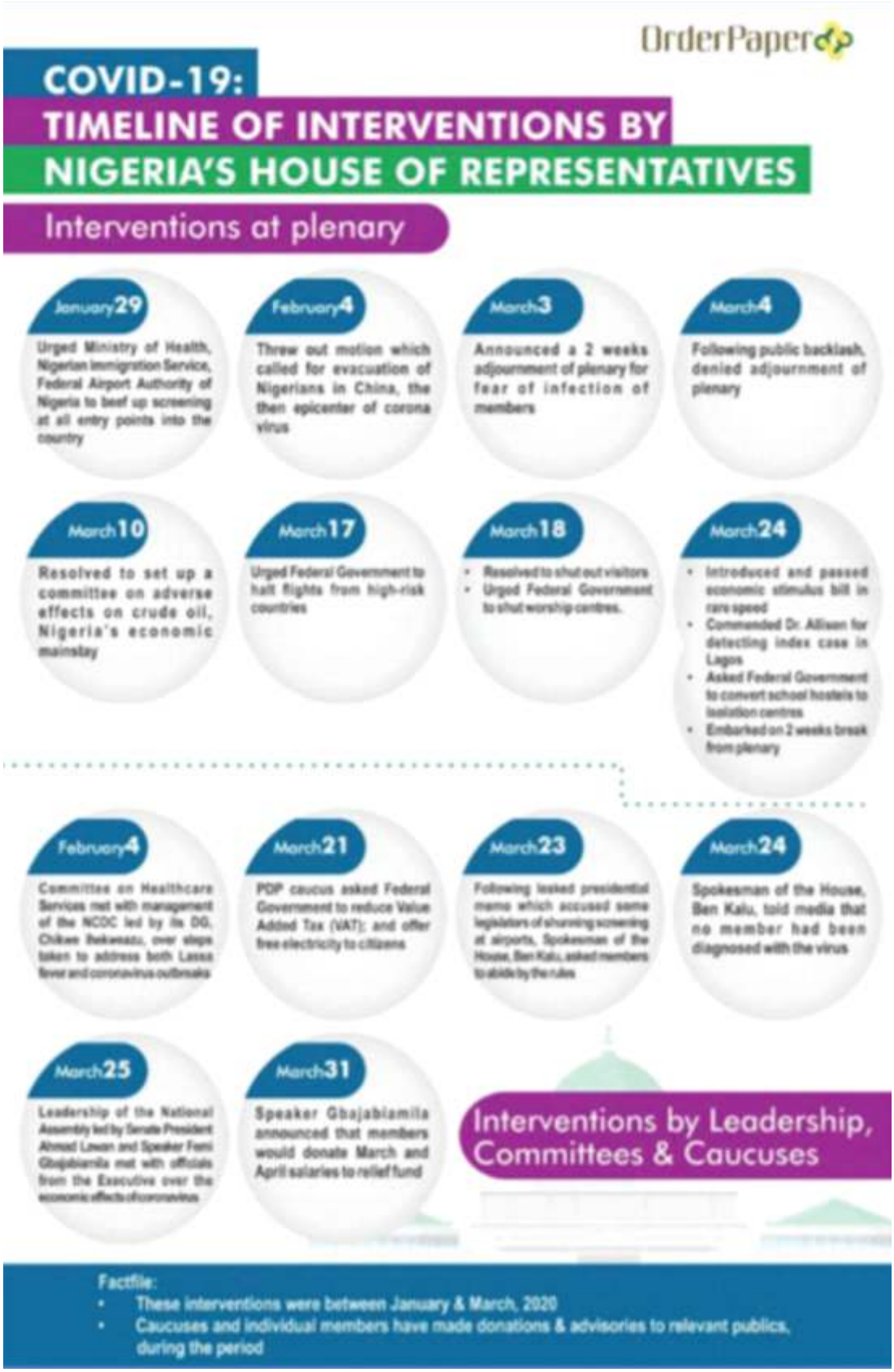


Figure 3: COVID-19 interventions by the House of Reps. Source: OrderPaper[67]

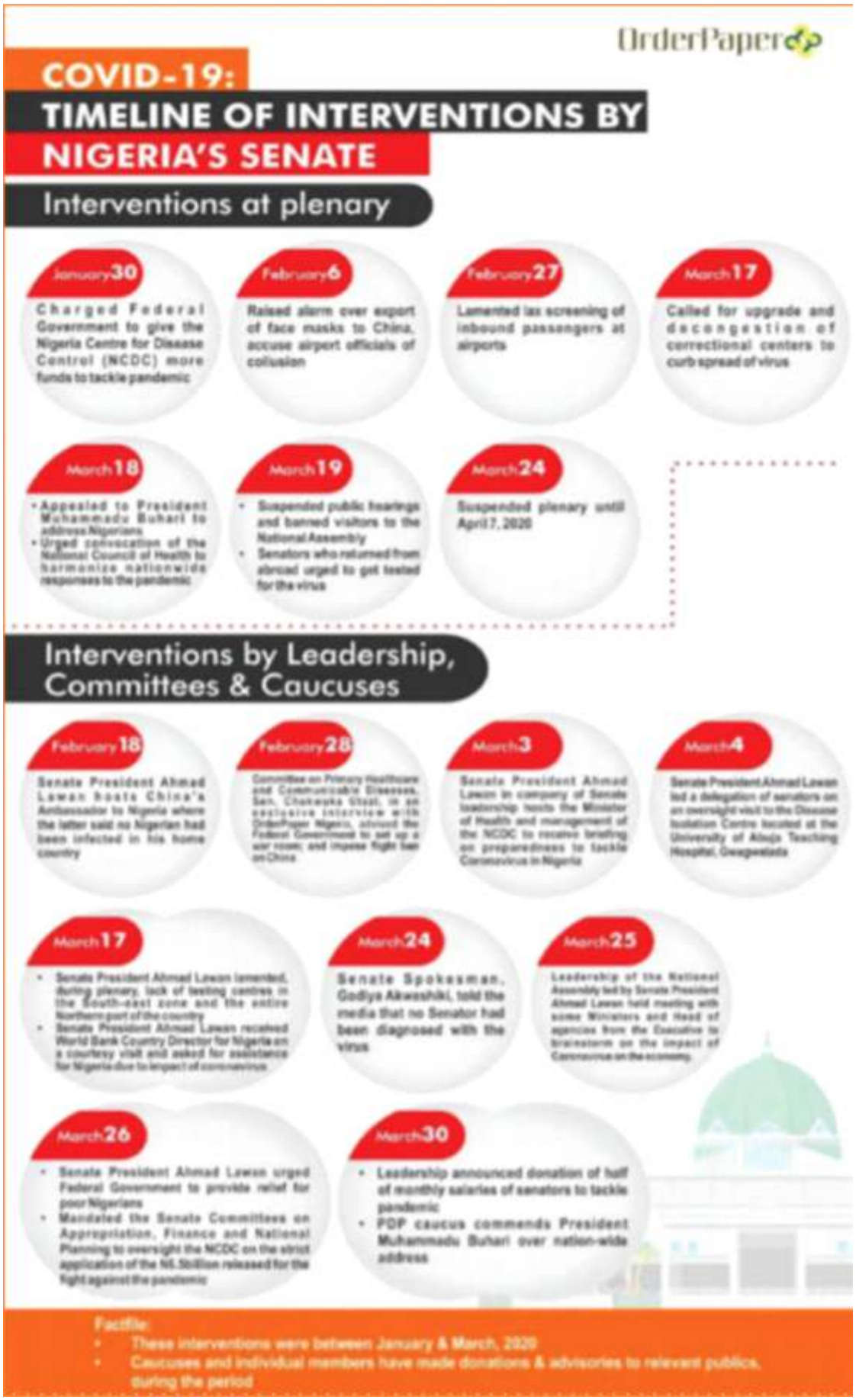


Figure 4: COVID-19 interventions by the Senate. Source: OrderPaper[68]

2. Suspension of Activities

The pandemic also resulted in a suspension of the activities of the National Assembly. On 24 March 2020, both houses of NASS agreed to shut activities by two weeks (to resume 7 April 2020) to prevent the spread of the virus and to allow members enlighten their constituents on the dangers.[69] However, the suspension became indefinite as a result of the lockdown order imposed.[70] It was not until 28 April 2020 that the House of Representatives decided that they would be seating only once a week, on Tuesdays, until the lockdown was lifted.[71] Indeed, this issue is not exclusive to NASS as virtually all stakeholder activities were suspended during the period of the lockdown. In this way, the pandemic had a negative effect by leading to a suspension of activities.

3. Cost Implications

The pandemic also had cost implications for NASS. Apart from the normal costs in providing PPE for legislators, legislators in both houses also impressively donated parts of their salaries to help fight against the pandemic.[72] In this sense, there was a trade-off as funds that would have been directed into the normal work of legislators for their constituents were redirected to fighting the pandemic.

4. Reduction in Citizen Participation

The pandemic also had the negative effect of reducing citizen participation in the legislative process. In 2020, NASS issued guidelines that restricted the number of aids that could come into the National Assembly, and courtesy visits were no longer accepted. At the height of the pandemic, the number of people present at physical engagements was capped at fifty, seating arrangements provided for social distancing, and sanitisers, face masks and so on were provided for participants.[73]

The implication of these restrictions on physical engagements is that the space for the inclusion of citizens was either minimally open or entirely closed.[74] Indeed, it was originally intended that there would be no public hearing on the Control of Infectious Diseases Bill 2020.[75] It was only in the face of public backlash that the House of Representatives decided to hold a public hearing with limited participants.[76] In this way, the pandemic had the negative effect of reducing public participation in legislative processes.

5. Use of Technology

One positive thing that came out of the pandemic was increased use of technology in the legislature. In addition to the reduced number of people present at physical meetings in the NASS building, others also joined the meetings virtually through Zoom.[77] NASS was therefore able to adapt to changing realities by harnessing technology to improve its processes.

Conclusion

NASS's electoral activities have undoubtedly been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, most notably in the delayed legislative agenda. Activities such as meetings, engagement with stakeholders, and public hearings also had to be modified to comply with COVID-19 protocols. Unfortunately, the pandemic resulted in a reduction in citizen participation in the legislative process. However, given that NASS was able to integrate the use of technology into activities like meetings, it should also harness this to allow for greater public participation, both now and even when the pandemic is over. This should lead to greater transparency and public accountability in the legislative process.

Political Parties

Background

Political parties are defined by the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) as including any association whose activities include canvassing for votes in support of a candidate for election to the office of President, Vice-President, Governor, Deputy Governor or membership of a legislative house or of a local government council.[78] Political parties are the sole body with the function of canvassing for votes, as the Constitution also prohibits any other association apart from political parties from performing this function.[79]

Political parties in Nigeria are subject to regulation by INEC, which has the power to register parties, deregister them for non-performance, and monitor their finances, conventions, congresses, and party primaries.[80] Following INEC's deregistration of over 70 parties after the 2019 general elections, there are only 18 registered political parties in Nigeria. These are represented in table 2 below.

S/N	PARTY LOGO	ACRONYM	FULL NAME
1		A	Accord
2		AA	Action Allia nce
3		AAC	African Action Congress
4		ADC	African Democratic Congress
5		ADP	Action Democratic Party
6		APC	All Progressives Congress
7		APGA	All Progressives Grand Alliance
8		APM	Allied Peoples' Movement
9		APP	Action Peoples Party

9		**APP**	Action Peoples Party
10		**BP**	Boot Party
11		**LP**	Labour Party
12		**NNPP**	New Nigeria Peoples Party
13		**NRM**	National Rescue Movement
14		**PDP**	Peoples Democratic Party

Table 2: Registered political parties in Nigeria. Source: INEC[81]

Political parties are highly important to the electoral process as independent candidacy is not currently allowed under our laws, which means that a political aspirant must be a member of a party and be sponsored by that party before they are qualified to stand for elections.[82]

Activities and Programmes

To understand the activities and programmes of political parties in this electoral cycle, we interviewed a PDP officer. We also undertook desk review of secondary sources, including the verified social media handles and websites of the parties, media reports, and reports from other stakeholders.

The main activities of political parties in this electoral cycle were conducting primary elections and organising campaigns. Other activities also included voter education, contributing to electoral reform, making online publications, and performing other day-to-day activities in their respective offices.

1. Primary Elections

The parties that put forward candidates for the elections that occurred in this period (such as the Edo and Ondo State governorship elections and the numerous by-elections) conducted primary elections to select these candidates. INEC's supplementary regulations and guidelines for the activities of political parties stated that in the conduct of their primaries, parties must comply with the prevailing requirements for public health including the provision of PPE for participants.[83] It must be noted, however, that enforcement of these guidelines was poor.

By INEC's guidelines, the parties also had to use a nomination portal for the electronic submission, withdrawal and substitution of names and particulars of their candidates as elected at party primaries.[84] Thus, the advent of

COVID-19 effectively altered parties' mode of conducting primaries.

2. Campaigning

Another major activity of parties during this period was campaigning for their sponsored candidates. INEC's supplementary guidelines stated that parties' campaigns must comply with the Commission's guidelines and other public health regulations and protocols.[85] The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) guidelines were more robust. They provided that the number of people gathering at campaigns should be limited to one-third of the actual capacity of the venue, and a minimum of 2 metres social distancing should be observed.[86] The guidelines also encouraged virtual campaigns and rallies where applicable.[87] However, in practice the enforcement of these provisions was also poor.

