

The Governorship Race: The Battle Ground States



8th March, 2019

Tomorrow, 9th March 2019, we will once again exercise our civic rights and responsibilities as citizens to elect our Governors and Members of the State Houses of Assembly. Despite some of the hitches experienced during the Presidential and National Assembly elections that took place on Saturday 23rd February 2019, we as a people and as citizens demonstrated our commitment to peaceful elections and such commitment should be carried over to the final round tomorrow.

Tomorrow's elections are important because governors are about the most strategic positions in governance and who emerges often have a direct bearing on good governance and improved or worsened security. The State Houses of Assembly have been historically incapable of over-sighting governors and if and when we improve the quality of the intake, governance would certainly improve in the country. The greatest challenge to good governance in Nigeria is the relatively high percentage of governors who are excessively corrupt, irresponsible in their governance mandate and often almost completely absent from their respective States. My hope is that citizens have closely monitored and assessed the performance of their governors and are ready to sanction bad governors.

During the last election, one of the challenges encountered is the thuggery orchestrated by some of the governors. There is a strong possibility that some of them would be tempted to use the vast resources at their disposal to affect electoral outcomes. In the last round, some sitting governors in Gombe and Oyo States lost their senatorial bids and in the case of Imo State, the Governor was alleged to have forced the returning officer to declare him elected under duress. As Nigerian Governors consider any challenge to their desires as unacceptable behaviour that requires punishment, security agencies must be at their best to ensure that governors too abide by the law.

LAGOS STATE

Lagos State remains a highly competitive state, as illustrated by the results of the 2019 presidential elections in the state, in which the APC won 580825 votes to the PDP's 448015. But in the National Assembly elections, the APC's dominance in the state since May 1999 is clearly evident in the party's winning all the three senatorial seats and an overwhelming majority of the seats in the house of representatives. If the APC repeats this performance

in the governorship and house of assembly elections on March 9, 2019, it will maintain the dominance of the executive and legislature in the state, begun since May 1999, under one of the partners in the coalition of parties in the APC.

Political Dynamics: 2019 Presidential Elections

Yet the unfolding political dynamics in the state suggest that the contest for the governorship elections will be a highly competitive one between the two major parties in the state, the APC and the PDP. It is a contest that is now, more than ever, cast in terms of capturing the ethnic voting banks controlled by the two major ethnic groups in the state—the Yoruba and Igbo. In effect, the governorship elections in the state, as indeed of the presidential elections that preceded them, are viewed as a test-run for the prospects for a Yoruba or Igbo presidency in 2023.

As with the presidential elections, the following considerations have defined the political context for the governorship elections in the state:

1. Fractionalization within the APC state leadership that has been festering since Bola Tinubu ended his two-term tenure as Governor in 2007, over his continued hold over the state government and over complaints about internal democracy deficits within the party in the state.
2. The progressive depletion and fractionalization of the PDP leadership in the state, the weakness of its party structures in the state, and the lackluster presidential and gubernatorial campaign of the party in the state.
3. The denial of a second term to the current state Governor and his defeat in the state party primaries for the governorship elections.
4. Concerns within the APC in the state that the Governor has not shown strong commitment to supporting the party's governorship candidate in the state, resulting in the move to impeach him--a move that was aborted when it was realized that it might be electorally unwise for the party to continue with the impeachment process in the state house of assembly.
5. Perception of the strong Igbo ethnic voting bloc in the state, the competition to secure, weaken or suppress it, and the ethnic animosity it reignited, particularly after the presidential elections.
6. The spill-over/demonstration effect of the "o to ge" (Enough Is Enough) movement in Kwara State in Lagos State and the strenuous effort to counter it by the APC in the state.

KANO STATE

There are 29 candidates contesting for governor of Kano State but the major battle is between Governor Abdullahi Ganduje of the APC and his main rival from the PDP, Alhaji Abba Kabiru Yusuf. Governor Ganduje got significant negative publicity and a dent to his image after allegations and wide circulation of video material allegedly depicting him receiving millions of dollars bribery in cash. against Governor Abdullahi Ganduje of the APC, the contest ought to be over integrity between him and his PDP rival Alhaji Abba Kabiru Yusuf.

On Monday, a Federal High Court in Kano nullified the primary conducted by the Peoples' Democratic Party in Kano State, which produced Abba Kabir-Yusuf as the party's governorship candidate in the state. The nullification followed a suit filed by one of the party's governorship aspirants, Alhaji Ibrahim Ali-Amin, who challenged the legitimacy of the process which produced Kabir-Yusuf as candidate. He had contended that the PDP, during the primary, "sidelined and booted him out" of the race.

