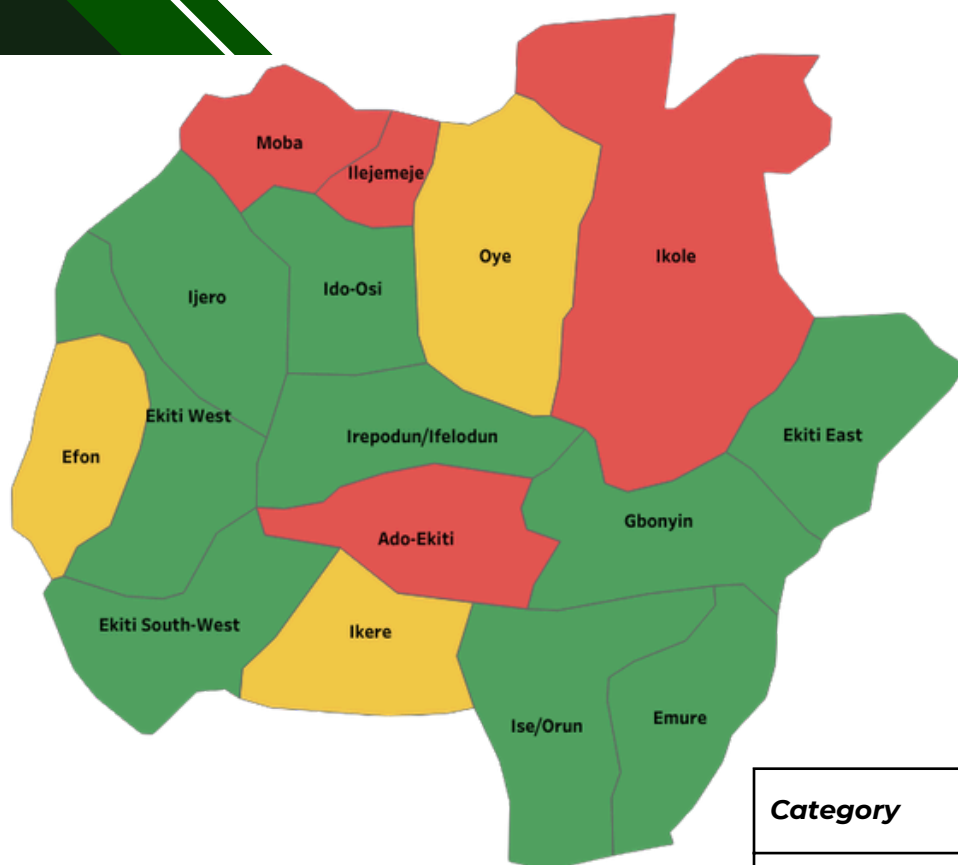




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EKITI STATE CONTEXT ANALYSIS 2026



Category	Color	Meaning
Critical	■ Crimson	Extreme hotspot
High	● Red	Sustained insecurity
Moderate	■ Yellow	Emerging risk
Low	■ Green	Stable

Political Context Analysis of Elections in
Nigeria: A Case Study of Ekiti State



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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Kukah Centre (TKC), founded by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, is a non-profit policy and research institution dedicated to promoting democracy, good governance, and national cohesion in Nigeria. Through evidence-based research, data-driven analysis, and inclusive dialogue, the Centre works to strengthen human-rights protection, accountability, and sustainable peace. Its interventions are designed to generate actionable insights that inform governance reforms, deepen civic participation, and reinforce institutional resilience.

As the Secretariat of the National Peace Committee (NPC), The Kukah Centre provides administrative support to the NPC — a non-governmental, non-partisan body of eminent Nigerians that has been central to Nigeria's democratic stability since its establishment in 2015. The Committee is widely recognized for facilitating the National Peace Accords, through which political parties and candidates commit to issue-based campaigns and respect for electoral outcomes. Beyond the accords, the NPC engages in preventive diplomacy, mediation, and dialogue, consistently helping to de-escalate political tensions and safeguard democratic transitions across electoral cycles.

In alignment with this peacebuilding mandate, The Kukah Centre accepted to host the Election Security Information (ESI) Hub under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN II) programme. The ESI Hub functions as a central coordination and data-intelligence platform that tracks electoral offences, identifies insecurity flashpoints, and generates verified, real-time analysis to inform decision-making. By integrating systematic data collection, geospatial analysis, and strategic communication tools, the Hub provides actionable insights to key stakeholders, including INEC, security agencies, civil society organizations, media, and development partners. Thereby enhancing early warning, countering disinformation, and advancing the shared goal of peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections in Nigeria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	01
PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS	02
METHODOLOGY	03
POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT	04
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, POLITICAL ACTORS, AND POWER DYNAMICS OF EKITI STATE	07
SECURITY AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS	14
CITIZENS, MEDIA, AND CIVIC SPACE IN EKITI STATE	24
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS	27
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ELECTIONS	29
RISK, SCENARIO, AND STAKEHOLDER MAPPING	31
IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING AND ENGAGEMENT	38
STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PEACE COMMITTEE	41



EKITI STATE ELECTIONS CONTEXT ANALYSIS



INTRODUCTION

On the 20th of June 2026, the people of Ekiti state will go to the polls to elect a governor. This election represents a pivotal democratic event in Nigeria's political calendar. As an important off-cycle election, it serves as both a crucial test for the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state and a key opportunity for the opposition to realign in a state with a history of volatile politics and fierce competition.^[1]

In Nigeria's political landscape, Ekiti State occupies a unique position. Known as the **"Fountain of Knowledge"** because of its concentration of academic institutions and high literacy rate, the electorate is renowned for being politically aware and volatile. Since the state's creation in 1996 and the return to democracy in 1999, Ekiti has held seven gubernatorial elections, with the forthcoming June 2026 poll marking the eighth. Notably, Ekiti operates on an off-cycle election schedule—a consequence of the 2010 Court of Appeal ruling that nullified the 2007 election and mandated a rerun, permanently shifting the state's electoral calendar out of sync with the national cycle.

More significantly, no incumbent governor has ever secured a second consecutive term in office. Governors Ayodele Fayose and Kayode Fayemi both served two terms, but neither did so back-to-back—Fayose was impeached during his first term before returning years later, while Fayemi lost his re-election bid as an incumbent in 2014 before staging a comeback in 2018. Following Governor Biodun Oyebanji's first term, which has been marked by initiatives to promote an unprecedented age of political stability and reconcile deep-seated partisan differences, the 2026 election takes place at a critical juncture. Consolidating this **"paradigm shift"** from a politics of animosity to one centred on governance and development is the foundation of both his campaign and his administration—and would require him to achieve what no governor has done before: break the jinx of self-succession.

The purpose of this research is to methodically examine the factors influencing this election. It will be guided by main analytical questions, focusing on:- the key actors and methods of power contestation in a shifting political landscape; the interplay between formal electoral rules and informal political practices; the role of informal norms, zoning agreements, and emerging issues like security and economic welfare; and the identification of principal risks to electoral integrity and opportunities for constructive engagement.

^[1]The Nation Newspaper. (2026). Ekiti 2026: election that should firm up BAO's political paradigm shift
<https://thenationonline.net/ekiti-2026-election-that-should-firm-up-baos-political-paradigm-shift/>

2.0 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS

2.1 PRIMARY PURPOSE

The focal purpose of this report is to systematically examine the political, institutional, social, and power dynamics shaping the Ekiti State gubernatorial election, scheduled for June 20, 2026. The analysis focuses on evaluating factors that influence electoral integrity, political competition, citizen participation, and the risks of manipulation or violence. To guide this assessment, the analysis is structured around four cross-cutting questions:

1. Historical background of the state, who holds political power, how is it exercised, and how is it contested during elections?
2. What formal electoral rules exist, and how are they applied or bypassed in practice?
3. Which informal norms, incentives, and patronage systems shape political behaviour?
4. What are the key risks, spoilers, and opportunities for reform or engagement?

2.2 SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS

To ensure focus and depth, the scope of this analysis is defined along the following parameters:

TABLE 1: SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

SCOPE DIMENSION	PARAMETERS FOR EKITI 2026 ANALYSIS
Focus Election	Gubernatorial election
Geographic & Administrative Focus	The analysis covers all 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Ekiti State, with particular attention to historically volatile constituencies and areas experiencing emerging security threats.
Electoral Cycle Phase	The primary focus is on the pre-election period (1999 – June 2026) , encompassing party primaries, candidate nomination, campaign activities, and preparatory logistics. Implications for the election-day and immediate post-election phases are also considered.
Key Actors	State institutions (INEC, Security Agencies under ICCES), the Ekiti State Government, Political Parties and their candidates, non-state actors (Media, Civil Society Organizations, Traditional and Religious Leaders), and the Electorate.

SCOPE DIMENSION	PARAMETERS FOR EKITI 2026 ANALYSIS
Thematic Focus Areas	The analysis will delve into the Political & Institutional Landscape; Security Dynamics; Socio-economic & Identity Factors; the Media and Information Environment; and the Political Economy of the election.
Temporal Coverage	While focused on the 2026 cycle, the analysis will draw upon relevant precedents and trends from the 2018 and 2022 governorship elections to provide historical context and track evolution.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This context analysis is based on the systematic study and synthesis of existing qualitative and quantitative sources. The methodology allows for rigorous analysis, triangulation, and validation of information drawn from a range of authoritative materials. The analysis employs the following methods:

i

Desk Review:

A comprehensive review of relevant policy and strategy documents, legal and institutional frameworks, electoral guidelines, prior assessments, situation reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature to establish the political, media analysis, security reports, legal, and governance context of the elections.

ii

Secondary Data Analysis:

Examination of publicly available and institutional data drawn from sources such as Independent National Electoral Commission reports, security and risk briefings, media monitoring outputs, and governance and conflict datasets to identify trends, patterns, and risk factors relevant to the election.

iii

Primary Data Analysis:

Consultative engagements were conducted with key stakeholders, including INEC officials, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Traditional Leaders, Religious Leaders, and Community Leaders. These engagements served to validate desktop findings, contextualise quantitative data, and capture emerging risks not reflected in secondary sources.

4.0 POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The 2026 election will be contested within a unique institutional framework defined by Ekiti's political culture and a national legal structure. This environment is shaped by a powerful incumbent, a historically strong but currently challenged opposition, and informal rules that often rival formal statutes in importance.

4.1 Constitutional Framework

The 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act of 2026 govern the election. The “25% Spread Clause” is a crucial legal provision that requires a candidate to receive the most votes and at least 25% of the vote in two-thirds of Ekiti's sixteen Local Government Areas (LGAs) to win in the first round. Historically, this regulation has encouraged statewide campaigning rather than depending on local strongholds. Similarly, the main law governing INEC's activities is the Electoral Act of 2026. The key provisions for the election include:

- **Early Party Primaries:** Mandates parties to conclude primaries and submit candidates' names at least 180 days before the election.
- **Technological Integration:** Legally backs the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results, aiming to enhance transparency .
- **Campaign Finance Limits:** Sets spending ceilings for gubernatorial candidates, though enforcement remains a significant challenge.

Additionally, judicial recourse is provided by the constitution. Since 1999, the Ekiti election has been the subject of numerous legal disputes that have established significant precedents. Vote validity, the “two-thirds spread” computation, and the criteria for proving electoral malpractice have all been influenced by previous tribunal and appellate court rulings. Both legal strategy and the public's perception of judicial recourse are influenced by these precedents.

4.2 Electoral Management and Administration

4.2.1 Core Operational Components

- **INEC's Capacity & Funding:** While INEC has constitutional operational independence, its financial dependence on federal appropriations can lead to delays. For an off-cycle election like Ekiti 2026, the timely and direct release of funds is critical for early procurement and planning.
- **Technology Deployment:** The successful use of **BVAS for voter accreditation** and the **INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV)** for uploading polling unit results will be the most scrutinized technical aspects. Past experiences in Ekiti and other states have shown that failures here are major triggers for disputes.

- **Logistics and Staffing:** Efficient movement of personnel and materials to all wards remains a perennial challenge. The recruitment, training, and deployment of impartial ad-hoc staff are vulnerable to local political pressure and compromise.
- **Security Collaboration:** INEC's relationship with security agencies under the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) is vital. The neutrality and professional conduct of police and other agents at polling units directly affect voter confidence and process integrity.