3. Voter Education

Parties also engaged in voter education to sensitise members of their party and other members of the general public. Due to the pandemic, this activity necessarily included education on how to vote safely during the pandemic. One of our interviewees stated:

> We have offices in the 774 local governments, we have offices in over 4,000 wards in Nigeria, so communication is very easy in the party process. So we educate our members and we stress that they begin to observe the COVID-19 protocols – they are just important matters.[88]

This role of parties in conducting voter education was also stated in the NCDC guidelines, which provide that parties should engage with communities and share information on how people can vote safely.[89]

4. Electoral Reform

Political parties contributed to the electoral reform process by engaging with the National Assembly, as well as providing their recommendations during public hearings. For example, during the public hearing on the Electoral Bill on 9 December 2020, there were political party representatives who were given the opportunity to present and submit their memoranda to the National Assembly.

5. Online Publications

In line with their duty to promote political dialogue, political parties also made publications during this electoral cycle, mostly using their websites as platforms to post news updates, press releases, and so on. Examples of parties that did this are the AAC, ADC, NNPP, PDP, SDP, and YPP.[90] In addition to normal news updates and press releases on parties' websites, in May 2020 the APC also launched the maiden edition of its monthly journal, "The Progressives", which was available in in both hard copy and e-copy.[91]

6. Other Day-to-Day Activities

The normal day-to-day activities include meetings, congresses, and engagements in the respective offices of the parties. These activities also had to be modified to comply with COVID-19 protocols such as social distancing at meetings, using masks and sanitisers, capping the number of people who can be present at a physical meeting, and reducing the time spent in physical meetings. This meant that the day-to-day activities were somewhat constrained due to the pandemic. This was illustrated by one of our interviewees:

> For instance, we cannot hold some regular sessions in the NWC [National Working Committee]. We cannot stay

for long hours in a meeting room because it will negate the protocols of COVID-19.[92]

Impact of COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on political parties were both positive and negative, as discussed below.

1. Increased Costs

The pandemic brought about increased costs on parties, particularly regarding the wearing of masks. Parties had to provide masks for their staff as well as participants during primary elections. In addition to this, the NCDC guidelines stated that the use of face masks is mandatory for everyone attending the campaign rally. One of our interviewees explained the impact of this:

> The pandemic has increased cost of electioneering for us in the sense that we go out for campaign, you must wear a mask. In wearing a mask, masks are supposed to be replaced every four hours – that is the rule that you are supposed to replace your mask every four hours. Now, when you buy a bundle of the disposable masks, it is one thousand naira. If you are going for a campaign even if you are going to share one to each person, it wasn't part of our electioneering before, so it has added to the cost of election.[93]

This shows that due to the pandemic, parties faced the additional cost of providing masks for not only their staff and participants at primary elections, but also for members of the public during campaigns. This greatly increased their electioneering costs.

2. Reduced Reach

Another sense in which the pandemic affected parties was by reducing their reach towards citizens. This is due to the rules regarding social distancing which affected the extent to which parties could organise physical campaigns. Although the NCDC guidelines encouraged virtual campaigns and rallies, one of our interviewees explained:

> Using Edo election as a case study, people are saying we should not put people together – we should use digital media to reach out to them. What is the percentage of Nigerians that are on digital media? The media sector that has the greatest access is the radio but, in the radio, how do you show someone the picture of the candidate? How do you show them the format of the party logo? So, what is the percentage of Nigerians that are educated that can read on the phone? What is the percentage of Nigerians that have access to android phones in such a manner that they can even comprehend messaging? So, to a large extent the pandemic has forced some changes in the electoral process.[94]

Therefore, in addition to reducing the extent to which parties could organise physical campaigns, the pandemic also meant that parties were unable to reach large numbers of people through the media due to the situation of the country whereby a large percentage of people do not have (regular) access to social media, as well as the unsuitability of using radio to convey a party's logo/candidate.

3. Voter Turnout

Another implication of the pandemic was that it became more difficult for parties to sensitise voters to come out and vote on election day. An

interviewee speaking on the effect of the pandemic noted that:

> It can make voters to become afraid saying "with this corona if you go out you will go and catch the pandemic". So some voters will have a rethink of going to the polling unit. And when you look at the process of voting, the logistics of observing social distancing during the voting process, people are bound to stay longer than they normally would during elections in the past.[95]

From this statement, we can ascertain that both fear of contracting the virus and longer time spent in polling units due to COVID-19 protocols discouraged people from coming out to vote. This also meant it was difficult for parties to encourage voters to vote for their selected candidate. No doubt, this contributed to some extent to the poor voter turnouts in the Edo and Ondo elections (24.53%[96] and 32.84%[97] respectively).

4. Reduction of Official Responsibilities

Following the reduction in physical gatherings due to the pandemic, there was also a reduction of official responsibilities. This was illustrated by an interviewee:

> For instance, if you look at the office as I speak now, I am likely going to be the only member of the National Government Committee present or maybe the National Secretary. Others will act from home because of the tendencies associated with the pandemic, so because of that even official responsibilities have become reduced.[98]

> As there was a reduced number of people physically present at the office, this also had an effect on the level of official responsibilities, since there is a limit to what people can do from home.

5. Use of Technology

Through the use of nomination portals as provided by INEC, parties were able to integrate the use of technology into their primary elections, thereby ensuring that their activities were not completely halted by the pandemic. However, apart from this there was no significant increase in the use of technology by parties generally. Only a handful of parties made online publications through their websites, as discussed above.

Conclusion

The activities of parties, most notably primary elections and campaigning, had to be modified to comply with COVID-19 protocols. This had the combined effect of increased costs, particularly regarding the provision of masks, as well as reduced reach due to restrictions on physical gatherings. The pandemic also meant that voter education had to take on a new dimension, which involved voting safely during the pandemic. It would appear that this was not very effective, given the poor turnout at the elections. However, INEC's provision of nomination portals meant that parties were able to integrate the use of technology into their primary elections. Parties can further take initiative by using technology to engage with their members even outside the main election period. This is in line with their role of promoting political dialogue.

Civil Society Organisations

Background

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are key stakeholders in the electoral process in Nigeria. They fall under the broader term of civil society, which is difficult to define precisely due to its broad nature. One attempt at defining civil society has been given by CIVICUS, which explains civil society as the arena outside the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations, and institutions to advance shared interests.[99] Civil society is also sometimes referred to as the "third sector" (after government and the private sector), that has the power to influence the actions of elected policy-makers and businesses.[100]

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies explains that civil society comprises of organisations (including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), and faith-based organisations (FBOs)), online groups and activities including social media communities, social movements, labour unions, and social entrepreneurs.[101] In this section, we are focusing on the first strand of civil society, that is, organisations including NGOs, CBOs, and FBOs.

These organisations contribute to the electoral process in numerous ways, including conducting research and analysis of elections, conducting civic and voter education, conducting advocacy and engagement with different stakeholders, organising trainings and capacity building sessions for key institutions, and observing and monitoring elections. Through their work along the electoral cycle, CSOs help to ensure the integrity and credibility of elections.

In the 2019-2023 electoral cycle, some of the major CSOs that have been conducting electoral work are Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), CLEEN Foundation, Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI), The Electoral Hub, and Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA).

Activities and Programmes

To understand the activities and programmes of CSOs in this electoral cycle, we interviewed a Director in Cedar Seed Foundation and a Programme Officer in another CSO. We also undertook desk review of secondary sources, including the websites and verified social media handles of these CSOs, publications from the CSOs, and media reports. The following are the main activities of CSOs in this electoral cycle.

1. Research and Analysis

CSOs had research and analysis as one of their major activities during this time period. The Electoral Hub produced political context analyses, media monitoring, and results analyses of the Edo and Ondo elections. Prior to the Edo elections, CDD reopened its Election Analysis Centre to serve as a one-stop-shop for rigorous analysis of the electoral process.[102] Similarly, in the build-up to the Edo elections, YIAGA Africa in conjunction with NOI Consulting carried out a survey to empirically gauge the opinions of the electorate on the impact of COVID-19

pandemic and the campaign environment.[103]

The outputs of CSOs' research were comprehensive reports on elections. For example, CDD, KDI, and YIAGA all produced pre-election reports based on their observations in Edo State, with recommendations on how stakeholders can support a peaceful and credible process.[104] These research activities helped to further knowledge about the context in which the elections took place.

2. Civic and Voter Education

Another activity conducted by CSOs during this period was Civic and Voter Education (CVE). These organisations employed different means to ensure that the voting community was well enlightened and informed to make the right choices during elections. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic also meant that CVE necessarily included information on how to vote safely. Although the rules on social distancing and limited physical contact affected the conduct of CVE, CSOs developed innovative ways to educate voters. For example, The Electoral Hub trained young people on "The Electoral Process and Democracy in Nigeria" using the WhatsApp platform. CDD during the Edo State election designed and implemented a robust civic education programme with components including an instructional video broadcasted on African Independent Television (AIT), two radio jingles broadcasted on Independent Radio, Edo, and a one-hour radio program, "*Your Vote*", on Independent Radio.[105]

In addition to disseminating relevant election information, CSOs were able to dispel misinformation and disinformation. For example, CDD has taken an active role in monitoring and dispelling misinformation through its "Fact Checker" publications on social media and on its website. This was useful during the Ondo State election, as the fact check team was able to debunk a viral video on Twitter claiming that three people were killed, while Betty Anyanwu-Akeredolu, the first lady of Ondo, was injured at Ward 5, Unit 6, Owo.[106]

3. Advocacy/Engagement with Stakeholders

CSOs also conducted advocacy in the form of meetings and engagements with relevant stakeholders such as political parties, INEC, and other CSOs. In the run-up to the Edo elections, CDD convened a roundtable with CSOs and other stakeholders to examine the pre-election environment and proffer practical ways to promote electoral integrity.[107] PLAC also convened the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, which organised both internal and external meetings regularly to discuss electoral issues.[108] Cedar Seed Foundation further conducted advocacy visits with the support of the MacArthur Foundation:

> There were a lot of advocacy visits to National Assembly, to INEC, to some political parties by Cedar Seed Foundation during the MacArthur project.[109]

A noticeable impact of CSO advocacy was in the area of peace interventions, particularly in Edo State. Ahead of the Edo elections, the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room held meetings with the National Peace Committee on ways to foster peace and mitigate electoral violence.[110] Furthermore, The Kukah Centre and the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations supported the signing of various

peace accords by political parties and their candidates for the Edo election.[111] These efforts all contributed to the low level of violence in the Edo elections.

4. Election Observation

Election observation is crucial to the electoral process, as observer reports are perceived as credible accounts of the extent to which an election was free and fair. The level of openness to both local and international observers also demonstrates transparency in the electoral process. Thus, the mere presence of electoral observers supports the credibility of the electoral process.

All elections conducted in this time period were observed by CSO groups. Over 50 domestic observer groups were approved to observe the Edo and Ondo elections, including CDD, CLEEN Foundation, YIAGA, PLAC/Situation Room, and KDI.[112] For the by-elections in December 2020, at least 62 CSOs sent observers.[113]

The outputs of election observation were statements and comprehensive reports, which include details of logistical issues, security issues, the extent of electoral malpractices if any, the extent of electoral violence if any, the level of compliance with COVID-19 protocols, and so on.[114]

Impact of COVID-19

CSOs felt the impact of COVID-19 in four main areas: costs, funding, activities, and technology.

1. Increased Costs

CSOs faced increased costs as a result of the pandemic. This has been the trend across other stakeholders, who similarly faced new costs of getting protective equipment such as sanitisers and masks for their staff. One of our interviewees explained that due to the pandemic, they started "using sanitisers, wearing face masks during meetings".[115]

2. Less Funds

In addition to facing higher costs for running their activities, some CSOs ironically received less funds from donors. This is because some donor funds were redirected toward interventions aimed at mitigating the direct impact of the pandemic. This was explained by one of our interviewees:

> Well, in our own case we just didn't have funds to work with because the British people had their own issues which was all COVID related. I mean development agencies needed to repurpose their funds and all of those same things with other funders actually – even the foundations.[116]

Another interviewee further corroborated this point:

> COVID-19 affected our activities in so many ways because we couldn't get access to donors through their offices because everybody was working remotely, and some applications that we applied, they sent us information that everything is put on hold because of COVID. So we couldn't get funding in 2020 as much apart from MacArthur Foundation.[117]

3. Reduced Activities

The activities of CSOs during this period were also reduced for a number of reasons related to the pandemic. One reason was that they had less funds, as discussed above. As a result of

these reduced funds, a survey conducted by the Nigerian Network of NGOs reveals that many organisations were forced to reduce, suspend, or completely stop their activities and operations.[118] This is reflective of a trend throughout Africa, as a survey by EPIC Africa similarly reveals that nearly 70% of the African CSOs that responded to the survey had to reduce or cancel their operations due to lack of funding.[119]

Another reason for the reduced activities of CSOs is that the pandemic led to lockdowns across the country, which meant that CSOs had to shut down their offices for the time period. Even after the lockdown, the COVID-19 rules on social distancing and limited physical contact meant that CSOs' activities remain reduced. One of our interviewees mentioned that during election observation, they "had to sort of reduce the number of people who will be at the states because of COVID-19 protocols".[120]

Another indirect effect of the pandemic on CSOs was that since the pandemic forced other stakeholders to reduce their activities, the CSO activities that were connected to the activities of those other stakeholders were also necessarily reduced. Speaking on this connection between the activities of CSOs and those of other stakeholders, one of our interviewees commented:

> There were several constraints from funding to physical meetings, and of course you know that there was no continuous voter registration for both Edo and Ondo so those were some things that we could not observe going into the elections.[121]

4. Use of Technology

Due to COVID-19 rules limiting physical engagements, CSOs had to switch to virtual means such as Zoom to conduct their meetings, or adopt a hybrid of both physical and online meetings. One of our interviewees explained that they resorted to:

> reducing the number of participants and then actually even combining physical and virtual meetings, so instead of having 50 people in a space like before, you do 25 people and ask other people to join online.[122]

Another interviewee stated:

> When COVID-19 crept in, we couldn't travel so we did some of the projects virtually.[123]

Furthermore, CSOs harnessed technology by organising webinars to promote online engagement. For example, YIAGA held a webinar on COVID-19 and elections, in order to engage with key election stakeholders on the impact of COVID-19 on elections in Nigeria.[124]

CSOs also increasingly used social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, to communicate with each other and carry out their activities smoothly. For example, CDD in collaboration with The Cable created a WhatsApp group to aid election coordination and passing of information relating to the Edo and Ondo elections. As stated above, The Electoral Hub also used the WhatsApp platform to virtually train over 300 young people (students and NYSC members) on "The Electoral Process and Democracy in Nigeria". This use of technology meant that the organisation could reach large numbers of people despite the physical restrictions arising from COVID-19.

