

Nigerian Election Watch

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AN NDI NIGERIA NEWSLETTER ON THE 2007 ELECTIONS

A Challenging Electoral Landscape

The landscape as Nigeria approaches the 2007 general elections presents peaks, valleys and plateaus. Before the euphoria created by the defeat of the third term agenda in May could subside, the passage of the Electoral Act 2006 gave stakeholders a framework within which to situate plans and projects. Yet the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to release its actual election timetable caused increasing frustration and left a vacuum which rumors of plans by the Obasanjo administration to prolong its stay in office by means of an Interim Government were tailor-made to fit.



INEC's August National Forum therefore came none too soon, as not only did President Olusegun Obasanjo appear in person to scotch ideas that he would in any way support 'the Interim National Government contraption', but also, INEC released the long-awaited timetable showing that Voter Registration would commence across the country on the 7th of October, while the state and national elections would be held on the 14th and 21st of April 2007 respectively.

With these dates, the deadlines in the Electoral Act such as those for the submission of candidate lists, close of voter and political party registration also crystallized. At the same forum, INEC demonstrated some of its preparations for the conduct of the elections, most notably machines for voter registration by direct data capture. Tested on former Head of State Yakubu Gowon among others, the electronic data to be captured includes both a photograph of the voter and biometric data: finger or thumb print. This, INEC assured, would deter double registration and would certainly prevent double voting on election days. The Geographical Information System showing the location of individual polling stations and other data were also demonstrated by INEC.

Once again however, the nation risks falling off the plateau of expectation to the valley of despondency in its electoral journey. On one hand, uncertainty persists about the extent to which INEC will indeed be ready to commence registration of voters on the 7th of October. Although the Commission is now training those who will operate the voter registration machines, reports from across the country indicate attempts manipulate the recruitment of *ad hoc* staff for the exercise. Questions also remain as to whether there will be suffi-

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NDI Calls on Domestic Election Observers to Collaborate

Ahead of the 2007 Elections, the National Democratic Institute has called on Domestic Elections Observers to collaborate towards observing the 2007 elections. This call was made during a meeting between the NDI and its Domestic Election Monitoring partners and other leading election monitoring bodies in August. In her remarks at the meeting, Ms. Ayo Obe, Senior Program Manager, Elections, urged the groups to work together to

ensure unity in their position on the extent to which the elections are representative of the peoples' wishes. She said disharmony or going-it-alone in monitoring the elections would prevent organizations from garnering the kind of authority that would make a difference to the process. It might also afford sponsored organizations with ulterior motives an opportunity to counter the objective positions of independent groups. Speak-

ing in the same vein, Dr. Keith Jennings, Country Director, NDI/Nigeria and Mr. Pat Merloe, NDI Senior Associate and Director Programs on Election Processes reiterated the need for observer groups to combine their efforts as that would strengthen their voice and instill confidence in the electorate about the elections.

In his response, Mr. Inno-

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Election '07 Timetable

- Update of Voter Register – Oct. 7th, 2006
- Release of notice of polls – Nov. 8th, 2006
- Last day for submission and substitution of candidates of political parties – Feb. 6th, 2007
- INEC Publishes list of party candidates – Mar. 24th, 2007
- Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly Elections – April 14th, 2007
- Presidential and Senatorial/ House of Representatives Elections – Apr. 21st, 2007

Issue-Based Voting: A Novel Approach To Voter Education

One of the most important criteria for assessing any democratic political process is the level of popular participation in the electoral process. In Nigeria, with a population of 120 million of which over 65 million are estimated to be of voting age, voter education is imperative as a means of encouraging citizens to play a meaningful role in their country's democracy. The need for such encouragement is reinforced by the low voter turnout during the 2003 elections and a perceptible lack of public confidence in the build up to the 2007 elections.

Against this background, NDI is conducting a novel Issue-based Voter Education and Voter Mobilization training with civil society organizations across the six geopolitical zones of the country. This approach seeks not only to provide basic election information; but rather, to tie citizens voting rights to issues of poverty, health and social

development. It also places emphasis on direct voter contact, and the coordination of voter mobilization efforts.

To achieve these goals, NDI has adopted the following programs:

Civil Society Voter Education Network Partners

NDI is funding 26 domestic civil society organizations, spread across the six geopolitical zones and including women, youth and faith-based groups to conduct issue-based voter education and mobilization activities.

Activities for which these groups have been funded include: theatre, training workshops, posters, stickers, radio and television programs and jingles, etc

Issue-Based Training Manual and Master Training

The manual was developed in consultation with civil society groups and provides guidance on how voters can be trained to

identify issues and development



Participants at NDI Voter Education/Registration Monitoring Training in Lagos

challenges in their communities, and to use such knowledge to make informed political choices during the election.