Table 2: Key Activities

KEY ACTIVITY	PARAMETERS FOR EKITI 2026 ANALYSIS
Election Date	June 20, 2026
Seats Contested	Governor of Ekiti State
Revised Register of Voters	1,059,360 registered voters
Total Number of LGAs	16
Total Number of Wards	177
Total Number of Polling Units	2,445
Incumbent Status	Governor Biodun Oyebanji (APC) is eligible for re-election
Total number of contestants for the position	13 governorship candidates
Accredited Parties	13
Final Candidate List Published	January 19, 2026
Campaign Window	January 21, 2026, – midnight on June 18, 2026

Table 3: Breakdown of Wards and Polling Units per LGA

NO.	Local Giverment Area	Number of Wards	Number of Polling Units
1	Ado-Ekiti	13	346
2	Ekiti East	12	106
3	Ekiti West	11	185
4	Ekiti South West	11	188
5	Efon	10	129
6	Emure	10	84
7	Gbonyin (Aiyekire)	10	115
8	Ido-Osi	11	114
9	Ijero	12	145
10	Ikere	11	125
11	Ikole	12	189
12	Ilejemeje	10	91
13	Irepodun/Ifelodun	11	176
14	Ise/Orun	10	114
15	Moba	11	115
16	Oye	12	191
Total	16	177	2445

5.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, POLITICAL ACTORS, AND POWER DYNAMICS OF EKITI STATE

This section analyses the formal and informal structures of power in Ekiti State, addressing the core question: **historical background of the state, who holds political power, how is it exercised, and how it will be contested in the 2026 election.** The analysis reveals a system dominated by elite personalities, fluid party loyalties, and patronage networks, where formal party competition is deeply shaped by informal bargains.

5.1 Historical Background of the State

Ekiti State was established on October 1, 1996, following its separation from the former Ondo State during the military administration of General Sani Abacha, with Ado-Ekiti designated as the capital. The state is situated entirely within the tropics, between longitudes 4°51' and 5°45' East and latitudes 7°15' and 8°51' North^[2]. At creation, the estimated population was 1,750,000, growing to 2,384,212 by the 2006 census. Administratively, the state comprises 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 38 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs), organised into three senatorial districts (Central, North, and South) and six federal constituencies^[3]. Agriculture forms the backbone of Ekiti's economy, employing over 75% of the population^[4]. The state is also rich in mineral resources, including clay, kaolin, cassiterite, and granite, though many remain underexploited. Education is a defining feature, with the state recognised nationally as a “Fountain of Knowledge.”^[5] The population is predominantly Yoruba, specifically the Ekiti subgroup. Christians constitute the majority, with smaller Muslim and traditional religion communities^[6]. Social cohesion is reinforced by shared cultural heritage, festivals, and community structures.

Electoral Infrastructure Profile:^[7]

1. Number of LGAs: 16
2. Number of LCDAs: 38
3. Number of Wards: 177
4. Number of Polling Units: 2,445
5. Registered Voters (2026): 1,059,360 (INEC voter register)

^[2] Ekiti State Government. (n.d.). About Ekiti. Retrieved January 2026, from <https://www.ekitistate.gov.ng/about-ekiti#geopolitical-arrangement>

^[3] Visit Ekiti. (n.d.). About Ekiti State. Retrieved January 2026, from <https://visitekiti.ek.gov.ng/about-ekiti-state>

^[4] Visit Ekiti (n.d.). DIGEST OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS YEAR 2023. https://www.ekitistate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2023/AGRIC_PUBLICATION_2023.pdf

^[5] Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission. (n.d.). Ekiti State. Retrieved January 2026, from <https://www.nipic.gov.ng/nigeria-states/ekiti-state>

^[6] European Union Agency for Asylum. (2021). Country guidance Nigeria: Ekiti. Retrieved January 2026, from <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-nigeria-2021/ekiti>

^[7] Independent National Electoral Commission. (2015). Directory of polling units, Ekiti State (Revised January 2015). Federal Republic of Nigeria. Retrieved January 2026, from https://wp1.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/PU_Directory_Revised_January_2015_Ekiti.pdf

5.2 The Early Republican Framework and First Upheaval (1999-2007)

Under Otunba Niyi Adebayo of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), who served a single term from 1999 to 2003, Ekiti began the Fourth Republic with relative stability. However, by the next election in 2003, the populist Ayo Fayose of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) ^[8] was elected as a result of President Olusegun Obasanjo's "national grid" politics. However, Fayose's first term ended in a constitutional crisis rather than at the polls. In October 2006, the State Assembly impeached him; the Federal Government later ruled that this action was unlawful, and General Tunji Olurin was appointed Administrator for a brief period. ^{[9] [10]}

The 2007 governorship election was intended to restore civilian rule, but instead plunged the state into its first major post-election legal dilemma. Engineer Segun Oni of the PDP was declared the winner and inaugurated. His main challenger, Dr. Kayode Fayemi of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), immediately contested the result, alleging widespread irregularities. What followed was a gruelling three-year legal battle that became a benchmark for electoral litigation in Nigeria. Fayemi's dogged pursuit of justice through the courts kept the legitimacy of Oni's administration under a permanent cloud. Finally, in a landmark ruling, the Court of Appeal sitting in Ilorin nullified Oni's election in 2010, citing illegal returns. The court did not declare Fayemi the winner outright but ordered a re-run in 10 out of the state's 16 Local Government Areas. This partial re-run paved the way for Fayemi's eventual victory and swearing-in in October 2010. This episode established a template: an election in Ekiti was not concluded on election day but was only truly settled after exhausting the judicial process.

5.3 The Era of "Stomach Infrastructure" and Judicial Power (2014-2018)

The 2014 election was a direct contest between the incumbent, Dr. Kayode Fayemi (now of the All-Progressives Congress, APC), and his perennial rival, Ayo Fayose (PDP). Fayose's campaign masterfully tapped into socioeconomic grievances, popularizing the term "stomach infrastructure", a synonym for the direct provision of money and goods to voters, as a counter to the incumbent's focus on physical infrastructure. Fayose's stunning victory, where he defeated Fayemi in all 16 LGAs, was a shock that reshaped political strategy not just in Ekiti but nationally. While the result itself was not overturned, the campaign marked the mainstreaming of vote-buying as a brazen and calculated electoral strategy.

Fayemi's return to the political arena in 2018 set the stage for another round of intense pre-election litigation. Before a single vote was cast, his intra-party rival, former Governor Segun Oni (who had since joined the APC), filed a suit challenging Fayemi's eligibility. Oni argued that, as a sitting Minister, Fayemi had not resigned within the constitutionally required period and referenced a past indictment by a state panel ^[11]. The Federal High Court in Ado-Ekiti, however, delivered a comprehensive dismissal. Justice Uche Agomoh ruled that a Minister is not the category of public officer required to resign, that Fayemi was validly nominated by his party, and that the court could not act as an appeal over a previously dismissed indictment case. This decisive judgment cleared the path for Fayemi's candidacy and subsequent victory at the polls.

The 2018 election itself, while declared largely peaceful by observers, was fundamentally marred by the systemic "see and buy" method of vote-buying ^[12]. Party agents, operating in clear view of security officials, would pay voters after they had cast their ballots and shown their marked ballot papers as proof.

^[8] Blueprint. (2025, November 11). Ekiti poll: Cases of ballot box snatching, vote buying emerge. <https://blueprint.ng/ekiti-poll-ballot-box-snatching-vote-buying/>

^[9] Ekiti State Government. (n.d.). Past governors. Retrieved February 5, 2026, from <https://www.ekitistate.gov.ng/about-ekiti/past-governors>

^[10] Daily Post. (2025, May 19). Ekiti 2026: Zoning, rivalries, battle for power reignite old political fires. <https://dailypost.ng/2025/05/19/ekiti-2026-zoning-rivalries-battle-for-power-reignite-old-political-fires/>

^[11] Ekiti State Government. (2025, October 23). Government inaugurates committee on electoral security [Press release]. <https://www.ekitistate.gov.ng/archives/17848>

^[12] <https://punchng.com/ekiti-see-and-buy-election-bazaar/>

This practice, which rendered the secrecy of the ballot meaningless, was so pervasive that INEC itself issued a communiqué condemning it. The electoral contest was thus a dual battle: one for the hearts and minds of the electorate, and another for their ballots through direct financial transaction. Fayemi won the election, but the PDP candidate, Prof. Kolapo Olusola, filed a petition at the Election Tribunal alleging malpractice in over 1,458 polling units. As with many such petitions, it was dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence, solidifying the judicial trend of upholding results unless petitioners could provide overwhelming, unit-specific proof.

Year of Election	Candidates (Party)	Key Election Petition & Court Decisions	Final Outcome
2007	Segun Oni (PDP) vs. Kayode Fayemi (ACN/AD)	- Tribunal dismissed Fayemi's petition. - The Appeal Court ordered a 2009 supplementary election. - Tribunal upheld Oni's win after the rerun. - Oct 2010: Appeal Court in Ilorin voided Oni's election, declared Fayemi winner. - May 2013: Supreme Court dismissed Oni's final appeal, citing lack of jurisdiction over the 2007 case.	Kayode Fayemi was sworn in (Oct 2010). Supreme Court affirmed (May 2013).
2014	Ayo Fayose (PDP) vs. Kayode Fayemi (APC) (incumbent)	- APC petitioned, alleging Fayose's disqualification (past impeachment, forged certificate) and electoral malpractices. - Dec 2014: Election Tribunal dismissed the APC's petition in its entirety. - The dismissal was upheld by higher courts.	Ayo Fayose's election upheld.
2018	Kayode Fayemi (APC) vs. Kolapo Olusola (PDP)	- PDP/Prof. Olusola petitioned the tribunal, challenging the result. - The Tribunal and subsequently the Court of Appeal dismissed the petition, upholding Fayemi's victory.	Kayode Fayemi's election upheld.

Year of Election	Candidates (Party)	Key Election Petition & Court Decisions	Final Outcome
2022	Biodun Oyebanji (APC) vs. Bisi Kolawole (PDP) vs. Segun Oni (SDP)	- PDP/SDP petitions challenged the result at the Tribunal. - The Tribunal and the Court of Appeal dismissed all petitions, affirming Oyebanji's win.	Biodun Oyebanji's election upheld.

5.4 Political Parties

Internal Democracy and Candidate Selection Processes

Internal party democracy in Ekiti remains weak and highly personalised. Candidate selection processes are routinely dominated by incumbent governors and their factions, national party leadership influence, and wealthy aspirants capable of financing delegate mobilisation. Empirical patterns from recent election cycles reveal delegate list manipulation and monetisation, consensus candidacies brokered through elite negotiations, and post-primary litigation reflecting unresolved factional splits^[13].

In the APC, gubernatorial influence has historically shaped primary outcomes, particularly during Fayemi's tenure and the 2022 succession process. In the PDP, factional fragmentation and Fayose-aligned patronage networks have frequently determined candidate emergence. Primaries function less as competitive democratic processes and more as elite bargaining forums, weakening party institutionalisation and heightening post-election grievances.

Dominant Parties vs Emerging Parties

Ekiti State's party system is a competitive duopoly dominated by two national parties: the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-Progressives Congress (APC). Since 1999, gubernatorial power has alternated between these two parties, producing the state's reputation as a competitive "swing state" at the gubernatorial level. This designation refers specifically to the high volatility and fierce alternation of power between the two dominant parties, not to the fragmentation of votes among a wide field. As the historical performance table below indicates, the PDP and APC (and their predecessor parties, AD and ACN) have consistently captured a combined share of over 95% of the vote in most cycles, with third parties playing a marginal role^{[14] [15]}.

The critical "swing" dynamic is therefore elite-driven and bipolar: it occurs when significant blocs of voters, often motivated by performance grievances or powerful patronage networks, shift en masse from one major party to the other, as seen in the pivotal transitions of 2003, 2014, and 2018. However, the political landscape has shown signs of evolution. The APC's consolidation of power under Governor Biodun Oyebanji, its sweeping victory in the 2023 local government elections^[16], and the current disarray within the PDP suggests the system may be transitioning from a competitive duopoly to a dominant-party system.

^[13] Omotola, J. S. (2010). Political parties and the quest for political stability in Nigeria. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 6(2), 125–145.

^[14] Adebayo, O. (2014). Overview of Ekiti State. Situation Room Nigeria. <https://situationroomng.org/overview-of-ekiti-state-2/>

^[15] 2018 Ekiti State gubernatorial election. (n.d.). Wikipedia. [8] Blueprint. (2025, November 11). Ekiti poll: Cases of ballot box snatching, vote buying emerge. <https://blueprint.ng/ekiti-poll-ballot-box-snatching-vote-buying/>

^[16] Punch. (2023, December 3). APC wins all chairmanship seats in Ekiti council polls. <https://punchng.com/apc-wins-all-chairmanship-seats-in-ekiti-council-polls/>

This potential shift does not negate Ekiti's history as a swing state but highlights that its electoral volatility is contingent on a robust and legally present opposition. The current weakness of the PDP is the primary factor testing this historical characteristic^[17].

The PDP established early dominance in the early Fourth Republic, particularly under Ayodele Fayose (2003–2006; 2014–2018), relying on populist rhetoric and deep patronage networks^[18]. The APC, inheriting the regional legacy of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), consolidated power under Kayode Fayemi (2010–2014; 2018–2022) and retained control in 2022 under Biodun Oyebanji^[19].

Third-force parties such as the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the Labour Party (LP) have periodically gained symbolic traction. Notably, the SDP placed second in the 2022 gubernatorial election (82,211 votes), reflecting protest voting and elite fragmentation within the PDP. However, these parties remain structurally weak due to limited grassroots organisational depth, poor access to sustained financing, and weak elite sponsorship and national coordination^[20].

