

CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT OF THE EKITI GUBERNATORAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA IN 2026

By

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD), Abuja, Nigeria.

Website: www.centrelsd.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The credibility of elections remains the cornerstone of democratic governance, political legitimacy, and peaceful political succession. Elections that are transparent, inclusive, peaceful, competitive, and reflective of the will of the people strengthen democratic institutions and enhance public confidence in governance. Conversely, elections that are characterised by manipulation, violence, vote buying, lack of transparency, and institutional weaknesses undermine democratic consolidation and erode public trust. It is against this backdrop that the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) conducted this Credibility Assessment of the Ekiti State Governorship Election scheduled for 20 June 2026.

The assessment was undertaken using the Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Index, a comprehensive framework developed to evaluate electoral integrity throughout the electoral cycle. The framework combines twelve electoral credibility indicators with the Centre LSD THRIVE Framework, which assesses Transparency, Healthy Environment, Reforms, Inclusivity, Voter and Political Education, and Equipment Functionality. The assessment draws from an extensive review of electoral laws, election observation reports, electoral reform literature, election security assessments, media reports, civil society publications, and lessons from previous elections in Ekiti State, particularly the 2022 Governorship Election.

The assessment found that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is taking place within a relatively favourable electoral environment. Ekiti State possesses several characteristics that support electoral credibility, including a politically conscious population, relatively high literacy levels, active civil society engagement, vibrant media institutions, a tradition of political competition, and a comparatively stable security environment. These factors provide a strong foundation for democratic participation and electoral accountability.

The report notes that Ekiti State occupies a unique position within Nigeria's electoral landscape. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the state has experienced highly competitive elections, judicial interventions in electoral disputes, peaceful transfers of power, and significant electoral reforms. The state's political history demonstrates both the possibilities and challenges of democratic governance in Nigeria. While electoral competition remains vibrant, persistent concerns regarding vote buying, campaign finance transparency, political polarisation, and declining voter turnout continue to threaten electoral integrity.

One of the most important findings of the assessment is that the legal and institutional framework governing the election is considerably stronger than in previous electoral cycles. The Electoral Act 2022 introduced significant reforms designed to improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency in election administration. These reforms include legal recognition of election technology, improved voter accreditation procedures, stronger electoral timelines, and enhanced transparency measures. The assessment concludes that the legal framework provides a sound basis for credible elections, although challenges remain regarding implementation and enforcement.

The deployment of election technology represents one of the strongest dimensions of the credibility assessment. The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) have significantly improved voter authentication, reduced opportunities for multiple voting and ballot stuffing, enhanced transparency, and strengthened public confidence in election administration. Lessons from the 2022 Ekiti Governorship Election demonstrate that these technologies contributed positively to electoral integrity and have become central to public expectations regarding credible elections. Nevertheless, the report cautions that technology alone cannot guarantee electoral credibility. Institutional integrity, operational efficiency, stakeholder trust, and effective communication remain essential complements to technological innovation.

The assessment also found that election administration and operational preparedness are generally strong. INEC has accumulated significant experience from previous elections and has demonstrated increasing professionalism in election management. Improvements in logistics, election personnel training, voter registration systems, and polling unit management provide a solid foundation for the conduct of the election. However, concerns remain regarding public trust, technology-related risks, logistical challenges, and the need for effective stakeholder communication throughout the electoral process.

Security constitutes another important dimension of electoral credibility. The assessment found that Ekiti State enjoys a relatively stable security environment compared to many parts of Nigeria. Strong community structures, active traditional institutions, and a history of relatively peaceful elections contribute positively to electoral security. Nevertheless, several threats remain. These include political intimidation, youth mobilisation for violence, misinformation, cyber threats, and post-election disputes. Significantly, the assessment concludes that vote buying poses a greater threat to electoral credibility than physical violence. Consequently, election security efforts must focus not only on preventing violence but also on protecting voter freedom and democratic choice.

One of the most significant findings of the report relates to campaign finance and vote buying. The assessment identifies vote buying as the single greatest threat to the credibility of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election. Evidence from previous elections suggests that vote buying has become increasingly sophisticated, institutionalised, and difficult to detect. While technological innovations have reduced opportunities for traditional forms of electoral fraud, political actors have increasingly turned to financial inducements as a means of influencing electoral outcomes. Weak enforcement of campaign finance regulations, inadequate transparency in political funding, and economic hardship among citizens have contributed to the persistence of this challenge. Unless effectively addressed, vote buying has the potential to undermine the credibility of the election despite improvements in other areas.

The assessment also examined issues of gender, youth, disability, and social inclusion. Findings indicate that while women participate actively as voters and election officials, they remain underrepresented among candidates and political decision-makers. Youth participation has increased significantly in recent years, particularly through digital platforms and civic engagement initiatives, but young people continue to face barriers to political leadership. Persons with disabilities benefit from stronger legal protections under the Electoral Act 2022 but continue to encounter accessibility challenges at polling units and within broader electoral processes. Consequently, inclusion remains one of the weaker dimensions of electoral credibility and requires additional attention from stakeholders.

Another major concern identified by the assessment is declining voter turnout. The 2022 Ekiti Governorship Election recorded only 36.5 percent voter turnout despite the existence of a large registered voter population. This trend raises important questions regarding voter confidence, political engagement, public trust in electoral institutions, and the perceived relevance of elections. The report emphasises the need for intensified voter education, civic engagement, and confidence-building measures to reverse this trend and encourage greater citizen participation.

Using the Centre LSD Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators, the election received an aggregate score of 66.7 percent, corresponding to a rating of Moderately High Credibility. The strongest indicators were the electoral legal framework, voter register integrity, election technology, and results management. The weakest indicators were campaign finance transparency, vote buying prevention, internal party democracy, and inclusivity.

Similarly, the THRIVE Assessment generated a score of 73.3 percent, indicating Moderately High Credibility. Transparency, reforms, and equipment functionality emerged as the strongest dimensions, while inclusivity recorded the lowest score. Combining the two assessment frameworks produced an overall Centre LSD Credibility Index score of 70 percent.

Based on this score, the report concludes that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election possesses Moderately High Credibility Potential. The election benefits from a strong legal framework, significant technological innovations, improving election administration, active stakeholder engagement, and relatively stable security conditions. However, important risks remain, particularly with respect to vote buying, campaign finance transparency, voter turnout, inclusion, misinformation, and public trust.

The report identifies three possible scenarios. The first is a High Credibility Scenario characterised by effective technology deployment, minimal vote buying, peaceful political competition, high voter turnout, and broad acceptance of results. The second, and most likely, is a Moderately Credible Scenario in which the election is generally well conducted but affected by manageable challenges such as vote buying, isolated incidents of misconduct, and moderate levels of dispute. The third is a Low Credibility Scenario characterised by widespread vote buying, technology failures, political violence, and extensive disputes over election outcomes. Based on current evidence, the report assesses the Moderately Credible Scenario as the most likely outcome.

To strengthen electoral credibility, the report recommends a comprehensive action agenda involving INEC, political parties, security agencies, civil society organisations, media institutions, development partners, traditional and religious leaders, and citizens. Key recommendations include strengthening campaign finance monitoring, combating vote buying, improving voter education, enhancing inclusion, strengthening election security, conducting comprehensive testing of election technology, improving stakeholder communication, and establishing mechanisms for continuous electoral credibility monitoring.

The report further recommends that Centre LSD establish an Ekiti Electoral Credibility Observatory to monitor election preparedness, track THRIVE indicators, assess emerging risks, and provide periodic credibility reports. Such an initiative would not only contribute to the credibility of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election but also generate valuable lessons for the 2027 General Elections in Nigeria.

