THE ELECTORAL HUB



POLITICAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS:

2023 IMO STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

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About The Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a knowledge and advocacy hub which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. It is committed to promoting electoral knowledge, integrity, and accountability in Nigeria. Our aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of critical and contextualized process. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

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

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Executive Summary

Background

This analysis provides an overview of legal, sociopolitical, and institutional factors influencing the forthcoming Imo State election, covering key players, the Election Management Body, and the electoral system. It discusses threats, obstacles, and internal/external factors impacting electoral integrity. Based on unbiased research and stakeholder perceptions, this analysis offers insights into the distribution of power, interests, and rules governing the 2023 off-cycle election in Imo State. It is s a valuable resource for understanding the election's context and dynamics, aiming to promote electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity.

Legal Framework

The Imo State governorship contest would be guided by the laws that make up the legal framework for elections in Nigeria. Nigeria's electoral process is governed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Electoral Act 2022, and INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections. These laws outline the fundamental principles and procedures for conducting fair and transparent elections. The Electoral Act 2022 introduces key provisions, such as the use of technology, the secrecy of the ballot, and gender equity. Additionally, related legislation, including the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, Child Rights Act (CRA), and Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, protects citizens' rights and regulates electoral matters. This comprehensive legal framework exists to uphold democratic principles and discourage electoral misconduct.

Electoral Background

Imo State, located in Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone, is divided into three Senatorial Districts, ten Federal Constituencies, twenty-seven State Constituencies, and twenty-seven Local Government Areas (LGAs). It comprises 4,744 Polling Units with 2,419,922 registered voters. The state has a history of seven governorship elections since 1999. The upcoming election, scheduled for November 11, 2023, will determine the next governor and deputy governor who will lead the state for the next four years. Prior to this election, efforts have been made to increase PVC collection, and 1,235 new polling units were created, bringing the total to 4,744. The state's executive, legislature and judiciary are led by Governor Hope Uzodinma, Speaker Chike Olemgbe, and Chief Judge Justice Theresa Eberechukwu Chikeka respectively.

Imo State Electorates

Imo State in Nigeria has a predominantly Igbo electorate. Around 55.3% of the population is part of the workforce, with 75.5% of households receiving remittances, both domestically and internationally. The average household size is 4.53 members. The state prioritizes citizen well-being, with good access to drinking water (83.21%) and high literacy rates (96.43%). However, challenges include infant mortality (84.44%) and total fertility rate (5.52%). In terms of infrastructure, 55.3% have national grid connections, and 69.6% have electricity access. Imo State faces economic disparities, with a poverty rate of 28.9%, and women head 27.5% of households. About 17% of school-age children were out of school in 2018, according to the Universal Basic Education Commission. Education is a priority, with several public and private higher education institutions available to residents.

Political Environment

Imo State was formally established in 1976, experiencing administrative changes and a significant shift in 1991 with the creation of Abia State. The 2023 gubernatorial election features 18 candidates, with the APC, PDP, and LP as major contenders. The election campaign officially began in June 2023. However, intra-party conflicts within the Labour Party have created divisions, potentially affecting their chances. Ensuring citizen participation and addressing voter apathy are essential prerequisites for the success of the election.

Political Parties

The upcoming November 11, 2023 governorship election in Imo State has 18 political parties as contestants. Notably, the incumbent, Hope Uzodinma of the APC, holds a strong position, given the party's control of both federal and state governments and significant legislative seats. The PDP's Sam Anyanwu is another prominent contender, although the party has faced some challenges, including the defection of its state executives to the APC. Achonu Nneji, representing the LP, may have a chance, but internal party disputes could impact his campaign. Ogunewe Lincoln Keonyemere Jack of AA is also worth noting. Other parties have limited recognition and media coverage. This election reflects the competition among these candidates and parties in Imo State's dynamic political landscape.

Inclusion and Representation

In Nigerian democracy, marginalized groups like women, youth, and persons with disabilities face under-representation due to structural and cultural factors. Despite policy reforms and initiatives, the upcoming Imo State election shows inadequate representation. Among 18 governorship candidates, there are no females, only one youth, and only one

PWDs. Deputy governorship candidates have slightly better inclusivity with two females and two youth but no PWD representation.

Key political and Socio-cultural Actors

Key political actors in Imo State include Hope Uzodinma, the current governor seeking re-election, and Rochas Okorocha, a former governor and senator. Emeka Ihedioha, a former governor, and Ikedi Ohakim, a past governor, are also notable figures. Samuel Anyanwu represents the PDP, Achonu Nneji is the Labour party candidate, and Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba is a former minister and politician. Achike Udenwa is a former governor, while Osita Izunaso serves as a senator. On the socio-cultural front, HRH Dr. E.C. Okeke, Eze Goddy Okeke, HRH Eze David Akujiobi Osuagwu, and HRH Eze T.A. Obiefule are traditional rulers in various zones of Imo State. Additional figures include senators Patrick Ndubueze and Ezenwa Francis Onyeuchi, former INEC chairman Maurice Iwu, and actor Kanayo O. Kanayo.

(In)Security and Violence

Imo State was previously considered one of Nigeria's most peaceful states, but it has experienced a rise in violence, particularly during the 2019 elections, marked by election-related violence, vote-box snatching, and violent protests at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) collation center in Owerri. Insecurity challenges, including banditry, kidnappings, insurgency, ritual killings, and unresolved assassinations, have plagued the state. Local government areas such as Ehime/Mbano, Okigwe, Oru West, Oru East, and Orlu have witnessed violent incidents in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections, including attacks on prominent figures like former governor Ikedi Ohakim and the House of Representatives candidate. INEC has expressed concerns about rising violence and insecurity in Imo, emphasizing the need for security measures to protect voters and election materials during the November 11, 2023 elections in the state.

Efforts at Mitigating Violence

In preparation for the November 11, 2023 off-cycle governorship election in Imo State, various stakeholders, including INEC have taken steps to address the security challenges. Some of these measures include a review of the 2023 general election with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), a consultative meeting to promote citizen participation and peace, engagement with the media for responsible reporting, and discussions with Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) to ensure decorum and collaboration with security agencies during the election and beyond.

Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have played a vital role in in the lead-up to the November 11, 2023 governorship election in Imo State. Notable CSOs include IRIAD – The Electoral Hub, which promotes electoral knowledge, accountability and integrity, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, which advocates for a fair and transparent election; the Imo Public Media Coalition, working to educate voters and ensure a standard election; Yiaga Africa, which highlights emerging political and security trends and engages in election observation; and Saving Our Votes, a coalition urging active voter participation, electoral integrity, and responsible conduct by politicians and security agencies in the three states with off-cycle elections. These CSOs are actively contributing to ensuring a transparent and peaceful election process in Imo State.

The Role of INEC

INEC plays a crucial role in overseeing elections to executive and legislative positions at the federal and state levels. Ahead of the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states, INEC has initiated a PVC collection exercise, and effected upgrades to the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result View Portal (IReV). To enhance voter access, INEC created additional polling units, including 1,235 in Imo State. Stakeholder engagement has been a focus, with meetings involving political parties, the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), and media organizations. INEC has also initiated activities like media accreditation, ad hoc staff recruitment, and various election-related tasks, all detailed in the election timetable.

Conclusion

The forthcoming 2023 Imo State Governorship Election holds significant importance, being the seventh governorship election since 1999, and it offers an opportunity to implement the new Election Act of 2022, strengthen INEC's capabilities, and enhance election integrity. The lessons from the 2023 general elections and the state's unique characteristics will shape the election. Sixteen political parties are participating, including the APC, PDP, and LP, with power dynamics playing a crucial role. Involvement of community stakeholders, traditional leaders, and CSOs, along with integrity safeguards like the results viewing portal and BVAS, aim to ensure transparency. Lessons from past elections and active stakeholder engagement could contribute to a credible and peaceful electoral process, and result in improvements in Nigeria's democratic journey.

Acronyms

A	Accord Party
AAC	African Action Congress
ADC	African Democratic Congress
ADP	Action Democratic Party APC All Progressives Congress
AG	Action Group
APGA	All Progressive Grand Alliance
APM	Allied Peoples Movement
APP	Action People Party
BVAS	Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System
CCD	Centre for Citizens with Disability
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CVR	Continuous Voter Registration
FC	Federal Constituency
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
ICCES	Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IRIAD	Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development
LGA	Local Government Area
LP	Labour Party
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NCDC	Nigeria Centre for Disease Control
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NiMet	Nigerian Meteorological Agency
NIHSA	Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency
NNPP	New Nigeria Peoples Party
NRM	National Rescue Movement
NWTF	Nigerian Women Trust Fund
PCA	Political Context Analysis
PCC	Presidential Campaign Council
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PLAC	Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre
PRP	Peoples Redemption Party
PU	Polling Unit
PVCs	Permanent Voter Cards
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
RA	Registration Area

RECs	Resident Electoral Commission
SC	State Constituency
SCR	Smart Card Readers
SD	Senatorial District
SDP	Social Democratic Party
TEH	The Electoral Hub
WIPF	Women in Politics Forum
YPP	Young Progressives Party
ZLP	Zenith Labour Party

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

This analysis lays out an overview of the legal, sociopolitical, and institutional factors and conditions that are likely to shape the 2023 governorship elections in Imo State, along with information on the major players and interest groups that shape elections in the state. Threats and obstacles to a credible process are also discussed, as are internal and external forces that can help safeguard and reinforce the integrity and credibility of the electoral process. This analysis is based on unbiased research into past election trends, current political and social dynamics in the state, as well as the electorate's and political observers' perceptions of the election. This analysis should serve as a stakeholder's guide on the distribution of power, the range and interests of the various actors, the formal and informal rules that govern the electoral process, and how all these can contribute to the integrity of the 2023 governorship election in Imo State.

The outcome of the election, scheduled to be held on November 11, 2023, would determine who becomes the governor of Imo state for the next four years. The election would be the seventh governorship election to be conducted in the state since the transition to democratic rule in 1999. One unique feature of the election is that it is to be held in the aftermath of the 2023 general election. This gives key electoral stakeholders the opportunity to act on lessons learnt during the general election. In addition to the preceding, Imo State governorship elections to be held on November 11th, 2023, offer an opportunity for INEC and other election duty bearers to implement provisions of the Electoral Act 2022.

Another point of interest in this election is the prevalence of violence linked to the activities of unknown gunmen in Imo State. Activities of these groups have created a complex environment, with preparations for the elections adversely impacted by attacks on INEC offices in the state. According to a report by INEC, there had been 50 attacks on its offices across the nation in four years and Imo state tops the chart with eleven (11) recorded cases[1]. These attacks led to suspension of relevant activities such as the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) process in some areas[2]. The issues briefly laid out here intersect with the broader need for a holistic understanding of issues leading to the election to inform this analysis of the pre-election political context in Imo State.

During the election, The Electoral Hub will be closely monitoring the process with a keen interest in the issues and challenges observed during the February 25th and March

[1] The Cable (2023), 50 Incidents in 15 States- INEC Details Attacks on its Office in 4 Years. https://www.thecable.ng/50-incidents-15-states-inec-details-attacks-on-its-offices-in-4-years

[2] Adenekan S. (2023), Imo Attack: INEC suspends CVR in more centres as missing staffers are found. Premium Times. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/524030-imo-attack-inec-suspends-cvr-in-more-centres-as-missing-staffers-are-found.html

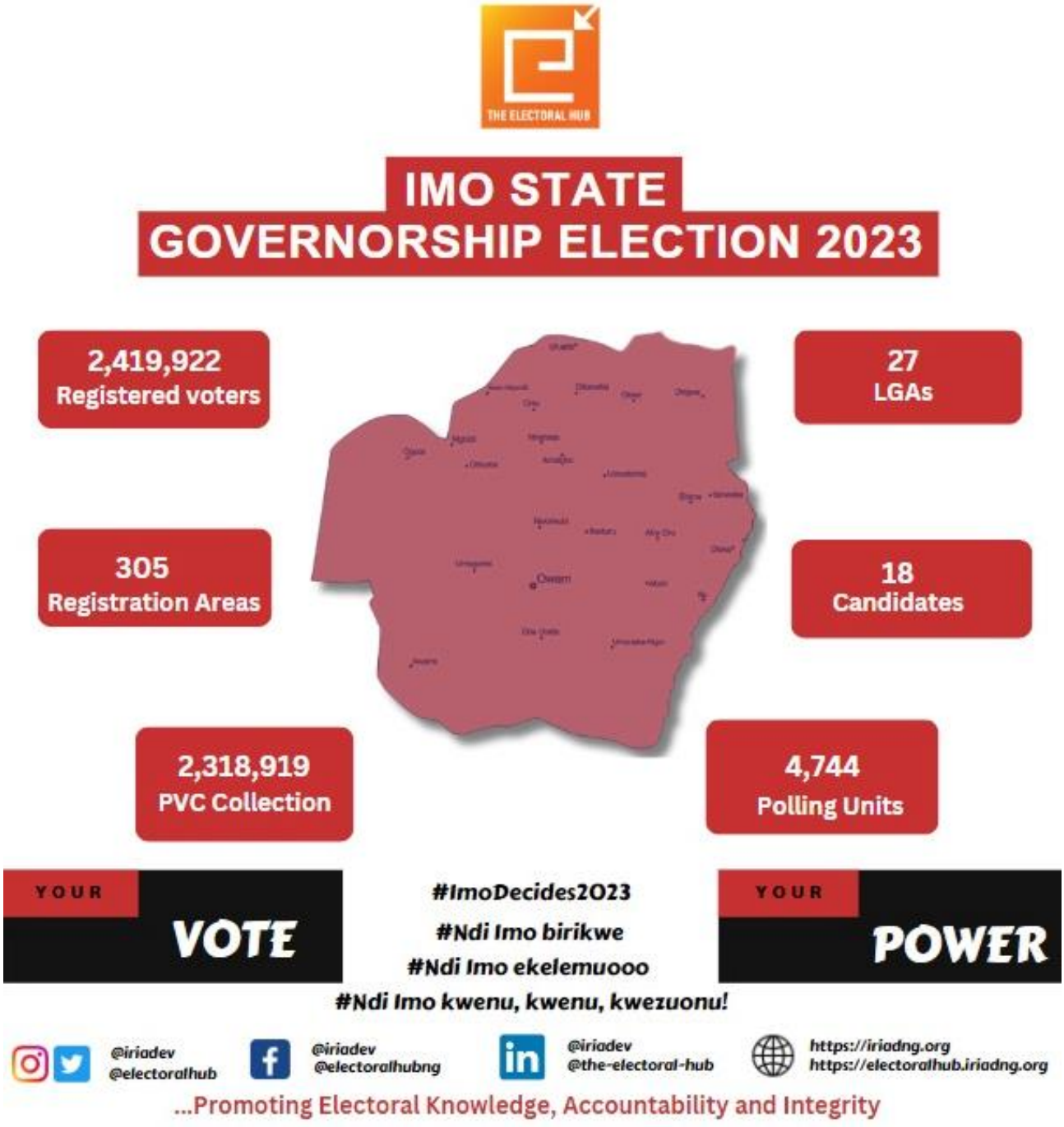
11th general election. The Electoral Hub's observance of the process would cover compliance with legal framework, RAC preparations and set-ups, security presence, fuel and currency scarcity impacts, youth, women and PWDs participation, malpractices including vote trading and electoral violence, election related -violence against women, ad-hoc staff performance, collation process management, and post collation electoral environment/conduct of key stakeholders. This would be aimed at ensuring a smooth and transparent electoral process in Bayelsa.

