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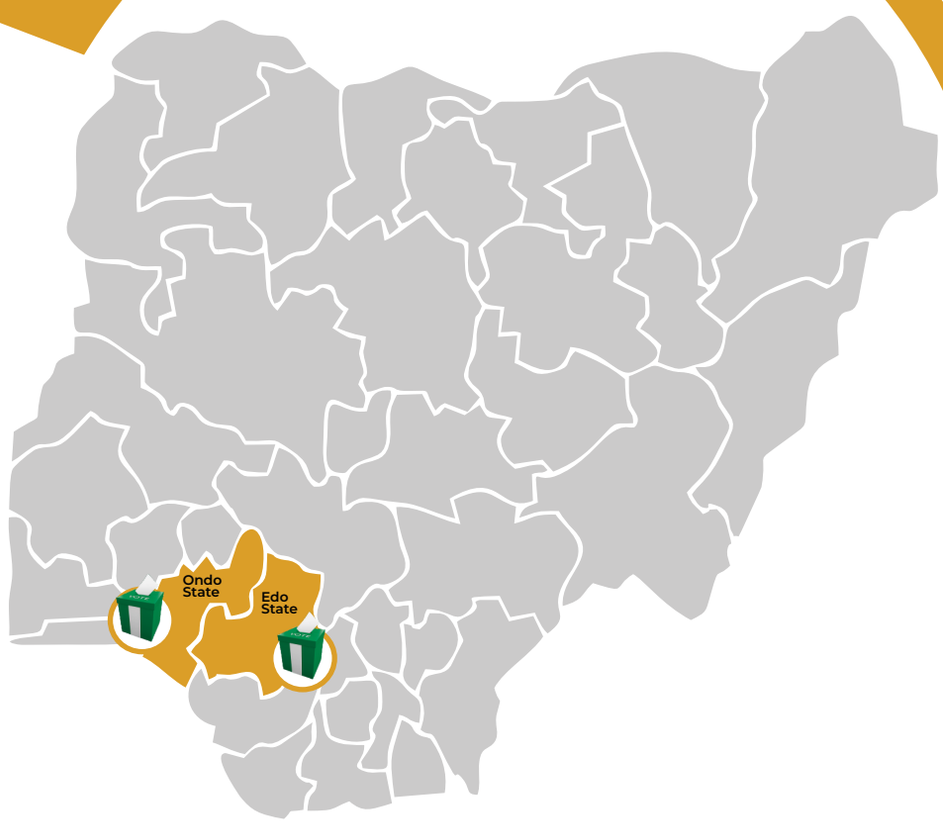

Citizens Perception of Edo and Ondo 2024 Gubernatorial Elections

Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development

Acknowledgements

About the Author

Amina Miango is a Nigerian-trained lawyer, chartered mediator, and election expert with over a decade of experience in election administration and management. She has extensive expertise in various aspects of electoral processes, including legal frameworks governing elections both domestically and internationally, election laws on candidates' qualifications, election dispute resolution mechanisms, and the dynamics between legal statutes and electoral procedures. Amina's commitment to upholding the integrity and fairness of electoral processes began at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), where she collaborated with a diverse range of electoral stakeholders to enhance the electoral process. Currently, she is the project lead for the Election Project at the Center for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), where she leads initiatives aimed at voter education and advancing electoral transparency, integrity, accountability, and inclusivity.

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Executive Summary

Elections are a fundamental component of democracy, serving as a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power and citizen participation. However, not all elections fulfil democratic principles; credibility is established throughout the entire electoral process, from campaigning and media freedom to voter registration and judicial independence. This survey sought to examine the state of democracy in Nigeria by assessing the roles of key electoral stakeholders, citizen participation, and the challenges of voter engagement in the upcoming off-cycle governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States.

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining online and offline data collection to gather insights from 2,156 respondents across urban and rural areas in both states. The survey explored citizens' understanding of the electoral process, their perceptions of electoral institutions, and their engagement in civic activities. The findings highlighted significant voter apathy, with historical data showing a declining trend in voter turnout, which has persisted despite increased voter registration and engagement in pre-election activities.

Summary of Key Findings

Key issues identified include:

a. The erosion of trust in electoral institutions, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the judiciary, and a general lack of confidence in political parties and candidates.

b. While there is notable participation in voter registration, only 25% of respondents are active members of political parties, and a majority expressed distrust in the parties' ability to represent their interests. Campaign participation is similarly low, with only 25.7% planning to engage in upcoming campaign activities.

c. Survey data revealed that social media is the primary source of election information for 50% of respondents, while traditional news outlets account for 22.8%. Although the media plays an indispensable role, 57% of respondents rated media coverage as fair, with a notable proportion perceiving it as biased or indifferent.

The survey results emphasise the critical need for targeted interventions to rebuild trust in electoral processes and institutions, enhance voter education, and improve citizen engagement beyond just voting. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can work towards a more vibrant and participatory democracy in Nigeria.

This report examines the roles of the media and electoral integrity in Nigeria's upcoming governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States. It highlights the critical functions of the media in elections and democracy, including accountability, voter education, agenda-setting, and serving as a platform for candidates. The media, both traditional and social, are pivotal in shaping public opinion and ensuring transparency. However, challenges like misinformation and disinformation on social media, which were prevalent during Nigeria's 2023 general elections, underscore the need for enhanced media literacy and regulatory frameworks. These perceptions underscore the necessity for impartial, accurate, and responsible media coverage.

Election integrity and transparency are underscored by credible electoral processes, including the roles of key stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the judiciary, and political parties. Citizens' trust in these institutions is crucial; however, the survey found that trust in INEC's ability to conduct free, fair, and credible elections is divided, with only 35.7% expressing confidence in the process. The judiciary's role in adjudicating election disputes is equally vital, and its impartiality is crucial for upholding the sanctity of elections.

Recommendations

Recommendations were made for each of the stakeholders identified in the survey in

Citizens' Participation

1. Continuous civic and voter education, integration of voter education into school curricula, targeted outreach to women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and making the voting process more flexible through the use of technology.
2. Make the voting process more flexible by decentralising voting points.

Make Political Parties Effective

1. Improve Internal Democracy in Political Parties
2. Transparency in activities of political parties
3. Make membership of political parties more inclusive

Media

1. Expand into New Niches
2. Take a people-centred approach to reporting elections and not a candidate approach which has been the norm.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

1. Use of appropriate election technology
2. Creative Voter Education Strategies.
3. Unbundled INEC

For the Judiciary

1. Alternative Dispute Resolution introduced to elections.
2. Reduce the time frame for election petitions and abolish appeals for election petitions.

Citizens' participation is an important aspect of democratic governance. In the coming Edo and Ondo Governorship elections, INEC's role should be to instil citizens' faith in its mandate; the judiciary must reject when parties in electoral issues insist on technicalities to win their cases and ensure that the electoral choices of voters are retained at all costs; the media should report issues without bias and ulterior motives and ensure that only truth about the process, about candidates and political parties are presented to the citizens in ways and formats they can understand. One of the reasons respondents gave for making up their mind to vote is the quality of candidates. Political parties as vehicles of civic and voter education should focus on programs that get citizens to participate by joining, actively participating in consultation and going out to vote on election day. Improving voter turnout in Nigeria's elections is possible, but it must be deliberate. Civil Society Organisations are uniquely placed to engage with all stakeholders including voters, INEC, Media, Judiciary, Candidates, and Political Parties; they can drive this process by collaborating with other CSOs to influence outcomes through organising stakeholder engagements to serve as interface with other stakeholders.

1.0 **Introduction**

Elections are a major component of every democracy which require effort and careful handling (Byakagaba, 1998). Elections serve as the determinant for development and peace(Norman, 2010) and stability; they are the vehicle for a peaceful transfer of power and citizens' participation. However, it is note-worthy that not all elections live up to democratic principles. All modern democracies hold elections, but not all elections are democratic. Democracy goes beyond holding elections, elections serve as the foundation for governments deriving legitimacy. The credibility of an election is not solely determined on election day but during the entire electoral process and activities. The ability of opposition parties to campaign without hindrance, the freedom of the media to report on the process, the state of the voter register, the independence of the judiciary to adjudicate on electoral disputes and the appointment of members of the Election Management Bodies (EMB) all serve towards determining the credibility of the electoral process. Citizen's participation in the electoral process is a major component of democratic elections. Democracy thrives on the ability of citizens to give their consent to be governed through elections. Jeane Kirkpatrick defines democratic elections as competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize the government, publish their criticism and present alternatives[1]. This definition posits that democratic elections do not only require the participation of citizens through voting but also in ensuring that government is held up to its responsibilities; It also posits that for elections to be democratic, they must be periodic, inclusive and definitive.

Election stakeholders include all individuals and organizations responsible for conducting and overseeing elections, as well as those who participate in or are affected by the election process[2]. They serve as the foundation of the process and ensure that elections uphold laid-down democratic principles. The electoral process's success hinges on the collective performance of all stakeholders. Stakeholders such as the Election Management body charged with conducting elections, civil society organisations who carry out the functions of watchdog demanding accountability and in some instances serve as sources of voter education, security agencies who ensure election security so that citizens can exercise their franchise, the media who are the vehicle for civic and voter education as well as accountability, the judiciary ensuring that elections conducted comply with electoral laws and regulations. All these stakeholders along with the voters themselves make up the lifeline of every democracy and their actions or inactions will determine if elections are credible or a sham.

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1. https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/gov/democracy-elections.htm

2. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/emh/emh02

Edo and Ondo States are two of the 8 off-cycle Governorship elections (namely Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi, Ondo and Osun States) which occur outside the general election cycle as a result of Court of Appeal judgments in 2008 and 2009 which set aside the results of the Governorship elections that were conducted in 2007 and new Governors namely Adams Oshiomole and Olusegun Mimiko were sworn-in in Edo and Ondo States respectively, changing the time the tenure of the governors in both states. Conversations after the 2023 General election revealed gaps in knowledge about the electoral process, suspicions of electoral institutions and debates over the legitimacy of the polls, especially the Presidential elections by citizens. The subsequent wave of election petitions further muddied the waters, particularly the conflicting orders and judgments from the electoral petition tribunals and the subsequent appeal Courts judgments. The suspicion laid more on the two central players in Nigeria's elections - the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Judiciary. INEC is responsible for conducting elections for positions ranging from the Presidency and Vice Presidency to Governorship and Deputy Governorship and overseeing elections for the National Assembly and State House of Assembly[3].

On the other hand, the judiciary plays a critical role in adjudicating disputes that arise from activities in the electoral process, ensuring the resolution of conflicts through a legal lens[4]. Additionally, there is a major concern about citizen's participation in the electoral process, not just voting alone but also in membership of political parties and campaigns. Voter apathy has become a major issue in the electoral process; with over 93 million registered voters in Nigeria, voter turnout for Presidential, National Assembly and State House of Assembly elections was poor; with 25.64% for Presidential elections. In the 2020 Governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States, only 557,442 of the 2,272,058 registered voters came out to vote in Edo State with the numbers not being any different in Ondo where 591,193 of the 1,812,644 registered voters came out to vote[5].