Conclusion

The activities of CSOs were affected drastically by the pandemic, and this is largely connected to the reduced funding from donor agencies. Some CSOs were able to continue their activities at a reduced scale, while others stopped them completely. This is worrying and could have a negative impact on the upcoming 2023 elections. Nevertheless, we commend the innovation of some CSOs to use digital CVE options, conduct webinars, engage with

Donor Agencies

Background

Donor agencies, also referred to as development partners, can broadly be defined as organisations, foundations or government agencies that fund and support interventions led by local organisations or bodies, with the overall aim of promoting development. Bariledum et al explain that since the start of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, the country has been receiving foreign democratic assistance, in both monetary and non-monetary terms, from the US, UK, EU, and other major international partners.[125] Donor agencies therefore play a vital role in the electoral process of Nigeria through the support that they provide to electoral programmes and initiatives organised by CSOs. They also sometimes send missions to monitor and observe elections.

Importantly, donor agencies do not limit their support to CSOs. In recognition of the central role that EMBs play in ensuring election success, donors have provided both financial and technical assistance to INEC for years. INEC classifies these donor agencies into three groups:

- Embassies and High Commissions, including the US Embassy and the British High Commission;
- Multilateral development agencies, including the UK's Department for International Development (now FCDO), the European Union (EU), and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES); and
- Foundations and other agencies, including the MacArthur Foundation, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA).[126]

Some of the major agencies providing election support to Nigeria in the current election cycle are the EU (supported by ECES), the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), OSIWA, MacArthur Foundation, and IFES.

Activities and Programmes

To understand the activities and programmes of donor agencies in this electoral cycle, we interviewed election experts at the EU, ECES and IFES. We also undertook desk review of secondary sources, including the websites of these donor agencies, online articles, and media reports. The main activities of donors in

this electoral cycle have been providing financial and technical support to implementing organisations, advocating for electoral reforms through engagement with stakeholders, and observing elections.

1. Financial Support

One of the main activities of donor agencies has been provision of financial support. Since 2014, the FCDO has spent over £50 million as part of the second phase of its Deepening Democracy in Nigeria (DDIN2) project, which is implemented by 17 organisations including ActionAid International, West African NGO Network, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation, PLAC, and CLEEN Foundation.[128] 30% of the DDIN2 budget is spent on election-related programmes.

MacArthur Foundation has also provided extensive financial support to a large group of CSOs in Nigeria working on elections, through its 'On Nigeria' project which aims to strengthen anticorruption and electoral accountability in Nigeria.[129]

OSIWA is another donor agency that has provided priority financial support to CSOs in Nigeria, in recognition of their role as important platforms for citizens' participation and oversight of governance processes at all levels.[130]

2. Technical Support

Another activity of donor agencies involves providing technical support to key electoral stakeholders and institutions in Nigeria. The EU's Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) project is a good example of this. It has five components aimed at supporting INEC, the National Assembly, political parties, the media, and civil society organisations.[131] The five components of the EU-SDGN project are implemented by ECES, PLAC, YIAGA, and CLEEN Foundation, among others.[132]

Component one of the SDGN which is aimed at supporting INEC is implemented by ECES. The following are some of the ways in which ECES has provided technical assistance to INEC:

- organising Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) workshops for INEC staff and other electoral stakeholders;
- organising trainings for INEC's EPM department;
- supporting workshops for the Election Monitoring Support Centre (EMSC);
- supporting INEC to develop a policy on conducting elections during COVID-19;
- supporting INEC to organise a peace accord signing ceremony in Edo State; and
- supporting INEC to develop its media monitoring capacity through the establishment of the INEC Media Monitoring Unit.[133]

The EU-SDGN has also involved providing technical support to the National Assembly towards the drafting of the Electoral Bill which aims to repeal the Electoral Act 2010.

In addition to the EU, IFES, through its Support for Electoral Reforms Project II (2019-21), has been providing technical support at the state level, as well as to INEC and CSOs.[134] All of these are aimed at

strengthening electoral processes in Nigeria ahead of the 2023 elections.

3. Advocacy/Engagements with Stakeholders

Donor agencies also conduct advocacy through high-level engagements with stakeholders. For example, the UK, US, EU, Germany and France have been advocating for the passage of the Electoral Bill 2021 through engagement with the leadership of the National Assembly, the leadership of PDP and APC, and the presidency.[135] In this way, donor agencies intervene to promote electoral reforms in Nigeria.

4. Election Observation

The elections conducted in this time period were also observed by donor agencies. Six international observer groups were approved to observe the Edo and Ondo elections: British High Commission, Embassy of the United States, European Union, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, International Republican Institute, and National Democratic Institute.[136]

The outputs of election observation were statements which were used to inform the public about the level of credibility of the elections, as well as to inform the donor agencies' future interventions in Nigeria's electoral process.[137]

In addition, the British High Commission committed to using events noticed during its observation mission to take action against any politician caught engaging in violence during the 2020 Edo and Ondo governorship elections, which could include restrictions on their eligibility to travel to the UK, restrictions on access to UK-based assets, or prosecution under international law.[138]

Impact of COVID-19

The main impact of COVID-19 on donor agencies was in the form of reduced funds and repurposing of funds. The rules limiting physical contact also had the effect of limiting physical engagements between donors and other stakeholders, and by extension increasing their use of technology.

1. Reduced Funds

Donor agencies had reduced funds to support electoral programmes. This is because the pandemic shrunk the economy of many countries, which in turn led them to cut their foreign aid budgets. For example, the UK reduced its annual aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of its national income, which amounts to a cut of almost £4 billion.[139] One CSO in Nigeria – Women for Women International – was immediately affected by the cut, as the UK terminated a three-year grant agreement that was already halfway through implementation.[140]

The reduced funds thus had both a direct impact on development partners in terms of their ability to support electoral programmes, as well as an indirect impact on CSOs in terms of their ability to implement the programmes.

2. Repurposing of Funds

Some of the reduced funds were also repurposed to support projects that would bring about immediate relief from the pandemic, rather than election programmes. These included health interventions, water and sanitation interventions, economic interventions, and general social assistance

which were initiated at the height of the pandemic.[141] This repurposing of funds meant that supporting election programmes, particularly new ones, was no longer a priority for donors in light of the immediate risks that the pandemic posed.

3. Limited Physical Engagements

The COVID-19 rules limiting physical contact also meant that there was a limit to physical engagements with stakeholders. Donor agencies could no longer have frequent physical meetings with stakeholders to advocate for electoral reforms, and even when these meetings were held they had to be in compliance with COVID-19 rules including social distancing, reduced number of participants, use of sanitisers, and wearing of masks. This was explained by one of our interviewees:

> The immediate impact of COVID was that most of these actions around our support to National Assembly, with the EMB, with civil society mobilisation and engagement with stakeholders, particularly on major issues as the electoral reform process, our engagement with political parties – all of those interventions and engagements were affected to the extent that we couldn't gather and engage with these people.[142]

A similar situation was evident in terms of citizen engagement:

> We had planned town halls in specific geo-political zones. We couldn't do that and we had to organise a national town hall on TV instead to make up for the fact that we couldn't physically gather in separate places. And of course, this affected the decentralised nature and the more inclusive interaction or engagement that a non-COVID setup would have afforded.[143]

The limited engagements were not restricted to meetings with stakeholders. Even activities such as election observation were affected. For instance, an interviewee noted:

> At the time, we had the Edo and Ondo elections. Unfortunately, those elections that we would normally be on ground to observe, we couldn't go ahead and do that because there was a travel restriction in place.[144]

4. Increased Use of Technology

Following on from the previous point, donor agencies had to adapt some of their activities through the use of technology, "moving from physical to e-engagement".[145] One of our interviewees explained:

> COVID-19 came in, but we had to re-adapt some of our activities into online formats. We began to look at other methods of passing across capacity building initiatives, so ECES developed again another copyrighted methodology known as Innov-Elections.[146]

Another interviewee noted that while they had to stop or postpone some activities completely, others like training of trainers at INEC were done over Zoom.[147] While the use of Zoom for trainings brought challenges such as poor connectivity from network providers, as well as less engagement from participants, it nevertheless provided a useful alternative.[148]

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had a debilitating effect on the economies of many countries, which led to not only a reduction of funds to

support electoral programmes but also a repurposing of funds into interventions aimed at bringing immediate relief from the pandemic. Due to the health risks posed by physical engagements, donor agencies also could not physically engage with stakeholders at the level they used to, although they were able to adapt some of their activities using technology. If the reduced support to electoral programmes continues in the long term, it could set back years of progress in the electoral process of Nigeria. Donor agencies must therefore take this into account in their future funding plans.

Media

Background

The media, also known as the mass media, refers broadly to various means of mass communication including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet. The media can be categorised into four broad types:

- Print media (e.g. newspapers and magazines)
- Broadcast media (e.g. radio and television)
- Outdoor media (e.g. billboards and posters)
- The internet (e.g. websites and social media)

Although the media, as the 'fourth estate of the realm', is not directly part of the political system, it can wield significant power, have a social influence, and bring about changes in policies.[149] With regard to the electoral process, the media's role is to publicise information about electoral stakeholders, particularly parties and their candidates, in order to enable citizens decide on who to vote. The media is also responsible for educating the public on their electoral rights and duties, shaping public opinion, and stimulating public discussion on electoral issues.

Furthermore, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) obliges the press, radio, television, and other agencies of the mass media to "uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people".[150] This role of the media necessarily involves elections, which are critical to upholding accountability. Indeed, the media plays a key role in upholding the integrity and credibility of elections by promoting principles such as free speech and access to information.

With the advent of the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic in this electoral cycle, the media is more important than ever as it gives citizens access to novel information such as precautions to take in light of COVID, and how to vote safely during the pandemic.

Some of the media agencies involved in elections in Nigeria are Africa Independent Television (AIT), Channels TV, Premium Times, The Cable, Daily Trust, and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR).

Activities and Programmes

To understand the activities and programmes of media agencies in this electoral cycle, we interviewed an editor at Premium Times. We also undertook desk review of secondary sources, including the websites and verified social media handles of these media agencies,

online articles, and publications from CSOs. Media agencies in this electoral cycle have been engaged in reporting on electoral issues, civic and voter education, election observation, and meetings and engagements.

1. Reporting on Electoral Issues

The main activity of media agencies has been reporting on electoral issues. This extensive reporting contributes to civic and voter education, promotes access to information, facilitates research on elections, and promotes public dialogue. For example, the ICIR website has a section on elections where it provided live updates of the Edo and Ondo elections.[151] Other media agencies including AIT and The Cable, also provided real-time updates on the elections through their websites and social media handles (particularly Twitter).

To promote information and further research on elections, the ICIR website also has an interactive dashboard with a breakdown of the vote count by LGA for both the Edo and Ondo elections.[152] Moreover, this section provides key information about dates for voter registration, upcoming elections, and so on.

In addition to promoting information about elections, media agencies also help to dispel misinformation and disinformation. In this regard, the ICIR has a fact check section on its website, through which it prevents citizens from making ill-informed electoral decisions.[153]

Apart from promoting factual information, media agencies also release analytical and opinion pieces, aimed at driving public conversation on pressing issues. For example, Premium Times released an analytical piece on the potential for technology to improve Nigeria's electoral processes.[154]

2. Civic and Voter Education

In addition to their normal reporting which provides information to citizens, media agencies also engaged in specific Civic and Voter Education (CVE) programmes, particularly relating to audio and visual outputs. This was even more important because the pandemic meant that physical CVE initiatives were limited. AIT and Channels TV had specific election programmes on their stations focused on discussing pressing electoral and political issues to enlighten citizens and spark public conversations.

Media agencies also collaborated with CSOs on some CVE initiatives. For example, prior to the Edo elections CDD produced an instructional video on conducting elections within the context of COVID-19, which was broadcast on a daily basis on AIT's *Kaakaki*, *Focus Nigeria* and *Democracy Today* shows.[155] Ahead of the Edo elections, Independent Radio, Edo also aired two radio jingles on fake news produced by CDD to inform voters on voting procedures and allay the fear of spread of COVID-19 at the poll.[156] Furthermore, Independent Radio aired a one-hour radio program, "Your Vote," every day in the week of the Edo election in order to enlighten citizens on mandate protection strategies.[157] All of these are specific ways in which media agencies promoted CVE in addition to their normal election coverage.