Table 5: Party Performance (1999–2022)

Year	Winning Vote Share	Runner-Up (Party)	Runner-Up Vote Share	Notable Outcome
1999	~73.5%	PDP	~27.5%	AD dominance at Fourth Republic starts
2003	~56.6%	AD	~43.4%	First major party shift
2007	62.10%	ACN	37.90%	PDP consolidated power
2014	~62.3%	APC	~37.2%	Incumbent (APC) defeated
2018	~51.3%	PDP	~46.3%	APC return to power
2022	~53.2%	SDP	~23.4%	APC consolidates; SDP strong 2nd

Role of Godfathers

Ekiti politics exhibits moderate godfatherism, distinct from the more entrenched patron–client hierarchies seen in states like Lagos or Rivers. Rather than a single dominant godfather, influence is

^[17] BusinessDay. (2024, May 9). Elections without competition: Inside Nigeria's quiet democratic squeeze. [13] Omotola, J. S. (2010). Political parties and the quest for political stability in Nigeria. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 6(2), 125–145.

^[18] 2007 Ekiti State gubernatorial election. (n.d.). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Ekiti_State_gubernatorial_election

^[19] This Day. (2022, June 20). Oyebanji's victory has put to rest succession jinx in Ekiti. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/2022/06/20/oyebanjis-victory-has-put-to-rest-succession-jinx-in-ekiti/>

^[20] 2022 Ekiti State gubernatorial election. (n.d.). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Ekiti_State_gubernatorial_election

fragmented among former governors, party financiers, traditional rulers, and Abuja-based political brokers^{[21] [22]}. Fayose and Fayemi function less as classical godfathers and more as elite patrons, using their networks to shape party primaries, campaign financing, and coalition building. Godfatherism manifests in Ekiti through candidate imposition during party primaries, strategic defections and elite realignments, and resource mobilisation for vote-buying and logistics. However, its effectiveness is constrained by Ekiti's politically assertive electorate and high elite turnover. Voters have repeatedly defied elite expectations, notably in 2014 and 2022, indicating that godfather influence is powerful but not determinative.

Incumbency Advantages

Incumbency advantages have grown since the 2018 governorship, culminating in the APC sweeping all chairmanship and councillorship seats in 2023 across the 38 LCDAs and 177 wards^[23]. However, historically, incumbents did not always secure re-election in Ekiti. Fayose unseated sitting governor Fayemi in 2014, and Fayemi displaced PDP's Kolapo Eleka in 2018^[24].

Elite bargains and cross-party defections characterise Ekiti politics, with defections often preceding elections. These elite bargains frequently determine party strength more than grassroots ideology, reinforcing the personalisation of party politics^[25].

Defections

Political defections have become a defining feature of Ekiti State's electoral cycles, often serving as strategic realignments driven by access to patronage, pre-election calculations, and post-election bargaining. The phenomenon peaked in the lead-up to the 2018 governorship election, when former Governor Segun Oni defected from the PDP to the APC, and again in 2020 when he rejoined the PDP before eventually moving to the SDP for the 2022 election. The 2022 cycle witnessed a cascade of high-profile defections: Deputy Governor Bisi Egbeyemi, several commissioners, and key legislative aides abandoned the PDP for the APC, citing "irreconcilable differences" and a desire to align with the ruling party's control of federal patronage. More recently, in early 2025, former PDP governorship aspirant Kayode Adaramodu led thousands of his supporters across 13 wards into the APC, citing Governor Oyebanji's inclusive governance style, while the ADC lost its 2022 running mate and key women leaders to the ruling party. These defections are rarely ideological; they reflect Ekiti's deeply embedded political economy, where access to state resources, contract awards, and protection from anti-corruption agencies incentivize politicians to cluster around the incumbent. The consequence has been a steady hollowing out of opposition parties, reinforcing APC dominance while rendering party structures increasingly unstable and transactional.

Party Financing and Campaign Spending Patterns

Party financing in Ekiti is opaque, personalised, and weakly regulated. Funding streams typically include state contractors and politically connected business elites, serving or former officeholders, and aspirants' self-financing. Observed financing patterns include heavy reliance on vote-buying during elections, use of state resources by incumbents (vehicles, media access, security leverage), and limited enforcement of campaign finance regulations by INEC. Vote-buying has become normalised in Ekiti elections, particularly in closely contested cycles such as 2018 and 2022, reinforcing elite capture of party structures and marginalising reform-oriented or grassroots candidates.

The 2026 Gubernatorial Race

Based on the official list from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 12 political parties have candidates for the 2026 Ekiti State governorship election.

^[21] Oluwaleye, J. M. (2023). State Interference and Service Delivery in Nigeria's Local Government Administration: The Case of Ado Local Government Area, Ekiti State, 2011 – 2021. *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, 11(2), 28–41. [17] BusinessDay. (2024, May 9). Elections without competition: Inside Nigeria's quiet democratic squeeze. [13] Omotola, J. S. (2010). Political parties and the quest for political stability in Nigeria. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 6(2), 125–145.

^[22] Mike Omilusi (n.d). Deconstructing the Philosophical and Socio-Political Underpinnings of Electoral Behaviour in Ekiti State, Nigeria

<https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-on-Ekiti-Elections-by-Mike-Opeyemi.pdf>

^[23] The Sun Nigeria. (2023, December 15). Ekiti LG poll and intrigues of APC's blanket victory. <https://thesun.ng/ekiti-lg-poll-and-intrigues-of-apcs-blanket-victory>

^[24] The Guardian. (2025). Ekiti 2026: Why opposition parties remain in disarray. <https://guardian.ng/politics/ekiti-2026-why-opposition-parties-remain-in-disarray/>

^[25] The Guardian. (2025). Ekiti 2026: Why opposition parties remain in disarray. <https://guardian.ng/politics/ekiti-2026-why-opposition-parties-remain-in-disarray/>

Table 6: 2026 Ekiti State Governorship Candidates

Political Party	Governorship Candidate (Age)	Running Mate (Deputy)
Accord Party (AP)	Opeyemi Falegan (41)	Omoyemi Olaleye (42)
African Action Congress (AAC)	Akande Oluwasegun (36)	Oluwasanmi Fajuyigbe
Action Democratic Party (ADP)	Ayodeji Ojo (42)	Itunu Ibitoye (35)
African Democratic Congress (ADC)	Oluwadare Bejide (66)	Paul Olowoyeye (52)
All Progressives Congress (APC)	Biodun Oyebanji (58) – Incumbent	Monisade Afuye (67)
Action Peoples Party (APP)	Bidemi Awogbemi (36)	Akinyemi Adewumi (53)
Allied People's Movement (APM)	Joseph Anifowose (65)	Margaret Ilesanmi (68)
Labour Party (LP)	Oyebanji Olajuyin (67)	Ayokunle Okumade (45)
New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP)	Blessing Abegunde (35)	Francis Ajayi (65)
People's Democratic Party	Dr. Wole Oluyede	Ayodeji Ogunsakin
Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)	Olaniyi Ayodele (49)	Modupe Adebisi (35)
Young Progressives Party (YPP)	Osinkolu Olusegun Ayodele	Arowolo David Olusesan
Zenith Labour Party (ZLP)	Victor Adetunji (38)	Adesina Oyeniya (35)

A Federal High Court nullified the PDP's primary election that had produced Dr. Wole Oluyede as the party's candidate. The PDP has appealed this verdict and maintains that Oluyede remains its valid candidate^[26]. The Appeal Court has ruled that the PDP candidates be included on the ballot, removing the earlier threat of exclusion. This decision helps preserve electoral competitiveness and mitigates a major potential source of credibility crisis.

5.5 Political Elites and Informal Power Brokers

Governors, Former Office Holders, and Traditional Rulers

The Ekiti political system is structured around an elite coalition anchored by the governor and the executive branch, former governors (notably Fayemi and Fayose), party executives, business financiers, traditional rulers, and religious leaders. These actors function as informal gatekeepers controlling party nominations, campaign financing, patronage distribution, and electoral mobilisation networks.

The executive branch remains the dominant political hub, with governors exerting decisive influence over party leadership structures, candidate endorsements, and security coordination. Ekiti's Fourth Republic politics have been profoundly shaped by the rivalry between Kayode Fayemi (APC) and Ayodele Fayose (PDP), whose alternating control of the governorship has created a cyclical pattern of elite competition.

^[26] Punch Newspaper (2026). Ekiti poll: PDP appeals judgment nullifying primary
<https://punchng.com/ekiti-poll-pdp-appeals-judgment-nullifying-primary/>

This rivalry reached its symbolic peak in the 2014 election, when Fayose defeated the incumbent Fayemi, a rare occurrence in Nigerian gubernatorial politics.

Religious Leaders and Ethno-Regional Influencers

Traditional and religious leaders in Ekiti State function as critical informal power brokers during governorship elections. Historically, the foundation of Ekiti society was a "bottom-up" theocratic system where authority was believed to be divinely guided, establishing deep-rooted structures of community leadership that persist today^[27]. This enduring moral and cultural authority makes these leaders highly influential in mobilizing voters and legitimizing candidates.

Their influence is explicitly transactional and often visible during election cycles. A clear example is the recent public endorsement of incumbent Governor Biodun Oyebanji for the 2026 election by the Association of Ekiti State Traditional Chieftaincy Title Holders, which vowed to "mobilize support across all communities"^[28]. The governor also actively participates in major inter-faith events attended by high-ranking traditional rulers and religious leaders, such as the State Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the State Qareeb Missionary. This demonstrates a reciprocal relationship where political leaders seek validation from these institutions, which in turn can leverage their grassroots networks to influence electoral outcomes.

Table 7: Geographic Voting Patterns

Region	LGAs	Political Tendency
North Ekiti	Ido-Osi, Ikole, Ilejemeje, Moba, Oye	Competitive but often APC-leaning in 2018 & 2022
Central Ekiti	Ado-Ekiti, Irepodun/Ifelodun, Ekiti West, Emure	Mixed; Ado often decisive swing unit
South Ekiti	Ikere, Ekiti South-West, Ise/Orun, Gbonyin, Ekiti East	Historically PDP-leaning (Fayose strongholds)

6.0 SECURITY AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS

This section assesses the security environment in Ekiti State during the pre-election period (August 2025 – May 2026), analysing recorded incidents, spatial and temporal trends, and their implications for electoral integrity, safety, and public confidence.

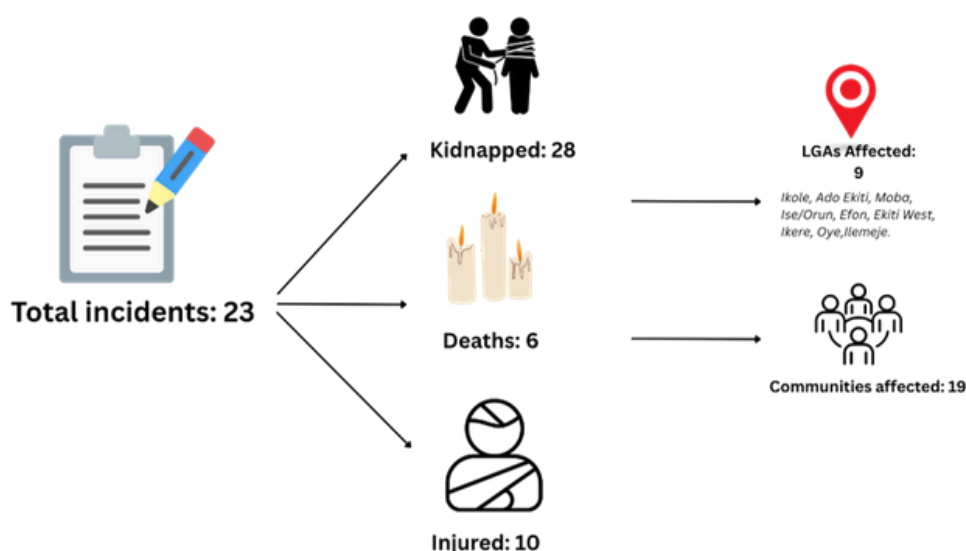
^[27] Onipede, K. J. Theocratic System of Administration in Ekiti Society before Oduduwa: A Discourse in Ekiti-Yoruba Indigenous Political Culture. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 23 No. September 2024, pp. 70–95. DOI: 10.30884/se[1] Cps Ekiti. (2024, November 28). *Ekiti 2026: Traditional Chieftaincy Title Holders Endorse Gov Oyebanji's re-election* [Status update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/cps.ekiti/posts/ekiti-2026-traditional-chieftaincy-title-holders-endorse-gov-oyebanjis-re-elect/1020148673643024/> h/2024.02.03

6.1 Election-Related Violence and Direct Threats

Between August 2025 and May 2026, Ekiti State recorded 23 security incidents across 9 Local Government Areas (LGAs), resulting in 6 fatalities, 10 injured persons, and 28 kidnappings. Notably, no incidents were classified as directly election-related during this pre-election phase. The absence of overt political violence or attacks targeting electoral infrastructure suggests that, in this period, elections were not a primary driver of violent conflict.