In conclusion, the assessment finds that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election has a strong opportunity to advance democratic governance and strengthen public confidence in elections. The institutional foundations for credible elections largely exist. However, the ultimate credibility of the election will depend on the commitment of stakeholders to transparency, accountability, inclusivity, peaceful participation, and respect for the will of the people. If these principles guide the conduct of the election, the Ekiti Governorship Election can serve as a model for future off-cycle elections and make an important contribution to the strengthening of democracy in Nigeria.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

The conduct of credible elections remains one of the most important indicators of democratic consolidation and good governance. Elections provide citizens with the opportunity to choose leaders, hold governments accountable, influence public policy, and participate in shaping the future of their societies. According to Dahl (1971), democratic governance requires meaningful participation, political competition, and public contestation. Elections therefore serve as the institutional mechanism through which these democratic values are expressed.

Globally, the credibility of elections has become a major concern for governments, electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, development partners, and citizens. While elections are now conducted regularly in most countries, the quality and integrity of these elections vary considerably. Electoral credibility goes beyond the mere conduct of voting; it encompasses the entire electoral cycle, including voter registration, candidate nomination, campaign activities, election administration, voting, result collation, dispute resolution, and post-election accountability (Norris, 2014).

In many developing democracies, including Nigeria, concerns about electoral integrity have persisted despite significant improvements in electoral laws and institutions. Electoral malpractice, political violence, vote buying, abuse of incumbency, weak internal democracy within political parties, misinformation, and declining public trust continue to undermine democratic governance (Diamond, 1999; Bratton, 2008).

Nigeria's democratic experience since the return to civil rule in 1999 illustrates both progress and persistent challenges. While the country has successfully conducted several electoral cycles and witnessed peaceful transfers of power, electoral credibility remains contested. Reports from domestic and international election observers have consistently highlighted concerns regarding transparency, logistical shortcomings, violence, vote buying, judicialisation of electoral outcomes, and the growing influence of money in politics (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2023).

The Ekiti Governorship Election scheduled for 20 June 2026 presents another important opportunity to assess the quality of electoral democracy in Nigeria. As one of Nigeria's off-cycle governorship elections, the Ekiti election is likely to attract significant national and international attention. Off-cycle elections are often viewed as testing grounds for electoral innovations, political strategies, election administration procedures, and security arrangements that may subsequently be applied during national elections.

Historically, Ekiti State has occupied a strategic position in Nigeria's democratic landscape. The state is renowned for high levels of political consciousness, active citizen participation, strong civil society engagement, and intense electoral competition. At the same time, the state has experienced episodes of political tension, judicial intervention, allegations of electoral malpractice, and widespread vote buying. Consequently, the credibility of elections in Ekiti State has implications not only for governance within the state but also for broader electoral reform efforts across Nigeria.

The 2022 Ekiti Governorship Election was particularly significant because it was the first governorship election conducted under the Electoral Act 2022 and featured the deployment of technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). These innovations were generally regarded as important improvements in electoral administration and transparency. Observer reports indicated improvements in voter accreditation and result management, although concerns remained regarding voter turnout, vote buying, inclusion, and electoral participation. The election recorded only 36.5 percent voter turnout despite nearly one million registered voters. This represented a decline compared to the previous governorship election.

As preparations intensify for the 2026 election, it becomes necessary to undertake a systematic assessment of the factors likely to influence electoral credibility. Such an assessment is important for identifying strengths, weaknesses, risks, opportunities, and priority interventions required to improve electoral integrity.

This report therefore presents a Credibility Assessment of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election using the Election Credibility Index developed by the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). The assessment seeks to provide evidence-based analysis that can inform electoral stakeholders, enhance public accountability, strengthen democratic participation, and contribute to the conduct of free, fair, peaceful, inclusive, and credible elections.

1.2 Rationale for the Assessment

The need for a credibility assessment of the Ekiti Governorship Election arises from several considerations.

First, electoral credibility is a prerequisite for democratic legitimacy. Elections that lack credibility often generate disputes, litigation, political instability, and public distrust in democratic institutions.

Second, the Ekiti election represents an important opportunity to evaluate the implementation of electoral reforms introduced through the Electoral Act 2022 and subsequent administrative innovations by INEC.

Third, previous elections in Ekiti State have revealed recurring challenges relating to vote buying, voter apathy, political competition, inclusion, and election security. Understanding these challenges is critical to preventing their recurrence.

Fourth, lessons from the Ekiti election may provide valuable insights for preparations towards the 2027 General Elections in Nigeria.

Finally, there is increasing demand from citizens, civil society organisations, development partners, and electoral stakeholders for objective and evidence-based assessments of electoral processes.

1.3 Objectives of the Assessment

The overall objective of this assessment is to evaluate the credibility of the Ekiti Governorship Election scheduled for 20 June 2026.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the preparedness of electoral stakeholders for the election.
2. Evaluate the electoral environment using the Centre LSD Election Credibility Index.
3. Identify strengths and weaknesses in the electoral process.
4. Assess potential risks to electoral credibility.
5. Examine issues relating to transparency, inclusivity, security, voter education, reforms, and election technology.
6. Generate evidence-based recommendations for improving electoral integrity.
7. Contribute to broader efforts aimed at strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria.

1.4 Key Assessment Questions

The assessment seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is the electoral environment conducive to credible elections?
2. How prepared is INEC to conduct a transparent and efficient election?
3. What are the major threats to electoral credibility?
4. To what extent are women, youth, and persons with disabilities included in the electoral process?
5. How effective are existing electoral reforms?
6. What role is technology likely to play in enhancing electoral integrity?
7. What interventions are required to improve electoral credibility?

1.5 Conceptual Framework: Electoral Credibility

Electoral credibility refers to the degree to which stakeholders perceive an election as free, fair, transparent, inclusive, peaceful, competitive, and reflective of the will of voters. According to Norris (2014), electoral integrity exists when elections are conducted in accordance with international standards and democratic principles throughout the electoral cycle.

Election credibility involves both objective and subjective dimensions. Objectively, elections must comply with legal and procedural requirements. Subjectively, citizens and stakeholders must have confidence that the process is fair and trustworthy.

Scholars such as Diamond (1999), Lindberg (2006), and Norris (2014) argue that credible elections contribute to democratic consolidation, political stability public trust, government

legitimacy, peaceful transfer of power and citizen participation. Conversely, elections that lack credibility can result in electoral violence, political instability, judicial disputes, voter apathy, weak governance and democratic backsliding.

This assessment adopts a holistic understanding of electoral credibility that extends beyond election day and covers the entire electoral cycle.

1.6 The Centre LSD Election Credibility Index

The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) developed the Election Credibility Index as a practical framework for assessing electoral integrity and stakeholder performance throughout the electoral cycle.

The framework recognises that election credibility depends on multiple institutions, actors, and processes. It therefore evaluates both the formal electoral system and the broader political environment within which elections take place.

The Index consists of two complementary components:

A. The THRIVE Framework

The THRIVE Framework assesses six dimensions of electoral credibility:

Transparency (T)

The extent to which electoral processes are open, verifiable, accountable, and accessible to stakeholders.

Healthy Environment (H)

The extent to which the political and security environment supports peaceful participation and protects electoral rights.

Reforms (R)

The adequacy and implementation of legal, institutional, and administrative reforms.

Inclusivity (I)

The participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, marginalised groups, and opposition actors.

Voter and Political Education (V)

The effectiveness of voter education, civic engagement, democratic literacy, and anti-disinformation initiatives.

Equipment Functionality (E)

The reliability and effectiveness of electoral technology, logistics, equipment, and operational systems.

B. Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators

The assessment also evaluates:

1. Electoral Legal Framework.

2. Independence and Accountability of INEC.
3. Voter Register Integrity.
4. Polling Unit Accessibility.
5. Internal Party Democracy.
6. Campaign Finance Transparency.
7. Voter Education.
8. Inclusivity.
9. Electoral Security.
10. Voting and Result Management.
11. Election Dispute Resolution.
12. Media Fairness and Information Integrity.

1.7 Methodology

This report adopts a mixed-methods desk review approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Sources of Data

The assessment draws on:

1. Academic literature on elections, democracy, and electoral integrity.
2. Official documents from INEC.
3. Reports from election observation missions.
4. Civil society reports and election monitoring publications.
5. Security threat assessments.
6. Media reports and election-related publications.
7. Reports from previous elections in Ekiti State.
8. Centre LSD election credibility frameworks and policy documents.

Particular attention was given to findings from the 2022 Ekiti Governorship Election because they provide useful baseline information for assessing preparedness for the 2026 election. Observer reports highlighted issues relating to voter turnout, polling unit operations, gender inclusion, security deployment, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and vote buying.

Analytical Approach

The analysis combines Political Economy Analysis (PEA), Electoral Integrity Assessment, Risk Assessment, Stakeholder Analysis, Comparative Analysis of Previous Elections and Scenario Planning.

Each credibility indicator is assessed using available evidence and rated on a scale ranging from:

Very High Credibility

High Credibility

Moderate Credibility

Low Credibility

Very Low Credibility

The aggregate ratings are subsequently used to determine the overall credibility outlook for the election.

1.8 Scope and Limitations

This assessment focuses on the period leading up to the 20 June 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election.

The report covers:

- Pre-election environment.
- Electoral administration.
- Political parties and candidates.
- Security conditions.
- Media environment.
- Citizen participation.
- Technology deployment.
- Election-day preparedness.

Because the assessment is conducted before election day, it does not evaluate actual voting, result collation, declaration of results, or post-election litigation. Consequently, the findings should be regarded as a pre-election credibility assessment rather than a final evaluation of the election.

1.9 Structure of the Report

Following this introductory chapter, the report is organised as follows:

Chapter Two: Political Economy and Electoral Context of Ekiti State.

Chapter Three: Historical Analysis of Electoral Credibility in Ekiti State.

Chapter Four: Overview of the 2026 Governorship Election.

Chapter Five: Assessment Using the Twelve Centre LSD Credibility Indicators.

Chapter Six: THRIVE Index Assessment.

Chapter Seven: Security Threat Assessment.

Chapter Eight: Gender, Youth and Inclusion Assessment.

Chapter Nine: Campaign Finance, Vote Buying and Political Competition.

Chapter Ten: Election Technology and Results Management.

Chapter Eleven: Credibility Scorecard and Scenario Analysis.

Chapter Twelve: Conclusions and Recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND ELECTORAL CONTEXT OF EKITI STATE

2.1 Introduction

Understanding the political economy and electoral context of Ekiti State is essential for assessing the credibility of the 2026 Governorship Election. Elections do not occur in a vacuum. They are shaped by historical experiences, socio-economic conditions, political institutions, elite behaviour, voter perceptions, and broader governance dynamics. Consequently, electoral credibility depends not only on election-day administration but also on the political and economic environment within which elections are conducted.

Political economy analysis provides a useful framework for understanding how power, resources, incentives, institutions, and interests influence political behaviour and electoral outcomes. According to Leftwich (2007), political economy analysis seeks to understand how political and economic processes interact to shape development outcomes. In the context of elections, political economy analysis helps explain why electoral actors behave in particular ways, why electoral reforms succeed or fail, and how incentives influence the conduct of political parties, candidates, institutions, and voters.

This chapter examines the historical evolution of politics in Ekiti State, its socio-economic characteristics, governance dynamics, political competition, electoral behaviour, and emerging trends likely to influence the credibility of the 2026 Governorship Election.

2.2 Historical Evolution of Ekiti State

Ekiti State was created on 1 October 1996 from the old Ondo State during the administration of General Sani Abacha. The state consists of sixteen Local Government Areas with Ado-Ekiti as the capital city.

The Ekiti people are predominantly Yoruba and share strong cultural, linguistic, and historical ties. The state is often described as one of the most educated states in Nigeria due to its long tradition of investment in education, literacy, and public service. Many prominent academics, civil servants, judges, political leaders, and professionals in Nigeria trace their origins to Ekiti State.

Historically, Ekiti society has been characterised by strong community institutions, active civic participation, respect for education, and relatively high levels of political awareness. These characteristics have contributed to a politically conscious electorate that actively participates in public debates and electoral processes.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the state has emerged as one of Nigeria's most politically competitive states. Governorship elections in Ekiti have often been intensely contested and have attracted national attention due to their implications for regional and national politics.

2.3 Demographic and Socio-Economic Context

Ekiti State has an estimated population of over three million people, with a significant proportion residing in rural communities. Agriculture remains the dominant economic activity, although public sector employment, education, commerce, and small-scale enterprises also contribute significantly to livelihoods.

Key socio-economic characteristics of the state include:

High Literacy Levels

Ekiti is widely regarded as one of Nigeria's most literate states. Educational attainment is generally higher than the national average, contributing to political awareness and active citizen engagement.

High Youth Population

A substantial proportion of the population consists of young people. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain significant concerns and influence political mobilisation and voter behaviour.

Public Sector Dependence

Many households depend directly or indirectly on government employment, pensions, public contracts, and state-funded programmes. Consequently, elections are often perceived as having significant implications for access to economic opportunities and public resources.

Poverty and Economic Vulnerability

Despite high literacy levels, poverty remains a significant challenge. Rising inflation, declining purchasing power, unemployment, and economic hardship have increased voter vulnerability to inducement and vote buying.

Urban-Rural Dynamics

The state exhibits significant urban-rural differences in access to infrastructure, information, employment opportunities, and public services. These differences influence voting behaviour and campaign strategies.

These socio-economic realities shape political competition and contribute to electoral incentives that affect credibility.

2.4 Political Culture and Voting Behaviour

Political culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations that citizens hold regarding politics and governance. Almond and Verba (1963) argue that political culture plays a crucial role in shaping democratic participation and institutional performance.

Ekiti State possesses several distinctive political characteristics:

High Political Awareness

Citizens generally exhibit strong interest in political affairs and public policy issues. Political discussions are common within communities, professional associations, educational institutions, and traditional forums.

Strong Electoral Competition

Unlike many states where one political party dominates over long periods, Ekiti has experienced frequent political alternation. Political competition remains vibrant and unpredictable.

Issue-Based Political Engagement

Compared to many parts of Nigeria, voters in Ekiti often demonstrate interest in governance performance, education, infrastructure, salary payments, pensions, and social welfare programmes.

Personality-Driven Politics

Although political parties are important, charismatic leaders and influential political figures often shape electoral outcomes significantly.

Increasing Influence of Money Politics

In recent years, the growing influence of vote buying and financial inducement has become a major concern. The increasing monetisation of politics threatens the tradition of issue-based political engagement and undermines electoral credibility.

2.5 Evolution of Party Competition in Ekiti State

Since 1999, political competition in Ekiti State has largely revolved around the major political parties at the national level.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), Action Congress (AC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Progressives Congress (APC), and Social Democratic Party (SDP) have all played significant roles at different times.

A defining feature of Ekiti politics has been the frequent alternation of power between competing political forces. This has produced several consequences:

Positive Consequences

- Increased electoral competitiveness.
- Greater political participation.
- Improved accountability pressures.
- Enhanced voter engagement.

Negative Consequences

- Intense political polarisation.
- Frequent litigation.
- Winner-takes-all politics.
- Heightened electoral tensions.

The 2026 Governorship Election is expected to continue this tradition of intense competition, particularly because political actors view Ekiti as strategically important within the broader South-West political landscape.