2024 is a super-election year and has been tagged the year of democracy, with close to three billion people voting in 65+ countries[6]. In Edo and Ondo States of Nigeria, voters head to the polls to vote for new governors as the tenure of office of the incumbents come to an end on 11th November 2024 and 23rd February 2025 respectively[7]. Both States are unique in outlook. In Edo State, the incumbent was elected the first term on the platform of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and in 2020 decamped to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to contest elections which he won. For Ondo State, the present Governor was Deputy Governor up until a few months ago when he was sworn in after the death of the Governor in line with constitutional provisions[8].

Nigeria has since the return of democracy in 1999 had seven general election cycles and multiple off-cycle elections. The electoral process has arguably improved with various technologies introduced since 2011 when fresh voter registration was carried out to include biometrics for the

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3. Third Schedule, Item F, paragraph 15(a), the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)
4. Section 285, he Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)
5. https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=7246
6. https://yearofdemocracy.org/
7. https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12946
8. Section 191, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999

first time. The Electoral Act that was in use from 2010 to 2022 had provisions restricting the use of technology, especially concerning voting and transmission of results, those restrictions have since been removed by the Electoral Act 2022. Despite improvement in the process, participation has dwindled every electoral cycle, from National to state-level elections. Taking lessons from the 2023 general elections which had the lowest voter turnout of every general election since the return of democracy despite an increase in voter registration, it is important to understand why the numbers keep decreasing, especially with regard to citizens' perception about electoral institutions.

Building on past advocacy and research into thematic areas, the Center for Journalism Innovation and Development through its Media in National Election (MiNE) hopes that the survey will serve as a foundation for continuous advocacy for improving participation in the electoral process, especially by collaborating with other stakeholders and Civil Society Organisations(CSOs) to impact the knowledge that when citizens vote, they are not only choosing their leaders but are also deciding on policies and laws that will impact their lives. Therefore, not voting cannot be an option, with all that is at stake.

This report is in 5 parts, made up of an introduction in part one, outlining the issues arising from the 2023 general election. Part two talks about the methodology of the survey. Part three depicts the thematic areas in the survey namely citizen participation, political parties, media, INEC and the Judiciary. The report seeks to highlight the influence election stakeholders have had on voters and potential voters on one hand and the electoral process on the other hand through their actions. At the end of the report, recommendations are made to improve participation, not just in elections but also in political party membership as well as recommendations to the EMB, Judiciary, Media and Political Parties on the way forward.

2.0 **Scope and Methodology**

The survey was a non-partisan, data-focused initiative aimed at providing insights into citizens' understanding of the electoral process, their voter registration status, the clarity and availability of information on candidates and issues, their perception of electoral institutions, and overall participation and engagement in civic activities. The findings will help inform strategies to enhance voter education, improve information dissemination, boost voter turnout, and serve as a basis for stakeholder engagement in both states, ensuring a more informed and active electorate.

The survey employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both online and offline data collection to ensure inclusivity, especially for individuals in areas with limited internet access. The survey which was designed using Google forms and had 28 questions which was deliberately

designed to elicit answers to cover diverse indicators such as campaigns, INEC, the judiciary, political parties, and to allow the respondents share their thoughts on these indicators as freely as possible without constraints. The offline survey involved 19 data collectors who gathered data from both urban and rural areas in Edo and Ondo States. In the first week, the survey was conducted online and shared across multiple social media platforms by users with large followings on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, focusing on diverse and non-partisan users.

The survey form was designed to collect both basic demographic data and more detailed opinions on various aspects of the electoral process. The collected data included optional fields such as name and contact information, and mandatory fields such as age, community/local government of residence, age group, gender, voter registration status, and membership in political parties. Respondents were also asked about their views on electoral institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the judiciary, participation in campaigns, voting intentions, barriers to participation, and the most important electoral issues to them, among others.

To ensure the representativeness of the sample, a power analysis was conducted to determine the optimal sample size. With a confidence level of 95%, at least 385 responses were needed to ensure the real value was within ±5% of the measured value. The survey collected 2,156 responses: 1,222 from Ondo State (population ~5.3 million) and 935 from Edo State (population ~4.7 million). The respondents cut across urban and rural areas, with 29% from urban areas and 71% from rural areas. This indicates that the majority of the respondents in the survey are from rural areas. 76.9% of respondents were aged 18 to 35, 12.3% were aged 36 to 45, and 10.8% were aged 45 and above. Women made up 52.8% of the respondents, and men comprised 47.2%.

All respondents were assured of the protection of their private data before the collection started. Data collectors signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to maintain confidentiality and restrict data use solely for the survey's purposes.

The methodology included both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative data from the survey responses were analysed using statistical methods to identify trends and patterns. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed thematically to capture the nuanced perspectives of the participants.

The survey lasted for six weeks resulting in a robust dataset that reflects the diverse views and experiences of citizens in Edo and Ondo States. These insights will help stakeholders in developing targeted interventions to improve voter education and engagement across different demographics and regions.

3.0 Thematic Areas of the Survey

3.1 Citizens' Participation

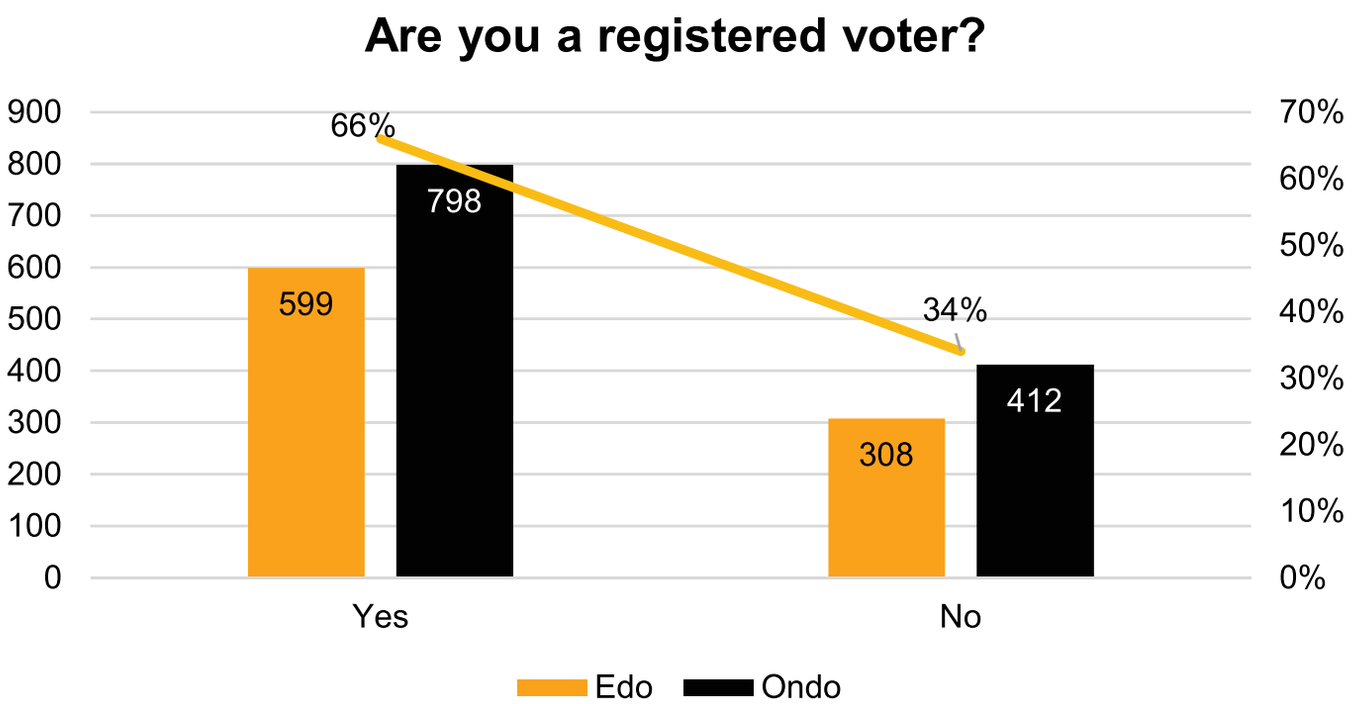
All known human rights statutes including the Nigerian Constitution recognise the right of citizens to participate in elections and governance[9]. Citizens participation is not restricted to only voting and registering to vote. Participation goes beyond just voting, it can extend to picking a candidate and campaigning on their behalf to canvass for votes, attending debates and rallies, being informed about the electoral process and candidates in an election, running for office and serving as election and registration officials. Citizen participation ensures that elections are representative of the people's will and that elected officials are held accountable. Nigeria has a long history of voter apathy; each electoral cycle returns fewer votes on elections. Despite increased participation in pre-electoral matters especially with technology improving information dissemination by political parties, candidates, civil societies and INEC, it has not translated to actual numbers in the last three electoral cycles. In 1999 on the return of democracy with 57,938,945 registered voters, voter turnout was 52%, which went up to the highest voter turnout to date at 69% in 2003, 57% in 2007, 54% in 2011, 44% in 2015 with 67,422,005 registered voters and in 2019, 35% voter turnout[10].

In 2023, the number of registered voters in Nigeria rose to 93,469,008[11] with ages 18 to 34 making up 39.65%, the highest demography of voters in Nigeria, followed by ages 35 to 49 at 35.75%. Despite the number of registered voters, 23, 965, 218 persons voted in the Presidential elections in 2023 approximately 25.64%.

Voters have continuously shown disinterest in the process of governorship elections as they have for national elections. Citizens' reluctance to participate can be tied to the level of trust they have in electoral institutions. On the return to democracy in 1999, Edo State had a registered voter base of 1,414,511, of which 58.51% voted in the election. For Ondo State, the total number of registered voters was 1,333, 617 with 40.24% voter turnout during the Governorship election[12]. With 1,504,181 in 2003, Ondo had a voter turnout of 63.83% while Edo with 1,432, 891 registered voters had a voter participation of 79.74%[13]. 2012 was the first time off-cycle elections were held in Edo and Ondo States. With 1,638,597 total registered voters in Ondo, the election had a 38.12% voter turn-out, and Edo did not fare any better. In 2016, the total number of registered voters in Edo was put at 1,900, 223 with a voter turnout of 32.74% with Ondo at 35%[14]. Despite the increase

9. Sections 39 and 40 CFRN, 1999; Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Articles 22 and 25 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; Articles 10 and 13, African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.
10. https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/158/
11. Source - INEC
12. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Intra-and-inter-party-post-election-crisis-feud-in-Akindele/2e30363a435143c80ffe4142234eb3b80845091c/figure/13
13. https://dawodu.com/aluko50.htm
14. https://saharareporters.com/2012/10/20/ondo-gubernatorial-election-results-live, INEC

voters with 2,128,288 collecting their Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) before the general election; ds to political disengagement, it undermines democracy and diminishes its potential benefits. Ondo had 1,991,344 with a PVC collection of 1,729,641 which is about 86.9%[15]. Voter registration is ongoing and specific numbers of registered voters have not yet been release by INEC for the Governorship elections. Somehow, pre-electoral participation has not translated into actual voting on election day. Different causes have been canvassed for the continuous devolving of voter turn-out in elections, one of which is mistrust in electoral institutions which has led citizens to keep away altogether. However, the strength of every democracy is the freedom of citizens to critique and replace their elected officials through elections. The ability to dissent is one of the most remarkable attributes of democracy. Where citizens' dissent turns into cynicism and mistrust for electoral institutions which eventually leads to political disengagement, it undermines democracy and diminishes its potential benefits[16].