3. Election Observation

Another activity engaged in by media agencies was election observation, through which they were able to provide real-time updates on elections. The Edo and Ondo elections were monitored and observed by these agencies, in some cases in collaboration with CSOs. For example, The Cable and ICIR, in collaboration with CDD, provided real-time updates of

happenings at the Ondo election on social media.[158] Furthermore, the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ) deployed 54 observers to monitor the integrity of the Edo elections, and they also had access to the reports from YIAGA which deployed about 300 volunteers across Edo State.[159]

4. Meetings and Engagements

Media agencies also organised internal and external meetings as part of their day-to-day activities. With the support of the EU-SDGN, the International Press Centre organised roundtables with media agencies to discuss the outcomes of media monitoring and documentation of election promises.[160]

External engagements among media agencies also resulted in the establishment of a media cohort partnership consisting of PTCIJ, the Premium Times newsroom, The Cable, Daily Trust, and the ICIR.[161] The goal of this partnership was to amplify real-time election field reports from the observers of the Edo and Ondo elections.

In this way, the activities of media agencies – reporting on election issues, civic and voter education, election observation, and meetings and engagements – were mutually reinforcing. They all increased the amount and quality of information available to the general public about the elections.

Impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on media agencies was mainly in the form of increased costs and reduced revenue. The rules limiting physical contact also meant that there was reduced access to news sources; however, this brought about the advantage of better use of technology and thus a more efficient reporting process.

1. Increased Costs

The pandemic brought about the normal costs that every electoral stakeholder faced in this period, such as provision of masks and sanitisers for staff. These were novel costs that had to be borne by the media agencies. One of our interviewees noted that:

> We provided PPE, face masks and all other things that they [the reporters] could use on the field.[162]

In addition to these costs, media agencies, particularly print media, faced increased production costs because most of the consumables like the newsprint, the ink, the machines, and the printing plate are imported.[163]

2. Reduced Revenue

The increase in costs was also accompanied by a reduction in revenue. This is because not only did readership and sales drop for print media agencies, but the number of advertisements, which form a large portion of the revenue of both physical and online media agencies, also dropped.[164] In addition, the pandemic made it difficult to run special projects to raise funds for financing the agencies, which further reduced the level of revenue they had.[165] This combination of increased costs and reduced revenue also had indirect effects in terms of layoffs and reduction of staff salaries.[166]

3. Reduced Access to News Sources

The pandemic also resulted in reduced access to news sources. Due to COVID-19 rules, journalists at these media agencies could no longer access news sources in the way they used to. This occurred in various ways,

including restriction of movement during the lockdown period, high costs of transportation which impeded movement, denial of requests for physical interviews, and denial of journalists' access to CEOs and government officials.[167]

4. Increased Use of Technology

The reduced access to news sources however had a positive effect in the sense that it increased the use of technology within the media agencies. While these agencies had already been using their websites and social media handles to inform citizens, the pandemic promoted an increased use of digital technology in not just disseminating information but also gathering it. This meant that reporters shifted to accessing information via WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom meetings, Twitter, YouTube and phone calls.[168] It has been pointed out that through this increased use of technology, media agencies have become more efficient in the COVID-19 era because reporters do not need to run to the office to file stories any longer – with little resources, they can report live from their locations and can conduct virtual interviews.[169] This also improves their ability to provide real-time information to the public.

Additionally, media agencies increasingly used technology for some activities such as trainings. An interviewee explained:

> The PTCIJ was training people who were going to go to the hinterlands to observe the elections and report back. They did that online. There was no physical meeting. […] I recall vividly that trainings were done online either by Zoom or whatever.[170]

Conclusion

Media agencies have been hit hard by the pandemic, with the combination of increased costs and reduced revenue leading to multiple layoffs and a reduction of staff salaries. Moreover, the rules limiting physical contact also resulted in reduced access to news sources. Nevertheless, the pandemic brought about a positive shift by forcing media agencies to not only disseminate but also gather information through digital sources. This increased use of technology should be retained even after the pandemic so as to reduce costs and increase the ability of journalists to provide fresh information regardless of their location.

Part 3

The Impact of COVID-19

The Electoral Process During COVID-19

Nigeria recorded its first case of coronavirus (COVID-19) on 27 February 2020 in Lagos State.[171] Eleven days later, a second case was announced in Ogun State, and by 22 March 2020, there were 30 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nigeria.[172] The virus quickly spread until all 36 states in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) had confirmed cases.

The Nigerian government responded to the outbreak of the pandemic in various ways, notably by imposing a lockdown in the FCT and Lagos and Ogun States for an initial period of 14 days, which was later extended for an additional 21 days in the same three states and Kano State.[173] The lockdown included school and office closures, bans on public events, curfews, and cessation of interstate and international travel.[174] Alongside the federal lockdown, many states also adopted similar measures restricting movement. The wearing of face masks in public places was also made mandatory.

As discussed throughout this paper, both the pandemic and the rules surrounding it had tremendous impacts on each stakeholder of the electoral process. This section will highlight recurring themes and discuss the specific ways in which COVID-19 affected the electoral process through its impacts on electoral stakeholders.

Negative Impacts

The negative impacts of COVID-19 were evident in terms of increased costs, delayed or cancelled activities, mental impacts on election practitioners, and reduced participation in the electoral process.

1. Increased Costs

Due to the pandemic, every stakeholder faced the increased cost of using personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and sanitisers. Apart from providing these PPE for staff within their offices, some stakeholders also faced the extra responsibility of providing additional PPE. For example, INEC had to procure PPE for all election workers, while political parties had to provide masks for members of the public attending their campaigns and rallies.

In addition to the costs of providing PPE, stakeholders also faced additional costs due to the inflation that was driven by border closures, reduced production, restrictions on importation, and exchange rate fluctuations. In the case of print media agencies for example, production costs increased due to a hike in the prices of consumables used for printing, most of which were imported.

2. Delayed or Cancelled Activities

Many stakeholders also had to delay or cancel their activities completely due to the pandemic. During the lockdown period for example, all offices were shut and this undoubtedly affected activities that needed to be conducted physically. Those physical activities that could be postponed were postponed, while others which could not be postponed were cancelled completely.

Moreover, other pandemic-related factors such as increased costs and reduced revenue/funds meant that even after the lockdown, some stakeholders could not continue their activities. This was especially

noticeable in the case of CSOs who had to either scale down or stop operations due to reduced funding.

3. Mental Impacts on Election Practitioners

Another element of the pandemic which is not typically talked about is the mental impact it had. Studies have shown that the pandemic caused a surge in depression cases in Nigeria, with symptoms including fear, anxiety, and insomnia.[175] This was due to factors such as restrictions on social and religious gatherings, restriction of movement, economic hardship, and the general uncertainty brought by the pandemic. The inadequate mental health care system in Nigeria also fuelled the problem.

In terms of election practitioners, some of the specific factors likely to have increased their level of depression were job losses, reduction of salaries, and, particularly in the case of CSOs, loss or reduction of donor funding. This mental impact of the pandemic is likely to have affected their work in various ways and, if unchecked, could undermine the quality of the work that they do.

4. Reduced Participation

A major impact of the pandemic on the electoral process was reduced participation. As discussed earlier, the pandemic had the effect of reducing citizen participation in the legislative process. During elections, participation was reduced even further. The level of participation in Nigerian elections had already been at an all-time low, with the 2019 elections having a turnout of only 35%. However, the pandemic further contributed to the abysmally low turnout levels for at least five reasons.

Firstly, continuous voter registration was discontinued, which prevented new voters from registering to vote in the elections. Secondly, distribution of PVCs was suspended, which prevented those with uncollected PVCs – as many as 483,868 in Edo and 372,888 in Ondo – from participating in the elections. Thirdly, civic and voter education was reduced due to the limits on physical engagements. Although digital CVE methods were used, this was unsuitable for rural areas without easy access to television and the internet. Fourthly, the level of campaigning by political parties was reduced due to COVID-19 rules. Fifthly, the fear of contracting the virus likely prevented some citizens from going out to vote.

The combination of these different factors contributed to the particularly low turnout levels in the Edo and Ondo elections: 24.53% and 32.8% respectively. The electoral process was therefore greatly affected in the sense that it resulted in limited participation during elections. Given the already low turnout levels in the country, this is a worrying trend that must be addressed.

Positive Impacts

Despite the numerous negative impacts of COVID-19, there were also positive impacts, notably in the use of technology, innovation, and increased efficiency.

1. Use of Technology

Since the pandemic brought about restrictions on physical gatherings, many stakeholders were also forced to adapt to the new realities by integrating technology into their activities. Zoom became a particularly useful and popular

platform enabling stakeholders to hold meetings and continue activities regardless of their location. WhatsApp groups also become increasingly popular to aid communication and election coordination. While some stakeholders switched completely to virtual engagements, others adopted a hybrid of physical and virtual engagements.

Undoubtedly, some stakeholders were better able to integrate technology than others depending on the nature of their work. For example, it was not feasible for political parties to switch completely to digital campaigning, as this would have resulted in them missing out of a large percentage of Nigerians who do not have access to television or the internet. Even among those stakeholders that were able to integrate technology, there were varying levels depending on the specific activity. For example, CSOs could use Zoom for meetings and trainings, but they had to appear physically for election observation.

2. Innovation

The pandemic also forced stakeholders to innovate in unprecedented ways. Examples are the virtual situation room and the numerous portals for election stakeholders created by INEC, the Innov-Elections tool created by ECES, and the election coordination groups on WhatsApp created by some CSOs. In this way, electoral stakeholders were able to mitigate some of the challenges brought about by the pandemic through innovation.

3. Increased Efficiency

The combination of innovation and better use of technology resulted in increased efficiency. According to some stakeholders (e.g. in INEC), the flexibility that came with working from home and communicating virtually led to an increase in efficiency. This was also true for media agencies who could now give fresh news updates from any location due to their newfound use of technology to gather information. Ultimately, the integration of technology helped to streamline stakeholders' work which led to increased productivity and efficiency.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the pandemic has affected the electoral process drastically. It brought about increased costs for every stakeholder, it led to some stakeholders delaying or cancelling their scheduled activities, and it further reduced the level of participation in elections. Furthermore, the pandemic had a mental impact on election practitioners in the sense that it increased the level of fear, anxiety and depression. These negative trends need to be addressed in order to ensure that stakeholders can continue to work to improve the electoral process.

However, one positive effect of the pandemic has been in the area of technology and innovation, which virtually every stakeholder has used to ensure that their work continues in the midst of the pandemic. This is one area that has improved the quality of stakeholders' work, and the gains made in technology during this period should be retained and further built on even when the pandemic is over.

Recommendations

Having discussed the electoral process during COVID-19, it is important to make recommendations for the future. But in order to discuss how to reduce the effect of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities in the near future, we must first look backward and discuss which stakeholder would have been best placed to intervene at the height of the pandemic.

The Role of Each Stakeholder

The following are the suggestions of our interviewees regarding who would have been best placed to intervene at the height of the pandemic:

1. Government

One of our interviewees suggested that the government would have been best placed to intervene through laws and policies:

> COVID-19 affects everybody so it requires the intervention of all, but in every organised modern society the intervention should be led by government. In many ways, government needs to show appropriate response with policies, with laws, with regulations and enforce them. Government responds by putting in place the adequate public health response, government responds by providing palliatives to citizens, government responds by educating the citizens.[176]

The government played a part by passing the Economic Stimulus Bill, setting up the Presidential Task Force, handing out palliatives to citizens, setting up recovery measures for companies who were most affected, and formulating other policies aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

However, another interviewee posited that the government did not do enough, pointing out that the order mandating the wearing of masks was not accompanied by the provision of masks for those who could not afford them:

> Government has to up its antics in managing COVID-19. For instance, the other people out there, government is not providing support for them. They are just telling them to go and wear mask, go and observe protocol, go and do this, go and do that. They are not looking at the economic implications of the actions that they are driving. Do you know if I can afford a mask? If you bring out ten masks now in a nylon that's one thousand naira, how many Nigerians can afford that? So, what is the government doing in respect to that?[177]

2. INEC

One of our interviewees also suggested that materials to be used for observing COVID-19 protocols such as masks should have been provided by INEC. This is because if INEC does not carry out this responsibility, it would be handled by parties, and this might influence a person's choice of who to vote for. He explained:

> I think the basic thing is for the electoral officers to first and foremost take responsibility for provision of materials to be used in the observance of COVID-19 protocols rather than pushing the cause to the parties [...] for

> instance if I go for election, if I am going to vote, some people give account of being offered a face mask by a party in an election and it changed such a person's mindset from voting for a particular person, and say it was party A that showed me support or it was PDP that provided masks – even the person I came to vote for didn't provide masks.[178]

Another interviewee also commented on the inadvertent consequence of INEC not fulfilling this responsibility:

> We understood INEC's position to say it's impossible to provide face masks. But the inadvertent consequence of that was that people were sharing face masks simply because it was a requirement to be able to vote. We saw cases where people would finish voting and give somebody else their face mask to wear. And I think that that sort of housekeeping, logistics issues could have been better organised by INEC.[179]

If the responsibility of providing masks had been handled by INEC, perhaps the enforcement of COVID-19 protocols on election day would have been higher.