2.6 Electoral History and Governance Transitions

Ekiti State has experienced several disputed elections and judicial interventions since 1999.

Notable developments include:

2007 Governorship Election

The election generated significant controversy and was subsequently challenged in court.

2010 Judicial Reversal

The Court of Appeal overturned the earlier election outcome and installed Dr. Kayode Fayemi as Governor.

2014 Governorship Election

Ayo Fayose of the PDP defeated the incumbent Governor, demonstrating the state's competitive political environment.

2018 Governorship Election

Dr. Kayode Fayemi returned to power under the APC platform after defeating the PDP candidate.

2022 Governorship Election

Biodun Oyebanji of the APC won the election with 187,057 votes, while Segun Oni of the SDP secured 82,211 votes and Bisi Kolawole of the PDP received 67,457 votes. Voter turnout was 36.5 percent.

These experiences demonstrate that electoral outcomes in Ekiti are highly competitive and often influenced by broader national political dynamics.

2.7 The Political Economy of Vote Buying

One of the most important electoral credibility challenges in Ekiti State is vote buying.

Vote buying refers to the exchange of money, goods, services, or promises of benefits in return for electoral support. Studies by Bratton (2008), Nichter (2018), and International IDEA (2022) indicate that vote buying tends to increase where poverty, unemployment, weak institutions, and low trust in government are prevalent.

Several factors contribute to vote buying in Ekiti:

Economic Hardship

Rising living costs make many citizens vulnerable to financial inducements.

Competitive Elections

The closeness of electoral contests increases incentives for candidates to purchase votes.

Weak Enforcement

Although electoral laws prohibit vote buying, enforcement remains inadequate.

Normalisation of Clientelism

Repeated exposure to inducements has created expectations among some voters.

Observer reports from previous elections documented widespread incidents of vote buying across polling units.

The persistence of vote buying represents one of the most serious threats to the credibility of the 2026 election.

2.8 Security Context

Compared to many states in Nigeria, Ekiti enjoys relatively favourable security conditions. However, election-related security risks remain significant.

Potential threats include:

- Political violence.
- Thuggery.
- Intimidation of voters.
- Disruption of campaigns.
- Destruction of campaign materials.
- Misinformation and cyber threats.
- Post-election disputes.

The security threat assessment prepared ahead of the election identifies the need for proactive interventions to prevent escalation of tensions and ensure peaceful participation.

The professionalism and neutrality of security agencies will therefore be critical determinants of electoral credibility.

2.9 The Role of Traditional Institutions

Traditional rulers continue to play important roles in maintaining social cohesion and promoting peaceful coexistence in Ekiti State.

Although constitutionally non-partisan, traditional institutions influence political behaviour through:

- Community mobilisation.
- Conflict mediation.
- Peace advocacy.
- Civic education.
- Promotion of electoral participation.

The engagement of traditional rulers in promoting peaceful elections can significantly enhance electoral credibility.

2.10 Civil Society and Citizen Engagement

Ekiti State has a vibrant civil society sector comprising:

- Professional associations.
- Faith-based organisations.
- Community-based organisations.
- Youth groups.
- Women's organisations.
- Election monitoring groups.

Civil society organisations have played important roles in:

- Voter education.
- Election observation.
- Advocacy for electoral reforms.
- Promotion of transparency.
- Monitoring electoral violence.
- Countering misinformation.

The continued engagement of civil society actors will be essential for strengthening electoral accountability in 2026.

2.11 Media Environment

The media environment in Ekiti State is relatively vibrant and includes:

- Radio stations.
- Television stations.
- Newspapers.
- Online news platforms.
- Social media networks.

While the media contributes significantly to voter education and public accountability, increasing use of social media has also created opportunities for:

- Fake news.
- Disinformation.
- Hate speech.
- Political propaganda.

Effective media monitoring and fact-checking initiatives will therefore be important components of electoral credibility.

2.12 Emerging Dynamics Ahead of the 2026 Election

Several emerging developments are likely to influence the credibility of the election:

Economic Conditions

Economic hardship may increase voter vulnerability to inducement.

Technology

BVAS and IReV have raised expectations regarding transparency and accountability.

Public Trust

Public confidence in electoral institutions remains fragile following controversies surrounding recent elections.

Youth Participation

Growing youth engagement creates opportunities for increased participation and accountability.

Security Concerns

Although relatively stable, election-related security threats require continuous monitoring.

Political Competition

The election is expected to be highly competitive, increasing both opportunities for democratic engagement and risks of electoral misconduct.

2.13 Implications for Electoral Credibility

The political economy analysis reveals a complex electoral environment characterised by both opportunities and risks.

Factors likely to enhance credibility include:

- High political awareness.
- Strong civil society engagement.
- Improved electoral technology.
- Competitive political environment.
- Relatively stable security conditions.

Factors likely to undermine credibility include:

- Vote buying.
- Economic hardship.
- Declining voter turnout.
- Political polarisation.
- Misinformation.
- Weak enforcement of electoral laws.

Overall, the political economy context suggests that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election has the potential to be credible, but this outcome is not guaranteed. Electoral credibility will depend largely on the behaviour of political actors, the effectiveness of electoral administration, the neutrality of security agencies, and the ability of citizens and civil society organisations to hold stakeholders accountable.

2.14 Conclusion

The political economy and electoral context of Ekiti State presents a mixture of strengths and vulnerabilities. The state's history of political competitiveness, high literacy levels, active civic engagement, and relatively stable security environment provide a strong foundation for democratic elections. However, persistent challenges such as vote buying, economic vulnerability, misinformation, and declining voter participation continue to threaten electoral integrity.

Understanding these contextual realities is essential for assessing the credibility of the 2026 Governorship Election.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL CREDIBILITY IN EKITI STATE (1999–2022)

3.1 Introduction

A proper assessment of the credibility of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election requires an understanding of the historical trajectory of elections in the state. Electoral credibility is cumulative. Public trust in electoral institutions, political parties, candidates, and election

outcomes is often shaped by experiences from previous electoral cycles. Consequently, examining the history of elections in Ekiti State provides important insights into recurring patterns, institutional improvements, persistent challenges, and lessons that can inform preparations for the 2026 election.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Ekiti State has witnessed some of the most competitive and politically consequential elections in Nigeria. The state has experienced peaceful transfers of power, electoral disputes, judicial reversals of election outcomes, technological innovations, and significant reforms in electoral administration. These experiences make Ekiti an important case study for understanding electoral credibility in Nigeria.

This chapter reviews the evolution of elections in Ekiti State from 1999 to 2022, identifies major credibility challenges, examines reforms and innovations, and draws lessons relevant to the 2026 Governorship Election.

3.2 Electoral Credibility and Democratic Consolidation

Electoral credibility is widely regarded as a key pillar of democratic consolidation. According to Diamond (1999), democracy becomes consolidated when electoral outcomes are accepted as legitimate and political actors consistently operate within democratic rules and institutions. Lindberg (2006) similarly argues that repeated credible elections contribute to democratic learning, institutional strengthening, and improved governance.

In Nigeria, however, electoral credibility has often been undermined by:

- Electoral violence.
- Manipulation of voter registers.
- Ballot stuffing.
- Multiple voting.
- Vote buying.
- Abuse of incumbency.
- Weak internal democracy.
- Judicial controversies.
- Lack of transparency in result management.

Ekiti State has experienced many of these challenges, although the severity and frequency have varied across election cycles.

3.3 The 1999 Governorship Election: Democratic Transition

The 1999 election marked Nigeria's return to democratic governance after years of military rule. In Ekiti State, the election generated significant enthusiasm among citizens who were eager to participate in the new democratic dispensation.