However, the prevailing criminal and interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, mob attacks, cattle rustling, and human trafficking, creates a baseline of instability that can be exploited or exacerbated during heightened political activity. These forms of violence strain local security resources and community cohesion, creating conditions in which election-related tensions could more easily escalate.

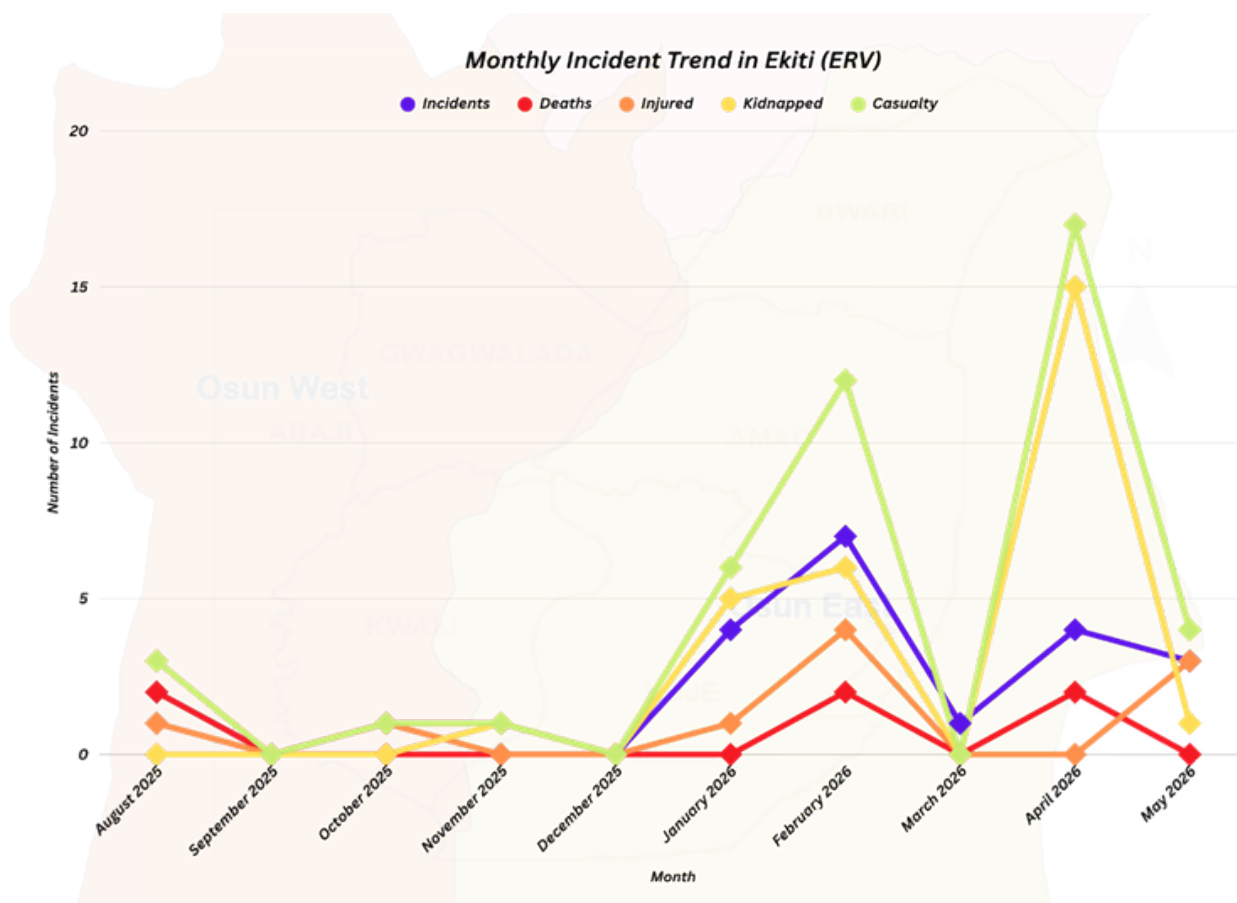
Ekiti State Security Incident Snapshot (ERV) – August 2025 – May 2026



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

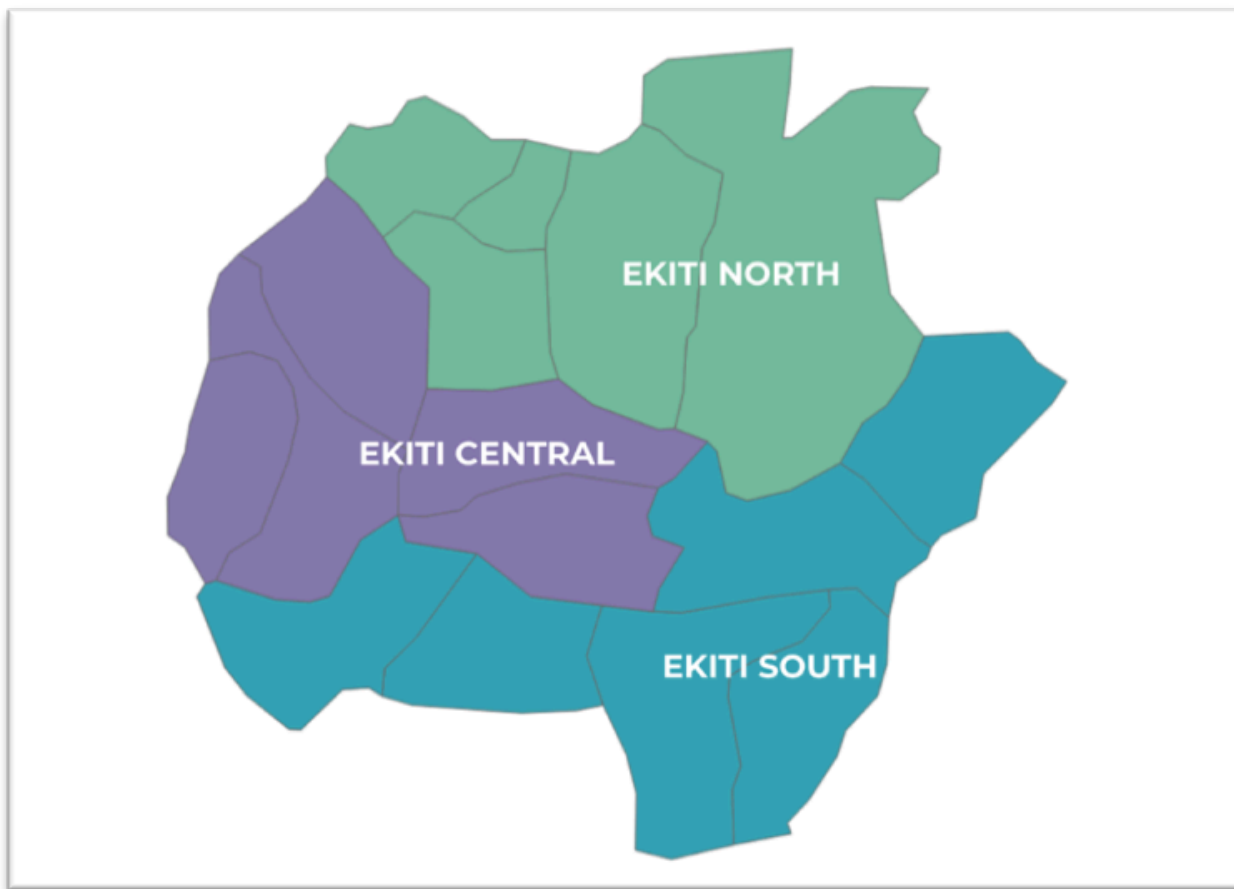
Between August 2025 and May 2026, the ESI-hub recorded 23 security incidents across 9 Local Government Areas in Ekiti State, resulting in 6 deaths, 10 persons injured, and 28 kidnapped victims. Within the ERV (Election-Related Violence) dataset, no incidents were classified as directly election-related during this pre-election phase. There were no attacks on INEC facilities, no targeted assassinations of candidates or electoral officials, and no organised political massacres. However, this should not be interpreted as an absence of political tension. The separate EOTS (Electoral Offences Tracking System) framework recorded 24 electoral offences during the same period. While these events are not classified as 'election-related violence' in the ERV sense, they demonstrate that political tensions are present and have manifested in property destruction, rhetorical escalation, and institutional friction. The absence of lethal political violence is a positive indicator, but it does not equate to an absence of electoral risk.

However, the prevailing criminal and interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, mob attacks, cattle rustling, and human trafficking, creates a baseline of instability that can be exploited or exacerbated during heightened political activity. These forms of violence strain local security resources and community cohesion, creating conditions in which election-related tensions could more easily escalate.



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

6.2 Spatial Distribution, Hotspots, and Structural Drivers



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Ekiti North Senatorial District

LGAs Covered: Ikole, Moba, Oye, Ilemeje

Incident Count: 9 incidents

Human Impact: 2 deaths, 4 injury, 28 kidnapped

The ESI-hub recorded the highest number of incidents in Ekiti North across the state, accounting for almost half of all events. Critically, the district accounted for 100% of all kidnappings in Ekiti, establishing it as the primary abduction corridor.

Risk Profile:

- **Kidnapping hotspot:** 28 individuals were kidnapped across the district, with the highest concentration of abductions recorded.
- **Lethal incident:** Two fatalities occurred, indicating that while kidnapping is the dominant threat, violence can escalate to loss of life.
- **Injury count:** One injury was reported alongside abduction events.

Implication: Ekiti North faces acute mobility and access risks. The threat is not direct political violence, but the fear of abduction, which suppresses voter turnout, deters ad-hoc staff deployment, and disrupts electoral logistics in rural and peri-urban communities.

Ekiti Central Senatorial District

LGAs Covered: Ado-Ekiti, Efon, Ekiti-West

Incident Count: 11 incidents

Human Impact: 4 deaths, 4 injuries, 0 kidnapped

The hub also recorded the second-highest number of incidents in Ekiti Central. Unlike the north, there were no kidnappings. However, the district recorded the highest number of fatalities (4) in the state.

Risk Profile:

- **Urban violence hub:** Incidents were primarily criminal or interpersonal—domestic disputes, mob violence, and altercations—rather than organised political violence.
- **Lethality risk:** The district accounts for almost half of all deaths in the state, demonstrating that even without abduction, violence in this zone is highly lethal.
- **Absence of abduction:** No kidnappings were recorded in Ekiti Central.

Implication: Ekiti Central faces social stress and urban policing deficits, not organised armed threats. The risk lies in the spillover of community tensions into politically charged environments as campaigns intensify.

Ekiti South Senatorial District

LGAs Covered: Ikere, Ise/Orun

Incident Count: 2 incidents

Human Impact: 0 deaths, 2 injuries, 0 kidnappings

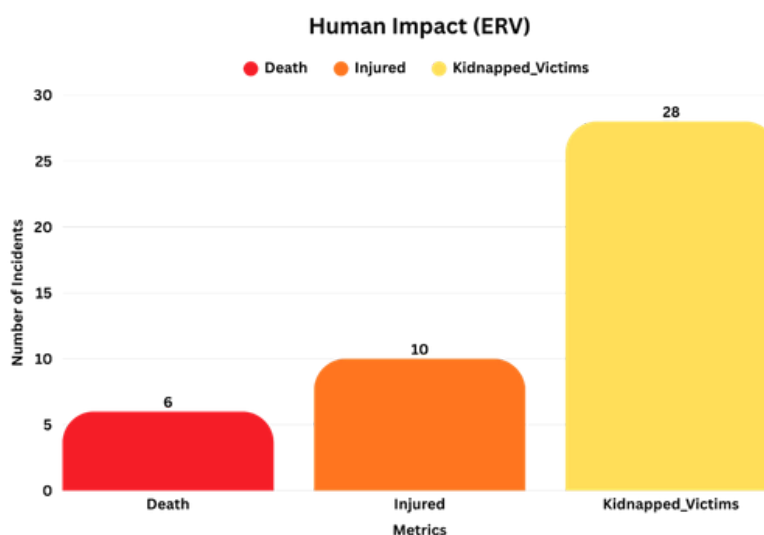
Ekiti South remained the most stable district throughout the reporting period.

Risk Profile:

- **Low-risk zone:** 0 fatalities, no kidnappings, and low incident frequency.
- **Injury count:** 2 injuries were reported across two separate assault incidents.
- **Resilience factors:** The district demonstrates stronger community security cohesion or lower criminal infiltration relative to other zones.

Implication: Ekiti South requires routine monitoring only. It presents no immediate structural or electoral security risks and may function as a stabilising buffer during the electoral period.