As we prepare for the election, we have, in line with our mission of promoting electoral knowledge, accountability and integrity has produced this Political Context Analysis (PCA), a pre-election analysis to help stakeholders understand the contexts and dynamics in which the 2023 governorship election will be conducted in Imo State.

1.2 Task and Method

This analysis lays out an overview of the legal, sociopolitical, and institutional factors and conditions that are likely to shape the 2023 governorship election in Imo State. Also contained in this PCA are details about the efforts of the major players, interest, and interest groups that could shape election-related events. Threats and obstacles to a credible process are also discussed, as are internal and external forces that can help safeguard and reinforce the integrity and credibility of the electoral process. This analysis is based on unbiased research into past election trends, current political and social dynamics in the state, as well as the electorate's and political observers' perceptions of the election. This analysis should serve as a stakeholder's guide to the distribution of power, the range and interests of the various actors, the formal and informal rules that govern the electoral process, and how all these can contribute to the integrity of the 2023 off-cycle election.




THE ELECTORAL HUB
IMO STATE
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION 2023
2,419,922
Registered voters
27
LGAs
305
Registration Areas
18
Candidates
2,318,919
PVC Collection
4,744
Polling Units
YOUR
VOTE
#ImoDecides2023
#Ndi Imo birikwe
#Ndi Imo ekelemuooo
YOUR
POWER
#Ndi Imo kwenu, kwenu, kwezuonu!
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Constitutional and Legal Frameworks

Elections in Nigeria as well as other democracies are political as well as legal activities. They are, therefore, expected to be conducted in conformity with the provisions of relevant laws. For the Nigerian state, the Electoral Legal Framework comprise of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), The Electoral Act, 2022, and INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022. The provisions in these legal frameworks govern the conduct of elections across the country and is therefore of utmost relevance to the 2023 off-cycle elections in Imo State. They clearly lay out the processes and regulations guarding electoral conduct across the country.

2.1 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN)

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria serves as the supreme law of the country, establishing the fundamental principles and structure of governance. It outlines the powers, functions, and responsibilities of various government bodies and defines the rights and duties of Nigerian citizens. In the context of elections, the Constitution provides a foundational framework for the legal treatment of electoral issues. It empowers the National Assembly to enact laws that establish the procedures and penalties for electoral offences, ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and upholding democratic ideals.

The Constitution emphasizes the need for free and fair elections as a cornerstone of democracy. Sections 33 to 43 of the 1999 Constitution specifying the fundamental rights of citizens is a tacit pointer to the rights of citizens to exercise their freedom to partake in leadership decisions without undue influence or coercion (as exemplified by electoral offences). More so, Sections 106, 107, 131, and 177 amongst others laying out conditions for qualification or disqualification for occupancy of executive or legislative positions at the federal and state levels also border directly on electoral issues. Similarly, Section 239 (1) establishes the jurisdiction of the election petition court (Appeal Court) to decide on presidential election disputes, and Section 285 establishing election petition tribunals across various elections in the country are direct pointers to the crucial place of the Constitution in regulating electoral conduct.

In addition to the preceding, provisions in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which hold that no association can canvass for votes for any candidate at an election other than a political party (Section 221) and prohibits political parties from owning or receiving funds or assets from outside Nigeria (Section 225(3)) further shows the pivotal place of the Constitution in regulating the electoral process and determining ideal practices in electoral conduct in states across the country, including Imo State.

2.2 Electoral Act 2022

In Nigeria, the Electoral Act serves as a crucial legal instrument for regulating virtually all aspects of electoral conduct and ensuring the credibility of the process. It outlines rules and regulations that govern the entire electoral process, from voter registration to results announcement. The Electoral Act 2022 repealed the Electoral Act 2010. The Act contains provisions for regulating the conduct of Federal, State and Area Council elections, approving the use of card readers, and other technological devices in elections and political party primaries, providing a timeline for the submission of a list of candidates, specifying criteria for substitution of candidates, placing limits of campaign expenses, and addressing the omission of names of candidates or logo of political parties[3]. The Act further lays out an elaborate list of electoral offences, treated largely as criminal offences with appropriate punitive measures[4].

Specifically, Part VII (Sections 114 – 129) of the Electoral Act 2022 specify electoral offences and prescribed punitive measures. These offences encompass a range of behaviours which include forgery of documents, multiple voting, impersonation, and vote trading. The Act takes a firm stance against such actions to safeguard the integrity of elections and uphold the democratic principles of the nation. Electoral offences outlined in the Act are designed to prevent actions that could jeopardise public will and compromise the credibility of elections in the country. Offences like spreading false information, engaging in violence or intimidation, and tampering with election results are not only discouraged but also incur penalties to those who engage in such. The Act emphasizes the importance of peaceful and transparent elections by deterring individuals from participating in any form of misconduct that could disrupt the electoral process or manipulate its outcomes. By clearly defining these offences and their consequences, the Act plays a crucial role in ensuring that elections in Nigeria are conducted fairly and following democratic values. The Electoral Act also underscores the significance of accountability and responsibility in the electoral process. It places the responsibility not only on voters and candidates to uphold the law but also on election officials and stakeholders to administer the process with honesty and impartiality.

The 2022 Electoral Act introduces reforms and innovations in the electoral process towards improving transparency, accountability, inclusion, and the overall integrity of the electoral process. Below are some of its key provisions:

[3] Electoral Act, (2022) Explanatory memorandum

[4] For more on Criminalization of Electoral Offences, see Okechukwu Ibeanu (2022, April 28) "Prosecuting Electoral Offences as a Mechanism for Electoral Accountability." Keynote Address Presented at the Roundtable on Electoral Offences in Nigeria organized by The Electoral Hub on the 28th April, 2022.

Table 1: Key Provisions in the Electoral Act, 2022

S/N	SECTION	PROVISION
1	Section 3(3)	Early release of INEC's funds
2	Section 8(5)	Political neutrality of INEC Staff
3	Section 9 (6)	End of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR)
4	Section 16	Possession of one valid PVC by each voter
5	Section 24 (3)	Suspension of election on security grounds
6	Section 28	Notice of election 360 days to election
7	Section 29 (1)	Early conduct of Party Primaries
8	Section 34	Substitution of candidates who dies during election
9	Section 37	Contested election of candidate nomination (validity of nomination)
10	Section 47 (2)	The legalization of electronic accreditation of voters
11	Section 50	Allows INEC to determine the mode of results transmission
12	Section 51	Redefined Over-voting focuses on the number of accredited voters
13	Section 54(2)	Inclusion of Persons with Disability
14	Section 65	Gives INEC Powers to review results declared under duress
15	Section 75(1)	Registration of parties terminates 12months before the general election
16	Section 81(2)	Notice of merger of parties 9months to the general election
17	Section 84 (12)	Resignation of political appointees before they can participate in primaries as voters and candidates
18	Section 94 (1)	Extension of the period of campaigns to 150days before 24hours to the election
19	Section 96	Campaigns by political parties ends 24 hours to the election

Compiled by The Electoral Hub[5]

The off-cycle elections in Imo State provides another opportunity to monitor and assess the implementation of the 2022 Electoral Act. Some of the progressive provisions in the Electoral Act that signpost the improvements in the electoral process that should be considered by process monitors and observers are:

[5] This list is an updated version of the Electoral Landscape since the Assent of the Electoral Act 2022. www.electoralhub.iriad.org/blog/

1. **Use of Electoral Technologies:** The Electoral Act empowers INEC to deploy technology into the electoral process in the areas of accreditation, voting and transmission of results. Some of the innovations include the use of the Bi-modal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and other technological devices for voter accreditation and transmission of results. See Sections 47(2), 60(5) Electoral Act, 2022

2. **Result Visualization Portal:** The Electoral Act 2022 empowers INEC to deploy technologies and innovations in result transmission. The Commission has, therefore, established a Result Visualization Portal – the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) – and deployed it for electoral conduct during the Ekiti and Osun governorship elections. Challenges with uploading Presidential election results to the IReV portal during the 2023 general election have raised questions on how well this technological innovation would be fare as the country prepares for the off-cycle election in Imo State.

3. **Voting by Open Secret Ballot:** The Secrecy of the ballot is a universal electoral integrity norm and standard. This is aptly covered by Section 50 (1) which states that "voting shall be by open secret ballot". Proper implementation and compliance with this section will go largely curb the major electoral offence of voting trading (buying and selling) at the PU.

4. **Transmission of Results:** Whether transmission of results will be done electronically and what methods would be used in line with provisions of Section 50 that allows INEC to determine the mode of results transmission.

5. **Overvoting:** Section 51 redefinition and clarification on overvoting to focus on the number of accredited voters and not the number in the register of voters. How will this be done by the presiding officers taking into consideration issues of adequate training and knowledge about this Section.

6. **Inclusion of PWD:** Section 54(2) compels INEC to provide assistive devices to PWDs at the polling units. How well will poll officials comply with this requirement? Particularly looking at issues of competence of poll officials.

7. **Gender Equity and Inclusion:** Section 54(2) also compels INEC to assist special needs and vulnerable persons at the PUs. The elderly, pregnant and nursing mothers fall within this group. They would require quick action at PUs so special attention would include them being attended to before others. This will encourage and promote gender equity and inclusion in the electoral process.

Inclusivity is an important measure of electoral integrity and democratic progress.

8. **Dispute during Result Collation:** Section 64 provides for how results collation disputes are to be addressed and resolved.

9. **Powers to Review Results Declared under Duress:** Section 65 provides for a seven-day duration for INEC review of declaration and return made involuntarily and contrary to the law. This clause if not properly monitored can be deployed by desperate politicians who may try to manipulate the result collation process by compelling a false declaration at the different collation points.

10. **Electoral Offences and Offenders:** In line with the new legal provisions, does INEC have a developed plan and/or strategy for preventing electoral offences? Will INEC prosecute more election offenders than before? What are some of the methods INEC seeks to explore to make this possible? How does INEC plan to prosecute electoral offenders? Part VII (Sections 114-129).

2.3 INEC Regulations and Guidelines

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) regulations and guidelines are essentially a set of rules, principles, and procedures established by INEC, the Nigerian EMB, to govern various aspects of the electoral process. It is designed to ensure the fairness, transparency, and integrity of the electoral process. The regulation covers a wide range of areas, including voter registration, participation of political party, campaign finance, election conduct, and results declaration. The commission has, in recent times, released guidelines for electoral conduct in 2019 and 2022.

Ahead of the 2023 general elections, INEC updated the 2019 version of the electoral regulations and guidelines in 2022 and deployed it for use. The document titled Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022 covers matters of elections and arrangements for their conduct, accreditation and voting procedure during elections, collation of results and making of returns, electoral during COVID-19 and other health emergencies, among others. Each of these key areas contained several specific provisions aimed at guiding the diverse aspects of electoral conduct and ensuring the integrity of the process. These guidelines would be deployed for off-cycle election in Imo State on November 11, 2023.

2.4 Other Related Laws and Policies

Another guiding policy for election is INEC's COVID-19 policy on Conducting Elections in the context of COVID-19[6]. This is yet to be amended to conform to the Federal Government lifting COVID-19 restrictions and relaxing the rules. Thus, INEC will maintain its policy on Conduct of Election in the Context of COVID-19 which includes use of facemasks/shields and keeping a social distancing by voters of two meters (6 feet) on election day.

The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act is a crucial piece of legislation in Nigeria aimed at addressing and eradicating various forms of violence against individuals, especially women and vulnerable groups. Enacted in 2015, the VAPP Act provides a comprehensive legal framework to prevent, prohibit and punish all forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. This legislation recognizes the importance of safeguarding the rights and dignity of all persons, regardless of gender, age, or social status. The focus of the Act on violence of all forms places issues of electoral violence directly within its purview.

Importantly, the Act introduces protective measures for victims, such as restraining orders and orders for the payment of compensation, to ensure their safety and well-being. Specific provisions of the Act as contained in Sections 2 – 4 which borders on wilful infliction of injury, coercion, and creation of fear of injury respectively, are all relevant provisions for regulating diverse aspects of the electoral process in Nigeria. Similarly, Section 11 specifies punitive measures for the destruction of properties and Section 18 provides against intimidation all find relevance within the context of discourse on electoral offences, electoral violence, and voter intimidation.

Lastly, Section 23 is specifically focused on political violence. The section contains provisions against committing and attempting to commit political violence. It also proscribes and ascribes appropriate punishments to the act of aiding and abetting perpetrators of political violence. These provisions amongst others make the VAPP Act a crucial legislative instrument for regulating electoral offences in Nigeria.