The Alliance for Democracy (AD), which enjoyed strong support throughout the South-West region, emerged victorious. The election was generally regarded as credible when compared to elections conducted during previous military transitions.

Credibility Assessment

Strengths:

- High public enthusiasm.
- Strong voter participation.
- Broad acceptance of results.
- Peaceful political environment.

Weaknesses:

- Weak electoral institutions.
- Limited electoral technology.
- Inadequate voter education.

Overall Credibility Rating:

Moderately High.

The 1999 election established the foundation for democratic governance in the state.

3.4 The 2003 Governorship Election: Growing Political Competition

The 2003 election occurred against the backdrop of increasing competition between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Alliance for Democracy.

Nationally, the PDP expanded its political influence and succeeded in capturing several states previously controlled by opposition parties. In Ekiti State, the PDP won the governorship election.

Although the election was accepted by many stakeholders, concerns emerged regarding the neutrality of electoral institutions, the use of state resources during campaigns, and allegations of electoral manipulation.

Credibility Assessment

Strengths:

- Competitive political environment.
- Active citizen participation.
- Peaceful voting in many areas.

Weaknesses:

- Allegations of irregularities.
- Perceived abuse of incumbency.
- Weak transparency mechanisms.

Overall Credibility Rating:

Moderate.

The election marked the beginning of increasing public concerns regarding electoral integrity in Nigeria.

3.5 The 2007 Governorship Election: Crisis of Electoral Credibility

The 2007 Governorship Election is widely regarded as one of the most controversial elections in the history of Ekiti State.

National and international observers criticised the election for widespread irregularities, including:

- Procedural violations.
- Result manipulation allegations.
- Poor election administration.
- Inadequate transparency.
- Weak accountability.

The election generated significant disputes and was challenged before election tribunals and appellate courts.

Judicial Reversal and Political Implications

Following prolonged litigation, the Court of Appeal eventually overturned the election outcome and declared Dr. Kayode Fayemi the winner in October 2010.

The judicial reversal had far-reaching implications:

Positive Implications:

- Demonstrated the importance of judicial oversight.
- Strengthened confidence in election petitions.
- Reinforced accountability mechanisms.

Negative Implications:

- Reduced public confidence in electoral administration.
- Increased reliance on courts to determine electoral outcomes.
- Raised questions about the credibility of election management processes.

Credibility Assessment

Strengths:

- Competitive political environment.
- Judicial review mechanisms.

Weaknesses:

- Extensive allegations of malpractice.
- Poor election administration.
- Weak transparency.
- Lengthy dispute resolution process.

Overall Credibility Rating:

Low.

The 2007 election remains an important reminder of the consequences of weak electoral integrity.

3.6 The 2010 Judicially Mandated Transition

Although not an election year, the 2010 judicial reversal significantly influenced political perceptions in Ekiti State.

The installation of Dr. Kayode Fayemi following the Court of Appeal judgment reinforced the role of judicial institutions in electoral accountability. At the same time, it highlighted the inability of electoral processes to conclusively determine winners without judicial intervention.

The experience contributed to growing demands for electoral reforms and improved election administration.

3.7 The 2014 Governorship Election: A Test of Reform Efforts

The 2014 Governorship Election occurred within a context of heightened political competition between the PDP and the All Progressives Congress (APC).

The election attracted considerable national attention because of its implications for the forthcoming 2015 General Elections.

Many observers considered the election an improvement over previous contests due to:

- Better election administration.
- Enhanced security deployment.
- Improved voter accreditation.
- Reduced levels of overt electoral violence.

The PDP candidate, Mr. Ayodele Fayose, defeated the incumbent Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi.

Credibility Assessment

Strengths:

- Improved election management.
- Relatively peaceful environment.
- Acceptance of results.
- Professional conduct of election officials.

Weaknesses:

- Allegations of militarisation.
- Concerns regarding misuse of security agencies.
- Isolated incidents of voter inducement.

Overall Credibility Rating:

Moderately High.

The election demonstrated that improvements in electoral administration could enhance public confidence in election outcomes.

3.8 The 2018 Governorship Election: Intensified Competition and Vote Buying Concerns

The 2018 Governorship Election was one of the most competitive elections in the state's history.

The APC candidate, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, defeated the PDP candidate, Professor Kolapo Olusola.

While the election was generally peaceful, concerns emerged regarding:

- Vote buying.
- Monetisation of campaigns.

- Increased use of financial inducements.
- Influence of political godfathers.

Election observers reported widespread allegations of "see-and-buy" practices in which voters allegedly displayed evidence of voting choices before receiving payments.

Significance

The 2018 election marked a turning point in discussions about electoral integrity in Nigeria because vote buying emerged as a major threat to electoral credibility.

Traditional forms of electoral manipulation such as ballot snatching and ballot stuffing appeared to decline, while financial inducement became more prominent.

Credibility Assessment

Strengths:

- Competitive election.
- Peaceful voting process.
- Improved election administration.

Weaknesses:

- Widespread allegations of vote buying.
- Excessive influence of money in politics.
- Weak enforcement of electoral laws.

Overall Credibility Rating:

Moderate.

3.9 The 2022 Governorship Election: Technology and Electoral Innovation

The 2022 Governorship Election represented a major milestone in Nigeria's electoral reform journey.

The election was the first governorship election conducted under the Electoral Act 2022 and featured the deployment of two major technological innovations:

Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

BVAS was introduced to improve voter accreditation through biometric verification and facial recognition.

INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV)

The IReV platform enabled polling unit results to be uploaded electronically and viewed by the public.

These innovations significantly improved transparency and reduced opportunities for certain forms of electoral fraud.

3.10 Key Findings from the 2022 Election

Voter Turnout

The election recorded 360,753 voters out of 988,923 registered voters, representing only 36.5 percent turnout. This was approximately 7.9 percentage points lower than turnout recorded in 2018.

The declining turnout raised concerns regarding:

- Voter apathy.
- Public trust in elections.
- Political disengagement.
- Citizen confidence in electoral outcomes.

Poll Opening and Logistics

Observer reports indicated that many polling units opened on time and that election officials generally complied with INEC guidelines. The average commencement time was approximately six minutes later than the official opening time.

This represented a significant improvement compared to earlier elections.

Gender Inclusion

Observer reports revealed encouraging levels of female participation among polling officials. Female polling officers outnumbered male polling officers in several Local Government Areas. Women also participated actively as voters.

This development reflected growing attention to gender inclusion within electoral administration.

Persons with Disabilities

Despite improvements in legal provisions protecting disability rights, observer reports highlighted continuing accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities.

These challenges included:

- Physical access barriers.
- Transportation difficulties.
- Inadequate assistive facilities.
- Limited disability-sensitive voter education.

Security

Security deployment was extensive, with over 26,000 security personnel reportedly deployed across the state. Observer reports indicated that the election was generally peaceful, although isolated incidents of tension were recorded.

Vote Buying

Vote buying remained a major concern. Election observers documented numerous incidents of vote buying across monitored polling units.

The persistence of vote buying highlighted the limitations of legal reforms in addressing the influence of money in politics.

3.11 Major Trends in Electoral Credibility (1999–2022)

The historical analysis reveals several important trends.

Improvement in Electoral Administration

INEC's capacity to organise elections has improved significantly over time.

Increased Use of Technology

The introduction of BVAS and IReV has enhanced transparency and accountability.

Decline in Traditional Electoral Fraud

Ballot snatching and ballot stuffing appear less common than in earlier elections.

Rise of Vote Buying

Financial inducement has emerged as the dominant threat to electoral credibility.

Increasing Judicialisation

Courts continue to play important roles in resolving electoral disputes.

Growing Attention to Inclusion

Women and persons with disabilities are receiving greater attention within electoral reforms.