When respondents were asked if they were registered voters 1397 (66%) of respondents stated that they were registered voters, and the remaining 720 (34%) had an opportunity to register to vote in the ongoing voter registration exercise by INEC to update the voter register by accommodating those who turned 18 since the last voter registration and are interested in registering and those who have never registered at all but have now decided to in order to vote.. Beyond participation through elections, a minute number of citizens surveyed belong to political parties with the majority stating that they would not participate or were unsure of participating in campaigns. A 2008 study by the London School of Economics stated that cynicism is one of the greatest threats to democracy as those who hold contempt for politicians and institutions are less

15. https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=13198

16. https://www.undp.org/nigeria/blog/participation-nigerian-elections-far-more-important-and-potent-cynicism

likely to vote[17], this may be the case in this instance as respondents proffered various reasons for their refusal to participate in campaigns and voting including the quality of candidates, fake promises by politicains, lack of trust for electoral institutions such as INEC and the judiciary, security and election malpractice. Furthermore, in exploring the factors that influence citizen's participation in campaigns and voting, the respondents were asked for the factors that influence their decision to participate in campaigns, their major response was the trust in candidates at 41.5%, belief in the electoral process at 16%, with 12.6% stating that understanding the key issues was a determinant for them, 8.4% stating peer pressure as a factor, 5.2% stating convenience of location and 16.3% stating other factors. For factors influencing their decision to vote, 35.7% trust in candidate is the determining factor, 23.7% stated the belief in the electoral process, 12.1% stated that understanding the issues will determine if they will vote on election day, convenience of polling locations making up 9%, with 6.3% stating peer pressure as a determining factor.

3.2 **Political Parties, Campaigns and Candidates**

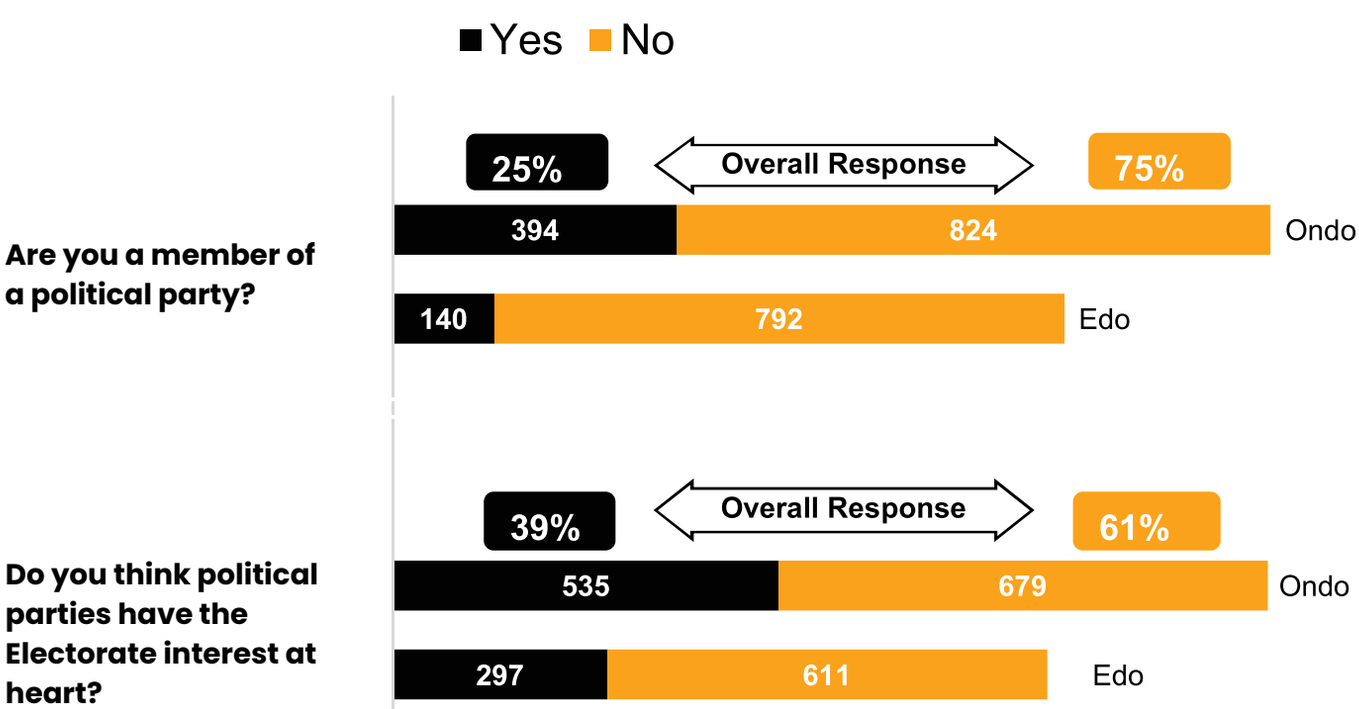
Schattschneider believes that modern democracies cannot work without political parties[18]. Lipset refers to them as the core institutions of democratic politics[19]. Modern Political Parties as structured carry out a variety of functions including mobilisation of supporters, selecting candidates for elections, developing policy, voter education and canvassing for votes. While political parties are not the only means for citizens to mobilise, citizens can collectively hold them responsible for their actions and serve as a vehicle for the collective responsibility of elected officials. A political party is a group of organised people with almost similar political aims and opinions, that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office (Pippa, 2004). The existence and function of political parties are regulated through legal and institutional frameworks. These regulations can be external as in the case of the Constitution, the Electoral Act and INEC regulations or internal as in the case of Political Parties Constitutions, guidelines and rules. One of the requirements for registration of political parties in Nigeria is submission of a constitution, this signifies the intention of the party to be bound by internal law. The existence and non-existence of political parties is hinged on the provision of the Constitution[20]. INEC is charged with the sole role of registering and monitoring political parties.

Nigeria is a multiparty democracy with19[21] political parties currently in existence. In 1999, there were three political parties namely Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP); twenty years later in 2019, 91 political parties contested for various positions in the General elections. In 2020, INEC deregistered 74 of the political parties in in the number of registered voters in Edo and Ondo States for the 2020 Governorship elections, the voter turnout was still below the previous elections. For 2023, Edo had 2,501,081 registered

17. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/sep/14/research.humanbehaviour
18. E.E. Schatterschneider. 1942. Party Government New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston
19. Lipset, S. M. (1996). What are parties for? Journal of Democracy, 7(1), 169-175.
20. Section 221 and 225A, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)
21. https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=11

line with its powers granted under section 225A of the Constitution, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court[22], which brought the number of political parties down to 18 and in 2023, an additional party was registered to bring the total of political parties in Nigeria to 19. Political parties hold a place of importance in the Nigeria electoral process since non-partisan candidates are prohibited under electoral laws, and political parties are the only group allowed to canvass for votes in an election[23]. That privilege is however exercised under the monitoring of INEC and subjected to legal qualifications. Political parties are expected to hold political primaries to nominate candidates[24], where they elect candidates, which they submit to INEC as their representation in the election in question[25]. Political Party's finances are also under the regulatory powers of INEC and are subject to sanctions.

Unlike other democracies like India where political parties have a hierarchy for participating and contesting elections, in Nigeria, all political parties even new ones can contest elections at all levels including Presidential elections. Fourteen political parties contested governorship elections in Edo State in 2020 with seventeen contesting in Ondo State. For the 2024 governorship election, seventeen political parties are contesting in Edo[26] and Ondo[27] States. The question is how well political parties are perceived, especially when contextualised through low or eroding grassroots membership, lack of internal democracy, and a crisis of public confidence.



22. https://placng.org/Legist/inecs-power-to-deregister-political-parties-affirmed-by-supreme-court/ ; INEC v. ACD (2023) 3 NWLR PT. 1870 AT 97.
23. Section 221, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)
24. Section 84, Electoral Act 2022
25. Section 29 Electoral Act 2022
26. A, AA, AAC, ADC, ADP, APC, APGA, APM, APP, BP, LP, NNPP, PDP, PRP, SDP, YPP, ZLP
27. A, AA, AAC, ADC, ADP, APC, APGA, APM, APP, LP, NNPP, PDP, PRP, SDP, YPP, YP, ZLP

Only 534 (25%) of respondents stated they are members of political parties with 1290 (61%) stating that they do not think political parties have their interest at heart when asked to state why, various reasons were proffered with 'selfish', 'corrupt', 'untrustworthy', 'incompetent', 'greedy', 'self-centered', 'biased', 'lies', and 'Fake promises' being the predominant feeling against politicians. The majority of respondents 39.2% who stated that the political parties have their interest at heart gave their reason, saying 'they are trying their best', 'based on their manifesto' and 'electoral candidates'. What this data shows is that there is a feeling of distrust among potential voters for political parties.

Candidates like political parties are major stakeholders in elections. Contesting elections helps build the experiences of a person irrespective of whether they lose or win. Campaigns provide citizens with experience and create a network of supporters and visibility[28]. Under our electoral process, a person translates from being an aspirant to a candidate after they are nominated by their political party and their details are forwarded to INEC[29]. For a person to become the candidate of a political party, the Constitution provides some basic qualifications for the office they are running for and no political party is allowed under law to infer additional qualifications[30]. For the office of Governor, the person must be a citizen of Nigeria, be 35 years old at the time of contesting, be a member of a political party be sponsored by the party and also be educated to at least school certificate level or its equivalent[31]. There is also the legal requirement that every candidate for Governor must appoint a Deputy Governor, failure to do so nullifies the nomination[32]. Voters look for different things in candidates, research shows that experience is one of the major factors for success in candidates[33]. In Edo and Ondo, incumbency has mostly favoured successive governors but for the present elections, Edo State has fresh candidates contesting for the elections. In Ondo, the former deputy governor turned governor has been in office for only a few months.