Like the VAPP (2015), the Child Rights Act (CRA) is also a vital legislative instrument with relevance to the conduct of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. It is a legal instrument designed to protect the rights and welfare of children across the country. Enacted in 2003, the Act is a comprehensive framework that outlines the rights and responsibilities of children, parents, guardians, and the government in ensuring the well-being and development of Nigeria's young population. The CRA is a response to international standards (including the United Nations Convention) on the Rights of the

[6] INEC (2020). Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of The Covid-19 Pandemic. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/INEC-Elections-and-COVID19-Documents-1.pdf

Child, and seeks to provide a legal foundation for promoting and safeguarding the rights of children in various aspects of their lives.

With a total of 278 sections, the Act serves as an elaborate instrument for the protection of Nigerian children. Section 26 of the Act specifically proscribes the employment, use or involvement of children in activities that constitute an offence. Subsection 2 of this provision further specifies a fourteen-year imprisonment term for violators of the provision. This provision is particularly relevant to the electoral process, especially concerning underage voting which, as media reports have revealed, features prominently as an electoral offence in Nigeria. The Act is, therefore, an important legislative instrument in the regulation of electoral matters and conduct in the country.

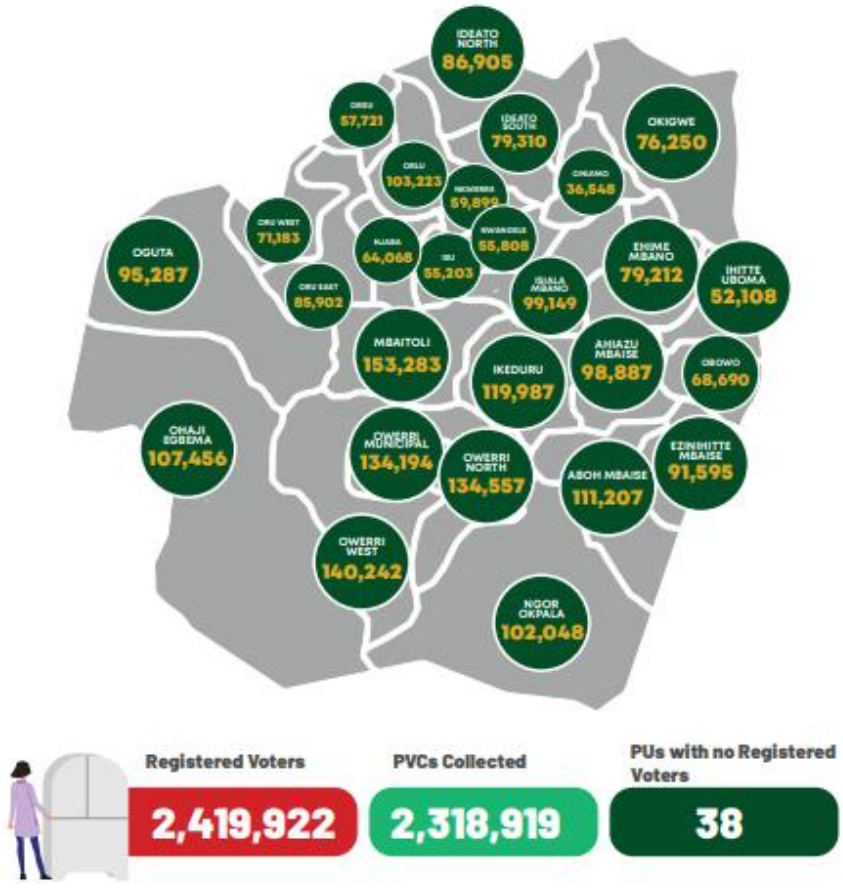
Another legislative instrument with utilitarian value in Nigerian electoral discourse is the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2019). Commonly referred to as the Disability Act, it serves as an important legal framework in Nigeria aimed at promoting the rights, inclusion, and well-being of people with disabilities (PWDs). It acknowledges the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and seeks to eliminate discrimination and barriers that hinder their full participation in society. The Disability Act aligns with international standards, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and reflects Nigeria's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens.

The Act's provision for PWDs to be considered first in queues as contained in Section 25 and its provision in Section 30 for PWDs to be encouraged to fully participate in politics and political life (by creating an enabling environment for PWDs to engage in public affairs and hold key positions in political parties) are all crucial provisions that lend credence to the relevance of the Act to electoral discourse in Nigeria.

Imo State Electoral Background

3.1 Electoral Delimitation

Imo state is one of the thirty-six (36) States that make up the component units of the Nigerian federation. Located in the South East of Nigeria, Imo State has three (3) Senatorial Districts, Ten (10) Federal Constituencies, Twenty-seven (27) State Constituencies, Twenty-seven (27) Local Government Areas (LGAs), 305 Electoral Wards, and 4,758 Polling Units (PUs). The figure below is the map of Imo State showing the registered voters by Local Government Area in the state.

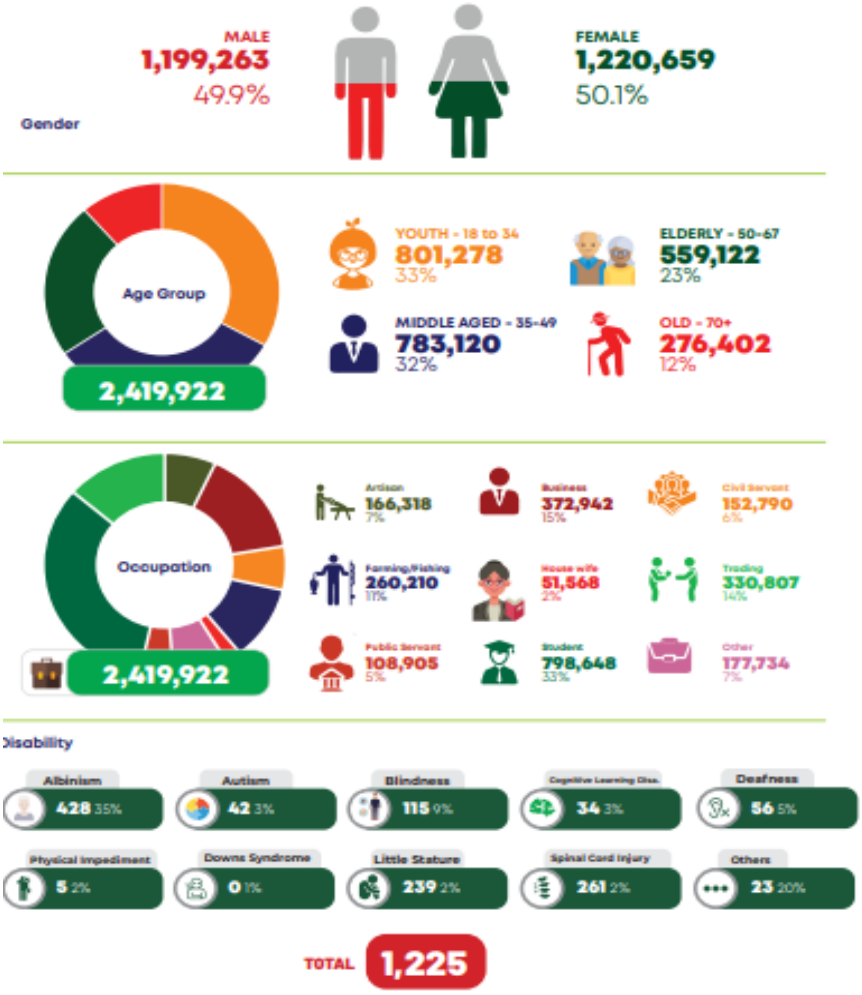


Source: INEC[7]

Beyond the breakdown of the number of registered voters by LGA in Imo State, INEC also provides a detailed breakdown of the registered voters by categories in the state. The brerakdown shows that the state has 50.1% of female registered voters and 49.1% of male registered voters. It also shows that 33% of registered voters are youths, 33%

[7] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency

are students, 1,225 voters are persons with disabilities. The figure below shows the registered voters by categories.



Source: INEC[8]

The November 11 2023 elections will be the seventh governorship election to be held in Imo State since 1999. Previous governorship elections in the state were held on January 9, 1999, April 19, 2003[9], April 14, 2007[10], April 26, 2011[11], April 11, 2015[12] and March 9, 2019[13].

[8] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency

[9] https://www.wikiwand.com/en/2003_Imo_State_gubernatorial_election

[10] https://www.wikiwand.com/en/2007_Imo_State_gubernatorial_election

[11] https://saharareporters.com/2011/05/07/imo-state-gubernatorial-election-rochas-defeats-ohakim

[12] The election was declared inconclusive a supplementary was conducted on April 26, 2015, https://www.channelstv.com/2015/04/26/okorocha-wins-imo-state-governorship-election/

[13] https://guardian.ng/politics/2019-imo-guber-65-candidates-jostle-to-take-over-from-okorocha/

Table 2: Electoral Delimitation/Statistics of Imo State

SEN. DISTRICT	FED. CONST.	STATE CONST.	LGA	HEADQUARTERS	WARD	PUs	VOTERs
IMO EAST	Aboh Mbaise/Ngor Okpala	Aboh Mbaise	Aboh Mbaise	Aboh	12	212	111,207
		Ngor Okpala	Ngor Okpala	Umuneke Ngor	11	193	102,048
	Ahiazu Mbaise/Ezinihitte	Ahiazu Mbaise	Ahiazu-Mbaise	Afororu	12	185	98,887
		Ezinihitte	Ezinihitte	Itu	12	175	91,595
	Ikeduru/Mbaitoli	Ikeduru	Ikeduru	Iho	12	227	119,987
		Mbaitoli	Mbaitoli	Nwaorieubi	12	287	153,283
	Owerri Muncipal/Owerri North/Owerri West	Owerri Muncipal	Owerri Muncipal	Owerri	11	239	134,194
		Owerri North	Owerri North	Orie Uratta	12	236	134,557
		Owerri West	Owerri West	Umuguma	10	251	140,242
TOTAL	**4**	**9**	**9**	**9**	**104**	**2005**	**1,086,000**
IMO NORTH	Ehime Mbano/Ihite-Ubima/Obowo	Ehime-Mbano	Ehime-Mbano	Ehime	11	154	79,212
		Ihitte-Uboma	Ihitte-Uboma	Isinweke	10	117	52,108
		Obowo	Obowo	Otoko	10	128	68,690
	Isiala Mbano/Okigwe/Onuimo	Isiala Mbano	Isiala Mbano	Umuelemai	12	196	99,149
		Okigwe	Okigwe	Okigwe	11	154	76,250

		Onuimo	Onuimo	Okwe	10	97	36,548
TOTAL	**2**	**6**	**6**	**6**	**64**	**846**	**411,957**
IMO WEST	Ideato North/Ideato South	Ideato North	Ideato North	Urualla	14	196	86,905
		Ideato South	Ideato South	Dikenafai	13	152	79,310
	Orlu/Orsu/Oru East	Orlu	Orlu	Orlu	13	209	103,223
		Orsu	Orsu	Awo-Idemili	11	137	57,721
		Oru East	Oru East	Umumma	10	171	85,902
	Isu/Njaba/Nwangele/Nkwerre	Isu	Isu	Umundugba	11	123	55,203
		Njaba	Njaba	Nnenasa	11	134	64,068
		Nwangele	Nwangele	Amaigbo	11	113	55,808
		Nkwerre	Nkwerre	Nkwerre	10	131	59,899
	Oguta/Ohaji-Egbeme/Oru West	Oguta	Oguta	Oguta	11	184	95,287
		Ohaii-Egbeme	Ohaii-Egbeme	Egbema	12	210	107,456
		Oru West	Oru West	Mgbidi	10	147	71,183
TOTAL	**4**	**12**	**12**	**12**	**137**	**1907**	**921,965**
GRAND TOTAL	**10**	**27**	**27**	**27**	**305**	**4758**	**2,419,922**

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[14]

[14] From INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency; https://soluap.com/list-of-local-government-areas-in-imo-state-and-their-headquarters/ , https://www.eduweb.com.ng/imo-state-lga-ward-new-and-existing-polling-unit/

The total number of registered voters in Imo State stand at 2,419,922 as disclosed by INEC for the 2023 November 11 gubernatorial elections[15]. The highest number out of the three November 2023 off cycle elections in Nigeria, others being Kogi and Bayelsa state which have 1,932,654 and 1,056,862 voters respectively. There is a marginal increase in Imo state voters 6.5% from the total number as at the 2019 elections which stood at 2,272,293[16]. INEC also reported to have created a total number of 1,235 new polling units for the February 2023 general elections from the previously existing 3,523 polling units used for the 2019 elections[17]. It was further noted that elections would not be held in 38 polling units in Imo state citing no registered voters for their exclusion[18].

Also, prior to the February 2023 elections, 94.2% (2,280,339) of the total number of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) 2,419,922 had been collected for Imo state, leaving only 5.8% (139,583) uncollected[19]. However, the number of uncollected PVCs has reduced to at least 134,000 in a few weeks to the November 2023 elections in Imo State[20]. Efforts to ensure a greater number of PVCs are collected by INEC led to the increase in deadline to October 9th for the exercise as stated by Professor Sylvia Agu, Imo State REC[21].

Table 3: Imo State Electoral Delimitation

Number of LGAs	**27**
Number of Electoral Wards	305
Number of Senatorial Districts	3
Number of Federal Constituencies	10
Number of State Constituencies	27
Number of Polling Units	4,758
Number of PUs with no Registered Voters	38
Number of Registered Voters	2,419,922
Total Number of Parties Contesting	18
Total Number of candidates	18

[15] Channels TV (2023) 5.4m Voters Registered For Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa Polls – INEC https://www.channelstv.com/2023/10/11/5-4m-voters-registered-for-kogi-imo-bayelsa-polls-inec/
[16] PremiumTimes Newspaper (2019) FOR THE RECORD: 2019 Elections: INEC List of Registered Voters in 36 States, FCT https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/312054-for-the-record-2019-elections-inec-list-of-registered-voters-in-36-states-fct.html?tztc=1
[17] Vanguard Newspaper (2021) INEC creates 1,235 new polling units in Imo https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/05/inec-creates-1235-new-polling-units-in-imo/
[18] Sahara Reporters (2023), There will be no Election in 38 Polling Units in Imo State- Electoral Body, INEC. https://saharareporters.com/2023/10/12/there-will-be-no-election-38-polling-units-imo-state-electoral-body-inec
[19] Channels TV (2023) 2023 Elections: Number Of PVCs Collected In Each State, FCT https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/24/2023-elections-number-of-pvcs-collected-in-each-state-fct/#:~:text=A%20breakdown%20of%20the%20figure,36%20states%20and%20the%20FCT.
[20] Vanguard Newspaper (2023) https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/09/potential-voters-in-imo-yet-to-collect-134000-pvcs-for-governorship-election-inec/
[21] Ibid

Source: INEC[22]

3.2 Key Governmental Stakeholders

Tables below are the breakdown of the representatives of Imo State across the three (3) senatorial districts, and ten (10) Federal constituencies at the federal level and the twenty-seven constituencies at the State level.