3. Political Parties

Political parties also had a role to play in terms of complying with COVID-19 rules on campaigning. This was explained by one of our interviewees:

> When you look at political parties, they were meant to also control the ways they conducted their daily affairs like the primaries and their campaigns. But that didn't happen the way it should have because you saw political parties flouting the guidelines and advisories that were placed with large crowds. They could have easily found ways to engage in digital campaigns rather than having in-person campaigns the way they did with large grounds being crowded by voters.[180]

4. Media

Furthermore, it was suggested that the media could have intervened by sensitising the public on how to participate in the electoral process safely:

> The media as well could have played a major CSR [corporate social responsibility] instead of waiting for the campaigns that were offered by the political parties to also ask the people to ensure that if they are going to vote, they should also provide personal protective equipment themselves.[181]

5. Security Agencies

It was also suggested that security agencies had a role to play in enforcing COVID-19 protocols:

> It is only the security people that will have to ensure that a rally, a campaign ground is not crowded [...] Security agencies would have to intervene when they see that a place is being crowded or social distancing is not maintained [...] If anybody is not adhering to the protocols, then they get them arrested.[182]

6. Everyone

Finally, it was suggested that while the government should lead the COVID-19 response, every sector of society had a role to play:

> Citizens also have to respond through behaviour change, through abiding by the public health regulations, the non-pharmaceutical response in terms of

> conduct and behaviour. The private sector also needs to respond by taking care of their staff, and the civil societies need to respond. So, it requires response by all sectors of society, and if any sector of the society gives an inadequate response it affects the whole value chain of response.[183]

This point was reinforced by another interviewee, who made reference to a multi-stakeholder engagement:

> I don't see it as the responsibility of one specific person. I think it is a multi-stakeholder intervention that would have helped us. As you would see, there are certain elements of it. First of all, there were certain elements that required government action, there are certain elements that required civil society actions, and there are elements within the space that required friends of Nigeria to also support the process. So again, it is a multi-stakeholder engagement.[184]

A third interviewee corroborated this point with an illustration:

> Imagine if a political party could have called for these rallies and the citizens abstained for their own safety. If one or two had that experience, I am sure they would have been forced to invent ways of reaching out to the electorate.[185]

Overall, given the complex and unprecedented nature of the pandemic, everyone – from government, INEC, and security agencies, to political parties, the media, CSOs and the general public – had a role to play. This knowledge should guide our future actions on mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

Reducing the Impact of the Pandemic

While there are vaccines being administered already, it will take a considerable amount of time for a sufficient number of people to be vaccinated to the extent that the world will be COVID-free. Indeed, with the new Delta variant of COVID-19 emerging in Nigeria, it is almost definite that the upcoming 2021 Anambra State elections will take place in the midst of the pandemic. In this light, it is important to consider how we can reduce the effect of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities for the period that COVID-19 will still be with us. Having already established that every stakeholder has a role to play, we can now consider specific recommendations for these stakeholders.

1. Early Planning

One way to reduce the effect of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities in the near future is to start planning early. One interviewee, speaking on the role of INEC, explained:

> Start early – whatever they have to do to avoid late rush and all that, so that people don't have to cluster. And I hope they are really thinking about Anambra already.[186]

Without early planning, there will be a rush, and this will lead to COVID-19 protocols such as social distancing and wearing of masks not being enforced. Moreover, with the plans to resume continuous voter registration (CVR) physically, there is a need for proper planning to prevent the overcrowding that usually comes with the process. An interviewee recommends institutionalising voter registration as an everyday 9-5 work process, in order to prevent the cluster of people when resumption of CVR is announced.[187]

2. Timely and Quality Passage of the Electoral Bills

Following on from the previous point, the quick passage of the Electoral Bill, the National Electoral Offences Commission Bill, and any other Bill affecting the electoral process is crucial to enable stakeholders especially INEC to start planning early, and also to avoid last-minute changes to the law. It is also important that the President gives his assent to these Bills on a timely basis. As the 2023 elections are fast approaching, it is important for stakeholders to know under what legal framework the elections would be conducted. This is useful not only to stakeholders' internal activities but also to facilitate trainings and education of the public.

However, the desire for a timely passage does not mean that the quality of the Bill should be ignored. There has been a lot of conflict regarding the issue of electronic transmission of results in the Electoral Bill 2021. The Electoral Hub has severally expressed its position on the issue: INEC, as the primary EMB in Nigeria, should be given the unfettered discretion to determine the mode and conduct of elections, including voting and transmission of results. This means that it should not be subject to the direction of the NCC, the National Assembly, or any other body. Indeed, INEC has also expressed that it has the capacity to transmit results electronically nationwide.[188] In the context of COVID-19, electronic transmission of results is more important now than ever, and INEC should be given the unfettered discretion to do this if it has the required capacity.

3. Proper Implementation of Laws and Policies

Passing of laws and policies must also be followed with proper implementation. This relates to not just the electoral Bills, but also those directly aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic. One interviewee, while noting that the government responded well with laws and policies, stated:

> But the challenge as usual is in implementation and that is a huge challenge in Nigeria.[189]

The government creating laws and policies is therefore a necessary step, but it is not sufficient in itself. There is also a necessary further step of proper implementation of these laws and policies. As an illustration, many Nigerians complained of not receiving the palliatives issued by the federal government, and during the #EndSARS protests, it was discovered that in some states these palliatives had been hoarded in large warehouses. The lack of implementation therefore defeated the creation of the policy, which resulted in untold hardship for a lot of Nigerians. The creation of laws and policies must therefore be supported with proper implementation. This can be done through transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure that measures put in place to mitigate the impact of the pandemic are actually followed through.

This point is not limited to the government alone. Other institutions such as INEC also need to ensure that their polices are implemented. For example, while INEC issued a policy on conducting elections during the pandemic, observers noted that this policy was not implemented in many polling units on election day. In reference to this policy, one interviewee noted that:

> The challenge is implementation like Edo elections and Ondo, both during the campaigns and the election itself, many of them did not abide by the guidelines.[190]

The Electoral Hub also noted in its reports of the Edo and Ondo elections that INEC's guidelines were not enforced on election day, as many polling units were overcrowded and many people, including INEC ad-hoc staff, were either not wearing their masks properly or not wearing them at all.[191] In order to have any impact, it is therefore important to set up mechanisms to ensure that policies aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic are actually enforced.

4. Adherence to COVID-19 Protocols

Going forward, it is also important to ensure strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols. The general public have a role to play by always using their masks, washing/sanitising their hands regularly, and maintaining social distancing. However, adherence to COVID-19 protocols is not limited to the general public. Specific stakeholders, particularly political parties, must also ensure that COVID-19 protocols are adhered to. This implies refraining from organising large physical campaigns which cause overcrowding. One of our interviewees suggests:

> Political parties should be a bit more ingenious and explore other ways of reaching out to their supporters – utilization of digital platforms, traditional and mainstream media. They should revamp their system of reaching out to their electorate and ensure that safety is prioritized as well.[192]

5. E-Voting

Adopting e-voting will eliminate the need to gather in crowded polling units on election day, which increases the risk of the virus spreading. Admittedly, e-voting will require a lot of technical and administrative work, so this recommendation is for the medium to long-term. Speaking on the risks of conducting e-voting prematurely, an interviewee stated:

> If not done properly, it will even compromise the transparency and accountability of the electoral process if the technological introductions are not conducive for such a country as ours.[193]

In the short term however, overcrowding on election day can be prevented by organising elections on different days until we are ready for e-voting. This was suggested by one of our interviewees, who stated that:

> We have gotten to a point where we don't need to come and cramp polling unit area on election day. We can hold elections on different days instead of putting all elections together.[194]

6. Better Integration of Technology

As the pandemic has forced many stakeholders to start using electronic methods such as Zoom for meetings, this development should continue. They should work with their ICT departments to better integrate technology into their work and further innovate to improve their activities. This would not only reduce the risk that comes with physical gatherings, but also help to streamline processes and thus improve the quality of their work.

Indeed, the integration of technology should enable a seamless transition if/when future emergencies occur. Based on the IPU's report on how parliaments around the world were delivering service during the pandemic, it is evident that some countries were able to continue parliamentary operations through video conference technology and live broadcasts.[195] In some cases, parliamentary proceedings were fully online, while in others

a combination of physical and online methods were used. This is unlike Nigeria where parliamentary activities had to be suspended completely for weeks, thus making them unable to address important issues during that period. If NASS is able to better integrate technology into its processes, for example by adopting electronic voting within its chambers, then it would be easier for it to continue activities virtually in the event of an emergency.

For political parties, they should make better use of their websites and social media pages. The Electoral Hub had earlier reported that most parties do not make adequate use of these communication technologies, with some parties not even having functional websites or verifiable social media pages.[196] If parties are better able to make use of these technologies, then the impact of the pandemic on their activities would be minimal.

It is also worth mentioning that in order to allow stakeholders to fully integrate the use of technology, the government should lift the ban on Twitter, and discontinue all other attempts to restrict social media. Any restriction on social media would make it difficult, if not impossible, in a COVID world, for parties to campaign, for CSOs to engage the public, for the media to gather and disseminate information, and so on. Removing restrictions on social media is therefore in the interest of electoral integrity and credibility as it will enable electoral stakeholders to carry out their work more easily in a COVID-19 context.

7. Improved Network Connectivity

Better integration of technology necessarily requires an improvement in network connectivity. We earlier discussed that one of our interviewees reported network connectivity issues as a challenge to using Zoom for trainings. ActionAid recommends that since the operations of the media have now shifted largely to the virtual space, stakeholders should devise ways of ensuring that the media have access to data that is both affordable and strong in connectivity.[197] This recommendation can be extended to all electoral stakeholders, who have been forced by the pandemic to embrace technology in one way or the other.

8. Reorientation of CSO Funding

CSOs in Nigeria, and indeed in Africa, have typically relied to a large extent on Western donors for funding. However, given that Western countries have been hit hardest by the pandemic, their economies continue to struggle. This makes it unlikely that they will increase the amount of foreign aid they provide in the near future. Against this context, CSOs need to find alternative sources of funding to enable them sustain their activities. Sesmaisons suggests self-funding, appeals to local private donors, and appeals to national governments to provide support.[198] The role of national governments in supporting CSOs is particularly important, as these CSOs play an important role in the development of the country. National emergency funding schemes should therefore include CSOs. The reorientation of CSO funding in this way would reduce the impact of the pandemic on CSO activities in the near future. Even after the pandemic, retaining these sources of funding would be beneficial as it would protect local CSOs from external shocks as well as changes in the political will of foreign governments.

9. Collaborations and Partnerships

In order to reduce the impact of the pandemic, electoral stakeholders also need to find new

opportunities for collaborations and build synergies. Media agencies have realised this as shown by the partnership between the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism, the Premium Times Newsroom, The Cable, Daily Trust, and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting. Indeed, one of our interviewees in the media explained how they were able to cut costs by forming a partnership with a CSO which paid for the PPE used by the media agency's reporters on the field.[199] More partnerships like these should be formed both within and across each stakeholder group in order to build synergies and reduce costs.

For example, Sesmaisons suggests that CSOs should form coalitions of interest at the national level, which would involve sharing information, providing joint services to individuals, and providing aid for vulnerable communities.[200] In this way, CSOs can cut costs and increase reach, thereby reducing the impact of the pandemic on their activities.

Another area for further collaboration is between INEC, CSOs and media to educate citizens and dispel misinformation. Given that the pandemic provides a new reason for citizens not to participate in elections, it is highly important for stakeholders to come up with innovative ways to boost citizen participation in the electoral process. This also involves educating them on how to vote safely, and assuring them that COVID-19 protocols will be followed to minimise their risk of contracting the virus. Forming partnerships will be a step in developing innovative solutions to these problems.

Finally, donor agencies, especially within Africa, need to collaborate. Just like international bodies collaborate to fund interventions in Nigeria,[201] regional and continental bodies within West Africa and Africa at large need to collaborate to fund interventions aimed at promoting the development of the continent. These and more areas of collaboration should build synergies, reduce costs, promote resource sharing, and increase access to information – all of which will promote the integrity and credibility of the electoral process in Nigeria.

10. Documentation and Experience-Sharing

Following on from the previous point, it is important to harness collaborations and partnerships to learn lessons from one another. By sharing lessons and experiences within and across stakeholder groups in different countries, we can document best practices of COVID-19 mitigation which would be useful both now and in the future. This was explained by one of our interviewees:

> With regard to this COVID-19 situation, I think that we need to understand or have some sort of joint and shared peer or experience sharing sessions or learning – for example, how did other countries navigate this process, and how can we begin to systematically document best practice?[202]

By engaging in these experience-sharing sessions, we can learn lessons from other countries and adapt them to the Nigerian context to ensure that we are better prepared to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in the near future.

Conclusion

All electoral stakeholders have a role to play in mitigating the effect of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities in the near future. In the immediate term, there is need for early

planning especially on the part of INEC ahead of the upcoming elections. The already existing laws and policies should also be implemented immediately. Furthermore, adherence to COVID-19 protocols by citizens and other stakeholders such as political parties needs to be strict.

In the short term, all Bills affecting the electoral process should be passed by NASS, the technological systems already put in place by stakeholders should be better integrated, partnerships should be set up both within and across stakeholder groups, and best practices of COVID-19 mitigation should be documented.

In the medium to long term, electronic voting should be established in Nigeria, CSO funding should be reoriented, and network connectivity in the country should be improved.