Senatorial District Risk Summary



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 8.0 Senatorial District Risk Summary

Senatorial District	Incidents	Fatalities	Injuries	Kidnappings	Primary Threat Type	Risk Level
Ekiti North	9	2	4	28	Kidnapping	High
Ekiti Central	11	4	4	0	Urban/Social Violence	High
Ekiti South	2	0	2	0	Assault	Low

Key Analytical Insight

Ekiti State's security threats are **spatially bifurcated**.

- **Ekiti Central** requires **urban conflict de-escalation and policing reforms**.
- **Ekiti North** requires **rural transit protection and voter reassurance**.
- **Ekiti South** requires **sustained vigilance but no urgent intervention**.

Key Structural Drivers evident in the data include:

i

Criminal Economies:

Kidnapping for ransom and cattle rustling represent livelihood strategies for armed groups, independent of political cycles.

ii

Community and Interpersonal Grievances:

High incidence of domestic and mob violence points to underlying social tensions and weak conflict resolution mechanisms.

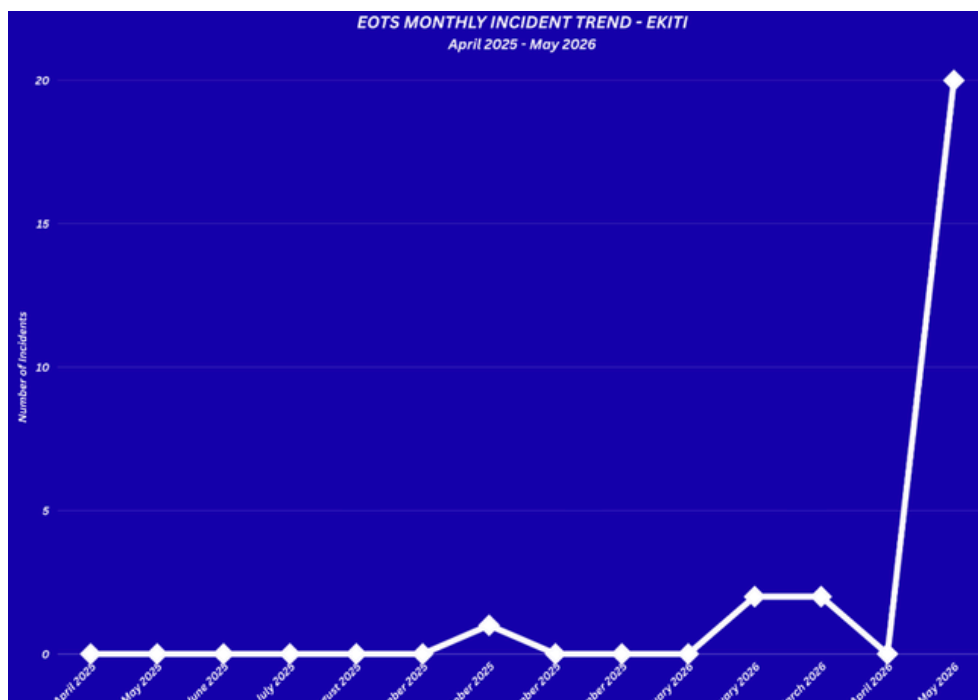
iii

Governance and Security Gaps:

The concentration of harm in specific LGAs suggests variations in local security effectiveness and community policing.

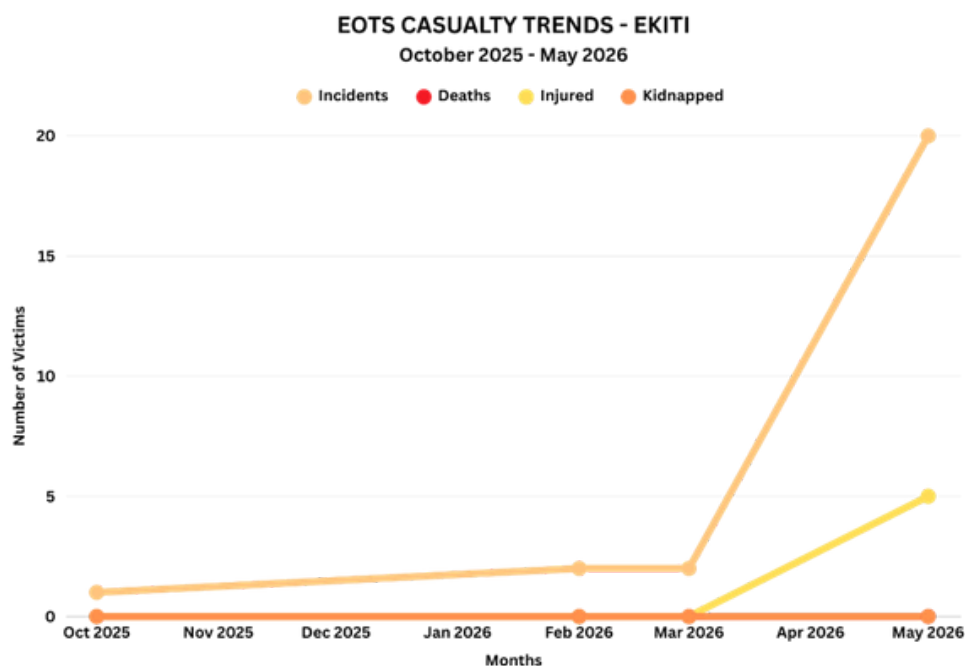
6.3 Electoral Offences Tracking System (EOTS):

The tracking and analysis of electoral offences in this report are grounded in Nigeria's domestic legal statutes and the voluntary commitments made by political actors. The primary legal framework is the Electoral Act 2026, which explicitly defines offences and prescribes penalties for actions ranging from political intimidation and destruction of party property to misinformation and interference with judicial or institutional processes. Concurrently, the National Peace Committee (NPC) Peace Accords establish a normative framework committing political actors to non-violence, issue-based campaigning, respect for judicial outcomes, and adherence to democratic processes. This section adopts a focused case-study approach, analysing incidents with institutional or escalation significance.



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Between April 2025 and May 2026, the ESI-hub recorded 24 electoral offence incidents across the State, resulting in 5 injuries, 0 deaths and 0 kidnapped victims.



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 9: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0098): Arson of ADC Secretariat in Ado Ekiti^[29]

Event:	On 21 October 2025, the African Democratic Congress (ADC) Secretariat in Ado Ekiti was set ablaze by suspected political thugs. The building was destroyed, though no casualties were recorded.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Alleged political thugs were the perpetrators. The primary target was the ADC as a political organisation and its operational infrastructure.
Impact:	The incident constitutes a direct act of political intimidation through property destruction. While non-lethal, the symbolic targeting of party infrastructure undermines peaceful electoral competition and signals heightened partisan tension.
Enforcement Gaps:	No publicly disclosed prosecution or accountability measures were reported, raising concerns regarding deterrence and the prevention of future party-targeted violence.

Table 10: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0092): Inter-Party Accusations of Political Terrorism^[30]

Event:	Following the arson incident, the ADC accused the APC of political terrorism in Ekiti State.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Political parties were both actors and targets in the rhetorical escalation. The broader target was public perception and political legitimacy.
Impact:	Although non-violent, the rhetoric intensified partisan hostility and increased escalation risk. Such framing may normalise adversarial mobilisation.
Enforcement Gaps:	No mediation or de-escalation framework was publicly identified.

^[29] TVC News. (2025). ADC Secretariat Set Ablaze in Ekiti. <https://www.tvcnews.tv/adc-secretariat-set-ablaze-in-ekiti/>

^[30] Vanguard. (2025). 2027: ADC accuses APC of political terrorism. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/10/2027-adc-accuses-apc-of-political-terrorism/>

Table 11: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0194): Detention of APC Chieftain Despite Court Developments^[31]

Event:	Reports indicated continued detention of an APC chieftain despite favourable judicial developments.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Institutional actors were implicated. The target was a political party member and the authority of the judiciary.
Impact:	The incident raises rule-of-law concerns and reflects institutional tension in a politically sensitive environment.
Enforcement Gaps:	No transparent institutional explanation or remedial action was publicly detailed.

Table 12: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0193): NUJ Denial of Political Harassment Allegations^[32]

Event:	The Ekiti NUJ denied claims of harassment and cautioned against political manipulation of the union.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Political party actors were implicated. The target was a civic institution and public perception.
Impact:	The incident reflects narrative contestation and information disorder within the pre-election space.
Enforcement Gaps:	No corrective or punitive actions were reported beyond public rebuttals.

6.4 Electoral Implications of the Security Environment

The recorded insecurity presents significant electoral risks:

- 1. Voter Turnout Suppression:** Fear of kidnapping, particularly in Moba Ilejemeje and Ikole LGAs, may deter voters, especially women, the elderly, and those reliant on early morning or evening travel to polling units.
- 2. Logistical and Operational Disruption:** The movement of election materials, INEC ad-hoc staff (including NYSC members), party agents, and observers could be hindered in high-risk LGAs. Kidnapping threats along rural travel corridors pose a direct challenge to deployment and retrieval plans.

^[31] Daily Post. (2026). Ekiti APC chieftain's family react over detention. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/02/11/ekiti-apc-chieftain-olumides-son-wife-cry-out-over-his-continuous-detention/>

^[32] Roundoff News. (2026). Ekiti NUJ denies harassment by govt. <https://roundoffnews.com/ekiti-nuj-denies-harassment-by-govt-warns-pdp-against-dragging-union-into-politics/>

3. **Erosion of Public Confidence:** Repeated incidents of violence, even if criminal, undermine public trust in the state's ability to guarantee safety, potentially reducing citizens' willingness to engage in the electoral process.
4. **Spillover of Community Tensions:** Pre-existing local conflicts and social stressors, as seen in Ado-Ekiti, can be amplified by divisive political campaigning, creating flashpoints for election-day disturbances.

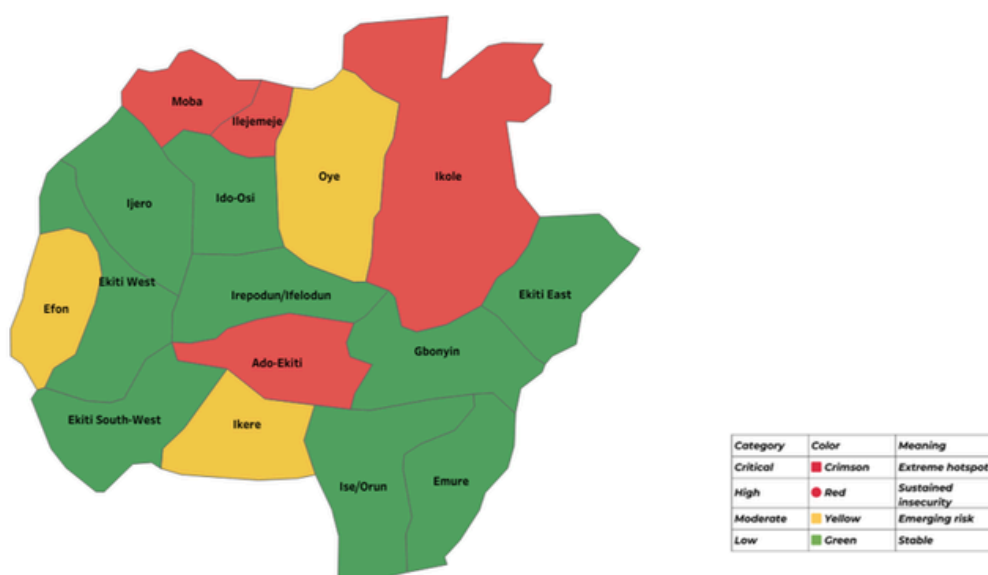
6.5 Risk Assessment and Flashpoint Mapping

Based on incident frequency, severity, and threat type, LGAs can be categorized as follows:

1. **High Risk:** Ado-Ekiti (urban violence hub), Ikole (kidnapping exposure), and Moba, Ilejemeje (kidnapping hotspot).
2. **Medium Risk:** Efon, Ikere (site of a fatal incident), and Oye (isolated, lower-impact incidents).
3. **Low Risk:** Ekiti East, Gboyin, Emure, Ise/Orun, Ekiti South-West, Ekiti West, Ijero, Ido-Osi, and Irepodun-Ifelodun.

The key risk driver is criminality rather than explicit political contention, meaning these threats are structural and likely to persist through the electoral period without targeted intervention.

Risk Map of Ekiti State (June 2025 - May 2026)



6.6 Role of External Actors and Imported Political Violence

A critical dimension of electoral security involves the role of external mercenaries and imported thugs, individuals brought into communities specifically to perpetrate violence or intimidate opponents. During the February 2026 Validation Forum, a stakeholder highlighted that "external mercenaries contribute to election-related crises," noting that any area can become violent "depending on the interest of the people". Transport unions and commercial motorcycle operators are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, with a stakeholder cautioning against "using transport workers as instruments of political violence". Imported thugs exploit cross-border mobility, complicate community-based early warning systems, and face lower social accountability. Mitigation requires inter-state security collaboration, proactive engagement with transport unions, and enhanced surveillance in border LGAs.