Table 4: Imo State Senators at the 10th National Assembly

S/N	SENATOR	DISTRICT	PARTY
1	Sen. Ezenwa Francis Onyeuchi	Imo East	LP
2	Sen. Patrick Ndubueze	Imo North	APC
3	Sen. Osita Izunaso	Imo West	APC

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[23]

Table 5: Imo State House of Representatives Members at 10th National Assembly

S/N	MEMBER	FED. CONSTITUENCIES	PARTY
1	Hon. Canice M. Nwachukwu	Orlu/Oru East/Orsu	APC
2	Hon. Ugochinyere Onyinye Ikeagwuonu	Ideato North/South	PDP
3	Hon. Ozurigbo Ugonna	Isu/Njaba/Nkwerre/Nwangele	APC
4	Hon. Mathew Nwogu	Aboh Mbaise/Ngor Okpala	LP
5	Hon. Miriam Onuoha	Isiala Mbano /Okigwe /Onuimo	APC
6	Hon. Jonas Okeke	Ehimembano/Ihitte Uboma /Obowo	PDP
7	Hon. Emeka M. Chinedu	Ahiazu Mbaise/Ezinihitte	PDP
8	Hon. Tony Okeke	Owerri Municipal/Owerri North/ Owerri West	LP
9	Eugene Dibiagwu	Oguta/Ohaji egbema/Oru West	APC
10	Akarachi Amadi	Ikeduru/Mbaitoli	APC

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[24]

[22] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf

[23] From INEC (2023). Report of the 2023 General Election. pp. 421. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-GENERAL-ELECTION-REPORT-1.pdf (INEC report provides the parties that won the elections. We conducted extra research to get the names of the candidates).

[24] From INEC (2023). Report of the 2023 General Election. p. 430. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-GENERAL-ELECTION-REPORT-1.pdf (INEC report provides the parties that won the elections. We conducted extra research to get the names of the candidates).

Table 6: Members of the Imo State House of Assembly

S/N	MEMBER	STATE CONSTITUENCIES	PARTY
1	Hon. Chike Olemgbe	Ihitte Uboma	APC
2	Hon. Amara Iwuanyanwu	Nwangele	APC
3	Hon. Kanayo Onyemaechi	Owerri West	APC
4	Hon. Nwaneri C. Reginald	Oru East	APC
5	Hon. Chidi O. Samuel	Okigwe	APC
6	Hon. Eddy Obinna	Aboh Mbaise	APC
7	Hon. Ikpamezie Innocent Ikechukwu	Mbaitoli	APC
8	Hon. Ambrose Egu	Ngor Okpala	APC
9	Hon. Iheoha Johnleoba	Ikeduru	APC
10	Hon. Dominic Ezeriorah	Oru West	APC
11	Hon. Esile James Uba	Onuimo	APC
12	Hon. Agabige Francis Uche	Orsu	APC
13	Hon Duru Iheonukara	Ideato South	APC
14	Hon. Osuoha Uzoma Francis	Ohaji/Egbema	APC
15	Hon. Ebonine Ozioma	Njaba	APC
16	Hon. Okechukeu Udeze	Ideato North	APC
17	Hon. Ibeh C. Kennedy	Obowo	APC
18	Hon. Osuji S. Ikechukwu	Isiala Mbano	APC
19	Hon. Ozoemelam Ndubuisi	Ehime Mbano	APC
20	Hon. Obodo U. Augustune	Owerri Muncipal	APC
21	Hon. Gilbert Nwosu	Oguta	APC
22	Hon. Ihezuo Ikenna Martin	Orlu	APC
23	Hon. Ozurumba K. Emeka	Isu	APC
24	Hon. Chisom Ojukwu	Nkeerre	APC
25	Hon. Chinemetem Agbaso	Ezinihitte	APC
26	Hon. Ofurum Onumajuru	Owerri North	APC
27	Okoro Rex Chikwesiri	Ahiazu Mbaize	PDP

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

The executive arm of government in Imo State is headed by the Governor, Hope Uzodinma. The legislative arm, the State House of Assembly, is led by the Speaker, Hon. Chike Olemgbe. The third arm of government, the judiciary, is headed by the Chief Judge, Justice Theresa Eberechukwu Chikeka. The gender and tenure of the Governor, Speaker and Chief Justice are shown in the table below:

Table 7: Heads of the Three Arms of Imo State Government

Arm	Head	Name	Sex	Tenure
Executive	Governor	H.E. Hope Uzodinma[25]	Male	2020 – Till date
Legislature	Speaker	Hon. Chike Olemgbe[26]	Male	2023 – Till date
Judiciary	Chief Judge	Justice Theresa Eberechukwu Chikeka[27]	Female	2022 – Till date

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

The incumbent, Hope Uzodinma is in the governorship race as the APC candidate. This is as he has only served a single tenure and is constitutionally eligible to run for a second 4-year tenure. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also specifies eligibility criteria to run for governorship across states in Nigeria as follows:

- Candidate must be a citizen of Nigeria by birth;
- Candidate must be thirty-five years of age at the point of contesting;
- Candidate must be a member of a political party and is sponsored by that political party, and
- Candidates must have been educated up to at least School Certificate level or its equivalent.[28]

The outcome of the governorship election is decided by a simple majority method. Accordingly, the winner must receive a majority of the total votes cast and at least 25% of the votes cast in at least two thirds of the state's local government areas. If no candidate satisfies these requirements, a run-off election between the top two vote-getters is held until a winner is determined.[29]

[25] https://apc.com.ng/home/member/hope-uzodinma/
[26] Vanguard Newspaper (2023) https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/chike-olemgbe-emerges-as-speaker-of-10th-imo-assembly/
[27] This Day Newspaper (2022) https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/07/15/uzodimma-swears-in-new-imo-cj-customary-court-of-appeal-president-others
[28] The Electoral Hub (2022) Political Context Analysis: 2022 Osun State Governorship Election. https://electoralhub.org/publications/political-context-analysis/political-context-analysis-2022-osun-state-governorship-election/
[29] Ibid

Imo State Geography

Imo State is situated in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Its geographical coordinates are latitude and longitude — 7.0205351, 3.52562[30]. It was formed from the previous East Central State on February 3rd, 1976, and is named for the Imo River.[31] Abia State was created from Imo State as part of General Ibrahim Babangida's formation of additional states in 1991. Twenty-seven local government areas (LGAs) and three senatorial zones make up the new Imo State[32].

The state consists mainly of people from the Igbo ethnic group and the Igbo language is spoken by most of the population in the State[33]. One of the unique features in Imo State is the Ada Palm Plantation Complex which is thought to be one of the largest and most prosperous oil palm plantations in the world[34]. Before the discovery of petroleum, the palm plantation, which was built in 1974, was one of the country's main sources of foreign revenue[35]. It now covers roughly 4,310 hectares of land and includes a housing development[36]. Other unique features include Oguta Lake Holiday Resort with its sand beaches, the Rolling Hills of Okigwe, the Amusement Park at Owerri, the Nekede Botanical Zoological Gardens, the Palm Beaches Tourist Village at Awomama[37]. The Rolling Hills of Okigwe has several endearing traits that place it among the top tourist destinations in Imo State and around Nigeria[38]. The hill is made up of a string of rising hills that range in height and roughness[39].

The neighbouring states are Enugu and Ebonyi States to the north, Anambra State to the west, Rivers State to the south and in the North and Rivers State to the South, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom States to the east[40]. Imo State covers an area of 5,530 square kilometre[41]. The major occupation of the local people is farming producing cash crops such as oil palm, raffia palm, rice, groundnut, melon, cotton, cocoa, rubber, and maize[42]. While consumable crops including yam, cassava, cocoa yam, and maize are produced in large quantities[43]. Imo State is homogenous in terms of culture, tradition, and language. Major and cities in Imo state include Isu, Okigwe, Oguta, Orlu, Atta Ikeduru, Akokwa, Mbaise, Mbaitoli, Mbieri, Ohaji, Egbema, Orodo, Nkwerra, Ubulu, Ngor

[30] https://ng.maptons.com/2901537#google_vignette
[31] https://www.facts.ng/nigerian-states/imo/
[32] https://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Imo/Brief-History-of-Imo-State.html
[33] https://www.facts.ng/nigerian-states/imo/
[34] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/06/5-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-imo/
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid
[37] https://www.facts.ng/nigerian-states/imo/
[38] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/06/5-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-imo/
[39] Ibid
[40] https://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Imo/Brief-History-of-Imo-State.html
[41] Ibid
[42] https://www.aziza.com.ng/read/2019/10/imo-state-and-local-government-area/
[43] Ibid

Okpala, Omuma, Owerri, Mgibidi, Awo-Omamma, Izombe, Orsu, and Amaigbo, Umuowa, Orlu, Isu/Umuozu[44]. Mineral resources in Imo State include Gypsium, Lead/Zinc, Lignite, Limestone, Marcasite, Oil/Gas, Phosphate & Salt[45] and White Clay[46].

It is crucial to highlight that the geography of the State affects electoral planning, logistics, and deployment, and as such, it should be considered throughout election preparations.

[44] https://www.aziza.com.ng/read/2019/10/imo-state-and-local-government-area/
[45] https://foreignaffairs.gov.ng/nigeria/natural-resources/,
[46] https://www.facts.ng/nigerian-states/imo/

Imo State Electorates

5.1 Population

The National Bureau of Statistics NBS population projection for 2022 places Imo State's population as 5,549,300 at 2.1% annual population change[47]. From the 2006 population census, Imo had a population of 3,927,563 (males- 1,976,471 and females- 1,951,092)[48]. In the 1991 population census the population of Imo State was 2,485,635. It has been reported that the total number of registered voters in Imo state is 2,419,922[49]. This means that only 43.6% of the projected population of Imo state have so far registered. A comprehensive breakdown of the population by LGA is given in the table below:

Table 8: Imo State Population Distribution/Statistics

S/N	LGA	Population Census (1991)[50]	Population Census (2006)[51]	Population Projection (2022)[52]
1	Aboh-Mbaise	115,360	194,774	270,700
2	Ahiazu-Mbaise	96,170	170,824	237,400
3	Ehime-Mbano	97,145	130,575	181,500
4	Ezinihitte	92,462	168,767	234,600
5	Ideato North	118,519	156,161	217,100
6	Ideato South	79,236	159,654	221,900
7	Ihitte/Uboma	69,009	119,419	166,000
8	Ikeduru	108,367	149,737	208,100
9	Isiala-Mbano	106,170	197,921	275,100
10	Isu	…	164,328	228,400
11	Mbaitoli	148,531	237,474	330,100
12	Ngor-Okpala	135,711	157,858	219,400
13	Njaba	…	143,485	199,400
14	Nkwerre	…	80,270	111,600
15	Nwangele	…	127,691	177,500
16	Obowo	64,277	117,432	163,200
17	Oguta	…	142,340	197,900
18	Ohaji/Egbema	119,116	182,891	254,200
19	Okigwe	…	132,701	184,500

[47] https://www.citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/
[48] https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA017__imo/
[49] Channels TV (2023) 5.4m Voters Registered For Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa Polls – INEC https://www.channelstv.com/2023/10/11/5-4m-voters-registered-for-kogi-imo-bayelsa-polls-inec/
[50] https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA017__imo/
[51] Federal Government of Nigeria (2009). Report on the Census 2006 Final Results. https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/ng/2009/ng-government-gazette-dated-2009-02-02-no-2.pdf
[52] https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA017__imo/

20	Orlu	117,343	142,792	198,500
21	Orsu	87,521	120,224	167,100
22	Oru East	…	111,743	155,300
23	Oru West	…	115,704	160,800
24	Owerri Municipal	…	125,337	174,200
25	Owerri North	…	176,334	245,100
26	Owerri West	…	101,754	141,400
27	Unuimo	…	99,368	138,100
	TOTAL	**2,485,635**	**3,927,563**	**5,459,300**

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Imo State electorates possess various socio-economic characteristics. In terms of its workforce, 55.3% of the total population contributes to the state's economic activities[53]. Additionally, a significant 75.5% of households receive remittances from international (12.9%) and domestic (72.2%) sources[54]. The average household in Imo State comprises 4.53 family members[55].

5.2 Living Conditions

In Imo state, 83.21% of residents have access to safe drinking water and 96.43% of the population is literate[56]. 55.3% of households in the state is connected to the national grid, and 69.6% have access to electricity[57].These positives are contrasted with a high infant mortality rate, which stands at 84.44%. Also, fertility rate in the state is 5.52%[58].

Imo State grapples with poverty, with a headcount rate of 28.9% as of 2018/2019. The poverty income gap is 0.069, and the Gini coefficient stands at 27.2, indicating economic disparities[59]. The state has a dependence ratio of 0.97, and 27.5% of households are headed by women, emphasizing the role of women in the state's social fabric[60]. The state has the lowest out of school rates in Nigeria with only 1% of its of its children reportedly out of school as of August 30th 2022[61].

Education is a priority in Imo State, with several public and private higher education institutions. These institutions, such as the Federal University of Technology, Owerri,

[53] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 49 https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1123
[54] Ibid Page 62
[55] Ibid, page 9
[56] https://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/
[57] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 87 https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1123
[58] https://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/
[59] The World Bank (2022) Nigeria Poverty Assessment 2022: A Better Future for All Nigerians. p. 28 https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099730003152232753/pdf/P176301074766630fa09c990da780535511c.pdf
[60] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 9
[61]UNICEF Chief of Data, quoted in Voice of Nigeria. https://von.gov.ng/imo-and-ekiti-states-rate-lowest-on-out-of-school-children/

Imo State University, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, and Madonna University, offer a diverse range of academic programs and courses, fostering the intellectual growth and development of the state's residents[62].