The combination of these interventions in the immediate, short, medium and long terms should uphold the integrity and credibility of

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to analyse the impact of the pandemic on the electoral programmes and activities of six key stakeholders in the electoral process – INEC, NASS, political parties, CSOs, donor agencies, and the media – and to provide recommendations on how to reduce the effect of the pandemic on these stakeholders' activities in the near future.
In response to our three research questions, we have found that:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected electoral stakeholders both positively and negatively. On the negative side, there have been increased costs, delayed or cancelled activities, decline in mental health, and reduced participation. On the positive side, there have been better use of technology, innovation, and increased efficiency.

2. Everyone, including the government, INEC, political parties, the media, CSOs, security agencies, and the general public, had a role to play in intervening and mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

3. In the near future, the effects of the pandemic on stakeholders' activities can be reduced by planning early, implementing already existing laws and policies, and adhering to COVID-19 protocols in the immediate term; passing electoral Bills that meet the integrity test, better integrating technology and innovation, forming collaborations and partnerships, and documenting best practices of COVID-19 mitigation in the short term; and establishing e-voting, reorienting CSO funding, and improving network connectivity in the medium to long term.

Ultimately, emergencies are inevitable events every society has to face every now and then. In the words of an interviewee, "it's COVID today, but we don't know what will happen tomorrow".[203] It is therefore important for

electoral stakeholders to prepare by developing mechanisms that can enable them respond quickly. A good example is through the integration of technology and innovation into their processes, which is one positive thing that has resulted from the pandemic. This is important to ensure that their quality of work does not deteriorate and the electoral process does not suffer due to the pandemic. The recommendations we have made are aimed at improving the integrity and credibility of the electoral process despite the pandemic, and it is hoped that stakeholders effectively utilise them in the conduct of their activities going forward.

Appendices

Appendix A

List of Interviewees

In the course of this project, The Electoral Hub conducted in-depth interviews with eleven key informants across six electoral stakeholder groups: INEC, National Assembly, political parties, CSOs, donor agencies, and the media.

S/N	NAME	ORGANISATION	POSITION
1	Professor Mohammad Kuna	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	Special Adviser to the INEC Chairman
2	Mr. Aminu Idris	INEC	Director, Elections and Party Monitoring Department
3	Mr. Ifeanyichukwu Agoha	INEC	Deputy Director, Electoral Training
4	Dr Otive Igbuzor	National Assembly	Chief of Staff to the Deputy Senate President
5	Mr Kola Ologbondiyan	People's Democratic Party (PDP)	National Publicity Secretary
6	Mrs Lois Auta	Cedar Seed Foundation	Executive Director
7	Agianpe Onyema	Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre	Senior Programme Officer
8	Mr Seray Jah	International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)	Country Director, Nigeria
9	Mr Wilson Manji	European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES)	Deputy Project Coordinator
10	Ms Laolu Olawumi	European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU - SDGN)	Programme Manager, Democracy and Rule of Law
11	Mr Festus Owete	Premium Times	General Editor and Head of National News Desk
12	Dr. Kole Shettima	MacArthur Foundation, Abuja	Africa Director

Appendix B

Table of Activities of Selected Stakeholders

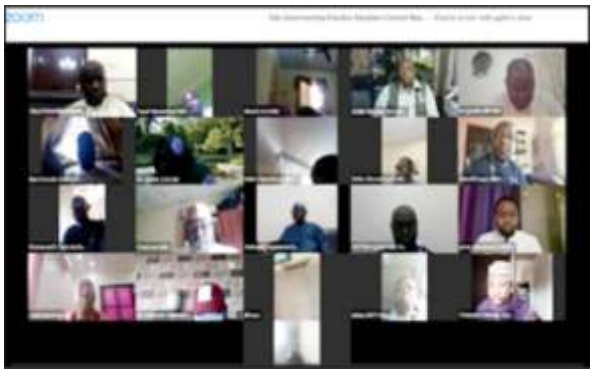
This table highlights the activities that selected stakeholders engaged in during the transition from physical engagements to virtual engagements to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. They include things like Zoom meetings, webinars, and radio engagements.

S/N	DATE	ACTIVITY
1	18 March 2020	CCD organised a radio talk show on Unilorin 89.3 FM and Sobi 101.9 FM, in Kwara state. The talk show was to sensitise the public to support the participation of persons with disabilities in Nigerian politics and elections.
2	23 March 2020	YIAGA had its first virtual weekly staff meeting on Zoom following its work-from-home policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3	4 April 2020	YIAGA organised a webinar on COVID-19 and elections
4	19 May 2020	INEC released a press statement on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the electoral process in Nigeria.
5	3 June 2020	YIAGA organised an e-talk show on democracy titled "The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Societies".
6	3 June 2020	CLEEN Foundation organised a virtual citizen's town hall meeting on voting amidst COVID-19. The focus was on INEC policy and on the conduct of 2020 Edo and Ondo governorship elections.
7	5 June 2020	CLEEN Foundation organised a tweet-chat on "Policing Elections in a Pandemic: Agenda Setting towards Ondo & Edo Governorship Elections".
8	7 June 2020	YIAGA hosted a virtual meeting with journalists ahead of the Ondo and Edo governorship elections.
9	8 June 2020	ADP organised a virtual town hall meeting
10	22 July 2020	ECES and other stakeholders hosted a "Stakeholders Meeting Towards A Disability-Inclusive Electoral Reform" on Zoom.
11	30 July 2020	CLEEN Foundation organised a webinar themed "Digital Electioneering in the COVID-19 Era: Preventing Electoral Violence in Edo and Ondo 2020".
12	6 August 2020	INEC introduced the election result viewing portal
13	31 August 2020	CCD participated in a virtual town hall meeting for a discourse on electoral violence in Nigeria: Edo state.
14	1 September 2020	CCD participated in a webinar with the topic – "Edo state Elections: Issues of Safety and Security".
15	8 September 2020	The European Union Election Observation Mission organised a virtual media monitoring
16	10 September 2020	CDD organised a virtual public presentation of findings on assessment of INEC's preparations for persons with disabilities for the 2020 governorship election in Edo State.
17	13 September 2020	CCD analysed findings from the assessment of INEC's preparations for persons with disabilities for the 2020 Edo governorship election on TVC's *Breakfast Show* programme.
18	30 September 2020	INEC met with the original manufacturers of electronic voting machines around the world for a practical demonstration to enable the Commission evaluate the available technology for the purposes of electronic voting.
19	24 March 2021	International IDEA released a database on how COVID-19 has affected the funding of election campaigns in various countries of the world, including Nigeria.

S/N	DATE	ACTIVITY
20	25 March 202	MacArthur Foundation launched anti-corruption radio programmes across the country.
21	26 May 2021	PTCIJ held a webinar titled "Intra-Party Democracy in Nigeria: Challenges and Solutions".
22	3 June 2021	PTCIJ held a webinar titled "Campaign Financing: The Laws and Road to Implementation".
23	24 June 2021	INEC launched an online registration portal for the resumption of continuous voter registration.
24	13 July 2021	PDP inaugurated the National Technical Committee of the party that would handle electronic registration of members and prospective nominees of the party.
25	14 July 2021	ICIR hosted an online conversation titled "Solving Nigeria's Security Conundrum: A Pan-Nigerian Approach".

Appendix C

Image Gallery



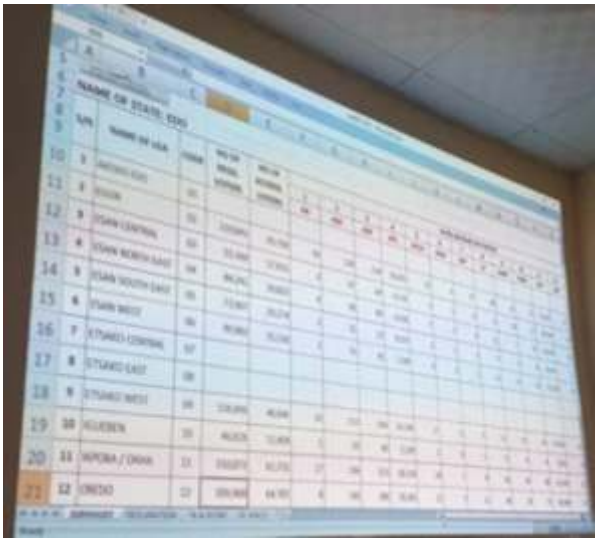
INEC virtual situation room for Edo election



INEC virtual meeting with political parties



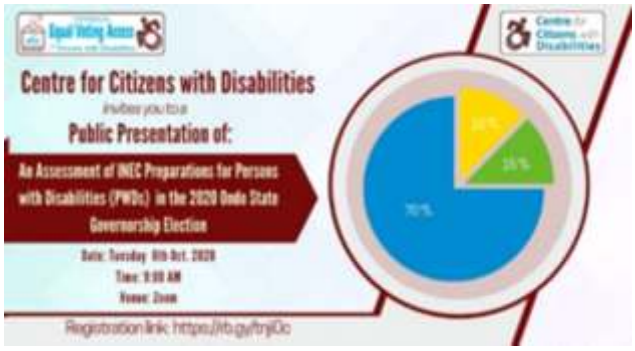
Live debate on TV and online organised by Situation Room and FCDO



CDD situation room for Edo election



National Stakeholder Forum and dissemination meeting organised on Zoom by ActionAid



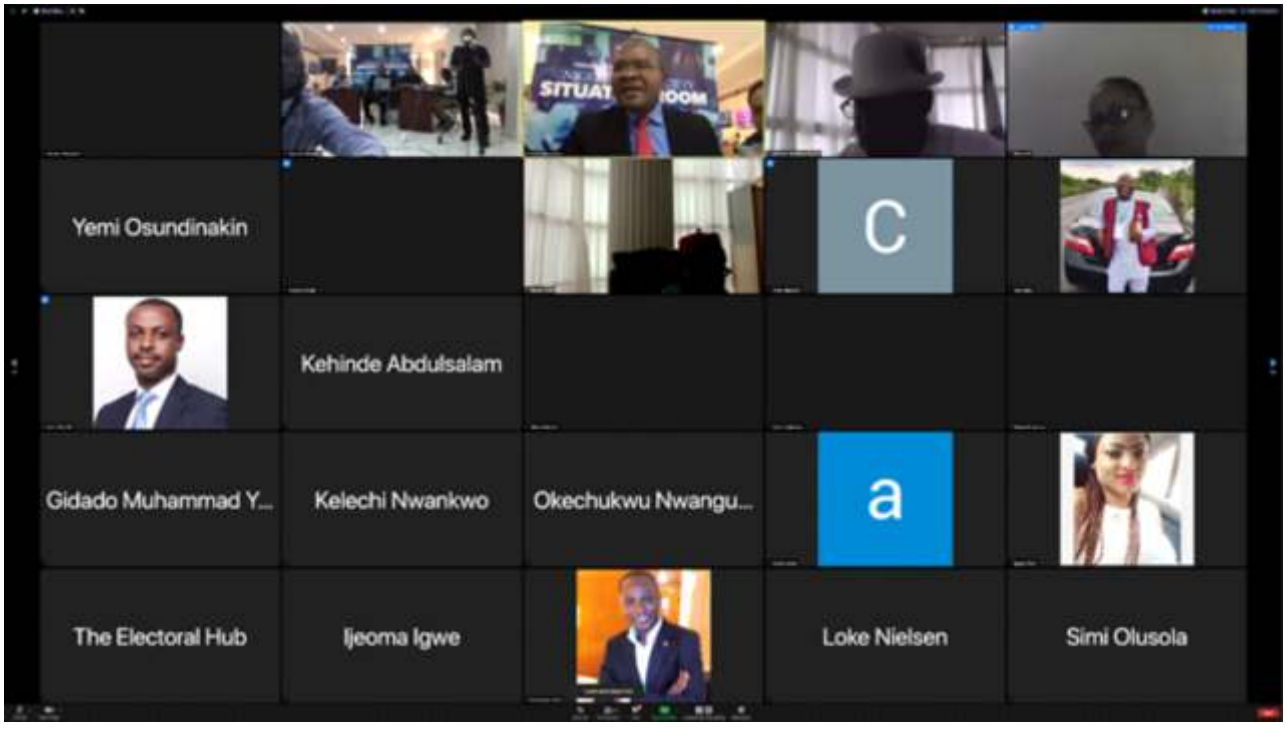
Public presentation meeting organised on Zoom by the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities



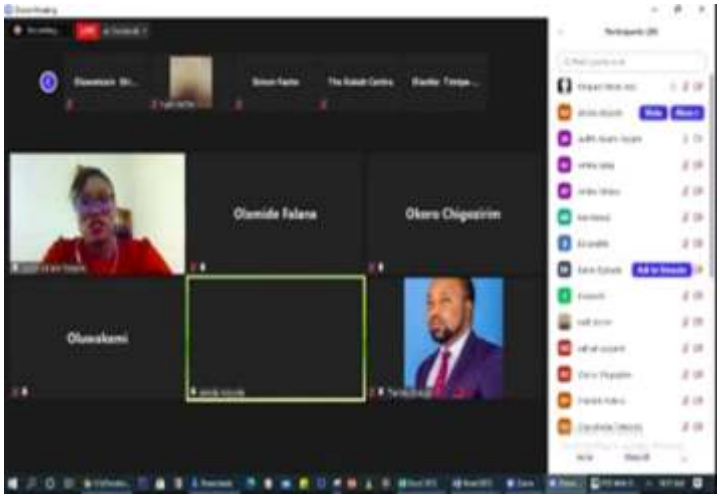
Webinar organised on Zoom by 100 Women Lobby Group