Prior to the February 23 poll, the PDP was actually bubbling with much hope that it would win Kano State or give APC a good fight. The defeat of the party at the presidential and National Assembly elections has dimmed the chances of the opposition PDP on March 9. PDP has only itself to blame because their leader in the State, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso imposed Mr. Yusuf on the party refusing to hold primaries as stipulated in the Electoral Act. The imposition weakened and depleted the party.

There was a lot of expectation that given the sharp divide between Ganduje and Kwankwaso, a third option might emerge in the form of the Peoples' Redemption Party. Their candidate, Salihu Sagir Takai, however emerged under controversial conditions. There was widespread allegation that Gen. Sulaiman Wali (Rtd), won the primaries and Takai came in late after losing in another party and seized the mandate. In any case, his campaign has not generated much enthusiasm.

For almost four years, Kano has been a theatre of open battle between the Kwankwasiyya and Gandujiyya political divides. The former is a mass political movement led by Senator Rabiu Kwankwaso, former presidential aspirant under the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), former governor and ex-minister. On the other divide is incumbent governor, Umar Ganduje, an estranged aide and protégé of Kwankwaso, who has sworn to retire his former benefactor from Kano politics in the coming polls. Both men have large following and the 9th March elections would be their final battle.

KADUNA STATE

The first point that can be made about Kaduna State is that it is a violence-prone State. The violence follows a bifurcation along an ethno-religious north south divide. The Presidential and National Assembly election results of 23rd February reflected the divide with the APC receiving 993,445 votes against 649,612 votes for the PDP. The proportionate scores of the two main contesting parties stand at: 60.5% for APC; and 39.5% for PDP. The odds are therefore with the APC for the gubernatorial race.

The State Governor, Nasir el-Rufai has both his negative and positive aspects that may affect his re-election bid. On the negative side, his selection of Hadiza Balarabe, a fellow Muslim, as a running mate is quite controversial giving the nature of the State as has been depicted earlier; and in spite of the fact that the lady in question is from or is of the Southern Zaria (another form of describing the largely Christian South of the State) ethnic stock. There is also the fact that simmering antagonism of the Shi'ite group in the State, whose national leader is still held in captivity despite several court pronouncements on his qualification for bail that the Federal Government has turned deaf ears to, is another major underbelly of the Governor that may affect his chances.

Perhaps, the political elites in the State ranging from Architect Namadi Sambo, the immediate past Vice President of Nigeria; the former Ag. Caretaker Chairman of the PDP and also one-time Governor of the State, Alhaji Senator Ahmed Makarfi; another former Governor, Ramalan Yero; plus political heavyweights such as Suleiman Hunkuyi; Yaro Makama; and Ambassador Sule Buba, who were in the same political camp with the Governor before, are now in the PDP and may want to undermine his re-election as this is the payback time, particularly for his alleged authoritarian leadership misdemeanors. Finally, under the negative factors that could affect him, we have Alhaji Isa Ashiru Kudan, the gubernatorial candidate of the PDP, who is considered to be a match for el-Rufai, going into the contest.

The flip side of the foregoing is the achievements of the Governor in terms of attempting with a measure of successes to institutionalize efficient governance system in the State. Among others, el-Rufa'i is reputed to have reduced wastes in government by pruning the size of his government; has eliminated ghost workers from the payroll; has cut down also on frivolous expenses; as well as he has introduced treasury single account (TSA), which is also considered to be one of the signature achievements of the Buhari Administration at the federal level. He has, furthermore, embarked on Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB) framework; as well as the clean up that has carried out in the education sector whereby un-certificated teachers have been flushed out of the system; etc. Some of these measures

may have impacted negatively on people and citizens of the State; there is no doubt that most of the radical changes have also been appreciated by even some of those who have been adversely affected.

IMO STATE

Imo State has 65 candidates – the highest number among the 29 states holding governorship election on March 9, in the race to succeed Governor Okorochoa. The front line candidates are Emeka Ihedioha, former Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives under, Senator Hope Uzodinma (APC), Ikedi Ohakim, the former Governor of the State (Accord Party), Ifeanyi Ararume, a former Senator (APGA), and Uche Nwosu, Okorochoa's son in-law (Action Alliance). Given the pedigree of the contestants, the Imo election promises to be a battle of the titans.

Three of these candidates - Uzodinma, Nwosu and Ararume - are said to be flying the APC flag using different political platforms:

- » Ararume was given the APGA ticket less than one month after defecting from the APC; Nwosu defected to AA because he was unable to secure the APC ticket (though his godfather and father in-law remained in the party).
- » Hope Uzodinma, said to be facing corruption allegations, is said to be Oshiomhole's candidate but does not enjoy the support of Buhari and other party faithful.