[62] https://www.dailyschoolnews.com.ng/universities-polytechnics-in-imo-state/

Political Environment

The 2023 governorship election in Imo State is an off-cycle contest due to a court ruling in 2020 which declared Hope Uzodinma of the APC as the governor following a legal challenge to the 2019 election results, leading to an unscheduled change in leadership[63]. This gives a hint competitive nature of political contests in the state, showing that beyond just election day activities, the political environment is shaped by post-election activities like litigations. The political environment is reflected in its history and the events unfolding as the state prepares for the off-cycle elections on November 11, 2023. What follows in this section is a panoramic description of the political environment in Imo State.

6.1 Brief History

Imo state is mainly inhabited by people from the Igbo ethnic group. The major languages are Igbo and English language. In the precolonial era, Imo State was a part of two prominent historical entities. First, it was connected to the medieval Kingdom of Nri, an influential civilization in the region[64]. Later, it became associated with the Aro Confederacy, another notable historical entity that left its mark on the area[65].

The colonial period, marked by British rule, brought significant changes to the region. This era began after British forces defeated the Aro Confederacy in the early 1900s during the Anglo-Aro War. Following this victory, the British incorporated the area into the Southern Nigeria Protectorate, marking the start of their influence in the region. As a British colonial territory, Imo State was a part of the Defunct Eastern Region created by the Richards Constitution of 1946[66].

With Nigeria gaining its independence in 1960, this area became a part of the Eastern Region. It wasn't until 1967 that a major administrative shift occurred, making the region a part of the newly created East Central State[67]. This change reflected the evolving political landscape of the nation after gaining independence.

A pivotal moment in the history of Imo State took place on February 3, 1976, under the leadership of General Murtala Muhammad. This was when Imo State was formally established, separating from the former East-Central State.[68] This marked a significant step towards granting the state more autonomy and control over its own affairs. Another significant adjustment occurred in 1991 during the time of General Ibrahim Babangida. Abia State was carved out of Imo State, redefining the state's boundaries as we know

[63] https://humanglemedia.com/off-cycle-polls-insecurity-threatens-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/
[64] https://allnews.ng/state-details/imo
[65] Ibid
[66] https://nigerianscholars.com/tutorials/west-african-constitutional-development/arthur-richards-constitution/
[67] www.imostate.gov.ng
[68] https://naijabiography.com/history-culture/history-of-imo-state/

them today[69]. These historical transformations have left an indelible mark on the culture, governance, and social dynamics of Imo State. Since its creation, Imo state has had 16 political leaders as contained in the table below:

Table 9: Imo State Administration Since Creation in 1976

S/N	NAME	Party	Tenure
1	Ndubuisi Kanu	Military	Mar. 1976 - 1977
2	Adekunle Lawal	Military	1977 - Jul. 1978
3	Sunday Ajibade Adenihun	Military	Jul 1978 - Oct. 1979
4	Samuel Onunaka Mbakwe	NPP	Oct. 1979 - Dec 1983
5	Ike Nwachukwu	Military	Jan. 1984 - Aug 1985
6	Allison Amakoduna Madueke	Military	Aug 1985 - Jan 1986
7	Amadi Ikwechegh	Military	Aug. 1986 - 1986
8	Anthony E. Oguguo	Military	1990 - 1992
9	Evan Enwerem	NRC	1992 - Nov 1993
10	James N.J. Aneke	Military	Dec. 1993 to Aug. 1996
11	Tanko Zubairu	Military	Aug. 1996 - May 1999
12	Achike Udenwa	PDP	May 1999 - May 2007
13	Ikedi G. Ohakim	PPA[70] / PDP	May 2007 - May 2011
14	Owelle Rochas Anayo Okorocha	APC	May 2011 - May 2019
15	Emeka Ihedioha	PDP	May 2019 - January 2020
16	Hope Uzodinma	APC	January 2020 to date

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[71]

6.2 The 2023 Election

The 2023 gubernatorial election in Imo State has 18 candidates as contestants. Amongst these, the major contestants are the candidates of the APC, PDP, and LP. The APC and PDP have been historically dominant in national-level politics across Nigeria, whereas the LP emerged as a major force in the 2023 general elections. In Imo State, APC holds sway as the incumbent party.

Incumbent Governor Hope Uzodinma, representing the All Progressives Congress (APC), is eligible for re-election. He assumed the role of Imo State governor in 2020 following the Supreme Court's nullification of the election of Emeka Ihedioha from the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Prior to becoming governor, Uzodinma had a successful political career as a two-term senator representing the Imo West Senatorial District from 2011 to 2019. He is widely recognized for his popularity, the backing of

[69] Ibid
[70] Governor Ohakim came in under the platform of Progressive People Alliance (PPA) and later defected to PDP https://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/08/defection-ppa-asks-court-to-sack-imo-gov-deputy/
[71] Compiled from https://www.dawodu.com/state-governors/imo-17

his party, which is in power at the national level, and his demonstrated capacity in governance, making him a strong contender for re-election.

Senator Samuel Anyanwu, a member of the PDP, hails from the Imo East senatorial district. He is not only a seasoned politician but also serves as the National Secretary of the PDP. Senator Anyanwu's extensive experience in local politics includes victories in senatorial and State House of Assembly elections, as well as service as a local government chairman. These credentials make him a formidable candidate in the upcoming elections.

In line with the INEC timetable and schedule for the Imo governorship election, campaigns by political parties began officially on 14 June 2023 and it is to end on 9 November 2023[72]. Since the beginning of campaign each party have carried out consolidated efforts towards ensuring the victory of their parties in the election. Campaign rallies have witnessed party chieftains showing support for the party's candidate. The APC for example, has assembled a robust campaign council comprising 582 members in preparation for the upcoming governorship election[73]. Some of the prominent figures within the council include the Chairman, Governor Bassey Otu of Cross River State, the Governor of Ebonyi, Francis Nwifuru, and Benjamin Kalu, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, amongst others. The council also benefits from the involvement of Rochas Okorocha, a former Senator. This formidable campaign council was officially inaugurated on Saturday, September 16, at the Landmark Event Centre in Owerri.

Similarly, the Labour Party has constituted a campaign council composed of 481 members[74], tasked with planning and executing the party's campaign for the forthcoming governorship election in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo States. The council includes key figures such as State Chairman Callistus Ihejiagwa, the Director-General of the Council, Chime Nzeribe, among others.

Imo State PDP has also established a 363-member campaign team in preparation for the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo States[75]. The council is led by Rt. Hon. Emeka Ihedioha CON, who serves as the Chairman of the Presidential Campaign Council, bringing his wealth of experience to the forefront. Chief Charles Ezekwem assumes the vital role of Director of Campaign, while Engr. Charles Ugwuh, the State Chairman of the Party, plays a crucial leadership role within the council. Additionally, the council includes several other notable members, including Evang. Mike Ikoku, Barr

[72] https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/TIMETABLE-FOR-2023-KOGI-BAYELSA-IMO-GOVERNORSHIP-ELECTION-1.pdf
[73] https://www.kemifilani.ng/news/imo-guber-full-list-of-apc-582-man-campaign-council
[74] https://www.pulse.ng/news/politics/lp-inaugurates-481-member-campaign-council-for-imo-guber/488r90c
[75] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/07/guber-polls-pdp-unveils-363-member-campaign-team-for-bayelsa-kogi-imo/

Golden Nwosu, Chief Ben Duru, Hon Henry Onwukwe, Hon Athan Ogu, Hon Meekam Mgbenwelu, Dr Bruno Ekwelem, Barr (Sir) Tony Eze, Mrs Gertrude Obiefule, Dr Nnamdi Nsorom, and Chief Mike Okafor. Together, this diverse and experienced team will spearhead the PDP's campaign efforts in Imo State, shaping the party's strategy and outreach for the upcoming election.

Senator Athan Achonu, running under the banner of the Labour Party, is a significant contender hailing from Imo North. He previously served as a senator, although his tenure was cut short by a court ruling in 2015. Despite this setback, Achonu has resurfaced as the Labour Party's governorship candidate, earning 134 votes to secure his nomination, besting his opponent with 121 votes in April 2023. His presence in the race as the only major candidate from Imo North adds a unique dimension to the electoral landscape.

6.3 Intra-Party Conflicts

Party disunity can hinder effective campaigning, weaken grassroots mobilization, and reduce the party's ability to present a strong, unified front to voters. It can also result in a splintering of support among party members, potentially leading to a loss of votes to other political parties. Furthermore, the public perception of a party in disarray can erode voter confidence and make it difficult to attract new supporters. The inability to resolve internal conflicts can also overshadow the party's policy agenda and campaign messaging. The period before the 2023 governorship elections in Imo State has been marked by intra-party conflicts, specifically within the Labour Party as detailed below:

Labour Party

Ahead of the 2023 general elections, Imo State Labour Party has been faced with an internal party issue which has resulted in the factionalizaiton of the party and divisions about who is the real candidate. Support for the Labour Party candidate in Imo State is divided, with one faction backing Senator Athan Achonu, who was initially declared as the party's governorship candidate by the National Working Committee, led by Julius Abure. In contrast, another faction led by Lamide Apapa has unequivocally rejected Achonu as the party's candidate. This internal discord has not only caused confusion among voters but has also resulted in a noticeable rift within the party.[76] The internal conflict within the Labour Party in Imo State poses a challenge to the party's prospects ahead of the 2023 governorship election. This factional dispute over the party's official governorship candidate has the potential to weaken the party's unity and cohesion.

In the run-up to the 2023 governorship election, the Labour Party in Imo State faces the challenge of reconciling these internal factions and presenting a united front to the electorate. The party's ability to effectively address and resolve this internal conflict will

[76] https://thewhistler.ng/imo-guber-ukaegbu-not-achonu-is-labour-party-imo-candidate-apapa-faction-insists/

be crucial in determining its success in the upcoming election. Failure to do so may put the party at a disadvantage and impact its prospects in a highly competitive political landscape.

6.4 Citizens Participation and Apathy

Elections that are free, fair, and credible depend on citizen involvement. The 2023 general election held on February 25, and March 11, 2023, were characterized by pervasive voter apathy. This makes it necessary for efforts to be exerted toward ensuring improved citizens' participation as Imo State prepares to elect her governor on November 11. There is a pressing need for continuous voter education to be ongoing and continue through election-day to encourage participation. Sensitization, awareness-building, and voter mobilization are all components of promoting public engagement in the election process.

6.5 COVID-19 Pandemic

The INEC policy for conducting elections in the framework of COVID-19 is still appropriate, notwithstanding the fact that experience to date indicates that voters rarely abide by COVID-19 protocols. [77] This is also because the Commission is yet to revise its COVID-19 policy. The Policy stipulate, among other things, the usage of facemasks in polling places as well as a social distance of two meters, the use of sanitizers, and the use of mentholated spirit to clean the accrediting machines and other surfaces. Like previous recently held elections, there is a strong probability that COVID-19 regulations will not be followed as Nigerians have returned to their pre-covid19 way of life.

[77] https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/media/files/ElectionsDuringCOVID-19July2020.pdf

Contesting Political Parties

Eighteen candidates have been submitted by political parties as their party nominees for the November 11, 2023 election in Imo State. The political parties are Accord Party (A), Action Alliance (AA), African Action Congress (AAC), African Democratic Congress (ADC), Action Democratic Party (ADP), All Progressive Congress (APC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Allied Peoples Movement (APM), Action People Party (APP), Boot Party (BP), Labour Party (LP), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), National Rescue Movement (NRM), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Young Progressives Party (YPP) and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP)[78]. Below is the comprehensive list of eighteen political parties with their governorship and deputy governorship candidates[79]:

Table 10: Political Parties and Candidates

Party	Position	Candidate	Gender	PWD	Age
A	Governor	Okere John Jude Uchenna	M	X	49
	Deputy	Ibe Kenechukwu	M	X	52
AA	Governor	Ogunewe L. K. Jack	M	X	60
	Deputy	Ukenna Marcel Onuoha	M	X	62
AAC	Governor	Awulonu E. Ifeanyi	M	X	54
	Deputy	Korie Michael Obilor	M	X	44
ADC	Governor	Okoroma James Otumbadi	M	X	56
	Deputy	Uche Chigozie Edwin	M	X	43
ADP	Governor	Nwoga Onyekachi Steve	M	X	54
	Deputy	Ottih Vivian Ogechi	F	X	42
APC	Governor	Uzodimma Odidika Hope	M	X	64
	Deputy	Ekomaru Chinyere Ihuoma	F	X	56
APGA	Governor	Ejiogu Anthony	M	X	49
	Deputy	Uche Anselem Ejike	M	X	66
APM	Governor	Edoziem Clinton Chibuike	M	X	40
	Deputy Governor	Nzeogu John Uchechukwu	M	X	35
APP	Governor	Achilike Anderson Obieze	M	X	41
	Deputy	Ikeagwuonu O. Uchenna	M	X	42
BP	Governor	Iwuanyanwu Isaac	M	X	35

[78] INEC (2023). Amended List of Candidates for the 2023 Imo State Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AMENDEMENT-N-O-1-AMENDED-LIST-OF-CANDIDATES-FOR-2023-IMO-STATE-GOVERNORSHIP-ELECTION-PURSUANT-TO-COURT-ORDERS.pdf

[79] Ibid

	Deputy	Aligekwe Eugene Alaoma	M	X	64
LP	Governor	Achonu Nneji	M	√	64
	Deputy	Nwulu-Onyeulo Anthony	M	X	44
NNPP	Governor	Odunzeh Uche Ben	M	X	42
	Deputy	Samuel G. Chukwubuikem	M	X	35
NRM	Governor	Okwara Lawrence Cole	M	X	46
	Deputy	Nwachukwu C. Joseph	M	X	46
PDP	Governor	Anyanwu S. Nnaemeka	M	X	57
	Deputy	Onyereri Chukwudi Jones	M	X	55
PRP	Governor	Uchechukwu Ishiodu[80]	M	X	41
	Deputy	Ahumbe Chiazor	M	X	43
SDP	Governor	Ekwebelem Obinna Bright	M	X	43
	Deputy	Nlem Uchenna Cyril	M	X	47
YPP	Governor	Opara Kemdi Chino	M	X	63
	Deputy	Okereke Leo. Nwafor	M	X	78
ZLP	Governor	Andy Chibuike	M	X	40
	Deputy	Nwigwe Paschal Ugonna	M	X	36

Source: INEC[81]

Since the beginning of the current democratic regime in 1999, power has been shared among four political parties in Imo State with Achike Udenwa of the PDP (1999–2007), Ikedi Ohakim of the PPA/PDP (2007–2011), Rochas Okorocha of the APGA/APC (2011–2019)[82], Chief Emeka Ihedioha of the PDP (2019 - 2020) and presently Hope Uzodinma of the APC who is also the party candidate for the November 11 2023 governorship elections[83].