Virtual training organised on WhatsApp by The Electoral Hub



Situation Room virtual meeting on Zoom



Virtual multi-stakeholder dialogue organised by KDI





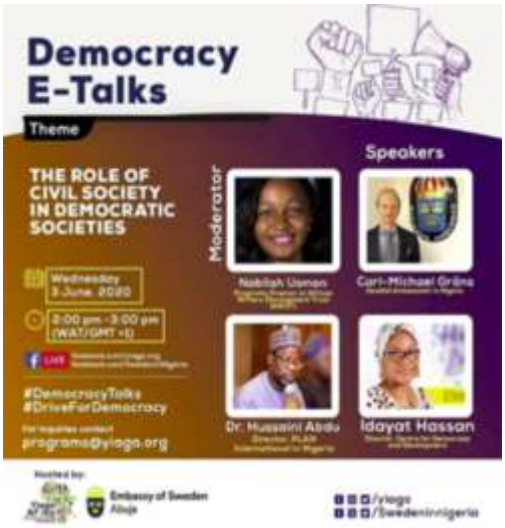
Virtual public presentation meeting by KDI



Virtual citizens' townhall on electoral reforms by YIAGA



Virtual citizens' townhall organised by YIAGA on TV



E-talk show organised by YIAGA on Facebook



Stakeholders' dialogue organised by CLEEN Foundation on Zoom



Virtual weekly staff meeting organised by YIAGA



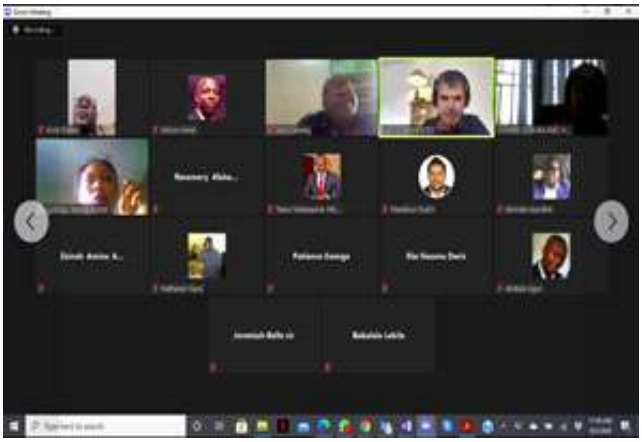
Virtual policy brief dissemination organised by CLEEN Foundation



Virtual training organised by CLEEN Foundation on Zoom



Virtual town hall meeting organised by



Virtual media monitoring organised by EU Election Observation Mission



Virtual stakeholders' meeting organised by ECES and other stakeholders on Zoom



Live webinar organised by PTCIJ



Webinar organised by PTCIJ



Online conversation organised by ICIR

References

[1] "The Electoral Integrity Initiative", Kofi Annan Foundation, 2 May 2016, https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/supporting-democracy-and-elections-with-integrity/electoral-integrity-initiative/

[2] "Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections", International IDEA, first published 18 March 2020, https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections

[3] Anthony Akinola, "Revisiting the Nigerian 1959 federal election", The Guardian (11 September 2017), https://guardian.ng/opinion/revisiting-the-nigerian-1959-federal-election/

[4] Amb. CL Laseinde, The Role of the Federal Government of Nigeria in Providing Security Before During and After the February 2015 Elections, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/attachments/140714_Laseinde_ppt.pdf

[5] Ibid

[6] http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-9356.html

[7] Douglas Anglin, "Brinkmanship in Nigeria: The Federal Elections of 1964-65", International Journal (Vol 20, No 2), pp173-188, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40199517

[8] https://africanelections.tripod.com/ng.html#1964_House_of_Representatives_Election

[9] http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-9356.html

[10] Amb. CL Laseinde, The Role of the Federal Government of Nigeria in Providing Security Before During and After the February 2015 Elections, op. cit.

[11] Toyin Falola and Julius Omozuanubo Ihonvbere (1985), The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-1983. London: Zed Books

[12] Richard Joseph (1981), "Democratization under Military Tutelage: Crisis and Consensus in the Nigerian 1979 Elections", Comparative Politics (Vol 14, No 1), pp. 75-100, https://www.jstor.org/stable/421862

[13] Chief Obafemi Awolowo v Alhaji Shehu Shagari & 2 Ors (SC 62/1979)

[14] Stephen Wright (1984), "Nigeria: The 1983 Elections", The Round Table, 73:289, 69-75, https://doi.org/10.1080/00358538408453620

[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid

[18] Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Nigeria: The 12 June 1993 presidential election including the parties and names of candidates who contested the election, the names and organizations involved in the tabulation of election results, and the relevant dates when election results became available to the general public and the media (1 May 1998), https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ab8b4.html

[19] Ibid
[20] Ibid.

[21] Human Rights Watch (2007), Criminal Politics: Violence, 'Godfathers' and Corruption in Nigeria. HRW: New York

[22] National Democratic Institute, Final NDI Report on Nigeria's 2007 Elections, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2313_ng_report_election07_043008.pdf

[23] Hakeem Onapajo (2015), "Nigeria's 2015 General Elections: The Salience of Electoral Reforms", The Round Table, https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2015.1090795. See also Milestones of Electoral Reform in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 4/2020, https://electoralhub.iriad.org/milestones-of-electoral-reform-in-nigerias-fourth-republic/

[24] Adeniyi Basiru & Kola Adesina (2019), "Electoral Reforms and the Administration of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria", Democracy and Security (15:3), 207-229, page 218, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2019.1643325

[25] Hakeem Onapajo (2015), "Nigeria's 2015 General Elections: The Salience of Electoral Reforms", op. cit.

[26] Akeem Ayanda Araba and Joseph Odunayo Braimah, "Comparative Study of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria", Global Journal of Human-Social Science F: Political Science (Vol 15, Issue 7), https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume15/4-Comparative-Study-of-2011.pdf

[27] EU EOM, "EU election observation mission presents final report with recommendations for electoral reform", https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/04._eu_eom_presents_final_report_on_the_general_elections_with_recommendations_for_reform_15_june2019_final.pdf

[28] "Nigeria: Widespread Violence Ushers in President's New Term", Human Rights Watch (10 June 2019), https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/10/nigeria-widespread-violence-ushers-presidents-new-term

[29] There is no information for the parliamentary election

[30] International IDEA, Voter Turnout by Election Type: Nigeria, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/231/40

[31] Nigeria currently ranks as low as 149 out of 180 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index: https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nga

[32] See Report of the Electoral Reform Committee, Vol 1, Dec

2008, https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Uwais-Report-on-Electoral-Reform.pdf

[33] Ibid

[34] According to the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer Survey Report, the government is the least trusted institution in Nigeria, with a trust quotient of just 24%. This also makes Nigeria the country with the lowest level of trust in government among the 28 countries considered in the report: https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2021-01/2021-edelman-trust-barometer.pdf

[35] This is reflected by the steady decline in voter turnout since 2003.

[36] See the explanatory memorandum to the Act

[37] See the long title of the Act

[38] INEC, Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Regulations-and-Guidelines-2019.pdf

[39] INEC, Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, INEC Policy Number 01/2020, https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/INEC-POLICY-ON-CONDUCTING-ELECTIONS-IN-COVID19.pdf

[40] Paragraph 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended)

[41] INEC Nigeria, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1331681212193234944; "INEC to deploy 6,000 ad-hoc staff for Plateau south senatorial by-election", Premium Times (14 October 2020), https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-central/420828-inec-to-deploy-6000-ad-hoc-staff-for-plateau-south-senatorial-by-election.html; Amby Uneze, "Imo North: INEC Recruits 3,000 Ad-hoc Staff", This Day (26 November 2020), ttps://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/11/26/imo-north-inec-recruits-3000-ad-hoc-staff/; Temidayo Akinboyo, "Lagos bye-elections: INEC begins training of 9,000 ad-hoc staff", Premium Times (23 November 2020), https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/427600-lagos-bye-elections-inec-begins-training-of-9000-ad-hoc-staff.html

[42] Interview with an INEC Director

[43] INEC Nigeria, Heal the Land (13 September 2020), https://www.instagram.com/p/CEstmNKD_BJ/

[44] INEC Nigeria, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1314764104075223040

[45] INEC, Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, INEC Policy Number 01/2020, op. cit.

[46] The portal can be viewed on https://inecelectionresults.com

[47] Interview with an INEC Director

[48] Cletus Ukpong, "Coronavirus: INEC postpones bye-elections in Bayelsa, Imo, Plateau", Premium Times (20 March 2020), https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/382815-coronavirus-inec-postpones-bye-elections-in-bayelsa-imo-plateau.html

[49] Interview with an INEC Director

[50] Ibid
[51] Ibid

[52] Idris Umar Momoh and Churchill Okoro, "Edo poll: 483,868 registered voters may not vote over unclaimed PVCs – INEC", Business Day, 5 July 2020, https://businessday.ng/politics/article/edo-poll-483868-registered-voters-may-not-vote-over-unclaimed-pvcs-inec/

[53] "INEC refuses registration of new voters for Ondo election", Business Day, 2 July 2020, https://businessday.ng/politics/article/inec-refuses-registration-of-new-voters-for-ondo-election/

[54] INEC Nigeria, Ondo State Governorship Election 2020: Declaration of Result (13 October 2020), https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1315955207499591680 ;INEC Nigeria, 2020 Edo Governorship Election: Declaration of Results (21 September 2020), https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1308000156135165953

[55] Gabriel Ewepu, "Edo Guber election: YIAGA releases 1st pre-election findings on political activities", Vanguard, 2 September 2020, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/09/edo-guber-election-yiaga-releases-1st-pre-election-findings-on-political-activities/

[56] Interview with an INEC Director

[57] Section 4(2), 1999 Constitution of Nigeria

[58] Part I of the Second Schedule to the 1999 Constitution
[59] Part II of the Second Schedule to the 1999 Constitution
[60] Section 4(5), 1999 Constitution of Nigeria

[61] Interview with a legislative adviser

[62] Rafiu Ajakaye, "Nigeria's Buhari rejects electoral amendment bill again", AA (7 December 2018), https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-s-buhari-rejects-electoral-amendment-bill-again/1332657

[63] Deji Elumoye, "Electoral Act Amendment Bill Passes

Second Reading in Senate", This Day (21 November 2019), https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/11/21/electoral-act-amendment-bill-passes-second-reading-in-senate/

[64] Section 52(3)

[65] https://twitter.com/SpeakerGbaja/status/1385245401515794437/photo/1

[66] Interview with a legislative adviser

[67] OrderPaper, Parliaments and Pandemics: Shift in Citizen Participation and Inclusion. A Prognosis on Nigeria Post-COVID-19. OrderPaper Nigeria, May 2020

[68] Ibid

[69] Udora Orizu, "How the Legislature Responded to COVID-19", This Day (4 April 2021), https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/04/04/how-the-legislature-responded-to-covid-19/

[70] Ibid

[71] Udora Orizu, "How the Legislature Responded to COVID-19", op. cit.

[72] OrderPaper, Parliaments and Pandemics: Shift in Citizen Participation and Inclusion. A Prognosis on Nigeria Post-COVID-19, op. cit.

[73] Interview with a legislative adviser

[74] OrderPaper, Parliaments and Pandemics: Shift in Citizen Participation and Inclusion. A Prognosis on Nigeria Post-COVID-19, op. cit.

[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid

[77] Interview with a legislative adviser

[78] Section 229, 1999 Constitution of Nigeria

[79] Ibid, Section 221

[80] Ibid, Sections 225, 225A and 226; Paragraph 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule

[81] https://inecnigeria.org/political-parties/

[82] Sections 65(2), 106, 131, 142(2), 177, and 187(2), 1999 Constitution of Nigeria

[83] INEC, Supplementary Regulations and Guidelines for the Activities of Political Parties, https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/INEC-Elections-and-COVID19-Documents-1.pdf

[84] Ibid
[85] Ibid

[86] NCDC, Guidelines for Conducting Elections During the COVID-19 Outbreak in Nigeria, https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/media/files/ElectionsDuringCOVID-19July2020.pdf

[87] Ibid

[88] Interview with a PDP officer

[89] NCDC, Guidelines for Conducting Elections During the COVID-19 Outbreak in Nigeria, op. cit.

[90] See http://aacparty.org, https://adcnignews.blogspot.com/, https://www.nnpp.org.ng/2021/02/22/nnpp-commiserates-with-those-affected-in-the-military-aircraft-crash/, http://peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng/, https://sdp.com.ng/, https://ypp.ng/

[91] APC Nigeria, https://twitter.com/OfficialAPCNg/status/1260951241959641089

[92] Interview with a PDP officer
[93] Ibid
[94] Ibid
[95] Ibid

[96] INEC Nigeria, 2020 Edo Governorship Election: Declaration of Results, op. cit.

[97] INEC Nigeria, Ondo State Governorship Election 2020: Declaration of Result, op. cit.