The Issues

If there is any elite consensus in Imo state, it is the collective loathing of Governor Rochas Okorochoa, who is bent on foisting his son-in-law as his successor. Nonetheless, the man is not a push-over. For a man who won Governorship election under APC, which was simply loathed in the South-east, you must give it to him that he has some capacity. He has contested to be the presidential flag bearer of different political parties – ANPP, PDP and APC and in fact sees himself as a future President of the country.

Under Okorochoa Imo State has acquired a certain notoriety that people are beginning to call it the Rivers State of South-east. It is said that he has taken the state hostage in a manner that is rarely seen in Igbo politics. The Chairman of the All Progressives Congress Imo State Governorship Primary Committee Ahmed Gulak narrated in October 2018 how he narrowly escaped being kidnapped in the state by persons described as agents of Okorochoa. In the February 23 Presidential poll in which Okorochoa was a Senatorial candidate, the returning officer Prof Innocent Ibeawuchi alleged that he was held hostage for almost 16 hours until

he declared Okorochoa the winner of the election. Even on television Prof Ibeawuchi said he was announcing the result under duress.

On Tuesday March 5, the Imo State Resident Electoral Commissioner Prof Francis Ezeonu said this of the governor: “Out in the field there was too much turmoil, we battled with thugs for INEC materials, corps members were hijacked and returning officers harassed and intimidated and in a few places forced to declare results that were obviously concocted under duress. Some other staff were obviously compromised. The maxim was either to play along or be battered”.

Imo is a literal battle ground State. The top five contenders (with the possible exception of Ihedioha) can also play rough, making the election one to watch – both for violence and rigging.

ADAMAWA STATE

In Adamawa, the stage seems set for a titanic 3-gliadiator clash. Governor Mohammed Umaru Jibrilla (Bindowo) squares up against Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri of the PDP and Senator Abdulazeez Murtala Nyako of the ADC. The most interesting thing about the race is that the major issue is not performance (or lack of it), because Bindowo has been adjudged even by his opponents as having performed fairly well. Another marker of the election is that for the first time there is no strong Christian contender, unlike in past elections when the Christian/Muslim divide had been a strong factor.

Governor Bindowo faces opposition both from within his party and from without. Those he contested the primary election with are still fuming with rage. A section of them have either openly or covertly been campaigning against him and for his opponents. They include Halilu “Modi,” younger brother of Aisha Buhari, wife of the president and General Mohammed Buba Marwa (Rtd). The position of others, like SGF Boss Mustafa and former E F C C boss, Nuhu Ribadu, is not clear, but they are particularly beholden to the governor.

The governor`s two opponents are quite formidable. Fintiri was speaker of the state assembly who also briefly held forte as governor, during which time he cleared salary backlog and embarked on some populist projects that are still fondly remembered by many in the state. He will also likely benefit from the “Atiku Factor.” The former Vice President and PDP President Candidate is a political lord of a sort in the state and is likely to deploy his political structure and wide reach in aid of his party`s flagbearer. In addition, the results of the Presidential/National Assembly polls favoured the PDP, though the dynamics this time around are substantially different.

On the other hand, Nyako is a scion of a famous and influential family. His father, Murtala Nyako, once governed the state. His political structure is very much intact and may come in handy for the young former naval officer. Abdulazeez Nyako is also likely to be seen by young voters as one of their own. He is equally the only “true Fulani candidate” in the race – others only speak the language. This reality is being discussed, albeit in hushed up tongues, in some quarters.

Adamawa is a complex, multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, where election period throws up all manner of issues, from the serious to the mundane, from the sublime to the ridiculous. This is exactly what is going on from Lamurde to Gombi, and from Mayo Belwa to Maiha. It is a battleground state simply because the interests of the voters are as varied as they can possibly get. Just about anything can happen.

OGUN STATE

Ogun State is a veritable battleground in the upcoming gubernatorial elections on Saturday, March 9, judging from the very fierce contest occasioned by the dynamics of personal ambitions, group/sub-ethnic interest, big-man politics, citizens'/voters' agency, and of history and ideology playing out in the state. This state is important in the elections as the home state of some of Nigeria's biggest political figures: Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief MKO Abiola, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, as well as the sitting and now re-elected Vice-President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo. But Ogun state has been a swing state since 1999, voting an AD government in 1999, PDP in 2003 and 2007, ACN in 2011 and APC in 2015. Not surprisingly then, political parties at each election have seen the state as a toss-up worthy of a fight.