APC remains the party to beat in the governorship election, controlling both the Federal and State governments, two senatorial seats, 5 House of Representative members and 26 State House of Assembly members. The closest challengers are the PDP and LP. Labour Party has one senatorial seat at the 10th National Assembly and 2 House of Representatives members while PDP has 3 House of Representative members and 1 State House of Assembly member[84].

[80]INEC was mandated by a court order to include PRP as a candidate in the election.
[81] INEC (2023) https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AMENDEMENT-N-O-1-AMENDED-LIST-OF-CANDIDATES-FOR-2023-IMO-STATE-GOVERNORSHIP-ELECTION-PURSUANT-TO-COURT-ORDERS.pdf
[82] Ojukwu and Abiakwu (2019) The Role of Music in Leadership: A Case Study of the Governance of Imo State from 2011-2019, UJAH, 20(3), 99 - 118
[83] Yiaga (2023) https://yiaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Political-and-Security-Trends-in-Bayelsa-Kogi-and-Imo-state_web.pdf
[84] Ibid

The candidate of the APC, Hope Uzodinma has a high probability of securing a second tenure due to his advantage as an incumbent. The incumbent party won 26 out of 27 seats in the State House of Assembly in the 2023 general election, showing how popular and powerful APC as a party is among the Imo people. However, Sen. Sam Anyanwu of PDP, a former federal lawmaker and party veteran, is another strong candidate who may be hoping the party's popularity over the years in Imo State propels him to unseat the ruling party and the incumbent governor. His ambition to gain the number one seat is not helped by the defection of PDP state executives to the APC and the allies of party chieftain Emeka Ihedioha moving to other parties[85]. Achonu Nneji, the LP candidate, may have a long-shot in the elections. The LP has emerged as the third force in national politics and has some notable wins in Imo state with 3 national seats to their credit. Nonetheless, internal party crisis is still an issue as he faces litigations from other LP governorship aspirants[86].

Another party and candidate to consider is Ogunewe Lincoln Keonyemere Jack of AA. He was the favourite to clinch the LP governorship ticket but lost to the Achonu Nneji and subsequently defected to AA where he won the governorship ticket[87]. Other political parties that have fielded candidates are not well-known in the state and have not received much media attention.

[85] Vanguard Newspaper (2023) https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/08/imo-decides-2023-will-opposition-stop-uzodimma/
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid

Inclusion and Representation

Democracy is centered on majority having control over decisions. For these decisions to be reached fairly, there must be inclusive participation and representation through the democratic institutions upon which these decisions are achieved[88]. Despite these two elements being key in democratic setting, in Nigeria there are basic challenges of under-representation of groups like women, youths and persons with disability (PWD) in the electoral processes as a result of structural institution and socio-cultural beliefs[89]. Efforts have been exerted at addressing these challenges through policy reforms. For example, the year 2019 saw the endorsement of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018[90] which represent a step forward to stop the discrimination of these group. Other such reform efforts include the 2014 INEC Gender Policy (IGP) which has enabled Commission to embark on a more gender-based approach in its activities[91], the National Youth Policy, The Electoral Act 2022, and the Discrimination Against PWD (Prohibition) Act[92], among others.

Some insights into the degree of inclusion and representation of the marginalized groups in the upcoming November 11, 2023, election can be gained from the breakdown of the candidates running in the Imo State election.

Table 11: Inclusivity of Governorship Candidates

	PARTY	CONTESTANT	M	F	PWD	YOUTH
1	A	Okere JohnJude Uchenna	√	-	-	-
2	AA	Ogunewe Lincoln Keonyemere Jack	√	-	-	-
3	AAC	Awulonu Emmanuel Ifeanyi	√	-	-	-
4	ADC	Okoroma James Otumbadi	√	-	-	-
5	ADP	Nwoga Onyekachi Steve	√	-	-	-
6	APC	Uzodimma Odidika Hope	√	-	-	-
7	APGA	Ejiogu Anthony	√	-	-	-
8	APM	Edoziem Clinton Chibuike	√	-	-	-
9	APP	Achilike Anderson Obieze	√	-	-	
10	BP	Iwuanyanwu Isaac	√	-	-	√

[88] IDEAS (2013) Inclusive Political Participation and Representation https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/inclusive-political-participation-and-representation.pdf, https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Report-on-Inclusivity-in-Nigerias-Elections.pdf

[89] The Electoral Hub (2022) Political Context Analysis: 2022 Osun State Governorship Election. https://electoralhub.org/publications/political-context-analysis/political-context-analysis-2022-osun-state-governorship-election/

[90] https://blogs.worldbank.org/nasikiliza/social-inclusion-persons-disabilities-nigeria-challenges-and-opportunities

[91] https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/INEC-GENDER-POLICY-2021-2025.pdf

[92] Ibid 2

11	LP	Achonu Nneji	√	-	√	-
12	NNPP	Odunzeh Uche Ben	√	-	-	-
13	NRM	Okwara Lawrence Cole	√	-	-	-
14	PDP	Anyanwu Samuel Nnaemeka	√	-	-	-
15	PRP	Uchechukwu Ishiodu	√	-	-	-
16	SDP	Ekwebelem Obinna Bright	√	-	-	-
17	YPP	Opara Kemdi Chino	√	-	-	-
18	ZLP	Andy Chibuike	√	-	-	-

Source: INEC[93]

The governorship candidates for the Imo state November 11, 2023 election are presented in Table 1 above. There is a total number of eighteen political parties with their respective candidates. The gender ratio of male to female is 18:0. Out of the seventeen candidates across the political parties, no female candidate was given a ticket. The distribution of the candidates by age saw only one candidate (5.5%) between the ages of 18 -35 representing the youth category. The PWD demography has one candidate amongst the candidates. This statistic highlights the skewed representation away from the marginalized population. The marginalized groups in the Imo State governorship race makes up only 11.1% of the totality of the population of candidates. Similar to the Kogi state November 2023 governorship candidates, the young people are under-represented, with only BP fielding a youth as candidate. PWDs also had only one candidate fielded by the LP in the governorship contest. More efforts are, thus, needed to close these inclusivity gaps.

Table 12: Inclusivity of Deputy Governorship Candidates

	PARTY	CONTESTANT	M	F	PWD	YOUTH
1	A	Ibe Kenechukwu	√		-	-
2	AA	Ukenna Marcel Onuoha	√		-	-
3	AAC	Korie Michael Obilor	√		-	-
4	ADC	Uche Chigozie Edwin	√		-	-
5	ADP	Ottih Vivian Ogechi		√	-	-
6	APC	Ekomaru Chinyere Ihuoma		√	-	-
7	APGA	Uche Anselem Ejike	√		-	-
8	APM	Nzeogu John Uchechukwu	√		-	√
9	APP	Ikeagwuonu Obinna Uchenna	√		-	-
10	BP	Aligekwe Eugene Alaoma	√		-	-
11	LP	Nwulu-Onyeulo Anthony	√		-	-

[93] INEC (2023) Publication of the Final List of Candidates for Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi States Governorship Elections https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AMENDEMENT-N-O-1-AMENDED-LIST-OF-CANDIDATES-FOR-2023-IMO-STATE-GOVERNORSHIP-ELECTION-PURSUANT-TO-COURT-ORDERS.pdf

12	NNPP	Samuel Godstime Chukwubuikem	√		-	√
13	NRM	Nwachukwu Chikwendu Joseph	√		-	-
14	PDP	Onyereri Chukwudi Victor Jones	√		-	-
15	PRP	Ahumbe Chiazor	√		-	-
16	SDP	Nlem Uchenna Cyril	√		-	-
17	YPP	Okereke Leo. Nwafor	√		-	-
18	ZLP	Nwigwe Paschal Ugonna	√		-	-

Source: INEC[94]

Table 2 is the summary of the deputy governorship candidates in Imo state. Two (11.1%) candidates out of the eighteen are female representing the Women group. Also, two candidates between the ages of 18 – 35 years represent the youth groups. While the PWD is not represented by any candidate across the political parties. The higher percentage of 22.2% (4) holds well for inclusivity under the deputy governorship category. However, this demonstrates a pitiful degree of inclusivity and representation, especially for PWD highlighting the necessity for the ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic institutions.

Thus, two female (5.5%) out of the thirty-six potential candidates (eighteen governorship and eighteen deputy governorship) represent the women group. This is worse than the Kogi state women representation and considerably below the percentage reserved for women in the National Gender Policy (NGP) where the minimum percentage required is 35%. For the youth representation, there is one governorship and two deputy governorship candidates making up three (8.3%) out of the possible thirty-four. While the 2.7% is a positive return for the PWD marginalized group

This under-representation of the marginalized groups seen from the low number of candidates vying for political positions can be attributed to political parties. They have been branded to be less democratic in its internal affairs and controlled by few individuals who are known to be males. Consequently, these accusations resulted to the delisting of 74 political parties by INEC for defaulting in its constitutional guidelines laid out for women, youth and PWDs. This action however has not yielded positive results reflective in the skewed representation towards the status quo of males[95].

In order to address the exclusion of citizens because of their social construction as women, youth, or PWDs, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) has persisted in working with important stakeholders and beneficiaries, including state and non-state actors. The aftermath results of the general elections prompted their further action when

[94] INEC (2023). Publication of the Final List of Candidates for Bayelsa, Imo And Kogi States Governorship Elections. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AMENDEMENT-N-O-1-AMENDED-LIST-OF-CANDIDATES-FOR-2023-IMO-STATE-GOVERNORSHIP-ELECTION-PURSUANT-TO-COURT-ORDERS.pdf

[95] https://www.wfd.org/story/changing-political-landscape-nigeria-through-inclusive-practices

they organized a multistakeholder meeting to reflect on the abysmal numbers recorded by Women, youth and PWDs. Furthermore, they have engaged the clerks of the National Assembly to sensitize them while also strengthening its relationship with political parties. A memorandum of understanding has been drafted in this regard with Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC)[96].

[96] Ibid

Main Political and Social-Cultural Actors

9.1 Political Actors

Hope Uzodinma is the current Executive Governor of Imo State. He was sworn-in as the Executive Governor of Imo State on the 15th January, 2020 after he challenged at the supreme court the victory of the PDP candidate Emeka Ihedioha for the March 2019 elections in which he won and was declared the duly elected Governor of Imo State. He also served as a senator under the platform of PDP representing Imo West Constituency at the 7th Assembly from 2011 – 2015[97]. He is contesting for a second term in office under the platform of the APC for the November 11, 2023 governorship elections[98].

Rochas Okorocha is a former two term Governor of Imo State who served as Governor between the period of 29 May 2011 to 29 May 2019. His first governorship tenure was won on the platform of APGA while his second tenure was won under the APC in 2015[99]. He has also served as a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria representing Imo West Constituency at the 9th Assembly from 2019 – 2023[100]. Rochas in 2005 formed the party Action Alliance (AA)[101].

Emeka Ihedioha was the Imo State Governor until the judgement of the Supreme Court on January 14, 2020 nullified his position as the Governor of Imo State in favour of the incumbent Governor who was declare the legitimate winner of the 2019 Imo gubernatorial election. Prior to this, he represented the People of Aboh Mbaise/Ngor Okpala Federal Constituency at the House of representatives from 2003 to 2015. During his time at the house, he was the chairman, house committee on Marine Transport from 2003 – 2007, chairman house committee on Cooperation and Integration in Africa and later the Chief Whip. He became the deputy speaker of the House from 2011 to 2015[102].

Ikedi Ohakim is the 4th Governor of Imo state that was elected democratically and sworn-in on the 29th of May 2007. His tenure ran from 2007 – 2011. Between the years 1992 to 1993, he was the commissioner for industry and tourism in Imo state and was credited with designing the State Industrial Development blueprint. He is also one of the founding members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) where he served as one of the members of the National Finance Committee[103].

Samuel Anyanwu is the PDP candidate for the November 11, 2023 governorship election. He contested and lost the PDP primaries to Emeka Ihedioha in 2019. Anyanwu served as a senator representing Imo East Senatorial District in the 8th National

[97] https://apc.com.ng/home/member/hope-uzodinma/
[98] Ibid
[99] https://www.entrepreneurs.ng/rochas-okorocha/
[100] Ibid
[101] Ibid
[102] https://www.celebsagewiki.com/emeka-ihedioha
[103] https://www.manpower.com.ng/people/15849/ikedi-ohakim

Assembly from 2015 – 2019 where he was the chairman senate committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public petitions and Vice chairman for the following committees: Banking, Insurance and other Financial Institutions, Customs, Excise and Tariffs, Marine Transport. He represented his local government Ikeduru at the State House of Assembly for two terms from 2007 – 2015[104].

Achonu Nneji is the Labour party governorship candidate for the off-cycle election in Imo state. He was also a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria representing Imo South Senatorial District at the 8th National Assembly. However, his tenure was short-lived as he was removed by the court in December 15 by the ruling of the Appeal Court in Imo state[105].

Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba is a former Minister of State for Education. He has also served as member House of Representative from 1999 – 2003 under the Okigwe North Federal Constituency. Under the All People's Party (APP), he contested for the governorship position in 2003, 2007 and 2011 but lost out in all elections. He was re-elected in 2019 for the Okigwe North Federal Constituency under the platform of Accord party. In the same year he became Minister of State for Education after he resigned his position. He is known as one of the founding members of the APC[106].