Declining Voter Turnout

Citizen participation has declined despite improvements in election administration.

3.12 Lessons for the 2026 Governorship Election

The historical analysis provides several lessons:

First, electoral reforms can improve transparency but cannot eliminate political misconduct without effective enforcement.

Second, technology is useful but must be accompanied by public trust, transparency, and accountability.

Third, vote buying remains the greatest threat to electoral credibility in Ekiti State.

Fourth, declining voter turnout requires urgent attention through voter education and civic engagement.

Fifth, election security must focus not only on violence prevention but also on protecting voter freedom.

Sixth, inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities should remain a priority.

Seventh, public confidence in electoral institutions is as important as technical efficiency.

3.13 Conclusion

The historical evolution of elections in Ekiti State reveals a gradual improvement in electoral administration, transparency, and institutional capacity. Significant reforms, particularly the Electoral Act 2022 and the deployment of electoral technology, have strengthened the integrity of elections. However, serious challenges remain. Vote buying, declining voter turnout, political

monetisation, and weak enforcement of electoral laws continue to undermine electoral credibility.

The history of elections in Ekiti demonstrates that while the state possesses many of the conditions necessary for credible elections, sustained efforts are required to strengthen public trust and protect the integrity of the electoral process. The lessons from previous elections provide a valuable foundation for assessing the preparedness and credibility prospects of the 2026 Governorship Election.

CHAPTER FOUR

OVERVIEW OF THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

4.1 Introduction

The Ekiti State Governorship Election scheduled for 20 June 2026 represents one of the most significant off-cycle elections in Nigeria ahead of the 2027 General Elections. Off-cycle elections have increasingly become important barometers for assessing the effectiveness of electoral reforms, the performance of electoral institutions, the preparedness of political parties, and the capacity of security agencies to support credible democratic processes.

The election is particularly important because it is taking place within a political environment shaped by the aftermath of the 2023 General Elections, ongoing debates about electoral credibility, growing concerns regarding vote buying and voter apathy, and increasing public expectations regarding the use of technology in elections. As a result, stakeholders across Nigeria are likely to view the Ekiti election as a critical test of the country's democratic institutions and electoral reform agenda.

This chapter provides an overview of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election, including the legal framework, electoral timetable, major stakeholders, political parties, candidates, voter registration statistics, election administration arrangements, and emerging issues likely to influence electoral credibility.

4.2 The Electoral Framework

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is being conducted under the framework of:

- The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended).
- The Electoral Act 2022.
- Regulations and Guidelines issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).
- Relevant judicial decisions and electoral precedents.

The Electoral Act 2022 remains the most significant legal instrument governing the election. The Act introduced several reforms designed to improve transparency, accountability, and electoral integrity.

Key provisions include:

Technological Innovation

The Act provides legal backing for the deployment of technology in voter accreditation, result management, and election administration.

Early Conduct of Party Primaries

Political parties are required to conclude primaries within stipulated timelines.

Campaign Regulation

The law regulates campaign periods and campaign finance activities.

Improved Voter Accreditation

The law strengthens voter accreditation processes and reduces opportunities for multiple voting.

Increased Transparency

The Act promotes transparency in result management and election administration.

The effectiveness of these provisions will significantly influence the credibility of the election.

4.3 Electoral Timetable and Preparatory Activities

The election is scheduled for 20 June 2026 in accordance with constitutional and statutory requirements.

The electoral timetable includes:

Pre-Election Activities

- Continuous voter registration and voter register updates.
- Political party primaries.
- Submission of candidates by political parties.
- Publication of candidate lists.
- Campaign activities.
- Recruitment and training of election personnel.
- Procurement and deployment of election materials.

Election Day Activities

- Accreditation of voters.
- Voting.
- Polling unit result collation.
- Ward collation.
- Local Government collation.
- State collation and declaration of results.

Post-Election Activities

- Election petitions and dispute resolution.
- Review of election performance.
- Stakeholder engagement and lessons learned.

The extent to which these activities are implemented according to established timelines will affect public confidence in the electoral process.

4.4 Stakeholder Mapping

Electoral credibility depends on the behaviour and performance of multiple stakeholders.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

INEC remains the principal institution responsible for conducting the election.

Its responsibilities include:

- Voter registration.
- Polling unit management.
- Recruitment and training of election officials.
- Deployment of election materials.
- Accreditation and voting.
- Result collation and declaration.

Public confidence in the election will depend significantly on INEC's professionalism, neutrality, transparency, and operational efficiency.

Political Parties

Political parties play a central role in electoral credibility because they:

- Select candidates.
- Mobilise supporters.
- Conduct campaigns.
- Recruit polling agents.
- Participate in election monitoring.

The conduct of political parties before, during, and after the election will influence public perceptions of legitimacy.

Candidates

The behaviour of candidates can either strengthen or undermine electoral integrity.

Candidates are expected to:

- Respect electoral laws.
- Conduct issue-based campaigns.
- Reject violence.
- Avoid vote buying.
- Promote peaceful participation.

Security Agencies

Security agencies are responsible for:

- Maintaining law and order.
- Protecting election officials.
- Safeguarding election materials.
- Preventing violence.
- Enforcing electoral laws.

Their neutrality and professionalism are essential for credible elections.

Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations contribute to:

- Voter education.
- Election observation.
- Advocacy.
- Monitoring electoral violence.
- Promoting transparency and accountability.

Media Organisations

The media plays important roles in:

- Information dissemination.
- Voter education.
- Candidate debates.
- Election monitoring.
- Fact-checking.

Citizens

Ultimately, electoral credibility depends on the willingness of citizens to participate peacefully and responsibly in the democratic process.

4.5 Political Environment

The political environment leading to the 2026 election is characterised by intense competition among major political parties.

Several factors contribute to this competitiveness:

Strategic Importance of Ekiti State

Ekiti remains politically significant within the South-West geopolitical zone.

National Political Implications

The election is viewed as an indicator of political trends ahead of the 2027 General Elections.

Incumbency Considerations

The performance of the incumbent administration will influence voter perceptions and campaign narratives.

Opposition Mobilisation

Opposition parties view the election as an opportunity to strengthen their political relevance and electoral support.

Voter Expectations

Citizens are increasingly demanding improved governance, economic opportunities, transparency, and accountability.

The highly competitive nature of the election creates opportunities for democratic participation but also increases risks relating to electoral misconduct.

4.6 Voter Registration and Participation Outlook

One of the major concerns arising from previous elections in Ekiti State is declining voter turnout.

The 2022 Governorship Election recorded only 36.5 percent voter turnout despite having nearly one million registered voters.

Several factors may influence voter participation in 2026:

Positive Factors

- Increased political awareness.
- Improved electoral technology.
- Civil society mobilisation.
- Media engagement.
- Competitive elections.

Negative Factors

- Voter apathy.
- Distrust of political actors.
- Economic hardship.
- Vote-buying culture.
- Security concerns.

The extent to which stakeholders address these challenges will influence voter turnout and electoral legitimacy.

4.7 Electoral Technology and Innovation

Technology is expected to play a central role in the 2026 election.

Key technological tools include:

Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

BVAS is expected to continue serving as the primary voter accreditation tool.

The system is designed to:

- Verify voter identity.
- Prevent multiple voting.
- Improve accreditation efficiency.
- Strengthen electoral integrity.

INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV)

The IReV platform is expected to facilitate:

- Electronic transmission of polling unit results.
- Public access to results.
- Transparency in result management.
- Reduction of opportunities for result manipulation.

The successful deployment of these technologies will be a major determinant of electoral credibility.

4.8 Election Security Environment

The security environment remains a critical component of electoral credibility.