The noteworthy candidates being presented by parties on the ballot on Saturday, and their heavyweight promoters include: Adekunle Akinlade of the Allied People's Movement (APM), supported by the incumbent governor, Ibikunle Amosun; Gboyega Nasir Isiaka of the Africa Democratic Congress (ADC), supported by Obasanjo and some traditional rulers; Dapo Abiodun of the All Progressives Congress (APC), supported by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, VP Osinbajo and the ruling party; Buruji Kashamu of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), the largest opposition party in the state, and himself a sitting senator; and Dimeji Bankole of the Action Democratic Party (ADP), a former speaker of the federal House of Representatives.

The political parties which appeared to lead the contest about a year ago were the ruling APC and the opposition PDP. The waters became muddied by the refusal of the APC NWG and the party's rival factions within the state to endorse Adekunle Akinlade, the anointed

candidate of the incumbent governor, Senator Ibikunle Amosun, at the primaries. Akinlade subsequently left the APC to seek his aspiration on the platform of the APM, with Amosun vowing to continue supporting him for the governorship, while retaining his own APC membership. The apogee of this internal rift and its most public dramatization was the stoning of the president and his entourage during a February rally in Abeokuta allegedly by elements hired by Amosun to disrupt the rally. Right after the presidential elections won by his party, the APC, Amosun was promptly suspended by the party for anti-party activities. Meanwhile Dapo Abiodun has the unalloyed support of the ruling party at the centre, the APC, its leaders, particularly Tinubu and Osinbajo, and has deployed its extensive party machinery to aid a win. It is expected that the split within the party would affect its performance at the polls tomorrow.

The opposition PDP in Ogun State has also had its share of internal crises within the party, dating back to the turbulent days of the sometimes controversial Otunba Gbenga Daniel. When he did not have his way in determining his successor in 2011, among other issues at the time, OGD (as he is known) left the PDP, taking his supporters to the then nascent PPN, both of which lost at the 2011 elections. Amosun's ACN won those elections simply because its simple majority was greater than the divided votes of the PDP and PPN, as analysis of the election numbers subsequently showed. The PDP has not really recovered since then, and in spite of recent efforts to rally the party again, the contest for the gubernatorial ticket between Kashamu and Adebutu in the post-primary period further weakened the party.

PLATEAU STATE

Prior to the October 10th Local government elections, governor Lalong of APC was praised and celebrated as "governor Alert," due to the payment of workers' salaries up to date. Events surrounding the conduct of local government election October 2018 changed all that. First, elections were held in 13 local governments, while 4 of the 17 local governments did not hold elections. Government cited prevailing security situations as reasons for not holding elections in Jos North, Jos South, Riyom and Barkin-Ladi. Secondly, APC's greatest undoing was when the Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission (PLASIEC) went ahead to announce results for 11 out of the 13 local governments when collation of results were still on-going. Thirdly, Governor Lalong went ahead to swear-in the chairmen few hours, while declaring the results for Langtang North and Mangu inconclusive. These actions did not go down well with many and was seen as Governor Lalong and APC's desperation to hold on to power by all means.

The gubernatorial contest is between Governor Lalong and Senator J.T Useni, a former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory and PDP flag bearer, with structures spread across

the seventeen council areas of the state is one of the very strong opposition out of over 20 political parties who would be fielding candidates for the governorship elections on March 9th 2019. Senator JT Useni believes that he will beat the incumbent Governor Simon Lalong considering the outcome of the presidential and National Assembly elections in the state. The PDP is emboldened by the fact that despite the political and financial clout of sitting governors like Abiola Ajumobi of Oyo State and Ibrahim Dankwambo of Gombe State, they could not secure their seat, in the February 23rd National Assembly election, the powers of incumbency can no longer guarantee electoral outcomes.

Contest for the 2019 governorship remains fierce, with religious undertones as some of the clergy men have been accused of playing partisan politics to the extent of speaking against aspirants in the presence of their congregation. Denominational conflicts have been strong as people are beginning to pitch camps with the two strong gubernatorial aspirants based on denominations- COCIN and Catholic. Others have gone ahead to say that APC is a Muslim party, because Governor Lalong has promised the Hausa Fulani more appointments when re-elected. Both Governor Simon Lalong and Senator J. T Useni are Christians from the same Senatorial District and have on several occasions condemned the use of religious rhetoric and religious text in circulation as capable of inciting violence.

BAUCHI STATE

In Bauchi State, Governor Mohammed Abdullahi Abubakar faces the battle of his political life. His re-election bid is really an uphill task, given the pervasive and widespread perception among the citizens of the state that he is unapproachable, and unfeeling; and that this far he has under-performed. An array of powerful forces have vowed to unseat him.