Sectoral Meetings

NDI is holding a series of sectoral meetings with religious leaders, professional bodies, students and regional socio-cultural groups such as the Arewa Consultative Forum, *Afenifere* and *Ohaneze Ndigbo* as a way of raising the level of awareness and public participation in the electoral process. It is expected that these meetings will afford the groups an opportunity to dialogue on ways they can mobilize their constituent

to participate in the political process.

Town Hall Meetings

As a way of building public confidence in the electoral process, NDI plans a series of Issue-based Voter Education Town Hall Meetings across the



Participants at NDI Media Outreach in Lagos

country. These fora will provide a platform for citizens to meet and question representatives of the election administration, political party candidates and domestic election monitoring and other civil society groups. ■

NDI Launches Town Hall Meetings

As part of its efforts to build confidence of the citizenry in the electoral process, the NDI launched its series of Town Hall Meetings in Ajegunle, Lagos State in August. The town hall meeting was organized in collaboration with two local NGOs noted for their extensive development work and activities within the community; the Ajegunle Community Support Project and the Human Support Services, and saw the active participation of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The event attracted the participation of women, men

and youth groups, market traders and religious and traditional leaders in the community and its environs.



Chief Ayo Dada (centre) Lagos INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner, Dr. Keith Jennings NDI Nigeria Country Director (left), at the Ajegunle Town Hall Meeting.

The Lagos State INEC Resident Commissioner, Chief Ayo Dada, used the occasion to

inform participants about the Commission's preparedness to conduct nationwide voter registration before the end of the year and other election-related issues, and answered questions from participants.

NDI will be organizing



Question and Answer session at the Town Hall meeting in Ajegunle

similar town hall meetings across the country in the run up to the 2007 elections as an avenue to discuss community needs and issues in mobilizing voters to take an active part in the electoral process. The meetings will also provide a platform to discuss strategies by which communities can hold elected officials accountable to their election promises. NDI will continue to work with its partners who work in the host communities in order to reach the different segments of each community. ■

...Collaboration (Continued from page 1)

cent Chukwuma, Chair of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) supported the call for collaboration, noting that groups would do better and gain greater respect if they worked together and spoke with one voice. He said that because of past experience, civil society organizations were already

“Domestic Election Observers would do better and gain greater respect if they worked together and spoke with one voice”

making plans to work together to protect the mandate of citizens, rather than remain mere onlookers and reporters. Other groups who shared the same view at the meeting were the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), and the Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL). The groups also agreed to adopt a common checklist for monitoring the 2007



Challenges... (Continued from page 1)

cient registration machines for the expected 65 million or more voters, given that contracts for the supply were only recently awarded. These concerns however, will be soon answered. However thinly-spread the exercise, there is no reason why INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu's pledge that voter registration will commence on the 7th of October should not be kept. And as Iwu pointed out, matters are still in advance compared to the 1998/9 or 2003 polls.

Less clear is the political environment as the nation approaches the 2007 polls. While the famous presidential 'body

Elections.

Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE) formed

A new organization, the Alliance for Credible Election (ACE), has been formed. NGOs and CSOs from across Nigeria met in Abuja in August 2006 and agreed to work together for credible elections in 2007. According to its founders, ACE emanated from a realization of the need for civil society organizations to collaborate and establish a common structure and voice to ensure that credible elections are conducted in Nigeria in 2007 rather than leaving it to individual and possibly isolated groups to take on the



INEC Chairman, Prof. Maurice Iwu, NDI Nigeria Country Director, Dr. Keith Jennings and NDI, Director of Elections, Pat Merloe during the Institute's visit to the commission

task alone. The official launch of the organization took place in Lagos on the 18th of September 2006, with former NLC President Adamu Ciroma as its President, and Emma Ezeazu as its Secretary. ■

language' is now compatible with Obasanjo's declared intention to leave office in 2007, the somewhat belated attempt to clear the ranks of potential contenders for his or any other elective office of corrupt elements is again heating the polity. Although moves against the son of Ibrahim Babangida and the sudden release of the Pius Okigbo report on the dissipation of the US\$12.8 billion (first) Gulf War oil windfall appear long overdue to many and only galvanized by Babangida having at last openly declared his intention to seek the presidency in 2007; the moves against Vice President

Abubakar Atiku present much graver potential pitfalls. The letter by the President to the Senate detailing the results of an internal panel which sat over an Economic and Financial Crimes Commission report on allegations against Atiku does not in itself commence impeachment proceedings. But it has already resulted in counter-threats of impeachment moves against Obasanjo himself.