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28. Agustina Haime, Agustín Vallejo and Leslie Schwindt-Bayer; Candidate Experience and Electoral Success - Latin American Research Review (2022), 57, 170–187 doi:10.1017/lar.2022.10

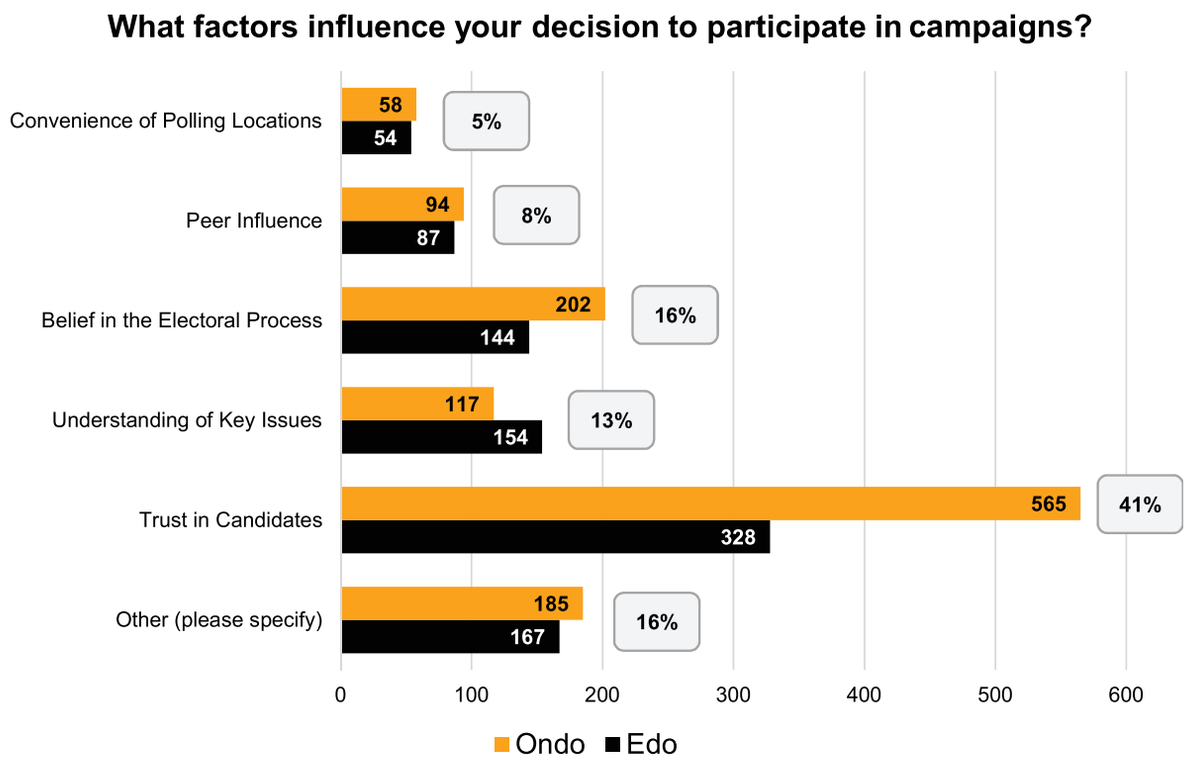
29. See Section 29 and 84, Electoral Act

30. Section 84 (3) Electoral Act, 2022

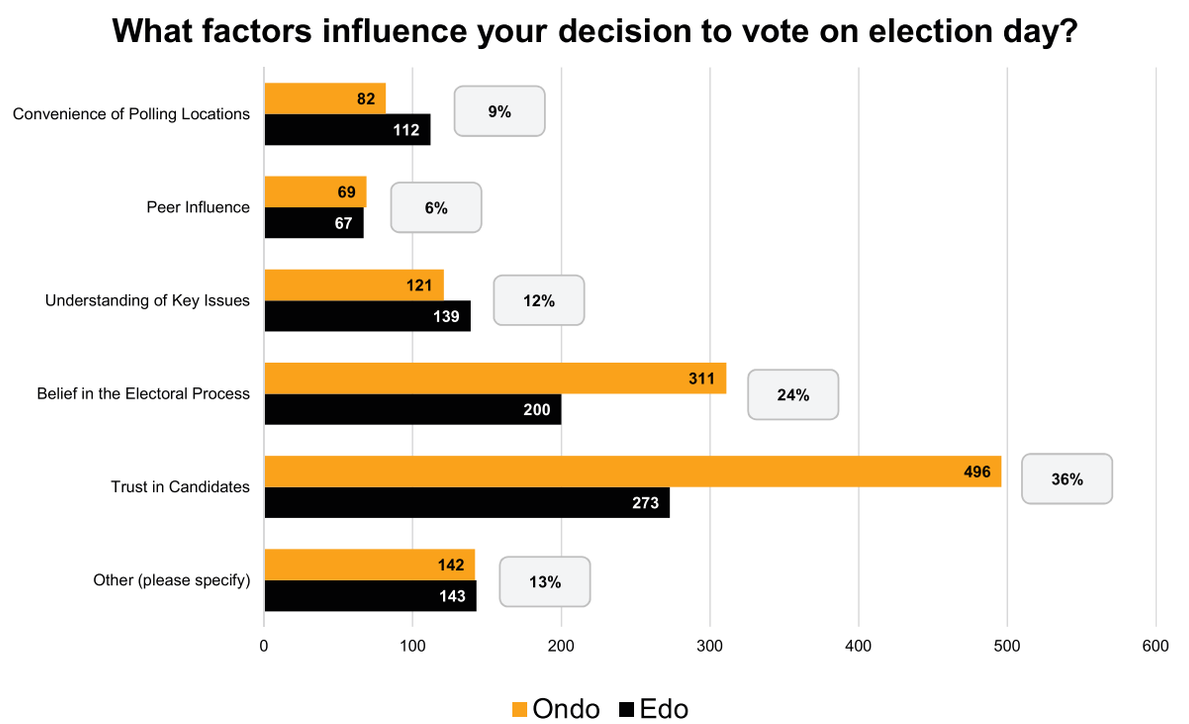
31. Section 177, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999

32. Section 187, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999

33. Haime, Agustina, Agustín Vallejo, and Leslie Schwindt-Bayer. "Candidate Experience and Electoral Success." Latin American Research Review, vol. 57, no. 1, Mar. 2022, pp. 170-187. DOI: 10.1017/lar.2022.10.



The quality of candidates in an election is important and 893 (41.5%) of the respondents in the survey stated trust in candidates is a reason for them to participate in campaigns with 769 (36%) stating that trust in candidates will determine if they vote on election day.



Political parties gain support for their candidates through political campaigns. Voters deserve all the information needed to decide on which candidate to vote for in a plethora of candidates. Political parties present their plans and messages through manifestoes and other methods to citizens to enable them to make informed decisions. In recent times, technology has helped political parties and candidates with their messaging to electorates, while not all voters can access the manifestoes of candidates and parties to read, they can follow the candidates' message

through interesting multimedia content which is not only easier to understand but also share. Social media has not only made election campaigns easier and made candidates more relatable, but it has also improved campaign donations for some candidates and it is a far cheaper means of reaching out to voters[34]. Campaigns, like every other aspect of the electoral process, are guided by laws which provide timelines for starting and when to end[35], the conduct of parties, candidates and their supporters during campaigns with sanctions laid out for all breaches[36]. Under the timetable and schedule of activities released by inec, the campaign will start and end on 24 april 2024 and 19 september 2024 respectively for edo state, and on 19 june 2024 and 14 november 2024 respectively for ondo state. In this survey, 550 (25.7%) of respondents stated that they plan to participate in campaigns with 1244 (58.2%) saying they will not participate and 352 (16.5%) are undecided about participating in campaigns.

Are you planning to participate in campaigns leading to the election?

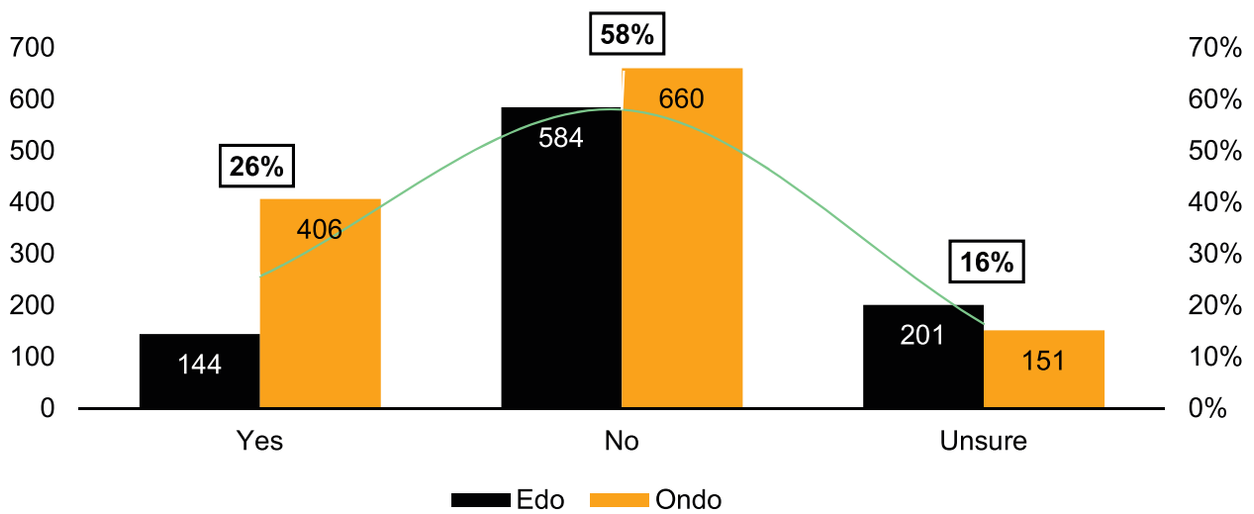


Table For Final List Of Candidates

Edo

Party	Position	Name	Gender
A	Governor	Iyere Kenedy	Male
	Deputy Governor	Enabulele Bright	Male
AA	Governor	Iseghohi Tom	Male
	Deputy Governor	Onaiwu Mabel Osemwonyenmwen	Male
AAC	Governor	Udoh Oberaifo David	Male
	Deputy Governor	Osunde Lord Osas	Male

34. Petrova, Maria and Sen, Ananya and Yildirim, Pinar, Social Media and Political Contributions: The Impact of New Technology on Political Competition

35. Section 94, Electoral Act

36. Sections 95,96,97 Electoral Act

	Deputy Governor	Osunde Lord Osas	Male
ADC	Governor	Izedonmwen Osarenren Derek	Male
	Deputy Governor	Osagie Philip	Male
ADP	Governor	Akhimie Kingson	Male
	Deputy Governor	Obazee Ramatu	Female
APC	Governor	Okpebholo Monday	Male
	Deputy Governor	Idahosa Dennis	Male
APGA	Governor	Osifo Isaiah	Male
	Deputy Governor	Bello Aneru	Male
APM	Governor	Ugiagbe Odaro Sylvester	Male
	Deputy Governor	Ezomo Timothy Ede	Male
APP	Governor	Areloegbeamos Osalumese	Male
	Deputy Governor	Oyarenua Paul	Female
BP	Governor	Osiriame Edeipo	Male
	Deputy Governor	Omorogbe Kingsley	Male
LP	Governor	Akpata Olumide Anthony	Male
	Deputy Governor	Alufohai Oluyinka Faith	Female
NNPP	Governor	Azena Azemhe Friday	Male
	Deputy Governor	Isokpan Ihueghian	Female
PDP	Governor	Ighodalo Asuerinme	Male
	Deputy Governor	Ogie Osarodion	Male