6.7 Role of Security Agencies

The data underscores the critical need for security agencies to shift from a reactive posture to an **intelligence-led, proactive deployment**. Key requirements include:

1. **Hotspot-Focused Deterrence:** Concentrating visible patrols and rapid response units in high-risk LGAs, especially along known kidnapping routes.
2. **Electoral-Specific Threat Assessment:** Collaborating with INEC to map vulnerable polling units, collation centres, and travel routes for personnel.
3. **Neutrality and Professionalism:** Maintaining impartiality to avoid being perceived as politicized, which is crucial for public trust. The involvement of security agencies in securing elections (Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security, ICCES) must be transparent and effective.

The security landscape in Ekiti presents a clear case of indirect electoral risk. While the state is not currently experiencing overt election-related violence, the entrenched patterns of criminal kidnapping and community violence create a vulnerable environment. This insecurity can suppress participation, disrupt operations, and amplify tensions during the electoral period. Mitigating these risks requires a data-driven, geographically focused security strategy that treats criminal violence as a direct threat to electoral integrity.

7.0 CITIZENS, MEDIA, AND CIVIC SPACE IN EKITI STATE

This section provides an in-depth analysis of citizen participation and the media landscape in Ekiti State, with a focus on the upcoming 2026 gubernatorial election. It builds on the previous analysis of political elites and electoral trends to examine the grassroots dynamics that shape electoral outcomes and democratic health.

7.1 Citizen Participation

Citizen engagement in Ekiti is characterized by significant voter apathy, which is often manipulated through clientelistic networks. This creates a paradox of high political awareness coupled with low democratic participation.

Voter Turnout Trends and Voter Apathy

Ekiti State exemplifies the national trend of declining voter participation. Data indicate a steady decrease in turnout from approximately 50.32% in the highly contested 2014 election to 36.47% in 2022 and a concerning 31.84% in the 2023 presidential election^[33].

Table 13: Voter Turnout Trends and Voter Apathy

Metrics	2014	2018	2022
Registered Voters	733,766	909,585	989,224
Accredited Voters	369,257	405,861	363,438
Valid Voters	350,366	384,594	351,865
Rejected Votes	10,089	18,857	8,888

^[33] Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2022). Report Of Observation of the Ekiti State Governorship Election 2022. <https://situationroomng.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Report-of-observation-of-the-ekiti-state-governorship-election-2022.pdf>

Metrics	2014	2018	2022
Votes Casted	360,455	403,451	360,753
Number of PVCs Collected	371,925	576,346	749,065
Percentage Turnout	50.32%	44.36%	36.74%

This apathy is driven by several interconnected factors::

1. **Systemic Distrust:** A deep-seated lack of confidence in the electoral process and the integrity of results discourages participation. Voters often question whether their votes will be accurately counted or will ultimately influence governance.
2. **Perceived Elite Disconnect:** Many citizens feel that political elites are unresponsive to their needs. The alternation of power between the APC and PDP has not, in the view of many voters, translated into transformative improvements in public welfare, leading to cynicism.
3. **Socio-Economic Pressures:** For a significant portion of the population facing economic hardship, daily survival takes precedence over electoral participation. The time and potential cost of voting are seen as burdens with uncertain returns.
4. **Normalization of Electoral Malpractice:** The prevalence of vote-buying (discussed below) has commodified the vote, transforming a civic duty into a transactional event. This erodes the normative value of voting for many.

This declining turnout has serious implications: it reduces the legitimacy of the winning mandate and increases the relative influence of smaller, well-financed, and organized interest groups that can mobilize voters through patronage rather than policy.

Barriers Faced by Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

While not explicitly detailed in the provided sources, the broader Nigerian and Ekiti-specific context reveals significant barriers:

- **Women:** women face structural barriers in party politics, including a lack of financial backing, patriarchal cultural norms, and violence or intimidation. They are often relegated to supporting roles (mobilizers, voters) rather than leadership or candidacy positions.
- **Youth:** Despite comprising a large demographic, youth face marginalization due to political gatekeeping by older elites, high costs of political participation, and a preference for experienced candidates within major parties. Their frustration partly fuels the apathy trend.
- **Persons with Disabilities:** Encounter physical accessibility challenges at polling units, a lack of tailored voter education, and societal stigma. INEC's provisions for assisted voting are not always effectively implemented at the grassroots level.

Vote Buying and Clientelism

Vote-buying is the most direct manifestation of clientelism in Ekiti's elections and has become a normalized campaign strategy. It operates as a tactical substitute for programmatic, ideology-based campaigning.

- **Mechanism:** It typically involves the direct exchange of money, food items, or other material goods for votes on election day. Party agents and local "gatekeepers" facilitate these transactions at the polling unit level.
- **Impact:** This practice fundamentally distorts voter choice, undermines electoral integrity, and entrenches a cycle of patronage. It makes elected officials accountable to their financiers and brokers rather than to the general electorate. The normalization of this practice is a primary driver of the public's distrust in the political system.
- **Context:** As noted in the political elite analysis, this clientelism is embedded within layered patronage networks that link state executives, party officials, local government chairpersons, and community brokers.

7.2 Media and Information Environment

The media plays a dual role in Ekiti: as a platform for political engagement and as a vector for misinformation. The regulatory environment struggles to keep pace with these challenges.

Traditional Media Ownership and Bias

Ekiti's traditional media landscape (local radio, newspapers, and state-affiliated TV) is characterized by:

1. **Partisan Leaning:** Many outlets have clear affiliations with major political parties or are influenced by politically connected owners. This results in coverage that favours their patrons, ranging from skewed reporting to the outright blackout of opposition activities.
2. **Government Influence:** The state government holds significant sway over publicly owned media houses, which often serve as platforms for the ruling party's achievements while offering limited critical scrutiny.
3. **Economic Vulnerabilities:** Financial constraints make some media outlets susceptible to patronage from politicians, exchanging favourable coverage for advertising revenue or direct financial support.

Social Media, Disinformation, and Hate Speech

Social media has become an increasingly critical battleground, especially for reaching younger demographics. Its role is amplified during election cycles.

1. **Rapid Information Spread:** Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and X are used for voter mobilization, campaign updates, and political debate.
2. **Disinformation & Hate Speech:** These platforms are also primary channels for the spread of fake news, inflammatory rhetoric, and hate speech. As seen in the lead-up to the 2026 election, INEC has had to explicitly warn political parties against "hate speech, inciting statements, misinformation, and personal attacks".^[34] False narratives about candidates, doctored images, and incendiary comments aimed at ethnic or political groups are common.
3. **Anonymous Mobilization:** The relative anonymity of social media allows for the coordination of both positive engagement and negative attacks, complicating accountability.

^[34] Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2022). Report Of Observation of the Ekiti State Governorship Election 2022. <https://situationroomng.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Report-of-observation-of-the-ekiti-state-governorship-election-2022.pdf>

Regulatory Oversight and Enforcement

The regulatory framework involves multiple actors with mixed effectiveness:

1. **INEC's Mandate:** INEC, as the electoral umpire, has a mandate to ensure peaceful campaigns. It issues warnings and guidelines, as seen in the January 2026 stakeholders' meeting, where it cautioned parties against violations and promised sanctions. However, its enforcement powers during the campaign phase are often perceived as weak.
2. **National Broadcasting Commission (NBC):** The NBC regulates broadcast media and can penalize stations for hate speech or unprofessional coverage. However, enforcement can be inconsistent and sometimes politically influenced.
3. **Legal Framework:** Laws such as the Electoral Act 2026 and the Cybercrimes Act provide a basis for prosecuting offenders. The major challenge lies in implementation—successful investigations and prosecutions for online disinformation or hate speech are rare, which undermines deterrence.
4. **The 2026 Context:** Ahead of the June 2026 election, INEC has publicly committed to closely monitoring campaigns in collaboration with security agencies. It has called on the media to report responsibly and on community leaders to promote peace. This indicates recognition of the problem, but its ultimate success depends on proactive and impartial enforcement.

8.0 EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The Ekiti State governorship election of 2026 is not merely a local contest for political power; it serves as a critical microcosm for testing Nigeria's democratic resilience and the efficacy of international support systems. As the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officially lifted the ban on public campaigns on January 21, 2026, the electoral landscape was immediately marred by controversy, with the provisional candidate list conspicuously omitting a major opposition party due to protracted legal battles^[35]. This charged atmosphere provides a crucial case study to examine a central question: Do external actors, including donor agencies, election observation missions, and regional bodies, reinforce incentives for genuine democratic reform, or do they inadvertently serve to stabilize and legitimize fundamentally flawed electoral processes? This narrative analysis argues that while the normative frameworks of regional organizations like ECOWAS and the AU provide a clear blueprint for reform, the practical application of external engagement in the Ekiti context reveals a strong tendency toward stabilization of the status quo, often at the expense of deeper structural accountability.

Donor Priorities and Diplomatic Engagement

International donor engagement in Nigerian elections has traditionally focused on technical assistance and conflict prevention; yet its impact on the inherently political aspects of contests, such as Ekiti 2026, is often muted and indirect. While specific donor agendas for this particular cycle are not detailed in the available sources, the established pattern involves funding for voter education, logistics support for INEC, and peace-building initiatives. However, the glaring omission of candidates from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) from the provisional list presents a profound political crisis that technical assistance cannot resolve. Donor-funded projects typically emphasize procedural correctness—functional polling units, timely result transmission, and peaceful conduct—but are structurally ill-equipped to confront politically motivated legal exclusion. When "technicalities," as critics argue, are used to disqualify major opposition contenders, the focus on a peaceful and orderly process can paradoxically legitimize an uncompetitive election.

^[35] Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2022). Report Of Observation of the Ekiti State Governorship Election 2022. <https://situationroomng.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Report-of-observation-of-the-ekiti-state-governorship-election-2022.pdf>

Diplomatic rhetoric in such scenarios often prioritizes stability. Calls from embassies and high commissions for a "peaceful, free, and fair" process are standard. However, faced with a pre-election landscape where judicial rulings threaten to disenfranchise a significant portion of the electorate, diplomatic actors frequently stop short of naming and shaming specific actors or questioning the legitimacy of exclusionary legal manoeuvres. This restraint, driven by broader bilateral interests and a principle of non-interference, functionally stabilizes a process tilting toward a "one-horse race". The engagement, therefore, reinforces a flawed process by treating its symptoms—potential violence—while sidestepping the root cause: the lack of a genuinely pluralistic contest.

Election Observation Missions: Between Access and Authority

Election Observation Missions (EOMs) represent the most visible form of international engagement, but their effectiveness is constrained by their mandate, timing, and the political environment they enter

A. Scope and Timing:

a) As evidenced by ECOWAS's preparatory activities for other member states, observation missions involve extensive pre-election assessments, consultations with national institutions, and the deployment of short- and long-term observers. Their work is grounded in regional protocols, such as the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance^[36]. However, a mission's ability to affect core issues is limited if key problems are "locked in" before their deployment. For Ekiti 2026, the critical juncture was the court ruling that voided the PDP's primaries before the Court of Appeal ruled otherwise, events that occurred before the official campaign period and likely before the full deployment of international observers. By the time observers arrive to assess campaign rallies and voting day procedures, the electoral field may have already been decisively narrowed.

B. The Credibility Dilemma:

The ultimate tool of an EOM is its final report and the credibility of its verdict. Missions can issue preliminary statements praising the peaceful conduct of voting day while expressing deep concern over the pre-election environment. This mixed assessment allows all sides to claim vindication. The incumbent can highlight the positive remarks on processual order, while the opposition can point to the critiques of the uneven playing field. This dynamic often leads to a stabilizing outcome: the process, however flawed, receives a veneer of international validation that discourages post-election unrest and allows the international community to move on. The mission's presence itself can deter the most egregious election-day malpractices, thereby "cleaning up" and stabilizing a process whose foundational fairness was already compromised.

Regional and International Norms: The Gap Between Principle and Practice

Regional bodies like the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have developed robust normative frameworks for democratic governance. The **ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance** is explicit in its commitments to the rule of law, transparent elections, and zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means. These norms are not abstract; they guide the work of observation missions and form the basis for regional peer review and, in extreme cases, sanctions.

The application of these norms to a complex sub-national case like Ekiti 2026, however, reveals significant limitations. The crisis is not a classic military coup but a "legalistic coup", the use of court rulings and administrative technicalities to achieve political exclusion. ECOWAS and AU norms are potent against blatant constitutional violations but are less agile in responding to democratic erosion within the bounds of a country's own legal system, however manipulated that system may be.

^[36] ECOWAS (2001). Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/ecowas2001protocol.pdf>

The regional response is further complicated by the principle of sovereignty and a preference for quiet diplomacy. Consequently, while these norms provide a powerful language for reform advocates within Nigeria, such as civil society organizations like the Ekiti Future Agenda (EFA), calling for issue-based campaigns, they are seldom invoked to apply direct, corrective pressure in sub-national electoral disputes. The norms exist as a reform compass, but the political will to consistently follow them, especially in politically delicate member states, often falters, resulting in a default position of stabilization.