Beyond the presidency, the contest for the office at state level is even more volatile, with three gubernatorial candidates having already fallen to assassins, while the number of lesser known victims of

NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

- **We'll Deliver On 2007 Elections –IWU** (*ThisDay August 31, 2006*)
- **IWU Explains Election Order** —(*ThisDay, Thursday August 31, 2006*)
- **Ours Is To Build Confidence In Elections - Ayo Obe** - (*New Nigerian, September 7, 2006*)
- **The Media, National Security And 2007 Elections—** (*The Guardian, Monday Sept. 10, 2006*)
- **Elections — Priority of Military, Security Agents—AGWAI—**(*Vanguard, September 11, 2006*)
- **IWU: The Master Strategist—**(*Vanguard, September 11, 2006*)
- **ACD Faction Rejects Fusion Into Action Congress—**(*The Guardian, Monday September 18, 2006*)
- **INEC To Avoid Elections In Insecure Akwa-Ibom Communities** —(*Vanguard, Monday September 28, 2006*)
- **IBB to OBJ: You Can't Provoke Me—**(*Sunday Sun, October 1, 2006*)
- **No New Political Parties After October 14—INEC—** (*The Punch, Tuesday October 3, 2006*)
- **Political Tensions Threaten Nigeria's Credit Rating—**(*The Punch, Tuesday October 3, 2006*)
- **INEC Designates special areas for registration—** (*ThisDay October 4, 2006*)
- **Voters' Registration: Senate Summons Iwu—** (*ThisDay October 4, 2006*)

“ Beyond the presidency, the contest for office at state level is proving even more volatile, with three gubernatorial candidates having already fallen to assassins, while the number of lesser known victims of electoral violence is. ... less known.”



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Coming Events

- NDI Deployment of Long Term Observers (LTOs): October 2006
- TMG National Forum on Elections 2007: October 12th 2006
- NDI Sectoral Meeting with Student Representatives in Lagos: October 18th 2006
- NDI Town Hall meeting in Benue: October 31st 2006
- Pre-Election Conference with NBA, NLC: 15th-16th November 2006
- NDI Sectoral meeting with Religious leaders and faith-based groups: November 9th 2006
- NDI Sectoral Meeting with Youths and Women: December 7th 2006

Election Facts

- Nigeria has over 120,000 polling stations.
- Over 500,000 ad hoc staff are to be engaged by INEC.
- Over 65 million people of voting age
- Voter Registration starts October 7th 2006 using Direct Data Capture.
- INEC has a Chairman and 12 National Commissioners with a Residential Electoral Commissioner (REC) for each state plus Abuja.
- INEC conducts National and State Elections
- State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) only conduct Local Government Elections.
- The Electoral Act was signed into Law in June 2006.
- Option A4 is not a voting method: it was used in 1992/3 to select candidates.
- Queue voting was used for Legislative and Gubernatorial elections in 1992/3
- The Open-secret voting method was used for the presidential election on June 12, 1993 in response to queue voting's lack of secrecy and paper ballot.

FROM NDI

Nigerian Election Watch is one of the ways the National Democratic Institute in Nigeria hopes to disseminate information and analysis about the 2007 Elections, and the activities under its Elections program.

NDI Nigeria, which aims to build public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process, believes that information is the key to voter confidence. Voter confidence in turn, is the key to voter participation, from the decision to register to vote, through the political campaigns, to the casting of votes.

The importance of the 2007 Elections is difficult to over-estimate. For decades the nation has been marking time while other African

nations move ahead in terms of both democracy and development. The nation's leadership position on the continent is now under serious scrutiny, while the entire world understands that progress in Africa hangs on the successful conduct of Nigeria's elections. Despite the many – often genuine – doubts being expressed, NDI Nigeria believes that the ultimate power to ensure that the 2007 Elections are held in accordance with the 1999 Constitution lies in the determination of the Nigerian people. At this stage, when voters are yet to be registered, an unduly negative approach is likely to result in hesitation and apathy on the part of the electorate.

That does not mean that concerns

about the preparations and the process should not be raised. The electoral authorities may not even be aware of some problems, and bringing them into the open offers an opportunity for them to demonstrate their good faith by making corrections. In any event, the response to such problems gives Nigerians a basis against which to judge the conduct of the electoral process.

NDI Nigeria welcomes your reactions and responses to this newsletter. We hope to publish on a regular basis as the nation moves forward to the 2007 Elections. ■