Achike Udenwa was the Governor of Imo State under the PDP serving two terms from 1999 to 2007. He was thereafter appointed a minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2008 until he was removed in 2010 by the former President Goodluck Jonathan[107].

Osita Izunaso is a serving senator in the 10th National Assembly representing Imo West Senatorial District. This is his second outing as a senator having been elected into the red chamber in the year 2007. He has also served as an honourable member Federal House of Representatives in 2003. Izunaso was one of the central founding members of the APC and became the first National Organising Secretary of the party[108].

9.2 Socio-Cultural Actors

HRH Dr E.C Okeke (Ezeudo II of Amaifeke) is the traditional ruler of Amaifeke ancient kingdom. He was inaugurated as the Chairman of Imo State Council of Traditional Institution on the 11th of June, 2020 by the Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodinma. He was the former chairman of the Orlu zone Council of Traditional Rulers[109].

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[104] https://www.politiciansdata.com/content/samuel-nnaemeka-anyanwu/
[105] https://www.manpower.com.ng/people/15481/athanasius-achonu
[106] https://gistflare.com.ng/chukwuemeka-nwajiuba-biography-age-family-wife-mother-phone-number-president-twitter-pictures-net-worth/
[107] https://www.manpower.com.ng/people/15809/achike-udenwa
[108] This Day Newspaper (2023) https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/05/06/osita-izunaso-a-core-party-man-who-wants-to-become-senate-president
[109] https://www.watchdogng.com/2020/06/eze-okeke-heads-imo-traditional-rulers-community-policing/

HRH Eze Goddy Okeke is the Ezediohanma I of Umukpa Alike and the monarch of Okigwe zone in Imo State

HRH Eze David Akujiobi Osuagwu is the Eze Ezikochi of Awaka and the monarch of Owerri Zone in Imo State.

HRH Eze T. A. Obiefule. Okiadurui is the Eze Okiruru of Umudioka and the monarch of Orlu Zone in Imo State.

Other notable personalities are:

Patrick Ndubueze is a serving Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria representing Imo North Senatorial District in the 10th National Assembly. In 1992, he was elected to represent Okigwe Federal Constituency at the Federal House of Representatives[110].

Ezenwa Francis Onyeuchi was elected as a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria representing Imo East Senatorial district in the 9th National Assembly and was re-elected as a Senator in 2023. Prior to this he was a member of the House of Representatives representing the Owerri Municipal/Owerri-North/West Federal Constituency from June 2011 – June 2019[111].

Professor Maurice Iwu is a professor of pharmacognosy and a former INEC chairman who was in charge of the Commission from June 2005 to April 2010. During his tenure as the Chairman of INEC, Maurice Iwu introduced innovations that significantly contributed to the success of the Commission. These included establishing partnerships with development partners, leading to the creation of the Joint Donor Basket Fund. Additionally, he set up The Electoral Institute (TEI), tasked with conducting research, and training for Commission staff, election workers, and security personnel[112]. Furthermore, Iwu improved staff welfare by introducing a hazard allowance, thirteenth-month salary, and a housing scheme, all of which enhanced the working conditions of INEC employees and boosted their morale[113]. Even after his tenure, Maurice Iwu has remained relevant in the electoral space by providing recommendations on ways to improve the electoral process. He continues to offer his opinions on various national issues, particularly in Imo State, his home state, where he actively engages in discussions and developments that impact the State[114].

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[110] Vanguard Newspaper (2023) https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/05/10th-nass-imo-north-senator-elect-ndubueze-joins-race/

[111] https://nass.gov.ng/mps/single/94# , https://citizenscienceNigeria.org/public-offices/persons/ezenwa-francis-onyewuchi

[112] Iwu M. (2021). Electoral Training and Education: The Case of the Electoral Institute in Nigeria. IDEA

[113] The Electoral Hub (2024). Electoral Commissions in Nigeria since 1958 (Forthcoming). The Electoral Hub with support from the Open Society Foundation.

[114] Premium Times. (2014). Ex-INEC boss, Maurice Iwu, gives recipe for credible 2015 elections. Premiumtimesng.com. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/171787-ex-inec-boss-maurice-iwu-gives-recipe-

Kanayo O. Kanayo is a popular Nollywood actor a United Nations Ambassador. He was conferred with member of the Federal Republic by the Nigerian Government for his contribution to the growth of the Country[115].

credible-2015-elections.html; Arise News. (2021). Nigeria: Maurice Iwu Speaks on Insecurity in Southeast Imo State. Arise News. https://www.arise.tv/nigeria-maurice-iwu-speaks-on-insecurity-in-southeast-imo-state/

[115] https://www.manpower.com.ng/people/16323/kanayo-o-kanayo

Civil Society Organisations

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are acknowledged as significant non-state development agents. Their duties encompass a wide range of areas, including social welfare, economic empowerment, humanitarian aid, political engagement, facilitation of efficient democratic governance, upholding the rule of law, and strengthening the quality of elections.[116] In Nigeria, CSOs have been essential to the establishment of democracy and democratic principles[117]. The works of CSOs have been notable in the buildup to November 11, 2023. The following are the contributions so far:

10.1 IRIAD - The Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub is the electoral arm of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development. The organization has been an active stakeholder in the electoral space, promoting electoral knowledge, integrity and accountability. Ahead of the 2023 off-cycle elections, The Electoral Hub prepared a factsheet and Political Context Analysis to provide insight into the political and social environment ahead of the election[118]. On November 7, 2023, The Electoral Hub also held a roundtable on Citizens' Rights and Impact of Insecurity on Elections[119]. This is part of its project supported by the **Open Society Foundations** and targeted at providing support to INEC through the production, policy dialogue and dissemination of three well-researched policy and briefing papers on the impact of insecurity on elections.

The Electoral Hub also proffered recommendations for improving ad-hoc staff performance following drawing from its Electoral Ad-hoc Staff Experience Sharing Roundtable. They have also disseminated election-related information through infographics aimed at to improve knowledge public knowledge about the electoral process and strengthening their quality of participation.

10.2 International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law

International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law is a non-governmental organization based in the South-East that promotes the development of democracy and good governance, including leadership accountability, observance of the law and civil

[116] https://www.justice-security.ng/understanding-operational-context-civil-society-organisations-nigeria-0
[117] Oke and Atufe-musa (2021) The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Deepening Democratic Tenets in Nigeria. Gusua International Journal of Management and Social Sciences. 4(1), 168 - 180
[118] www.electoralhub.org/publications
[119] https://electoralhub.org/news-and-events/gallery/
https://electoralhub.org/publications/policy-papers/impact-of-insecurity-on-inecs-preparedness-for-the-2023-general-election/
https://electoralhub.org/publications/policy-papers/gender-and-inclusion-dimension-of-impact-of-insecurity-on-the-2023-general-election/
https://electoralhub.org/publications/policy-papers/threat-of-electoral-violence-during-and-after-the-2023-general-election/

liberties, and the provision and enforcement of public safety and security that complies with human rights[120]. The CSO has been vocal in the build up to the Imo state governorship election demanding the election be conducted in a fair and transparent manner by INEC. In a letter addressed to the INEC chairman, the organization called for the transfer of the REC and Electoral Officers (Eos) in the state as their lengthy stay in the state makes them susceptible to manipulation and they have stayed for a longer period of time than the duration allowed by The Electoral Act 2022. They have continued to be observant and keenly monitoring the activities of the Commission[121].

10.3 Imo Public Media Coalition

Imo Public Media Coalition (IPMEC) is coalition of media practitioners, CSOs and other non-state actors for the November 11 governorship election in Imo state. This alliance is to create a level-playing field for all governorship candidates, educate voters in collaboration with INEC and ensure the desired outcome of a standard election to the people. They have organized a political debate featuring all the party candidates vying for the governorship position which will be aired by 17 radio and television stations in Imo state on the 26th of October 2023[122].

10.4 YIAGA

Yiaga Africa one of the leading Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) actively engaging the electoral process carried out a report titled the "Emerging Political and Security Trends in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo States". The report highlights emerging issues as well as contextual background ahead of the Off-cycle elections on November 11, 2023. Some of the emerging issues identified include, insecurity, distrust in Government institutions/weak institutions, unfair competition/executive impunity, intimidation of political opponents, poverty/economic crisis[123]. Yiaga Africa would also be engaging the Imo State governorship election through the #WatchingTheVote a citizen led election observation initiative geared[124].

10.5 Open Arms Initiative for Sustainable Development (OPAISD)

OPAISD is one of the leading CSO working on electoral governance in Imo State. For the governorship election, OPAISD actively engaged INEC with regular attendance at INEC stakeholders' briefings, and with support from INEC, conducted voter education activities - market sensitization, outreach and House to House campaign in Nwangele LGA for increased participation in the election. It also coordinated election observation

[120] https://intersociety-ng.org/who-we-are/
[121] Vanguard (2023) https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/08/cso-raises-alarm-over-alleged-compromise-of-imo-guber-election/
[122] The Guardian Newspaper (2023) https://guardian.ng/news/imo-guber-media-csos-collaborate-to-organise-political-debate-for-candidates/
[123] https://yiaga.org/publications/political-and-security-trends-in-bayelsa-kogi-and-imo-state/
[124] Ibid

and countering fake news project of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) as well as facilitated election situation room for TAF Africa's ABLE2VOTE campaign. Other activities of the organisation include: Radio programme on election sensitization to encourage women and persons with disability to fully participate in election, media campaigns to sensitize the public on tool and strategies to counter Fake News in Elections, step down training and capacity building for Umuornjo youth on countering fake news.

OPAISD also observed INEC/CBN dispatch of election sensitive materials, and specifically observed dispatch and deployment of inclusivity assistive election materials such as braille ballot guide, and magnifying glass.[125]

10.6 Foundation for Livelihood Advancement (FLA)

Another Imo State CSO that was active in the election is FLA. FLA worked in Orlu LGA and was engaged on general voter education. It conducted 'get out the votes campaign' in community markets of the LGA, good governance awareness campaigns among youths, election-no-be-war sensitizations in security risk and volatile communities in Orlu LGA, your PVC -your -power campaign for tertiary schools, FLA also actively participated in INEC/CSOs briefings and observed dispatch of election sensitive materials in some of LGAs of the State during the election. It also observed the election for partner CSOs – CDD and CTA, and coalitions- TMG[126].

[125] Juliet Okeiyi, Executive Director, OPAISD, Owerri, Imo State
[126] Kenneth Amogu, Programme Director, FLA

In (Security) and Violence

Imo state was ranked as the fifth most peaceful state in Nigeria and the most peaceful state in the South-East of the country, according to statistics gathered from 2010 to 2016 by the Foundation for Peace Professionals (FPP)[127]. Previously one of Nigeria's more tranquil regions, the Southeast has seen an increase in violence[128]. In the 2019 elections, Imo amongst other states were marred by election violence and vote box snatching in the governorship and house of assembly elections[129]. Imo State's collation and results release were also halted due to violent protests at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) collation center in Owerri[130].

Security challenges like other parts of the country remains a huge burden for Imo state "As you know, for a better part of 2020 and 2021, insecurity threatened the State with reports of various criminal activities coming incessantly. Banditry, kidnappings, insurgency, ritual killings and even cannibalism and unresolved cases of assassination were the order of the day" the governor stated[131]. According to Yiaga, five local government areas (LGAs) in Imo State: Ehime/Mbano, Okigwe, Oru West, Oru East, and Orlu have reportedly been the scene of violent incidents in the run-up to the general elections in 2023[132]. Notably, the convoy of the former governor of Imo state Ikedi Ohakim was attacked by gunmen leaving four people dead[133]. Also, the PDP chapter in Imo state reported that there was a deadly attack by more than 50 gunmen on the House of Representatives candidate for the Ideato South/Ideato North Federal Constituency on January 14, 2023, which left them in disbelief over the missed attempt[134].

In the build up to the Off-cycle November 2023 elections, the familiar enemy remains and has been tagged "*Insecurity: The monster threatening Kogi, Bayelsa, Imo off-season polls"*[135]. INEC has consistently raised concerns about the escalating violence and insecurity in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states, emphasizing the critical impact of these

[127] Daily Trust Newspaper (2018) Osun, Kogi Most Peaceful States In Nigeria – Report https://dailytrust.com/osun-kogi-most-peaceful-states-in-nigeria-report/
[128] https://pscc.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/images/publications/Pub_FES-Policy-Brief_An_analysis_of_the_evolving_patterns_of_insecurity_in_the_southeast.pdf
[129] Vanguard Newspaper (2019) https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/03/data-visualisation-election-violence-ballot-box-snatching-in-ondo-oyo-others/
[130] This Day Newspaper https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/03/11/violent-protests-stall-announcement-of-poll-results-in-imo
[131] Leadership Newspaper https://leadership.ng/insecurity-our-biggest-challenge-in-imo-uzodimma/
[132] YIAGA https://yiaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Political-and-Security-Trends-in-Bayelsa-Kogi-and-Imo-state_web.pdf
[133] The Guardian https://guardian.ng/politics/concerns-over-insecurity-in-south-east-and-possible-effects-on-2023-elections/
[134] Independent Newspaper https://independent.ng/worsening-insecurity-in-imo-threatening-our-preparation-for-2023-elections-pdp/
[135] Punch Newspaper (2023) Insecurity: The monster threatening Kogi, Bayelsa, Imo off-season polls https://punchng.com/insecurity-the-monster-threatening-kogi-bayelsa-imo-off-season-polls/

issues[136]. Below are some major incidents of election-related violence recorded in Imo State.

1. On the 18 of July, 2022 in Imo state, there was pandemonium following the reported killing of 14 youths by Ebube Agu security personnel who were returning from a wedding to their community in the Otulu area of Oru East Local Council of the state from Awo-Omamma in the neighboring Oru West Council. The youths were shot and killed[137].
2. On the 4th of December 2022, INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for Imo State, Professor Sylvia Agu reported that the INEC office in Oru West Local Government Area was attacked and vandalized by suspected hoodlums who destroyed the office furniture and fittings[138].
3. April 21, 2023, saw five police officers slain by gunmen at the Okpala Junction in the Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State. A couple from the Amankwo Okpala community named Mr. and Mrs. Chinaka Nwagu were also killed on that day[139].
4. The 19th of September 2023, it was reported that unidentified gunmen attacked and killed eight security personnel, in addition to setting two vehicles on fire. Soldiers, police officers, and men from the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps were among the security personnel impacted[140].