9.0 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ELECTIONS

This section examines the economic underpinnings of electoral politics in Ekiti State, analysing how financial power, state resources, and material incentives shape political competition and outcomes. This analysis is crucial for understanding the barriers to entry for new candidates, the persistence of elite networks, and the deeply embedded transactional nature of politics in the state.

9.1 The Prohibitive Cost of Running for Office

The financial barrier to becoming a gubernatorial candidate in Ekiti is extremely high, effectively restricting participation to the wealthy or those with access to substantial patronage networks. This begins with the official fees set by political parties:

Official Party Fees: For the 2026 election cycle, the All-Progressives Congress (APC) set the cost for its governorship Expression of Interest and Nomination forms at N50 million (N10 million for Expression of Interest and N40 million for Nomination). This is a significant financial hurdle that filters out aspirants without deep pockets or robust financial backing.

Informal and Ancillary Costs: Beyond official fees, candidates incur massive expenses for campaigning, media, logistics, security, and mobilizing supporters across the state's 16 Local Government Areas. These unofficial costs are widely understood to dwarf the official fees, contributing to a system where electoral success is heavily correlated with financial muscle.

9.2 Monetisation of Party and Government Structures

The high cost of politics is sustained by a deeply monetized political structure, where financial contributions are exchanged for influence and future access.

- a) **Patronage Networks and "Stomach Infrastructure":** A key strategy involves building extensive patronage networks. This often manifests as "stomach infrastructure"—the direct provision of money, food, or other material goods to voters. While not explicitly detailed in the current search results for 2026, this practice is a well-established feature of Ekiti's political history, creating a cycle of dependency where electoral support is transactional rather than programmatic.
- b) **Use of State Apparatus:** The incumbent administration leverages state projects and programs to bolster its electoral appeal. Governor Oyeibanji's 2026 New Year address meticulously listed infrastructure achievements (airport, flyovers, ring roads) and welfare programs (distribution of N1.4

billion to youths in agriculture) as evidence of performance, framing the election as a referendum on continued development. This strategic use of state resources blurs the line between governance and campaigning.

c) Cost Imposed on Opposition: There are indications that the political environment may be engineered to increase costs for competitors. According to The Guardian Nigeria, the state government has imposed a N60 million "signage fee" on political parties for campaign materials ahead of the poll^[37]. While the exact nature and enforcement of this fee are unclear from the available source, such measures, if true, would disproportionately burden less-funded opposition parties and further entrench the advantage of the well-resourced ruling party.

9.3 Vote Trading as a Livelihood Strategy

The search results do not contain current, specific reports or data on vote trading (the direct sale of votes by citizens) as a livelihood strategy in the context of the 2026 Ekiti election. This gap highlights a potential area for deeper ethnographic or survey-based research. However, the broader national economic context provided is critical for understanding the conditions that make vote trading an attractive or necessary option for many citizens. With poverty projected to rise to 62% (approximately 141 million people) by 2026, and federal budgetary allocations for direct poverty alleviation being minimal, many households face severe economic pressure. In such an environment, short-term monetary offers from political actors during elections can become a significant, albeit irregular, source of income, undermining the principle of free and fair choice based on policy or ideology.

9.4 Elections as Critical Access Points to State Resources

In Ekiti, winning an election is the ultimate gateway to controlling and distributing state resources, which reinforces the high-stakes, zero-sum nature of political competition.

A. Control Over Patronage and Contracts:

Victory grants the winner control over the state's budget, appointments, and contract awards. The consensus method adopted by the Ekiti APC for the December 2026 Local Government elections is explicitly designed to "foster unity," "reduce conflict," and "promote inclusive decision-making". In practice, this often means managing internal party competition by negotiating future access to appointments and patronage for different factions, ensuring that the party machinery remains unified and resources are distributed to maintain loyalty.

B. The "Unlimited Opportunities" of Governance:

Governor Oyeibanji's declaration of 2026 as a "year of unlimited opportunities" is a potent political message. It frames the state itself as a vehicle for opportunity, with the governor as the gatekeeper. This rhetoric reinforces the perception that political access is synonymous with economic access, incentivizing elite groups—from business contractors to traditional rulers—to align with the anticipated winner to secure their share of state-mediated "opportunities."

[37] The Guardian Newspaper (2026). Ekiti 2026: Political parties to pay N60 million campaign advert fees <https://guardian.ng/politics/ekiti-2026-political-parties-to-pay-n60-million-campaign-advert-fees/>

10.0 RISK, SCENARIO, AND STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

The preceding analysis of political, security, and social dynamics combines into three primary risk clusters for the 2026 Ekiti State Gubernatorial polls:

10.1 Risk Analysis

The synthesis of political, security, and social dynamics identifies three interconnected high-priority risk clusters for elections in Ekiti State. These risks are not isolated but are mutually reinforcing.

Table 14: Risk Analysis

Risk Category	Primary Drivers & Evidence	Likelihood	Geographical Location	Triggers & Early Warning Indicators	Mitigation
Credibility & Legitimacy Risk	1. Voter Suppression via Criminal Insecurity: The documented kidnapping threat in Ilejemeje, Moba and Ikole LGAs, alongside urban violence in Ado-Ekiti, creates a climate of fear that can significantly suppress turnout, especially among women, the elderly, and rural voters. This functions as a form of de facto disenfranchisement. 2. Operational Disruption: Kidnapping risks and community violence threaten the secure movement of INEC staff (especially ad hoc staff like NYSC members), materials, and observers. Delays or cancellations in high-risk areas could lead to widespread disenfranchisement and contested results. 3. Perception of State Failure: The inability of the state to curb criminal violence erodes public confidence in its capacity to guarantee a safe and fair election, leading to apathy or acceptance of malpractices.	High	Moba LGA, Ikole LGA, Ilejemeje LGA (Ekiti North); Ado-Ekiti LGA (Ekiti Central)	Erodes public trust in safety and fairness of process; provides legal grounds for challenging results based on disenfranchisement; delegitimises elected officials; fuels post-election grievances due to perceived injustice. Turnout could fall below 30% for the first time in Ekiti's history (compared to 36.74% in 2022).	Targeted voter reassurance campaigns via local radio; security escorts on rural transit corridors on election day; community dialogues with traditional rulers to encourage turnout; visible but non-intrusive policing; early distribution of non-sensitive materials to LGAs; contingency polling units in secure locations.

Risk Category	Primary Drivers & Evidence	Likelihood	Geographical Location	Triggers & Early Warning Indicators	Mitigation
Violence & Instability Risk	1. Criminal Violence Spillover: Existing kidnapping gangs and criminal networks could be co-opted or leveraged by political actors to intimidate opponents, disrupt campaigns, or "protect" interests, blurring the lines between criminal and political violence. 2. Election-Day Flashpoints: Pre-existing community tensions and interpersonal violence (evident in Ado-Ekiti) could escalate at polling units or collation centres, particularly in closely contested areas or if results are disputed. 3. Targeted Abduction of Electoral Actors: High-profile kidnapping of candidates, party agents, or INEC ad-hoc staff in vulnerable LGAs to delay, influence, or disrupt the electoral process.	Medium-High	Moba LGA, Ikole LGA, Ilejemeje LGA (Ekiti North - kidnapping corridor); Ado-Ekiti LGA (Ekiti Central - urban violence hub); border LGAs (Ikole, Moba, Ise/Orun) for cross-border thuggery	Physical harm to citizens and officials; disruption of voting and collation; potential suspension of polls in affected areas; broader chilling effect on political participation and public freedom of movement. Imported thugs face lower social accountability and exploit cross-border mobility from Kogi, Kwara, and Ondo states.	Inter-state security collaboration with neighbouring state commands; proactive engagement with transport unions (NURTW, RTEAN); surveillance of border entry points on election day; rapid response teams to quell disturbances; personal security briefings for candidates; secure movement protocols for INEC senior staff; rapid abduction response mechanism.

Risk Category	Primary Drivers & Evidence	Likelihood	Geographical Location	Triggers & Early Warning Indicators	Mitigation
Institutional & Logistical Failure Risk	1. INEC Operational Stress in High-Risk Zones: Deploying and securing personnel and materials in kidnapping-prone rural LGAs (Moba, Ikole, Ilejemeje) and volatile urban centres (Ado-Ekiti) presents a severe logistical and security challenge that could overwhelm contingency plans. 2. Cycle of Apathy and Distrust: Logistical failures or perceived insecurity on election day would reinforce existing voter apathy, potentially collapsing turnout and creating a "silent legitimacy deficit" for winners. 3. Information Disorder Amidst Fear: social media could be weaponized to spread panic about kidnappings or violence at specific polling units, triggering flight and suppressing turnout faster than official reassurance can be communicated.	Medium	Moba LGA, Ikole LGA, Ilejemeje LGA (Ekiti North - rural transit corridors); Ado-Ekiti LGA (Ekiti Central - urban centre); state-wide (information disorder)	Physical harm to citizens and officials; disruption of voting and collation; potential suspension of polls in affected areas; broader chilling effect on political participation and public freedom of movement. Imported thugs face lower social accountability and exploit cross-border mobility from Kogi, Kwara, and Ondo states.	Risk-based deployment plan with alternative transport routes; last-mile security coordination between NPF and NSCDC; early distribution of non-sensitive materials to LGAs; redundant BVAS units per polling unit; satellite communication backup for IReV uploads; pre-election network stress testing; media partnerships for verified safety messaging; real-time rumour tracking and rebuttal.

10.2 Scenario Building

Based on the interaction of the risks identified in Section 10.1, three plausible scenarios are outlined for the electoral period and immediate aftermath. These scenarios are anchored in the Priority Risks from the analysis, serving as practical tools for developing targeted mitigating interventions and early-warning checklists.

Table 14: Risk Analysis

Scenario	Description & Key Characteristics	Triggers & Early Warning Indicators
Scenario A: Managed Credibility Crisis (Most Likely)	i. Elections proceed with localised logistical disruptions in high-risk LGAs (Moba, Ado-Ekiti, Ilejemeje), but voting is completed statewide. ii. Turnout is suppressed in kidnapping-prone areas (Moba, Ikole, Ilejemeje) but meets or slightly exceeds low historical averages in safer zones. iii. Results are technically credible but heavily contested in courts by losers citing widespread disenfranchisement due to insecurity. iv. Outcome: A legally valid but politically disputed outcome, deepening public cynicism and testing judicial legitimacy amid claims of an "insecurity-assisted" victory.	i. Voter Suppression via Insecurity (High Priority Risk): Verified reports from community leaders of families relocating from rural LGAs pre-election due to kidnapping fears. ii. Operational Disruption (High Priority Risk): INEC announces last-minute redeployment of polling units in specific wards of Ilejemeje, Moba or Ikole due to security advisories. iii. Localised Violence (Medium-High Priority Risk): Isolated clashes between party agents at collation centres in Ado-Ekiti.

Scenario	Description & Key Characteristics	Triggers & Early Warning Indicators
Scenario B: Security-Dominated & Illegitimate (Higher Risk)	i. Voter apathy compounds with fear; turnout collapses significantly, particularly in rural and peri-urban hotspots, falling below 25%. ii. The election is seen as a foregone conclusion dominated by parties and candidates perceived as having stronger "security networks" or control of informal protection rackets. iii. Ambient criminal insecurity effectively acts as the primary campaign tool, suppressing opposition mobilization. iv. The process is peaceful but hollow, failing the public trust test entirely. v. Outcome: A severe, silent crisis of legitimacy for the elected government, fuelling long-term public disengagement and strengthening non-state armed groups' control in underserved areas.	i. Criminal Violence Spillover (Medium-High Priority Risk): A major kidnapping incident on a major road (e.g., Ado-Ikole-Ilejemeje road) within 96 hours of the poll. ii. Erosion of Public Trust (High Priority Risk): Coordinated social media campaigns and traditional town criers advising citizens to "stay home for safety." iii. Collapse of INEC Logistics (Medium Priority Risk): Multiple reports of NYSC members refusing last-minute postings to Moba or Ikole LGAs.
Scenario C: Violent Unravelling (Worst-Case)	i. High-stakes violence erupts, triggered by a targeted abduction of a high-profile candidate or INEC official in Ilejemeje, Moba or Ikole. ii. Clashes involve political thugs, vigilante groups, and security forces, spreading from rural hotspots to urban centres like Ado-Ekiti. iii. Critical INEC infrastructure is attacked or occupied. iv. Voting is suspended or indefinitely postponed in several wards across multiple LGAs. v. Outcome: A constitutional and security crisis requiring extraordinary measures, a heavily militarised election, a deeply flawed and incomplete result, and a protracted period of political instability and governance vacuum.	i. Targeted Abduction of Key Actors (Medium-High Priority Risk): Confirmed kidnapping of a leading gubernatorial candidate's aide or a senior INEC electoral officer. ii. Politicised Security Actors (Medium-High Priority Risk): Visible, partisan deployment of security forces to protect one party's rallies while opponents are attacked. iii. Institutional Failure (Medium Priority Risk): Proven, large-scale compromise of BVAS machines or materials in transit in a high-risk LGA, combined with a total breakdown of communication networks in that area.