PRP	Governor	Key Patience Ndidi	Female
	Deputy Governor	Ojo Abuomwande	Male
SDP	Governor	Anerua Abdulai Aliu	Male
	Deputy Governor	Amedu Paul	Male
YPP	Governor	Okungbowa Paul Ovbokhan	Male
	Deputy Governor	Mustapha Ahmed Tijani	Male
ZLP	Governor	Akhalamhe Amiemenoghena	Male
	Deputy Governor	Idubor Joyce Olamilayo	Female

Ondo

Party	Position	Name	Gender
A	Governor	Falaiye Abraham Ajibola	Male
	Deputy Governor	Ikuyajolu Femi Samuel	Male
AA	Governor	Akinuli Fred Omolere	Male
	Deputy Governor	Adeyemi Adetunji Oluwatoyin	Male
AAC	Governor	Ajayi Adekunle Oluwaseyi	Male
	Deputy Governor	Dada Olusanya David	Male
ADC	Governor	Nejo Adeyemi	Male
	Deputy Governor	Ibrahim Rashid Olaide	Male
ADP	Governor	Akinnodi Ayodeji Emmanuel	Male
	Deputy Governor	Moyosola Elizabeth Olorunmonu	Female
APC	Governor	Aiyeda Tiwa Lucky Orimisan	Male
	Deputy Governor	Adelami Olayide Owolabi	Male

APGA	Governor	Popoola Olatunji Tunde	Male
	Deputy Governor	Adedeji Taiwo Ayorinde	Male
APM	Governor	Ogunfeyimi Isaac Kolawole	Male
	Deputy Governor	Afolabi Arowolo Folorunsho	Male
APP	Governor	Fad Oju Amos Babatunde	Male
	Deputy Governor	Ajagunna Olarewaju Abimbola	Female
LP	Governor	Olorunfemi Ayodele Festus	Male
	Deputy Governor	Adu Olabisi Olubukola	Female
NNPP	Governor	Olugbenga Omogbemi Edema	Male
	Deputy Governor	Rotimi Emmanuel Adeyemi	Male
PDP	Governor	Ajayi Alfred Agboola	Male
	Deputy Governor	Akingbaso Festus Olarewaju	Male
PRP	Governor	Alli Babatunde Francis	Male
	Deputy Governor	Adewole Olanrewaju Olaide	Male
SDP	Governor	Akingboye Benson Bamidele	Male
	Deputy Governor	Shekoni Susan Gbemisols	Female
YPP	Governor	Akinm Urele John Otitoloju	Male
	Deputy Governor	Obe Ayodele John	Male
YP	Governor	Adegoke Kehinde Paul	Male
	Deputy Governor	Olupitan Otitoleke	Male
ZLP	Governor	Mimiko Olubansile Abbas	Male
	Deputy Governor	Afolabi Sunday Gabriel	Male

3.3 **Media Perception**

The Media plays diverse roles in elections and democracy. The media serve as watchdog for accountability, a tool for voter education, campaigns, and debate. There can be no democracy without a free and independent press[37]. The media's role is to provide adequate information about candidates, and their policies will help voters make informed decisions. They also serve to set the agenda for campaigns by helping to focus discussions on more important issues. They are also mandated to provide a platform for candidates to present their plans to the electorate. In recent times, journalists and media houses with fact-checking skills and capabilities have provided fact-checking of utterances of candidates which serves as an accountability tool to check falsehoods by canddiadtes. In shaping public opinion, the media not only provides diverse opinions but also shapes public opinion to ensure transparency[38]. The role of the media is so important that its obligations to society are enshrined in our laws[39].

Citizens' knowledge about the electoral process should go beyond knowing how to vote. It includes what they should look out for in candidates, participate effectively in debates and understand the issues to make an informed decision, that is where the media comes in, to provide that information and fill in the blanks for citizens in an impartial, accurate and responsible manner[40]. In democratic elections, the media needs to be diverse and independent to cover campaigns effectively interference from government and other powerful interests could pose as hindrances. Media partnership with the EMB is another effective role the media can play. INEC's press corps is one of the ways INEC shares information with stakeholders. INEC's press corps is made up of over 80 media houses made up of television, radio, newspaper and online media houses, who report on the work INEC does and its activities. The Media's role as a watchdog ensures compliance with the process, electoral laws and regulations by other stakeholders, especially the Election Management Body (EMB), security agencies, political parties, candidates and the judiciary[41].

Traditionally, the media used to be print, radio and television, however, technology and the rise of social media platforms have expanded the context to include online media platforms, social media and citizen journalism. Social media has become an important tool for other social and political mobilisation, such as in protests. In 2020, the EndSARs protesters in Nigeria made use of social media to mobilise and plan their protests[42]. Social media also played an important role in the Arab Spring, one of the most important cross-country protests in recent times[43]. Billions of people around the world rely on social media as a source of news and interaction with others. The most

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37. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/explore_topic_new

38. Ibid

39. Section 22 of the Constitution.

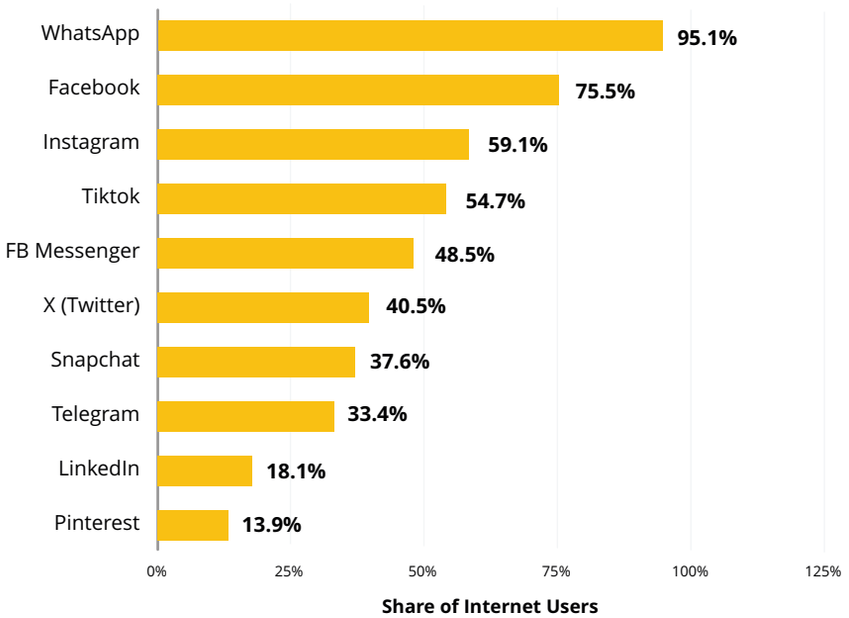
40. https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-media-elections-handbook-2004.pdf

41. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/introduction/me10/me10d

42. Usman Ch., Oghuvbu E.A., (2021) The Impact of the Media on the #Endsars Protests in Nigeria International Journal of New Economics and Social Sciences 2 (14) 2021: 155 - 165 DOI 10.5281/zenodo.5973151

43. https://www.iemed.org/publication/social-media-and-politics-and-the-arab-spring-moment/

widely used social media platforms in Nigeria are WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and X (formerly Twitter).



While social media is gaining traction in usage, regulating its usage, especially concerning curbing information disorder is difficult. Social media is one major vehicle where misinformation and disinformation are spread[44]. Dubawa a foremost African Indigenous fact-checking platform stated that Twitter was the most used platform for sharing false information even when it emanated from other sources[45] during the Nigerian general elections in 2023. Information disorder does not only spread untruth but is capable of causing political tension and intensifying divisions[46], hence the need for media and information literacy to help citizens sieve through and identify false news seeking to cause harm. In granting access to political parties and candidates, the law expects the media to provide equal access to all candidates[47]. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should provide monitoring for the media in the electoral process. The media must live up to laid down rules of reporting impartially and transparently.

Media monitoring serves as a feedback mechanism to ensure conversation about the quality of reporting and transparency in media reporting. As highlighted above, monitoring social media is a much difficult task especially if technology companies are unable to join in monitoring. In March 2024, Meta, Microsoft, Snap, Tiktok, the Rockefeller Foundation and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) launched Voluntary Election Integrity Guidelines for Technology Companies which will seek to establish a framework for meaningful, localized engagement and support between election authorities and technology companies and establish clear policies and processes for stakeholders to share information around elections, and ensure voters have access to high-quality information for the American Presidential elections holding in 2024. They will also enhance communication channels between technology companies and election authorities while lowering barriers for smaller and newer companies committed to supporting election integrity[48].

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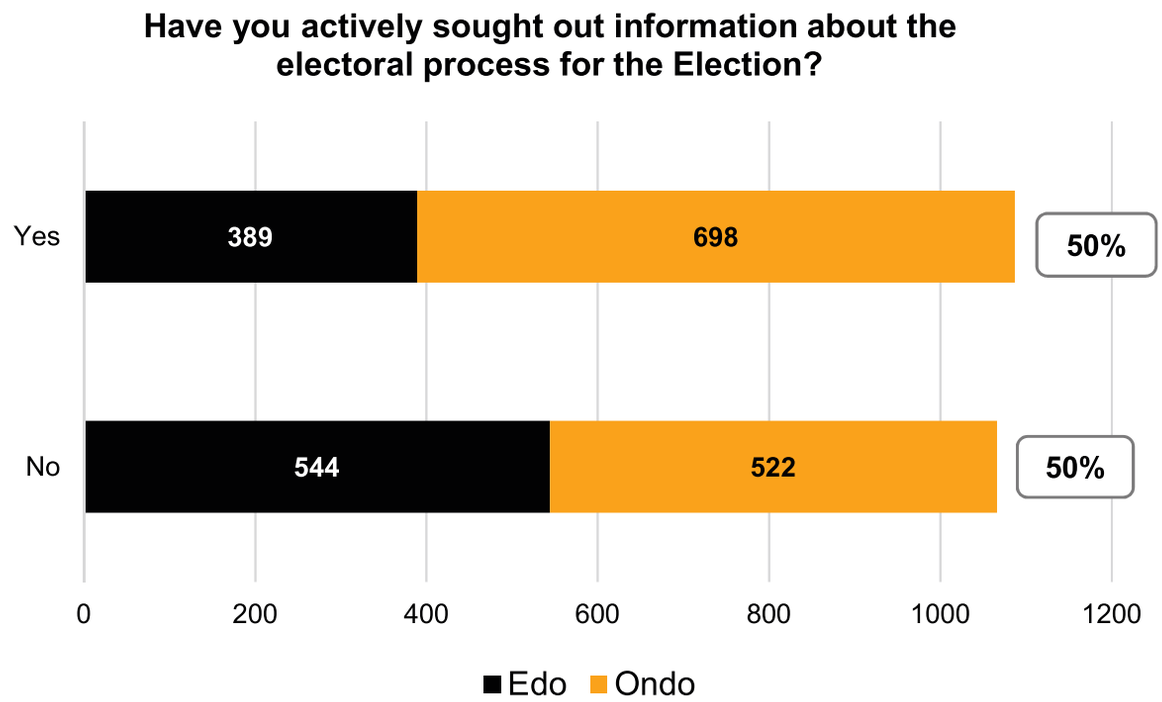
44. Wasserman, H., & Madrid-Morales, D. (2019). An exploratory study of "fake news" and media trust in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. African Journalism Studies, 40(1), 107-123.