Although Ekiti State generally enjoys a more stable security environment than many parts of Nigeria, risks remain.

Potential threats include:

Political Violence

Competition among political actors could generate tensions and violence.

Voter Intimidation

Attempts to influence voter behaviour through threats or coercion remain possible.

Disruption of Campaign Activities

Political rallies and campaign events may become flashpoints for conflict.

Cyber Threats

Increasing reliance on technology creates vulnerabilities relating to cyberattacks and misinformation.

Post-Election Tensions

Disputes regarding election outcomes could trigger unrest if not effectively managed.

Security agencies therefore have a crucial responsibility to ensure a peaceful electoral environment.

4.9 Gender, Youth and Inclusion Considerations

The election presents opportunities for strengthening inclusivity.

Women

Although women participate actively as voters and election officials, their representation among candidates and party leadership remains limited.

Youth

Young people constitute a significant proportion of registered voters and play important roles in political mobilisation.

Persons with Disabilities

The Electoral Act 2022 contains provisions aimed at improving accessibility for persons with disabilities. However, implementation challenges remain.

The extent to which these groups are effectively included in the electoral process will influence the credibility and legitimacy of the election.

4.10 Campaign Environment

The campaign environment is likely to be characterised by:

- Intense political competition.
- Extensive use of traditional and social media.
- High levels of political mobilisation.
- Issue-based campaigns alongside identity-based appeals.
- Increased use of digital platforms.

Key concerns include:

Misinformation and Disinformation

Social media platforms can facilitate the spread of false information.

Hate Speech

Inflammatory rhetoric may increase political tensions.

Campaign Finance Violations

Unregulated campaign spending may distort electoral competition.

Vote Buying

Financial inducements remain a major threat to electoral credibility.

The campaign period will therefore require effective monitoring by INEC, civil society organisations, and media institutions.

4.11 Emerging Risks to Electoral Credibility

Several risks have the potential to undermine electoral credibility.

High-Risk Issues

- Vote buying.
- Political intimidation.
- Campaign finance violations.
- Misinformation.
- Low voter turnout.
- Technology failures.
- Security breaches.

Moderate-Risk Issues

- Logistical challenges.
- Internal party disputes.
- Litigation.
- Media bias.

Low-Risk Issues

- Large-scale election violence.
- Systemic breakdown of electoral administration.

Although some risks appear less likely, they nevertheless require continuous monitoring and mitigation.

4.12 Preliminary Assessment of Election Preparedness

Based on available information, preparations for the election indicate a mixed outlook.

Areas of Strength

- Established legal framework.
- Availability of electoral technology.
- Previous experience with off-cycle elections.
- Active civil society participation.
- Relatively stable security environment.

Areas of Concern

- Persistent vote buying.
- Declining voter turnout.
- Public distrust in political actors.
- Economic hardship.
- Misinformation.
- Inclusion challenges.

Overall, the election environment provides a reasonable foundation for credible elections but contains significant risks that require proactive intervention.

4.13 Conclusion

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is taking place within a dynamic political, institutional, and socio-economic environment. The election benefits from important reforms introduced through the Electoral Act 2022, improvements in election technology, and increasing stakeholder awareness regarding electoral integrity. However, serious challenges remain, particularly in relation to vote buying, voter participation, campaign finance transparency, misinformation, and inclusion.

The election therefore presents both opportunities and risks. Whether it ultimately achieves high levels of credibility will depend on the effectiveness of electoral administration, the conduct of political actors, the professionalism of security agencies, the engagement of civil society organisations, and the participation of citizens.

The next chapter applies the Centre LSD Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators to assess the preparedness and credibility outlook of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASSESSMENT OF THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION USING THE CENTRE LSD TWELVE ELECTORAL CREDIBILITY INDICATORS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a systematic assessment of the credibility prospects of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election using the Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators developed by the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). The indicators are designed to assess the integrity of elections across the entire electoral cycle and provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating the preparedness of electoral institutions, political actors, security agencies, civil society organisations, media institutions, and citizens.

Unlike conventional election observation approaches that focus primarily on election day, the Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework recognises that electoral integrity is influenced by multiple factors before, during, and after elections. Consequently, this assessment examines both institutional preparedness and broader political dynamics that may affect the credibility of the election.

Each indicator is assessed and assigned one of the following ratings:

- Very High Credibility
- High Credibility
- Moderate Credibility
- Low Credibility
- Very Low Credibility

The aggregate assessment provides a preliminary indication of the overall credibility outlook for the election.

5.2 Indicator One: Electoral Legal Framework

Description

The legal framework establishes the rules governing elections and provides the foundation for electoral integrity. A credible legal framework should be clear, comprehensive, transparent, enforceable, and consistent with democratic principles.

Assessment

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is being conducted under:

- The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended).
- The Electoral Act 2022.
- INEC Regulations and Guidelines.
- Relevant judicial decisions.

The Electoral Act 2022 introduced significant reforms including:

- Legal backing for BVAS.
- Improved voter accreditation procedures.
- Enhanced transparency measures.
- Clearer timelines for electoral activities.
- Expanded use of technology.

The Act represents a substantial improvement over previous electoral laws and has strengthened the legal basis for credible elections.

However, challenges remain:

- Weak enforcement of campaign finance regulations.
- Absence of an Electoral Offences Commission.
- Slow prosecution of electoral offenders.
- Persistent legal ambiguities regarding some election technologies.

Strengths

- Modern electoral legislation.
- Strong constitutional foundation.
- Improved regulatory framework.
- Broad stakeholder acceptance.

Risks

- Weak enforcement mechanisms.
- Delayed electoral justice.
- Inadequate sanctions for violations.

Credibility Rating

HIGH

5.3 Indicator Two: Independence and Accountability of INEC

Description

The credibility of elections depends significantly on the independence, professionalism, neutrality, and accountability of the electoral management body.

Assessment

INEC has demonstrated considerable institutional improvement since 1999. Recent elections have shown increased commitment to:

- Professional election management.
- Deployment of technology.
- Stakeholder engagement.
- Improved logistics.

The successful deployment of BVAS and IReV during recent elections strengthened public confidence in electoral administration.

However, public trust remains fragile due to controversies surrounding recent national elections.

Key concerns include:

- Perceptions of political influence.
- Communication gaps.
- Delays in responding to public concerns.
- Transparency challenges in result management.

Strengths

- Institutional experience.
- Nationwide operational capacity.
- Technological innovations.
- Trained personnel.

Risks

- Public distrust.
- Operational lapses.
- Perceived lack of neutrality.

Credibility Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

5.4 Indicator Three: Integrity of the Voter Register

Description

A credible voter register ensures that only eligible voters participate in elections and that all eligible citizens have equal opportunities to vote.

Assessment

INEC has continued efforts to improve voter registration through:

- Continuous Voter Registration (CVR).
- Data verification procedures.
- Biometric registration systems.
- Register display exercises.

The use of biometric technology has significantly reduced opportunities for duplicate registrations.

However, concerns remain regarding:

- Uncollected Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs).
- Limited voter awareness.
- Registration challenges in some communities.
- Potential inaccuracies in voter records.

Strengths

- Biometric registration system.
- Continuous registration process.
- Improved database management.

Risks

- PVC collection challenges.
- Incomplete voter information.
- Public apathy.

Credibility Rating

HIGH

5.5 Indicator Four: Accessibility and Adequacy of Polling Units

Description

Polling units should be accessible, adequately staffed, properly equipped, and capable of accommodating all eligible voters.

Assessment

Ekiti State has an extensive network of polling units distributed across urban and rural areas.

However, previous elections identified challenges relating to:

- Accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- Distance to polling units.
- Inadequate facilities in some locations.
- Transportation difficulties.

Observer reports from previous elections indicated continuing accessibility concerns for persons with disabilities.