Ironically, at the fore-front of the "M. A. Must Go" clamour are several disenchanted individuals and groups within his All Progressive Congress, with whom the governor has been having a running battle. The arrow-heads of these groups include former Police Affairs Minister, Dr. Ibrahim Yakubu Lame, and Captain Bala Jibrin. Both had jostled for the APC ticket with the governor in 2014 and 2018. The primaries were really acrimonious and their outcomes controversial and unacceptable to many within and outside the party. The open rebellion, and their resolve to work against the governor and the party, is unprecedented.

The governor is also being challenged by a broad coalition of political leaders headed by the Wazirin Bauchi, Alhaji Bello Kirfi and the Speaker of House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara. They have been trying to build a formidable front to confront the governor, apparently by lining up behind one strong candidate. Those being considered are former F C T Minister, Bala Mohammed of the PDP and former Health Minister, Mohammed Ali Pate of the PRP.

Workers, particularly retirees and pensioners, who have had a rough deal in the past four years, have also been mobilizing against the governor. A section of the influential Islamic cleric has also turned against the governor. In fact, Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi, leader of the Darika sect in West Africa, has openly endorsed one of the governor's opponents. Also, suddenly the governor's origin has become an issue. Like his two predecessors, Abubakar's parents were allegedly not from the state. The propaganda has been that it was time to end the cycle of "rule by outsiders."

Since 2007, the state has become famous for inflicting crushing defeat on incumbents and high-profile politicians. Political awareness is quite high and the electorate have perfected the art of defending their votes in sync with the principle of "a kasa, a tsare, a raka, a jira" popularized by Buhari. Also, voters can actually choose different parties on poll day, as was demonstrated during the recent Presidential and National Assembly elections. While Buhari got about 80% of the votes cast, PRP clinched the two biggest federal constituencies – Bauchi and Katagum – and PDP maintained its strangle-hold of Dogara's Dass/Bogoro/Tafawa Balewa Federal Constituency.

However, the governor remains the candidate to beat. Aside from power of incumbency, control of the APC structure, and having enormous resources to prosecute the race. On the whole, the 2019 gubernatorial election in Bauchi State is a 3-horse race, involving Governor Abubakar of the APC, Bala Abdulkadir Mohammed of the PDP, and Mohammed Ali Pate of the PRP.

SOKOTO STATE

At the "Seat of the Caliphate," the race is a 2-horse one between the incumbent, Aminu Waziri Tambuwal and his former deputy, Ahmed Aliyu, who is a protégé of Senator Aliyu Magatakarda Wamakko, easily the grand god-father of contemporary Sokoto politics. What makes the race in Sokoto State a fierce and interesting one is that its outcome has the potential to decide the fate of the immediate political career of Tambuwal and, perhaps, which elite bloc in the state is really in control. At stake, therefore, are ego and god-father rivalry, not just votes.

Ordinarily a conservative state, with a history of predictable voting pattern, the fickle political antics of Tambuwal, easily tied to his presidential ambitions, seems to have altered everything. For the third time in a relatively short political career, Tambuwal returned to the PDP in time to contest for the 2018 presidential primaries, which he eventually lost. He was clever enough to make arrangement to fly the gubernatorial flag. Unfortunately, he failed to persuade many to follow him to the PDP. One of such was his deputy, Aliyu, who is now his main challenger.

In the meantime, the APC, both in the state and in Abuja, vowed to teach him a lesson by ensuring that his re-election bid comes to naught. Senator Wamakko, reputed as a grassroots leader, populist and strategist, has been the rallying point. He got two of his loyal “boys” (Aliyu and Faruk Yabo) to fly the APC flag.

The race in Sokoto promises to be a close one and can go either way. The two major parties are quite strong and on ground. Tambuwal enjoys the support of two other god-fathers, former governor Attahiru Bafarawa and billionaire businessman, Ummarun Kwabo A.A, who have an ax to grind with Wamakko. The governor is also allegedly backed by the Sultanate and its long and rich tentacles spread throughout the state, by those who detest Wamakko`s domineering and totalitarian kind of politics, and by those beholden to Tambuwal`s relative independence.

However, the governor is being accused of non-performance, and of being an absentee chief executive most of the time. He also being assailed of unbridled ambition, leading to misplaced priorities – particularly in abandoning his mandate as a first-term governor only to plunge into costly presidential aspiration. Very significantly, if the results of the Presidential and National Assembly polls are anything to go by, then Tambuwal has a huge mountain to climb, because the APC victory was overwhelming.



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