45. https://dubawa.org/a-typology-and-distribution-analysis-of-information-disorder-on-the-2023-general-elections-in-nigeria/

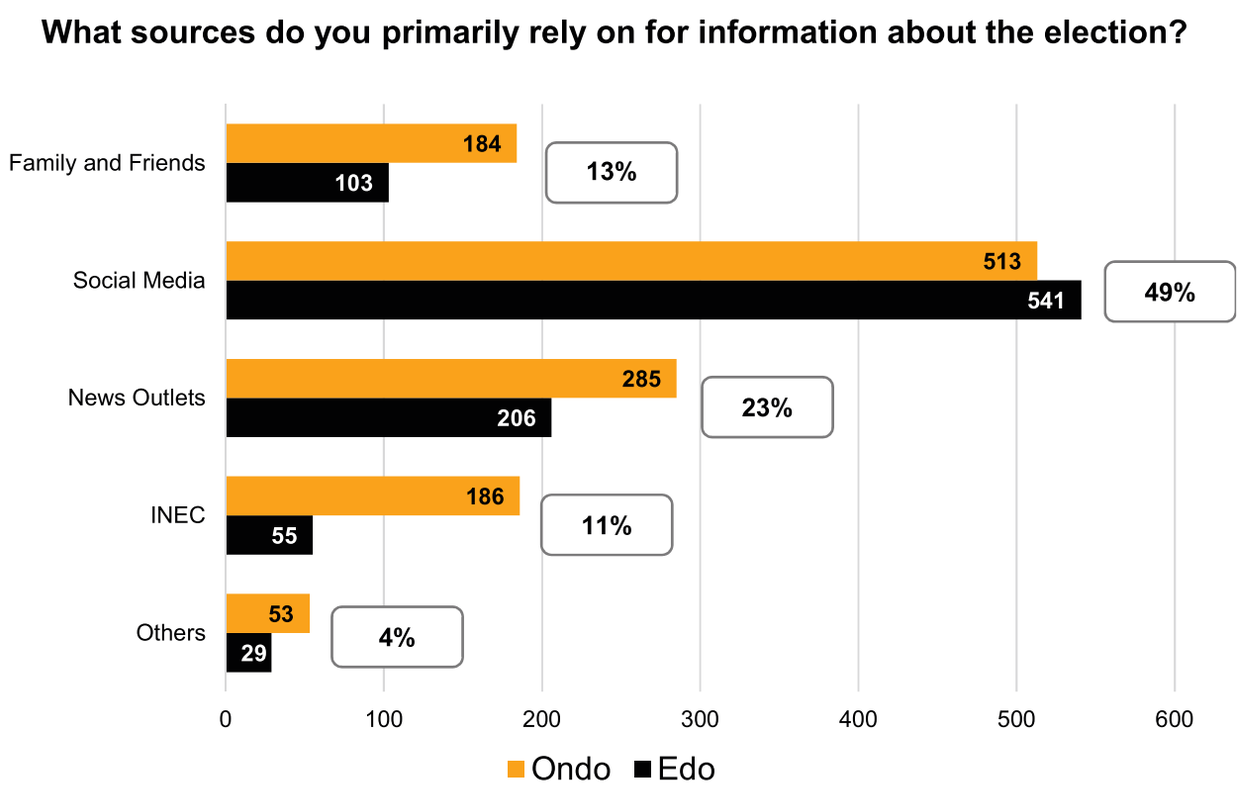
46. Wasserman, H., & Madrid-Morales, D. (2019). An exploratory study of "fake news" and media trust in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. African Journalism Studies, 40(1), 107-123.

47. Section 95

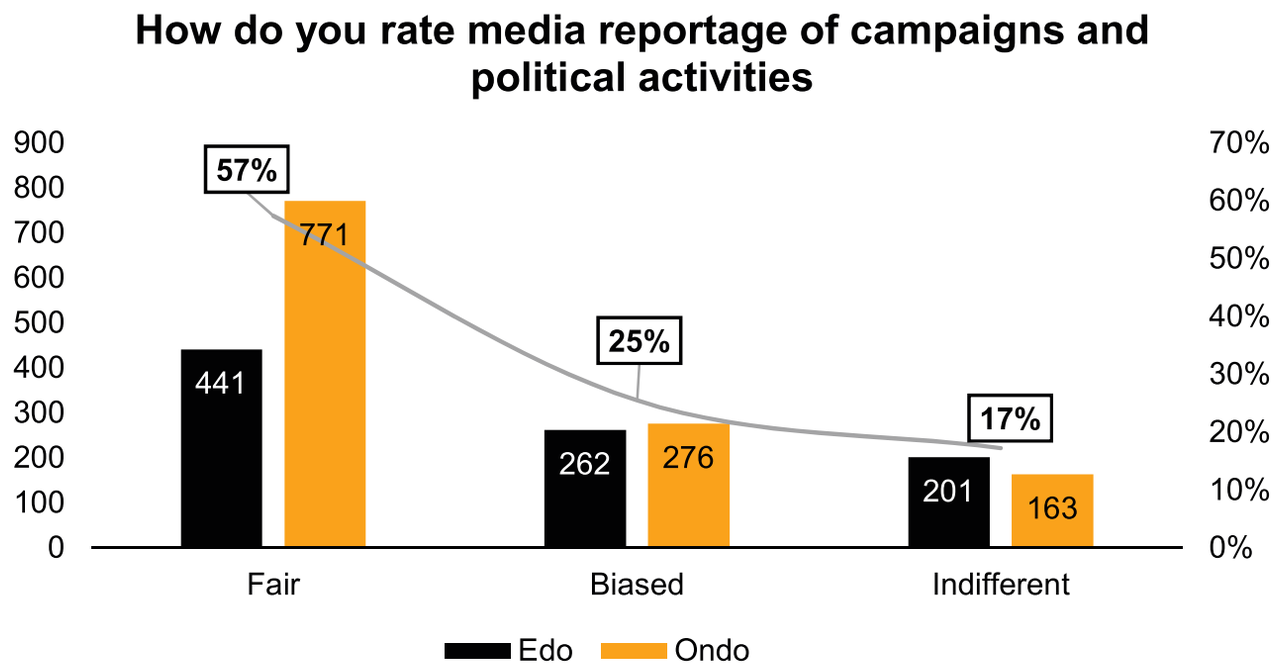
48. https://electionsandtech.org/



One of the questions this survey was seeking to answer was the source through which potential voters received information about the elections in both States. 1087 (50%) of respondents stated that they have actively sought information about the electoral process; 1060 (50%) stated that social media was their main source of information, 491 (22.8%) stated that they got their news from traditional news outlets, with 287 (13.3%) getting their information from family and friends and 241 (11.2%) from INEC.



When responding to the question "How do you rate media reportage of campaigns and political activities?" 1212 (57%) of respondents rated the media reportage of campaigns and political activities as fair with 538 (25%) and 364 (17%) rating it as biased or indifferent.



3.4 Election Transparency and Integrity

Election integrity is a difficult term to define, it is generally accepted that credible and transparent elections are the characteristics of election integrity. Transparency of elections includes a practical legal framework, a non-partisan, professional EMB, an independent and fair election dispute resolution mechanism, and an impartial media[49] amongst others. Professor Norris describes election integrity to be those characteristics agreed upon by international conventions and universal standards about elections which apply to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, on election day, and post-election. On the flip side of electoral integrity is electoral malpractice which is simply the violation of these principles (Pippa, 2014). The EMB is the major stakeholder in elections because of its unique role in conducting elections, Election integrity is not dependent on the role of the EMB alone. Political Parties, Candidates, Civil Society Organisations, Judiciary and in emerging democracies like Nigeria, security agencies all play very prominent roles in ensuring successful, transparent elections. This survey sought to look at the roles of some of these stakeholders and how the citizens perceived their role in the process while also looking inward. When journalists give out accurate, extensive information frequently, they help keep elections free and fair, and by extension, democracy thrives. In recent times, three things have posed some challenges to the electoral process - the Internet, social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The media, political parties and electoral regulators have a role to play in protecting the electoral process and protecting its integrity.

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49. https://www.ifes.org/our-expertise/election-integrity

3.4.1 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

> *"When the electorate believes that elections have been free and fair, they can be a powerful catalyst for better governance, greater security and human development. But in the absence of credible elections, citizens have no recourse to peaceful political change."* - ***Kofi Annan***

Election Management Bodies are those bodies set up to administer and manage elections. They are either set up to carry out all components of the electoral process or just some aspects of it. They also carry out not just elections but are expected under the laws setting them to carry out referendums, recall, register and monitor political parties, receive nominations of candidates, monitor the finances of political parties and build a database of voters through voter registration, among others. INEC's role in Nigeria's elections is multifaceted, including not only organising elections and ensuring every voter can participate but also the enforcement of electoral laws to promote fairness and transparency. Furthermore, its role extends to voter education and the establishment of mechanisms to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, such as voter registration and the deployment of electoral observers. INEC does not exist in a vacuum, it is a creation of law, the Constitution and the Electoral Act, the former establishing it and describing the boundaries of its powers and functions with the latter outlining the implementation of those functions. For electoral laws to be effective and ensure integrity, they should be detailed enough to allow EMBs to act independently in carrying out their functions[50]. The Constitution not only provides that INEC can make regulations to carry out its functions but also states that INEC cannot be subject to the control of any authority or person[51]. The EMB has the most extensive connection with other stakeholders. INEC's duties also intersect with diverse stakeholders in carrying out those functions; with political parties in its regulatory capacity, with the judiciary when litigating for election petitions and other electoral matters, CSOs who observe elections or carry out other advocacy in the process, security agencies who provide election security, the media in reporting elections, and voters in carrying out their civic duty, among others.