Given the increased security risks brought about by actions of gang and cult, vigilante and mob violence, clashes with Fulani herdsmen linked to fights over grazing land with recorded deaths, the continuous altercation between The Indigenous People of Biafra/ Eastern Security Network (IPOB/ESN) and the police, the Monday seat-at-home pronouncement by IPOB all threatening the peace and violence-free conduct of the November 11 2023 elections in Imo State, it's critical that all stakeholders come together to address this challenge and provide sufficient security to protect the voters from harm and safeguard voting materials and election workers to enable the successful conduct of the election by INEC.

[136] Ibid
[137] Ibid
[138] The Punch Newspaper https://punchng.com/imo-inec-facilities-destroyed-agency-decries-systematic-attacks/#:~:text=The%20PUNCH%20had%20reported%20that,today%2C%20Sunday%2C%20December%204.
[139] Punch Newspaper (2023) Insecurity: The monster threatening Kogi, Bayelsa, Imo off-season polls https://punchng.com/insecurity-the-monster-threatening-kogi-bayelsa-imo-off-season-polls/
[140] Ibid

Efforts at Mitigating Violence

The recognition of security as the prevailing security challenge ahead of the 2023 governorship elections in Imo State, stakeholders have responded by taking steps towards addressing the threat of insecurity issues in the state. A review of the 2023 general election by INEC during its meeting with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), a close attention way placed on the upcoming three off-cycle governorship elections in the states of Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo as the 2023 general election was evaluated to understand the way the general election was conducted for improvement and prevention of the arising security issues reported from the states[141]. INEC had earlier met with two stakeholders prior to the ICCES meeting and has also tasked the security agencies to carry out decisive actions against those perpetrating violence across the three-state preparing for the off-cycle elections.

In the same vein, Imo State stakeholders under the platform of Imo State Independent State-based Peace Architecture (ISPA) were partnered by the Kukah Centre to organize 2-day consultative meeting with the theme "Deepening Stakeholders Participation and Amplifying Citizens Voices Ahead of the 2023 off-cycle Elections in Imo State" to come up with innovative ways to provide a peaceful and credible governorship election in Imo state. While collectively expressing their concern over the outcome of the general elections, they advised the electorates to push for unity and peace in the state by desisting from acts that threaten the electoral process. They also noted that members of the Nigerian Police Force, INEC and other security personnel were undermining the election exercise's credibility and peaceful conduct in the state. While in response, CSP Ngozi Kalu, the state police commissioner's representative, stated that the command had taken notice of the problems with its officers during previous elections and had taken steps to ensure that the upcoming election on November 11th would be conducted in a credible and peaceful manner in addition to addressing any fallout[142].

In addition to efforts made by INEC, the Commission engaged with the media to seek their support for a peaceful conduct of the governorship election in Imo State. The National Commissioner and Member Information and Voter Education Committee (IVEC) Mohammed Haruna in his engagement with the media in Owerri called on media executives of their respective role ahead of the polls stating "The Media remains one of our critical stakeholders in reporting activities of the commission, pre-election, election, and post-election activities, we plead with the media to be factual, objective, and professional in their reportage[143]"

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[141] The Guardian Newspaper https://guardian.ng/news/inec-wants-security-improved-for-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/

[142] Ibid

[143]Vanguard Newspaper https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/09/inec-seeks-media-support-toward-peaceful-imo-guber/

A stakeholder meeting between Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) and INEC ahead of the November 11 polls held in Abuja, the INEC Chairman called on IPAC to inform its members to maintain decorum during the campaign rallies and procession and doing so on election day and beyond. The Chairman also informed IPAC that the Commission was collaborating with security agencies to ensure peace during the elections[144].

[144] Channels Tv (2023) Use Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa Polls To Rebuild Voters' Confidence, IPAC Tells INEC https://www.channelstv.com/2023/10/24/use-kogi-imo-bayelsa-polls-to-rebuild-voters-confidence-ipac-tells-inec/

Role of INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission is the body constitutionally responsible for conducting general elections, and governorship elections amongst others.[145] INEC will therefore oversee and conduct the 2023 off-cycle election in Imo State as well as in Bayelsa, and Kogi states.

13.1 Voter Registration

CVR training virtually started in June 2021 via the platform at https://cvr.inecnigeria.org. Voter registration includes both an online pre-registration phase and an offline full registration phase that involves biometrics capturing and calls for physical presence at INEC's local offices. According to the Commission, there are 2,419,922 registered voters in Imo State.

13.2 Use of Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

The Commission informed the general public that the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which replaced the Smart Card Readers (SCR), would be utilized, in the Io state governorship election as it was used for the elections in Anambra, the FCT, Osun and Ekiti, as well as the 2023 general election[146]. The Commission also noted that the results would be uploaded on the INEC Result View Portal (IReV)[147]. The Commission had carried out mock accreditation exercise in three polling units from each senatorial zone in the three states, which are 9 senatorial districts and 27 polling units[148].

13.3 Increasing Access to Polling Units

Delivering effective electoral services is a fundamental concept and a gauge of election integrity. In accordance with this notion and to enhance voters' access to polling units INEC raised the number of polling units around the nation. In Imo State, INEC created an additional 1235 polling units, thereby increasing the total number of PUs in the state from 3,523 to 4,758[149]. This is to ensure that voters have easier access and fewer queues in casting their votes.

While this is a good innovation, it is relevant that the Commission effectively manage the process to ensure that the main goal of the exercise is not defeated. For instance, during the 2023 general election The Electoral Hub observers observed that many persons were confused on election day as their polling units had been changed, this

[145] Third Schedule, part I, Paragraph F, Section 15 (a), CFRN, 1999 (as amended)
[146] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/633789-bayelsa-imo-kogi-election-results-to-be-uploaded-on-irev-inec-chairman.html, https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2023/10/17/inec-to-deploy-bvas-irev-in-kogi-imo-bayelsa-polls/
[147] Ibid
[148] https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12938
[149] https://guardian.ng/news/inec-creates-1235-polling-units-in-imo/

eventually led to the disenfranchisement of some voters who went to their old polling unit only to realize when it was late that their polling unit had been changed[150].

13.4 Engagement with Stakeholders

Engagement with stakeholders is a crucial part of the election process and is expected and a basic duty of EMBs. In accordance with this tenet, and in order to prepare for the election, INEC conducted a number of stakeholder interactions with various electoral stakeholders and voters at both its Abuja headquarters. These interactions are meant to guarantee a fair and orderly election in Imo State. The following are a few of the stakeholder gatherings for the Imo governorship election:

— On July 25, 2023, Mahmood Yakubu, the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and national commissioners of the electoral umpire met with leaders from political parties[151].

— The meeting was aimed at reviewing the 2023 general elections and preparing for the off-cycle governorship elections in Imo, Kogi, and Bayelsa states[152].

— On July 28, 2023, INEC held a meeting with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES)[153]. During the meeting, INEC Chairman, Prof. Yakubu Mahmood stated the need for Security agencies to take decisive action against promoters of violence and other anti-democratic behaviors like vote-buying, assaults on election officials, and interference with the electoral process while upholding absolute impartiality[154].

— The Commission released the Guide for Media Accreditation for 2023 Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo States Governorship Election. The portal was also opened for Media organizations intending to deploy Journalists to cover any or all the three Governorship elections to apply online to the Commission via the designated website; https://imap.inecnigeria.org[155].

— Ahead of the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo states, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) opened the portal for ad hoc staff

[150] The Electoral Hub (2023). *Electoral Accountability Matters: An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Election.* https://electoralhub.org/publications/post-election-analysis/the-electoral-hub-2023-general-election-analysis/
[151] Channels (2023), INEC Chair, Party Leaders Review 2023 Elections. https://www.channelstv.com/2023/07/25/inec-chair-party-leaders-review-2023-elections/
[152] Ibid
[153] Ogunseyin O. (2023), INEC Wants Security Improved for Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Elections. *Guardian*. https://guardian.ng/news/inec-wants-security-improved-for-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/
[154] Ibid
[155] https://imap.inecnigeria.org/accreditation-guide

recruitment on August 31, 2023[156]. On September 27, 2023, Mal. Mohammed Kudu Haruna, national commissioner for INEC, called for media executives to attend a crucial gathering in Imo State[157]. During the meeting, the National Commissioner urged the media to be factual, impartial, and professional in their reporting of the Commission's activities including pre-election, election, and post-election activities[158].

— On October 24, 2023, INEC met with representatives of Political Parties to discuss and address various issues related to the elections[159].

— On October 25, 2023, INEC held its quarterly consultative meeting with Civil society Organizations (CSOs) at the INEC conference room, in Abuja[160]. During the meeting, INEC Chairman Prof. Mahmood Yakubu revealed that the Commission has accredited 145 organizations deploying 7,896 observers[161]. He also stated the Commission would continue to engage stakeholders in the electoral process[162].

— On October 26, 2023, INEC held the Quarterly Consultative Meeting with the Media, at the INEC Conference Room, Abuja. During the meeting, the Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu noted that 94 media organizations deploying 1,255 personnel, have been accredited for the elections[163]. He urged media organizations to uphold the standards of professional ethics and put up a defense against false information in discharging their election duties[164].

— On October 27, 2023, INEC held the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) Held at the Conference Room, Office of The National Security Adviser (ONSA), Abuja[165]. During the meeting, Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, National Security Adviser (NSA), disclosed that the government is committed to providing all the components required to guarantee a faultless election for the governorships in the states of Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo, on November 11, 2023.

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[156] Egobiambu E. (2023), Apply: INEC Begins Recruitment of Ad-hoc Staff for Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi Polls. Channels TV. https://www.channelstv.com/2023/08/31/apply-inec-begins-recruitment-of-ad-hoc-staff-for-imo-bayelsa-kogi-polls/, https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12870
[157]INEC Twitter (2023), {@inecnigeria}, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1707085745079431650
[158] Ibid
[159]INEC Twitter (2023), {@inecnigeria}, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1716772084058079282
[160]INEC Twitter (2023), {@inecnigeria}, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1717137305301848421, https://von.gov.ng/imo-kogi-and-bayelsa-states-elections-critical-inec/
[161]Ibid
[162]Ibid
[163]INEC Twitter (2023), {@inecnigeria}, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1717506708962963770
[164] Ibid
[165] INEC Twitter (2023), {@inecnigeria}, https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1717890699679383842

13.5 Other Activities

On the Timetable and Schedule of Activities for the Imo state elections, the Commission's other activities include publishing the election notice and the final candidate list, election and party monitoring, accrediting journalists and election observers, registering party agents, and hiring and training ad hoc staff. Each of these tasks is to be completed for the election.

Election Observation and Observers

The democratic and electoral processes are not complete without election observation. The credibility of the election, and consequently the electoral process, is increased by election observation. Electoral observation, among other things, prevents fraud and identifies electoral irregularities. Allowing observers to participate in an election is a sign that the Election Management Body is ready to hold credible elections[166].

It is also among the simplest ways to compile reliable election-related data. Election observers have a significant impact on how transparent and credible elections are, as well as how widely accepted election outcomes are[167]. The acceptance of observers is further proof of the electoral process transparency. Election evaluations by observers also validate elected government. Additionally, observers' reports are frequently considered to be reliable records of how elections were conducted.

Ahead of the 2023 off-cycle governorship, the Chairman of INEC, Mahmood Yakubu, has asserted that a total of 145 organizations have been approved as observers, who would be deploying 7,896 observers across the three states.[168] This marks a significant step toward electoral fraud prevention and promotion of the credibility and integrity of the process.

[166] https://openelectiondata.net/en/guide/electoral-integrity/election-observation/
[167] African Union. (2013). Election Observation Manual. https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/au2014EOMmanual.pdf
[168] https://punchng.com/kogi-bayelsa-imo-elections-crucial-inec/#:~:text=Yakubu%20noted%20that%20the%20commission,145%20organisations%20deploying%207%2C896%20observers.%E2%80%9D

Conclusion

The impending 2023 Imo State Governorship Election will play a critical role in shaping the future of the state. In view of its importance, this political context analysis has provided insight on the numerous facets of this momentous event, which is set to take place on November 11, 2023. Understanding the circumstances of the election is important for preparations and interventions toward improved credibility.

It is the seventh governorship election in Imo since the return to civilian rule in 1999. It provides a chance to implement the new Electoral Act 2022, thus strengthening the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) capacities and increasing Nigeria's election integrity. Furthermore, the general elections in 2023, which were held earlier in the year, provide excellent insights for ensuring a smoother and more transparent electoral process. Imo State's distinct topography, cultural diversity, and demography will all play a role in defining the election. The participation of political parties and candidates is also notable. The political scene is dynamic, with 18 political parties competing, including the ruling All Progressives Congress, and LP as well as the PDP as Major oppositions. power dynamics and their possible influence on election results.

The engagement of community stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is critical on the civil front. The influence of traditional leaders, as well as the vigilance of CSOs working with security authorities, are critical for a calm election atmosphere. Finally, integrity safeguards have been put in place to ensure openness and trust. These initiatives, such as the results viewing portal, observation groups, and a test run of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), attempt to improve the integrity of the voting process.

Finally, as Imo State prepares for the 2023 governorship election, the lessons learned from previous elections, active stakeholder involvement, and the adoption of integrity measures will all contribute to a more transparent, credible, and peaceful electoral process. The people of Imo and the rest of the country are anxiously awaiting the results of this crucial election, which will surely impact the state's leadership for the next four years. It is our common hope that this election would mark a step forward towards improved credibility and integrity in Nigeria's electoral process and democratic journey.



...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity

ABOUT THE ELECTORAL HUB

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a knowledge and advocacy hub which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. It is committed to promoting electoral knowledge, integrity, and accountability in Nigeria. Our aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of critical and contextualized analysis, and solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

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

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