10.3 Stakeholder Mapping

The Core Role of the National Peace Committee (NPC)

The NPC is the anchor for electoral peace in Ekiti. Its mandate is to facilitate dialogue, mediate disputes, and uphold the moral commitments of the Peace Accord. Given Ekiti's risk of localized violence and criminal activity influencing the political process, the NPC's role as a neutral, respected convener is critical for fostering trust among parties and encouraging commitments to non-violence from elites and their supporters.

High Influence, High Interest

These stakeholders are central to the election's execution in Ekiti.

1. **Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC - Ekiti State Office):** Administers all technical and logistical aspects of the poll. Its operational success is heavily tested by the need to deploy personnel and materials safely in high-risk LGAs like **Moba, Ikole, and Ado-Ekiti**, making its planning and crisis response paramount.
2. **Security Agencies (Ekiti State Command):** The Nigeria Police Force, the military, and other agencies under ICCES are responsible for maintaining order. Their neutrality and operational strategy are essential, particularly for deterring kidnapping gangs and preventing criminal violence from spilling over into electoral violence.
3. **Political Parties & Candidates:** The conduct of major parties and their candidates sets the electoral tone. Their use of rhetoric, adherence to campaign laws, and control over affiliated youth wings directly determine the level of violence or peace, especially in hotspot areas.
4. **Ekiti State Government:** Led by the Governor, this body controls the state apparatus and resources. Its perceived neutrality is crucial; any partisan use of incumbency or state security apparatus could severely skew the playing field and escalate tensions.

High Influence, Lower Direct Interest

These entities shape the environment but are not direct electoral actors.

1. **Judiciary (Election Petition Tribunals):** They provide the final legal arbiter for post-election disputes originating in Ekiti. The speed and perceived fairness of their judgments are vital for resolving conflicts and legitimizing outcomes, especially in cases of disenfranchisement due to insecurity.
2. **Media Organizations (Local & National):** They control public information flow within the state. Responsible reporting is a major tool against disinformation and panic, while sensational or partisan coverage can inflame local tensions and amplify security fears.
3. **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Election Observers:** Local and national CSOs act as independent watchdogs, monitoring the process and advocating for transparency. Their presence is critical for building public confidence and providing early warning of violence or malpractice, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

Lower Influence, High Interest

These groups are the electorate and the most affected communities.

1. **Voters (General Population):** As the ultimate decision-makers, their participation confers legitimacy. Fear of violence, particularly in Moba, Ikole, and Ado-Ekiti, is a major suppressor of turnout and a direct threat to the election's mandate.
2. **Youth and Student Groups:** A large demographic whose engagement or alienation can impact turnout and stability. They are often targets for mobilization into political thuggery, but can be champions for peaceful participation.

3. **Traditional Rulers & Community Leaders:** Hold significant moral sway within their communities. They can be powerful advocates for peace and turnout, or, if co-opted, can legitimize intimidation and endorse violence.
4. **Business Community and Market Associations:** Economic stability is their primary interest. They can be influential advocates for peace to prevent disruptions to commerce, which are likely if violence erupts.

Table 16: Stakeholder Influence Matrix

Stakeholder Group	Level of Influence	Level of Interest	Primary Role & Current Context
INEC (Ekiti State Office)	Very High	Very High	Election administration. Under intense pressure to conduct credible elections amidst significant kidnapping and urban violence threats that challenge logistics and staff safety.
Security Agencies	Very High	Very High	Law & order enforcement. Must execute hotspot-focused, intelligence-led operations to deter criminal syndicates and maintain a visible, neutral presence to build public confidence for voting.
Political Parties	Very High	Very High	Contesting elections. Their internal discipline, control over supporters, and resistance to leveraging criminal networks for intimidation are major determinants of local peace.
Ekiti State Government	High	High	Controlling state resources and security policy. Its neutrality is critical; any perceived partisan use of the state apparatus would dramatically increase credibility and violence risks.
Judiciary	High	Medium	Electoral dispute resolution. Its efficiency and perceived impartiality in handling potential petitions related to insecurity and disenfranchisement are key to post-election stability.

Stakeholder Group	Level of Influence	Level of Interest	Primary Role & Current Context
Judiciary	High	Medium	Electoral dispute resolution. Its efficiency and perceived impartiality in handling potential petitions related to insecurity and disenfranchisement are key to post-election stability.
Media	High	Medium	Information shaping. Must combat fear-based disinformation, verify reports of violence, and avoid becoming a tool for political incitement in a tense environment.
CSOs & Observers	Medium	High	Independent monitoring and advocacy. Essential for public oversight, documenting incidents, and providing trusted alternative information in high-risk areas.

11.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING AND ENGAGEMENT

The analysis of Ekiti State’s electoral environment reveals a context shaped by localized criminal insecurity, a monetized political economy, urban-rural security disparities, and significant public fear affecting voter confidence. Effective programming must be pragmatic, geographically targeted, and adaptive to these realities. The following recommendations offer strategic entry points for stakeholders, grounded in a “Do-No-Harm” framework and human rights principles.

11.1 Strategic Entry Points and Programmatic Actions

The following initiatives are designed as tangible, scalable interventions that leverage existing structures and directly address the core risks identified in this analysis.

1. Inter-Party Dialogue Platform to Prevent Elite-Triggered Crises

To address the risks stemming from potential elite manipulation, monetized politics, and post-election disputes, formal channels for dialogue among contestants are essential. Therefore, there is a need to facilitate a sustained Ekiti Inter-Party Dialogue Platform, convened under the moral authority of the National Peace Committee (NPC). This platform should move beyond a one-off peace accord signing to facilitate regular meetings where parties can agree on specific codes of conduct, address security-related logistical grievances with INEC and security agencies, and establish a joint mechanism for reporting intimidation or violence. This will directly mitigate Credibility & Legitimacy Risk and Institutional Failure Risk by creating a forum for problem-solving that can isolate spoilers and build consensus on process integrity.

2. Youth-Led Peace and Security Awareness Campaigns

To disrupt the cycle where youth are vulnerable to recruitment as political thugs or are disenfranchised by fear, youth agency must be harnessed for peace and resilience. There is a need to support Youth-Led Peace and Security Awareness Campaigns that leverage peer-to-peer influence. This includes training youth ambassadors in conflict-sensitive communication and digital literacy, and supporting them to create content (short videos, community radio shows) that promote safe civic participation and counter fear-based apathy. This will directly address Violence & Instability Risk and help counter Voter Suppression via Insecurity by making civic engagement relevant and actionable for youth.

3. Media Partnerships for Safety and Transparency Messaging

To combat panic-inducing disinformation and fill the information vacuum in high-risk areas, credible local information channels must be amplified. There is a need to forge strategic Media Partnerships for Safety and Transparency Messaging. This involves:

- Co-creating content (e.g., security alerts, verified polling unit information, peace jingles) for broadcast on local radio and television stations; and
- Training journalists on conflict-sensitive and safety-focused election reporting.

These will directly mitigate the Information Disorder risk that fuels public fear and supports transparent processes by ensuring credible, calming information is widely available.

4. Collaboration with Traditional Institutions for Community Security

To address the underlying drivers of fear and criminality in hotspot areas, the enduring authority and local intelligence of traditional institutions must be engaged. There is a need to initiate formal Collaboration with Traditional Institutions. Programs should support Traditional Councils to:

- Facilitate community-security agency dialogues to improve local intelligence sharing and trust.
- Lead community dialogues on resisting political violence and coercion; and
- Use their moral authority to encourage voter participation and dissuade engagement with criminal elements.

These will directly address the structural drivers of insecurity and provide a culturally legitimate platform for enhancing community-based protection.

11.2 Do-No-Harm Considerations

1. **Securitizing Dialogue:** Maintain the Inter-Party Platform as a neutral, civil society-convened space, not dominated by security briefings, to preserve its role in building political trust and encourage candid dialogue.
2. **Reinforcing Exclusion:** In partnering with traditional institutions, consciously design parallel and inclusive avenues for women, youth, and marginalized groups to participate, ensuring these structures do not solely amplify existing patriarchal or gerontocratic hierarchies.

11.3 Adaptive Strategies for Shifting Conditions

1. **Pre-Election Focus:** Prioritize Inter-Party Dialogue and Traditional Institution collaboration to map hotspots, build trust, and establish mitigation protocols ahead of campaigns.
2. **Campaign & Election Day Period:** Activate all Media Partnerships and Youth Campaigns for real-time rumour management, safety messaging, and monitoring, with incident verification and liaison with security agencies.
3. **Post-Election Period:** Sustain the Inter-Party Dialogue Platform to manage grievances and prevent disputes from escalating. Media Partnerships focus on accurate information regarding results and tribunal processes.

11.4 Human Rights Considerations

All programs must explicitly:

1. **Amplify Marginalized Voices:** Ensure youth campaigns and media content actively include and represent women, PWDs, youth, and residents of high-risk LGAs.
2. **Protect Civic Space:** Monitor and document any intimidation of journalists or youth ambassadors, framing such actions as violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and participation.
3. **Promote Electoral Justice:** Use these platforms to advocate for the right to participate in public affairs in a safe environment, positioning security and credible elections as fundamental human rights issues.

11.5 Clear Implications for Programme Design

Table 17: Implications for Programme Design

Programme Area	Integrated Action
Election Security & Early Warning	A community-based early warning and response system serves as the core mechanism. It feeds verified, local incident reports to a central coordination desk, which can then engage security agencies (ICCES) with specific, actionable intelligence for hotspot LGAs.
Civic Engagement Initiatives	Move beyond generic voter education. Youth-Led Peace Campaigns and Media Partnerships should disseminate targeted safety information, verified logistics updates, and candidate accountability messages to drive informed and confident participation.

Programme Area	Integrated Action
Policy Dialogue & Advocacy	Use evidence and relationships built through the Inter-Party Dialogue Platform and Traditional Institution collaboration to advocate for policies that address root causes of insecurity, such as improved community policing and socio-economic programs for high-risk areas.
Party Reform Programmes	The Inter-Party Dialogue Platform serves as a soft entry point for party reform. Discussions on codes of conduct can naturally evolve into technical dialogues on transparent campaign finance and mitigating the use of criminal elements, building trust for deeper engagement.

12. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PEACE COMMITTEE

As the foremost moral authority on electoral conflict resolution in Nigeria, the National Peace Committee (NPC) occupies a unique position to shape the trajectory of the 2026 Ekiti gubernatorial election. Drawing on the security, political economy, and stakeholder analyses presented in this report, the following strategic recommendations are designed to guide NPC's engagement across the electoral cycle. These recommendations prioritize early intervention, elite management, and post-election stability, recognizing that in Ekiti's volatile political environment, peace is not secured on election day alone but must be cultivated before and sustained after.

12.1 Pre-Election

1. Convene pre-primary engagement with political parties and aspirants to secure commitments to violence-free primaries and acceptance of outcomes.
2. Facilitate a sustained Inter-Party Dialogue Platform that meets regularly to address logistical grievances, agree on codes of conduct, and establish joint reporting mechanisms for intimidation.
3. Convene dedicated sessions with traditional rulers and religious leaders to secure public commitments to neutrality and equip them with conflict-sensitive messaging.
4. Deploy targeted peace-building interventions in high-risk senatorial districts:

Ekiti North: Community dialogues addressing kidnapping fears and voter reassurance.

Ekiti Central: Urban peace messaging and youth de-escalation training.

Ekiti South: Positive reinforcement messaging to maintain stability.

12.2 Election Period

1. Maintain visible moral presence through a high-level NPC delegation deployed 48 hours before the election to engage party leaders, security commanders, and INEC officials.
2. Activate a dedicated rapid response mediation team positioned in Ado-Ekiti with direct communication lines to key stakeholders.
3. Establish a real-time election security situation room at ESI-Hub to:
 - i. Aggregate incident data from observers, and security agencies.
 - ii. Deploy geospatial mapping to visualize flashpoints.
 - iii. Verify and escalate critical incidents to NPC mediators and security commanders.
 - iv. Issue situational awareness updates to guide mediation deployment.
 - v. Counter misinformation with verified reports.
4. Coordinate community-level real-time monitoring and incident reporting.

12.3 Post-Election Phase

- 1.1. Sustain the Inter-Party Dialogue Platform through results collation and announcement to manage grievances and prevent post-election violence.
2. Convene a post-election stakeholders' reflection forum within two weeks, bringing together parties, INEC, security agencies, traditional leaders, and observers.
3. Support peaceful judicial process engagement by securing public commitments to accept court outcomes and monitoring tribunal proceedings.
4. Support the development of a standing state-level peace infrastructure for future elections and community conflict resolution.
5. Document lessons learned through a comprehensive post-election assessment to strengthen NPC's institutional memory and inform future engagements.