Citizens' perception of the independence, integrity and competence of an EMB matters in every election. The membership composition of the EMB is another factor to consider when advocating for the independence of the system and election integrity. Public confidence improves where electoral laws provide for qualifications of EMB members and the mode of appointment is clearly stated[52]. The qualification for membership of INEC is set out under the Constitution and it states that a person to be appointed must be non-partisan, a person of unquestionable integrity, not less than 40 years in the case of Chairman or 35 years in the case of National Commissioners[53]. INEC has the most

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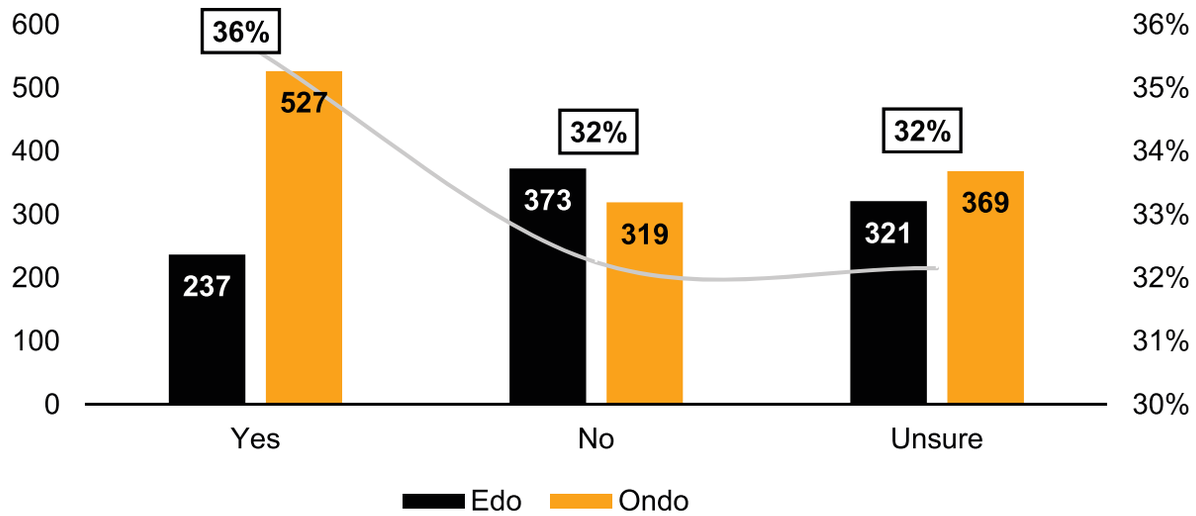
50. https://www.eods.eu/library/loader.pdf
51. Section 158 (1) of the Constitution
52. https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/513292555/677214213/EMD_chapter4.pdf
53. Third Schedule, Item F, paragraph 14

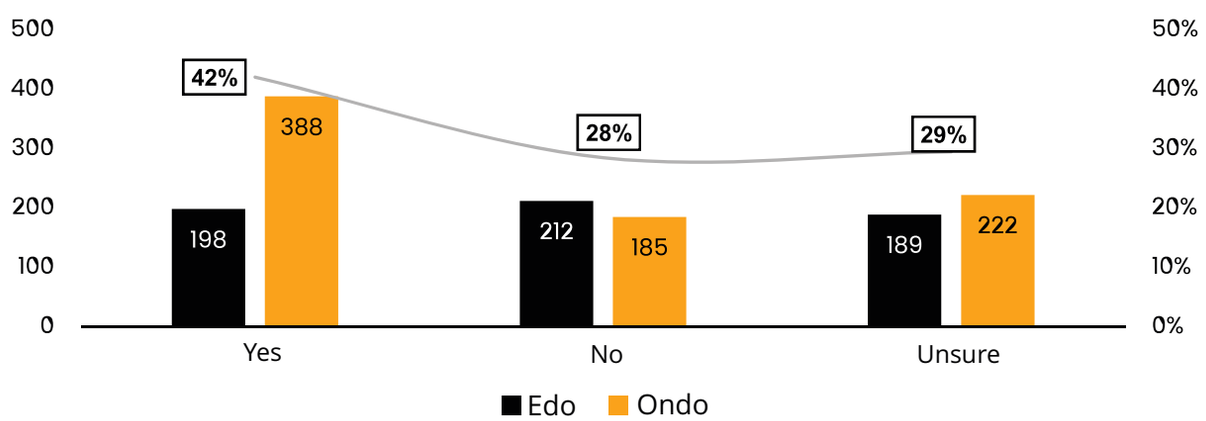
Do you trust the electoral process will be free, fair and credible?



important role in the electoral process. The powers to conduct elections, register political parties, monitor political parties and their finances, register voters, and other functions provided by the Electoral Act[54]. Conversations after the 2023 General elections centred around the credibility of INEC and the integrity of the 2023 general elections, hence the importance of determining a data-driven perception of INEC by citizens through this survey.

764 (35.7%) of the respondents in the survey trust that the election will be free, fair and credible; with 692 (32.4%) stating they do not trust that elections will be credible and 690 (32.3%) being unsure. The perception of citizens towards electoral institutions impacts their participation in elections. As discussed in the earlier part of this report, voter apathy has been on the rise with every electoral cycle. Where 32.3% of potential voters are unsure of the credibility of the electoral process, and an almost equal number outrightly do not trust INEC's ability to conduct credible elections, then there is potential for low turn-out on September 21st and 16th November respectively. The survey also compared how registered voters perceive the electoral process regarding its fairness, freedom, and credibility. 586 (42%) of respondents of the registered voters expressed trust in the electoral process to be free, fair, and credible. In contrast, 397 (28%) of respondents indicated a lack of trust in the electoral process, and 411 (29%) remained uncertain about their level of trust. These figures highlight a significant division in voter confidence, with a notable portion of the electorate either skeptical or undecided about the integrity of the electoral process.

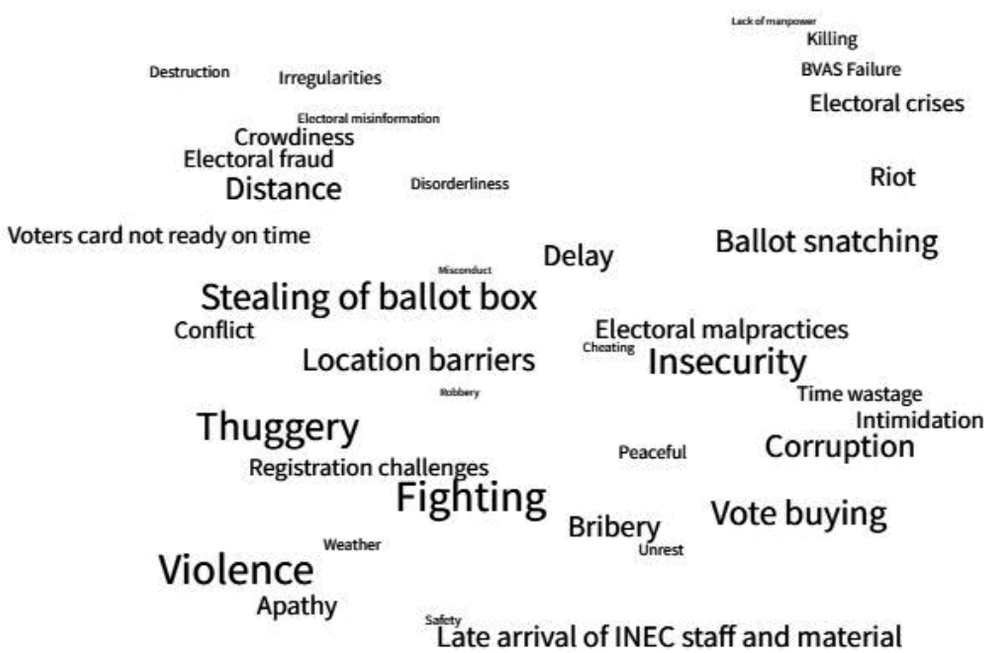
Registered voters and their level of trust in the electoral process



54. Third Schedule, Item F, paragraph 15

When asked about their most important issues or concerns in this election, respondents highlighted several key areas. These included free and fair elections, credible results, security, accountability, transparency, change, peaceful elections, credibility, election violence, election malpractice, good governance, job creation, good leaders, and empowerment.

Most of the respondents anticipate various barriers and challenges in participating in the election, including violence, ballot box theft, electoral malpractices, insecurity, delays, location barriers, late arrival of electoral staff and materials, registration challenges, voter apathy, rowdiness, disorderliness, technological failures, weather, and intimidation.



3.4.2 **The Judiciary**

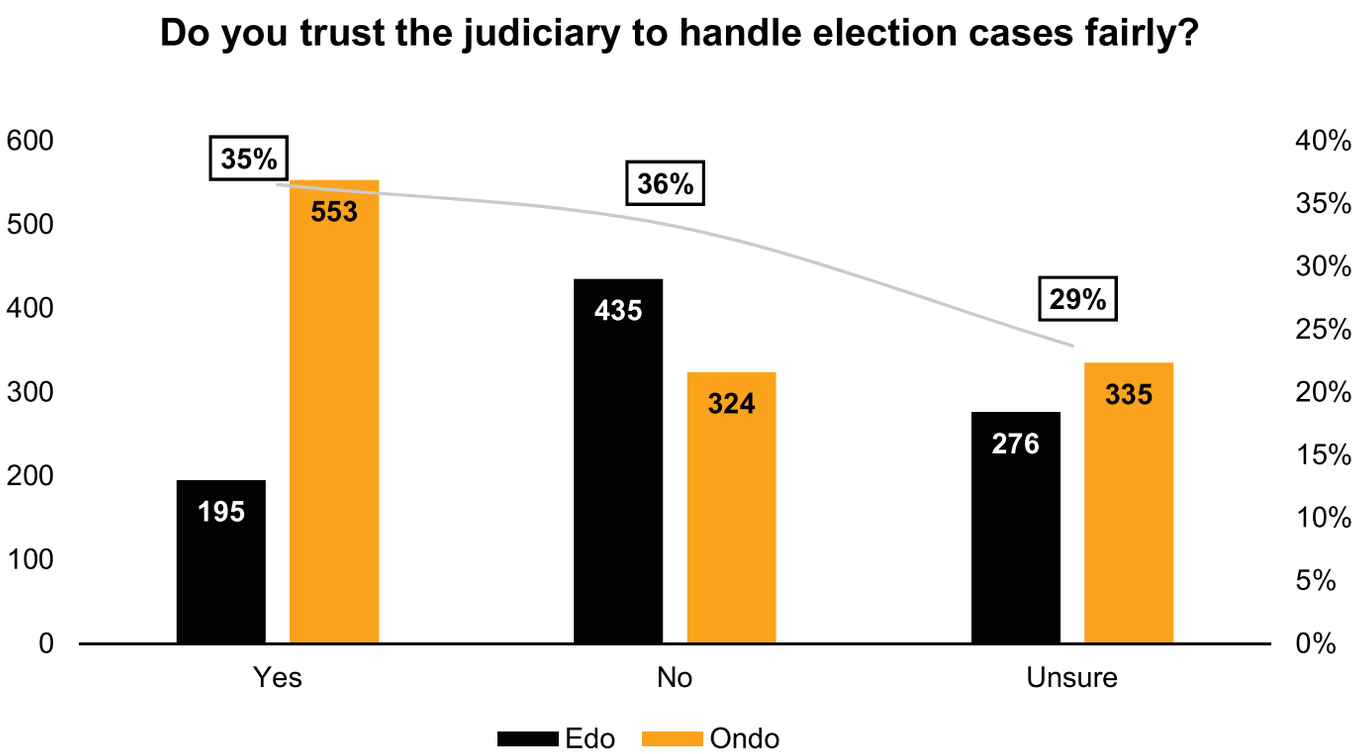
Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR) and Prosecution of electoral offences are an important part of elections. While one has been described as sui generis[55], as they are not civil cases per se but cases in a class of their own, electoral offences are criminal and have attached to them upon conviction fines or prison sentence or both. Stakeholders must have an avenue to seek redress for wrongs and the platform for that is the courts through the judiciary. It is also important that breeches to the electoral process be sanctioned by the State. The Judiciary serves as the ultimate arbiter, tasked with interpreting and applying electoral laws to settle disputes that inevitably arise before, during and after elections. Through its role of adjudication of electoral disputes and the rendering of judgments, the judiciary plays an important role in ensuring that electoral outcomes reflect the true will of the electorate. The Constitution creates special courts known as election tribunals[56] to adjudicate on election petitions setting timelines within which such cases are heard and judgement delivered, the Federal High Court[57] also has the exclusive jurisdiction to hear pre-election cases. The 2023 general election exposed cracks in the system, prompting scrutiny and debate over the efficacy of both INEC and the Judiciary in upholding electoral integrity.