[98] Interview with a PDP officer

[99] Charles Kojo VanDyck, "Concept and Definition of Civil Society Sustainability", Centre for Strategic & International Studies (30 June 2017), https://www.csis.org/analysis/concept-and-definition-civil-society-sustainability

[100] Adam Jezard, "Who and what is 'civil society'?", World Economic Forum (23 April 2018), https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/what-is-civil-society/

[101] "Concept and Definition of Civil Society Sustainability", Center for Strategic and International Studies (30 June 2017), https://www.csis.org/analysis/concept-and-definition-civil-society-sustainability

[102] Political Context Analysis: 2020 Edo State Governorship Election, Electoral Hub Political Context Analysis 1/2020, https://electoralhub.iriad.org/political-context-analysis-2020-edo-state-governorship-election/

[103] Chuks Okocha, "Survey Predicts Use of Strong Arm Tactics, Violence in Edo", This Day (1 September 2020), https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/09/01/survey-predicts-use-of-strong-arm-tactics-violence-in-edo/

[104] CDD, New Allegiances, Familiar Faces: A Preview of Edo's 2020 Gubernatorial Election (August 2020), https://www.cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EDO-STATE-PRE-ELECTIONS-AUGUST-2020-1.0.pdf; YIAGA, 2020 Edo Election: An election defined by strongarm tactics and violence, https://watchingthevote.org/2020-edo-election-an-election-

defined-by-strongarm-tactics-and-violence/; KDI, Historical View and Current Trends of Electoral Violence in Edo State, https://www.kdi.org.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/KIMPACT-NEVR-FACTSHEET-ON-EdoDecides2020.pdf

[105] Political Context Analysis: 2020 Edo State Governorship Election, op. cit.

[106] The Cable, "CDD FACT CHECK: Was Ondo first lady injured during an attack at her polling unit?", The Cable (10 October 2020), https://www.thecable.ng/cdd-fact-check-was-ondo-first-lady-injured-during-an-attack-at-her-polling-unit

[107] CDD, CSOs' Roundtable on the 2020 Off-Cycle Governorship Election in Edo State: Communique (6 August 2020), https://www.cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CDD-Communique-on-Edo-CSOs-meeting.pdf

[108] https://www.placng.org/situation_room/sr/igp-mohammed-adamu-hosted-an-interactive-session-with-situation-room-ahead-of-the-edo-and-ondo-governorship/; https://www.placng.org/situation_room/sr/dialogue-session-with-inec-resident-electoral-commissioner-in-edo-state-dr-johnson-alalibo/

[109] Interview with a Director in Cedar Seed Foundation

[110] Political Context Analysis: 2020 Edo State Governorship Election, op. cit.

[111] Chuks Okocha, Peter Uzoho, and Adibe Emenyonu, "Nigeria: Dousing Tension, Obaseki, Ize-Iyamu, Others Commit to Peaceful Election", All Africa (16 September 2020), https://allafrica.com/stories/202009160242.html; Jerrywright Ukwu, "Edo governorship election: APC, 5 other political parties sign peace accord", MSN (11 September 2020), https://www.msn.com/en-xl/africa/nigeria/edo-governorship-election-apc-5-other-political-parties-sign-peace-accord/ar-BB18VpE2

[112] INEC, List of Accredited Domestic and Foreign Observers for the Edo and Ondo Governorship Elections Scheduled for September 19th 2020 and October 10th 2020 Respectively, https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/List-of-Accredited-Domestic-and-Foreign-Observers-for-the-Edo-and-Ondo-Governorship-Elections..pdf

[113] Political Context Analysis: 2020 Senatorial District Bye-Elections, Electoral Hub Political Context Analysis 3/2020, https://electoralhub.iriad.org/political-context-analysis-2020-senatorial-districts-bye-elections/

[114] See CDD, Preliminary Statement on the Conduct of the Ondo State Governorship Election (10 October 2020), https://www.cddwestafrica.org/preliminary-statement-on-the-conduct-of-the-ondo-state-governorship-election/; YIAGA (2021), When Votes Count: Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote Report on the 2020 Edo and Ondo Governorship Elections, http://yiaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/When-Votes-Count-Yiaga-Africa-Report-for-the-Edo-and-Ondo-Governorship-Elections.pdf; Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Second Interim Statement on Edo State Governorship Election 2020, https://situationroomng.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Second-Interim-Statement-on-Edo-Governorship-Election-updated.pdf

[115] Interview with a Programme Officer in a CSO

[116] Ibid

[117] Interview with a Director in Cedar Seed Foundation

[118] Nigerian Network of NGOs, COVID-19 and the Nigerian Nonprofit Sector: What we Heard (June 2020), https://nnngo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Impact-on-Covid19-1.pdf

[119] EPIC Africa and @AfricanNGOs, The Impact of COVID-19 on African Civil Society Organizations: Challenges, Responses and Opportunities (June 2020), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5638d8dbe4b087140cc9098d/t/5efabc7884a29a20185fcbaf/1593490570417/The+Impact+of+Covid-19+on+African+Civil+Society+Organizations.pdf

[120] Interview with a Programme Officer in a CSO

[121] Ibid
[122] Ibid

[123] Interview with a Director in Cedar Seed Foundation

[124] https://web.facebook.com/yiaga.org/photos/webinar-on-covid-19-and-elections-the-world-is-grappling-with-a-public-health-cr/3451827278167409/?_rdc=1&_rdr

[125] K Bariledum, NB Godpower, and NS Tambari (2016), "Foreign Democratic Assistance to Nigeria (1999-2015): The Nexus Between Strategy and Elections Results", Global Journal of Political Science and Administration, (Vol 4, No 4), https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Foreign-Democratic-Assistance-to-Nigeria-1999-2015.pdf

[126] https://www.inecnigeria.org/home/development-partners/

[127] FCDO, Deepening Democracy in Nigeria 2 (DDIN2), https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203851

[128] Ibid

[129] https://www.macfound.org/programs/nigeria/

[130] https://www.osiwa.org/where_we_work/nigeria/

[131] http://democracy-support.eu/nigeria/

[132] Ibid

[133] Interview with an election expert at ECES; ECES, A Photo Story: Ondo State Elections, https://www.eces.eu/en/posts/a-photo-story-ondo-state-elections

[134] IFES, Nigeria, https://www.ifes.org/nigeria

[135] Meeting with a Programme Manager at EU-SDGN

[136] INEC, List of Accredited Domestic and Foreign Observers for the Edo and Ondo Governorship Elections Scheduled for September 19th 2020 and October 10th 2020 Respectively, op. cit.

[137] See US Embassy & Consulate in Nigeria, Embassy Statement on Concluded 2020 Edo State Governorship Elections (23 September 2020), https://ng.usembassy.gov/embassy-statement-on-concluded-2020-edo-state-governorship-election/; ECES, A Photo Story: Ondo State Elections, op. cit.

[138] "UK to Prosecute Politicians who Perpetrate Violence in Edo, Ondo Elections" Sahara Reporters (16 September 2020), http://saharareporters.com/2020/09/16/uk-prosecute-politicians-who-perpetrate-violence-edo-ondo-elections. See also US Embassy & Consulate in Nigeria, Imposing Visa Restrictions on Nigerians Responsible for Undermining the Democratic Process (14 September 2020), https://ng.usembassy.gov/imposing-visa-restrictions-on-nigerians-responsible-for-undermining-the-democratic-process-2/?_ga=2.141493492.712097355.1624197034-1964088663.1623739079

[139] Kate Whannel, "Foreign aid: Aid cuts could see lives lost, warns senior Tory", BBC News (7 June 2021), https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-57379699

[140] "Foreign aid: Who will be hit by the UK government cuts?", BBC News (7 June 2021), https://www.bbc.com/news/57362816

[141] Lisa Cornish, "Interactive: Who's funding the COVID-19 response and what are the priorities?", Devex (updated 16 June 2021), https://www.devex.com/news/interactive-who-s-funding-the-covid-19-response-and-what-are-the-priorities-96833; Stephen Brown, "The impact of COVID-19 on foreign aid", DevPolicy Blog (1 April 2021), https://devpolicy.org/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-foreign-aid-20210401-2/

[142] Interview with a Programme Manager at EU-SDGN
[143] Ibid
[144] Ibid
[145] Ibid
[146] Interview with an election expert at ECES
[147] Interview with a Director at IFES
[148] Ibid
[149] Phoebe Cooke, "What is the Fourth Estate, why is the press called the fourth estate and where does the term come from", The Sun (30 July 2019), https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6600872/fourth-estate-media-fourth-estate-term/

[150] Section 22, 1999 Constitution of Nigeria
[151] Available at https://www.icirnigeria.org/elections/

[152] Ibid

[153] Available at https://www.icirnigeria.org/category/factcheck/

[154] See Yusuf Akinpelu and Samson Adenekan, "ANALYSIS: With more technology, Nigeria's electoral process may just get better", Premium Times (31 May 2021), https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/464782-analysis-with-more-technology-nigerias-electoral-process-may-get-just-better.html

[155] Political Context Analysis: 2020 Edo State Governorship Election, op. cit.

[156] Ibid
[157] Ibid

[158] Deepening Democracy: Lessons from Ondo State 2020 Governorship Election, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 2/2020, https://electoralhub.iriad.org/deepening-democracy-lessons-from-ondo-state-2020-governorship-election/

[159] Mboho Eno, "PTCIJ deploys 54 observers to monitory poll integrity in Edo", Premium Times (19 September 2020), https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/415576-ptcij-deploys-54-observers-to-monitor-poll-integrity-in-edo.html

[160] http://democracy-support.eu/nigeria/4-activities

[161] "Five media houses partner to promote electoral accountability", Premium Times (18 September 2020), https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/415434-five-media-houses-partner-to-promote-electoral-accountability.html

[162] Interview with an editor at Premium Times

[163] ActionAid, Research Report on The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria Media Operations and Survival (September 2020), https://nigeria.actionaid.org/sites/nigeria/files/publications/MEDIA%20REPORT%20COMPRESSED%20FORMAT.pdf

[164] Olufunmilayo Obadofin, "Impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian Newsrooms", Pulitzer Center (6 July 2020), https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/impact-covid-19-nigerian-newsrooms

[165] Ibid

[166] Lekan Otufodunrin, "Layoffs, forced resignation, leave in The Punch, The Nation, others", Media Career Development Network (30 May 2020), https://mediacareerng.org/2020/05/30/layoffs-forced-resignation-leave-in-the-punch-the-nation-others/

[167] ActionAid, Research Report on The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria Media Operations and Survival, op. cit.

[168] Ibid

[169] Ibid

[170] Interview with an editor at Premium Times

[171] NCDC, First Case of Coronavirus Disease Confirmed in

Nigeria (28 February 2020), https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria

[172] Chioma Dan-Nwafor et al (2020), "Nigeria's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic: January to May 2020", Journal of Global Health (Vol 10, No 2), http://jogh.org/documents/issue202002/jogh-10-020399.pdf

[173] Ibid

[174] Ibid

[175] John Chukwuma Oyem et al (2021), "COVID-19 and Depression from the Nigerian Perspective; A Mini Review", Jundishapur Journal of Chronic Disease Care 10(2), https://doi.org/10.5812/jjcdc.111199

[176] Interview with a legislative adviser

[177] Interview with a PDP officer

[178] Ibid

[179] Interview with a Programme Manager at ECES

[180] Interview with an election expert at ECES

[181] Ibid

[182] Interview with an editor at Premium Times

[183] Interview with a legislative adviser

[184] Interview with a Programme Manager at EU-SDGN

[185] Interview with an election expert at ECES

[186] Interview with a Programme Officer in a CSO

[187] Ibid

[188] Friday Olokor et al, "INEC counters NASS, says nationwide e-transmission of election results possible", Punch (18 July 2021), https://punchng.com/inec-counters-nass-says-nationwide-e-transmission-of-election-results-possible/

[189] Interview with a legislative adviser

[190] Interview with a legislative adviser

[191] Deepening Democracy: Lessons from Edo State 2020 Governorship Election, https://electoralhub.iriad.org/deepening-democracy-lessons-from-edo-state-2020-governorship-election/; Deepening Democracy: Lessons from Ondo State 2020 Governorship Election, op. cit.

[192] Interview with an election expert at ECES

[193] Interview with a Programme Manager at EU-SDGN

[194] Interview with a PDP officer

[195] OrderPaper, Parliaments and Pandemics: Shift in Citizen Participation and Inclusion. A Prognosis on Nigeria Post-COVID-19, op. cit.

[196] Use of Communication Technologies by Political Parties in Nigeria, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 8/2021, https://electoralhub.iriad.org/use-of-communication-technologies-by-political-parties-in-nigeria/

[197] ActionAid, Research Report on The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria Media Operations and Survival, op. cit.

[198] Ibid

[199] Interview with an editor at Premium Times

[200] Irène Sesmaisons, "The impact of Covid-19 on African civil society organisations", Alternatives Humanitaires (22 November 2020), https://alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/2020/11/22/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-african-civil-society-organisations/

[201] For example, USAID and DFID (now FCDO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide joint funding of election support in Nigeria, while the UNDP has a joint donor basket fund to support electoral processes in Nigeria.

[202] Interview with a Programme Manager at EU-SDGN

[203] Interview with a Programme Manager at EU-SDGN

ABOUT THE ELECTORAL HUB

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

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

THE ELECTORAL HUB

...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability and integrity

8A Remilekun Street, Kukwaba, Abuja, Nigeria
Phone: +234 9121551337 and +234 9092068680;
Email: comms@electoralhubng.org
Twitter: @electoralhub;
Instagram: @electoralhub;
Facebook: @electoralhubng
Website: https://electoralhub.iriad.org

This Project is supported by

OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR WEST AFRICA

OSIWA