"The bedrock of our democracy is the rule of law and that means we have to have an independent judiciary, judges who can make decisions independent of the political winds that are blowing."
- Caroline Kennedy

There have been arguments about the extent of the role of the judiciary in adjudicating election petitions - should the judiciary interfere by setting aside the elections of duly elected officials through technical justice? The Supreme Court has in the past abhorred technical justice and has in a number of cases upheld the law to do justice devoid of technicalities. In Eze v FRN[58], the Supreme Court stated that "Justices of the Supreme Court are not judicial technicians and Supreme Court is not a workshop of technical justice." In Dapianlong v Dariye[59] the court stated, "The reign of technical justice is over, on the throne now sits substantial justice, long may you reign, substantial justice." Niki Tobi JSC (as he then was) defines "technicalities to be when a party quickly takes an immediately available opportunity, however infinitesimal it may be, to work against the merits of the opponent's case. In other words, he holds and relies tenaciously on the rules of the Court with little or no regard for the justice of the matter. As far as he is concerned, the rules must be followed to the last sentences, the last words and the last letters without much ado, and with little or no regard to the injustice that will be caused the opponent[60]". In instances where electoral victory is gotten through fraudulent means, the judiciary

55. PDP V. INEC & ORS (2014) LPELR-22892 (CA)
56. Sections 239 and 285
57. Section 29(5) Electoral Act, 2022
58. (2017) 15 NWLR (pt. 1589) 433.
59. (2008) 8 NWLR (Part 1036) 332.
60. Adedeji v The State (1992) 4 NWLR (Pt. 234) 248, at page 265

must act in favour of protecting the process. The Nigerian judiciary has shown bravery when it removed incumbents for not being validly elected under the electoral laws as is the case in Edo and Ondo in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Flowing from the above, by the principles of judicial precedents, in which those opinions are binding on all courts below the Supreme Court, all courts including the Supreme Court should understand that in every electoral matter, justice means ensuring that the people's votes count. The people who assume political office should be those whom the people elected. Where voters are not sure that their choices will be upheld by courts, especially on matters of technicality, it erodes their trust in the judiciary and encourages the perception of the judiciary as unreliable. 748 (35.3%) of respondents agree that the judiciary will handle election cases fairly, 759 (35.9%) and 611 (28.9%) said No and unsure respectively. Impartiality and adherence to due process by the judiciary are paramount in upholding the sanctity of the electoral process.



4.0 Recommendations

4.1 To Improve Citizens' Participation

a. Continuous civic and voter education is one way to ensure engagement with potential voters which could translate into participation. This could be done by integrating voter education into school curriculums so that children can understand the importance of involvement before they are eligible to vote. All stakeholders especially INEC, CSOs and Political parties should collaborate on organising public awareness campaigns on the importance of voting and participation. Voter education should also be created to target women, youth and persons with disability and find ways to make participation easier, safer and more inclusive.

b. **Make the voting process more flexible -** One of the major problems with voting in elections in Nigeria is the difficulty with the voting process. People can only vote in polling units where their registration is domiciled meaning, where a person is not close to their polling unit on election day, they will be unable to vote diasporans can only vote if they travel back to Nigeria and the lack of diverse voting methods all add to the difficulty in the process and therefore hinder participation. The use of appropriate technology is one of the easiest ways to make participation in the electoral process easier. In 2022, INEC provided a portal for pre-registration of voters, this helped simplify the process. The process can be improved to include concluding voter registration in the comfort of your home and being able to access your voter registration on the same day. If Nigeria can effectively streamline all its data sources, this will be easy to do. By implementing a combination of these strategies, it is possible to increase voter participation and strengthen democratic processes.

4.2 Make Political Parties Effective

a. **Improve Internal Democracy** - The National Democratic Institute[61] in a study identified three factors that political parties should focus on in building better structures. Improving internal democracy through transparency, accountability and inclusive organisational rule. In such a situation, party members are motivated because they are carried along in decision making and the process of electing leaders of the party is transparent.

b. **Transparency in Activities of political parties** - Transparency helps combat corruption by defining rules and providing disciplinary mechanisms to address unethical or corrupt behaviour. It is also a major booster of public confidence and perception of the political party.

61. Breth, Erica, and Julian Quibell, editors. Best Practices of Effective Parties: Three Training Modules for Political Parties. National Democratic Institute, [2003]

c. Outreach encompasses extending the membership of political parties to other sectors. For example inviting marginalised groups such as women, young people and persons with disability to become members. Political Parties in Nigeria need to look beyond just winning elections but look to creating ideologically sound institutions that are driven by policy, and research and they need to contribute to the political ethos in Nigeria.

4.3 **Media**

a. **Expand into New Niches** - The Media is the custodian of free speech and their role in every society is to provide accurate, comprehensive, and unbiased information to the public. 23% of respondents stated the media was their major source of information, this presents an opportunity for the media to target a younger audience by innovating through the use of technology. For mainstream media companies, social media is not the enemy, it presents an opportunity to expand into a new niche. The cyberspace is largely ungoverned and despite Cybercrime laws, people mostly get away with spreading fake news because, in most instances, this is done with no intention to harm; however, any information put out to the public whether to harm or not should be allowed to stay in public without countering with the truth. Every media house reporting on elections must do it side by side with fact-checking every piece of information it publishes.

It is necessary that irrespective of the politics of media ownership, informing the electorate should be the greater good and should endeavour to provide equal air time to candidates in an election. Often, media houses report from the point of view of the candidates and not from issues potential voters want to hear discussed. Media houses must endeavour to take a people-centred approach to reporting elections and not a candidate approach which has been the norm. Issues such as the economy, government spending, justice system reforms, and security can be misunderstood by voters, especially with low literacy rates, the media should present complex issues in formats that can be understood by potential voters easily such as videos, infographics, multi-lingual formats and other multimedia content. Above all, the media should adhere to the highest ethical standards of journalism.

4.4 **Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)**

a. **Appropriate Election Technology** - Allegations of irregularities and malpractices have cast a shadow over the credibility of the recent polls, raising significant concerns about the fairness and transparency of the electoral process. The 2023 general elections posed a credibility issue for INEC. While election technologies have proven to be immensely beneficial, enhancing both the process and its credibility, their implementation must be appropriate, taking potential risks into account. Inadequate or untimely introduction of technology could compromise transparency and disrupt the sustainability of the process. For Edo and Ondo States, every technology used must be thoroughly explained by INEC through enhanced voter education.

b. **Creative Voter Education** - One of the major sources of information for respondents is social media, this is not surprising as the largest number of registered voters and respondents in the survey are aged 18 to 35. This is the generation active on most social media platforms, therefore INEC needs to be more creative about its voter education strategies. It needs to increase efforts to non-conventional sites like Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat which use visuals to pass messages across. This will help INEC target younger people with messages on why voting is important.

c. **Unbundled INEC** - In the long term, reforms to INEC have become necessary due to its overburdened mandate. Following the Justice Uwais Committee's 2008 recommendations, INEC should be unbundled into four separate institutions, one of which would be the Electoral Offences Commission and another a Commission overseeing registration and monitoring of political parties. A crucial aspect of INEC's mandate that has seen little implementation is the prosecution of electoral offences. At the National Human Rights Commission's Monthly Review Forum of the 2023 Elections, held on 3 May 2023, the Director of Litigation and Prosecution at INEC highlighted that the Nigerian Police Force forwarded 215 electoral files to INEC for the prosecution of 774 individuals arrested during the elections. He also pointed out the administrative and institutional challenges to these prosecutions. To make INEC more effective, it should be unbundled with separate organisation granted the powers to prosecute electoral offences and another to register and monitor the activities of political parties.

4.5 **For the Judiciary**

a. **Alternative Dispute Resolution** - Our election dispute system is overburdened with cases. After the 2023 General elections, 1,209 election petitions were filed. An approach to counter this could be to find alternative ways of resolving electoral disputes such as including the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution to resolve electoral cases. This holds the promise of reducing electoral petitions and decongesting the tribunals. In the alternative, special courts and tribunals should be created to handle election petitions and electoral offences to focus on only cases arising from elections with petitions or criminal. Instead of adhoc election tribunals, these special courts remain permanent and their only mandate is to hear election petitions and electoral offences.

b. **Timeframe for election petitions** - Every conversation on electoral and judicial reforms should start from a proposal to change the way election litigation is carried out. The law provides that election petitions take 180 days from the day they are filed to the day judgement is given, and 60 days given for Appeals. These periods usually extend until long after incumbents have been sworn in. The period for election petitions should be reduced from 180 days to 30 days for all cases to be exhaustively dealt with before swearing-in. Also, the system for appeals of decisions of election petitions should be abolished. The Supreme Court can be the first court of instance for Presidential elections and the Court of Appeal be the first and last court for government elections. There should be no appeal for cases filed at the tribunals which will be the first and final court for election matters.

c. **Discipline Judges** - There have been cases of conflicting judgments by courts of similar jurisdiction which call into question the integrity of the process. Judges who give conflicting judgments that are not based on laid down legal principles and precedent should be heavily sanctioned.

5.0 Conclusion

Citizens' participation is an important aspect of democratic governance. It starts with citizens participating in electing those they desire to lead them. In making these decisions to participate, citizens must be able trust the electoral process and electoral institutions. This trust is gotten not only from the actions of the institutions but from the information available from major stakeholders. That is where electoral stakeholders are important by serving as vehicles of voter and civic education. In the coming Edo and Ondo Governorship elections, INEC's role should be to instil citizens' faith in its mandate; the judiciary must reject when parties in electoral issues insist on technicalities to win their cases and ensure that the electoral choices of voters are retained at all costs; the media should report issues without bias and ulterior motives and ensure that only truth about the process, about candidates and political parties are presented to the citizens in ways and formats they can understand. One of the reasons respondents gave for making up their mind to vote is the quality of candidates. Political parties have increasingly become more concerned with winning elections than with the quality of candidates. While the former is one of the major mandates of political parties, parties should endeavour to seek candidates who are tested and have high integrity and to open up their candidacy and membership to diverse demographics. Political parties as vehicles of civic and voter education should focus on programs that get citizens to participate by joining, actively participating in consultation and going out to vote on election day. Improving voter turnout in Nigeria's elections is possible, but it must be deliberate. Civil Society Organisations are uniquely placed to engage with all stakeholders including voters, INEC, Media, Judiciary, Candidates, and Political Parties; they can drive this process by collaborating with other CSOs to influence outcomes through organising stakeholder engagements to serve as interface with other stakeholders.

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