Strengths

- Broad geographical coverage.
- Established polling infrastructure.

Risks

- Accessibility barriers.
- Overcrowding in some locations.
- Inadequate facilities.

Credibility Rating

MODERATE

5.6 Indicator Five: Internal Democracy within Political Parties

Description

Credible elections begin with credible party primaries and transparent candidate selection processes.

Assessment

Internal democracy remains one of the weakest aspects of Nigeria's electoral process.

Recurring concerns include:

- Imposition of candidates.
- Delegate manipulation.
- Vote buying during primaries.
- Limited participation of ordinary party members.
- Litigation arising from primaries.

Party primaries often generate disputes that undermine confidence in democratic processes.

Strengths

- Legal requirements for primaries.
- Increased media scrutiny.

Risks

- Candidate imposition.
- Factional disputes.
- Weak accountability.

Credibility Rating

MODERATE-LOW

5.7 Indicator Six: Campaign Finance Transparency

Description

Transparent campaign finance systems promote fairness and reduce undue influence in elections.

Assessment

Campaign finance remains one of the most problematic areas of electoral integrity in Nigeria.

Persistent challenges include:

- Excessive campaign spending.
- Weak disclosure requirements.
- Poor enforcement.
- Influence of wealthy political actors.
- Use of illicit funds.

The growing influence of money in politics continues to undermine electoral credibility.

Strengths

- Existing legal provisions.
- Increased public awareness.

Risks

- Opaque funding.
- Abuse of state resources.
- Financial inducements.

Credibility Rating

LOW

5.8 Indicator Seven: Voter Education and Civic Awareness

Description

Voter education helps citizens understand electoral processes and make informed choices.

Assessment

Civil society organisations, media institutions, faith-based organisations, and INEC have undertaken voter education activities.

Strengths include:

- High literacy levels in Ekiti State.
- Active civil society organisations.
- Vibrant media environment.

Challenges include:

- Voter apathy.
- Misinformation.
- Political cynicism.
- Declining trust in institutions.

The low turnout recorded during the 2022 election suggests continuing challenges regarding voter mobilisation and engagement.

Credibility Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

5.9 Indicator Eight: Inclusivity

Description

Credible elections must provide equal opportunities for participation by women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

Assessment

Significant progress has been made regarding inclusion.

Previous elections demonstrated:

- Increased female participation among election officials.
- Active participation of women voters.
- Greater recognition of disability rights.

However:

- Women remain underrepresented among candidates.
- Accessibility barriers persist.
- Youth participation in leadership remains limited.

Strengths

- Improved gender representation.
- Growing attention to inclusion.

Risks

- Structural barriers.
- Financial constraints.
- Accessibility challenges.

Credibility Rating

MODERATE

5.10 Indicator Nine: Electoral Security

Description

A secure electoral environment is essential for voter confidence and democratic participation.

Assessment

Ekiti State generally enjoys relatively stable security conditions compared to many states.

Nevertheless, potential risks include:

- Political violence.
- Voter intimidation.
- Disruption of campaigns.
- Election-day disturbances.

Previous elections benefited from substantial security deployments.

The security threat assessment prepared for the election also identifies potential risks requiring proactive management.

Strengths

- Strong security planning.
- Multi-agency collaboration.

Risks

- Politically motivated violence.
- Security bias perceptions.
- Intimidation.

Credibility Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

5.11 Indicator Ten: Accreditation, Voting and Result Management

Description

This indicator evaluates the integrity of voting procedures, voter accreditation, result collation, and result transmission.

Assessment

The introduction of BVAS and IReV significantly improved election administration. These innovations reduced opportunities for:

- Multiple voting.
- Ballot stuffing.
- Result manipulation.

The 2022 election demonstrated the effectiveness of these technologies.

However, public confidence remains dependent on:

- Consistent functionality.
- Transparent result transmission.
- Effective communication.

Strengths

- Proven technology.
- Improved transparency.

Risks

- Technical failures.
- Connectivity challenges.
- Public distrust.

Credibility Rating

HIGH

5.12 Indicator Eleven: Election Dispute Resolution

Description

Effective dispute resolution mechanisms are critical for electoral legitimacy.

Assessment

Nigeria possesses established electoral tribunals and appellate processes.

Strengths include:

- Constitutional protection.
- Judicial independence.
- Established precedents.

Challenges include:

- Delays.
- High costs.
- Increasing judicialisation of politics.

Credibility Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

5.13 Indicator Twelve: Media Fairness and Information Integrity

Description

The media contributes significantly to transparency, accountability, and informed participation.

Assessment

Ekiti State benefits from a vibrant media environment.

Positive developments include:

- Active radio and television stations.
- Digital media engagement.
- Election reporting initiatives.

Challenges include:

- Misinformation.
- Disinformation.
- Hate speech.
- Partisan reporting.

Credibility Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

5.14 Summary Credibility Scorecard

Indicator	Rating
Electoral Legal Framework	High
INEC Independence and Accountability	Moderately High
Voter Register Integrity	High
Polling Unit Accessibility	Moderate
Internal Party Democracy	Moderate-Low
Campaign Finance Transparency	Low
Voter Education	Moderately High
Inclusivity	Moderate
Electoral Security	Moderately High
Accreditation, Voting and Result Management	High
Election Dispute Resolution	Moderately High
Media Fairness and Information Integrity	Moderately High

5.15 Key Findings

The assessment reveals several major findings:

First, the institutional foundations for a credible election are stronger than in previous electoral cycles.

Second, technological innovations have significantly enhanced transparency and accountability.

Third, vote buying remains the most serious threat to electoral credibility.

Fourth, internal party democracy continues to represent a major weakness.

Fifth, declining voter turnout remains a significant concern.

Sixth, public confidence in electoral institutions remains fragile and requires deliberate rebuilding.

Seventh, women and persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to full participation.

5.16 Preliminary Overall Rating

Based on the aggregate assessment of the twelve credibility indicators, the overall credibility outlook for the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is assessed as:

MODERATELY CREDIBLE WITH MODERATE RISKS

This indicates that while the election benefits from strong legal and institutional foundations, significant challenges relating to vote buying, campaign finance, political competition, inclusion, and public trust continue to threaten electoral integrity.

5.17 Conclusion

The application of the Centre LSD Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators demonstrates that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election possesses many of the conditions necessary for credible elections. However, credibility is not guaranteed. The persistence of vote buying, campaign finance opacity, internal party weaknesses, and declining voter participation require urgent attention from stakeholders.

The next chapter applies the Centre LSD THRIVE Framework—Transparency, Healthy Environment, Reforms, Inclusivity, Voter and Political Education, and Equipment Functionality—to provide a deeper assessment of the election's credibility prospects.

CHAPTER SIX

THRIVE INDEX ASSESSMENT OF THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

6.1 Introduction

The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) developed the THRIVE Index as a practical framework for assessing the credibility of elections. The framework recognizes that electoral credibility is multidimensional and cannot be adequately measured solely through election-day observation. Rather, it requires a comprehensive assessment of the broader electoral environment, institutional preparedness, stakeholder behaviour, and operational effectiveness throughout the electoral cycle.

THRIVE is an acronym representing six critical dimensions of electoral credibility:

T – Transparency

H – Healthy Environment

R – Reforms

I – Inclusivity

V – Voter and Political Education

E – Equipment Functionality

Together, these dimensions provide a holistic framework for evaluating the extent to which elections are likely to be free, fair, peaceful, inclusive, transparent, and reflective of the will of the electorate.

This chapter applies the THRIVE Framework to assess the credibility prospects of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election. Each dimension is evaluated using available evidence and assigned a score ranging from 1 to 5 as follows:

Score Rating

- 5 Very High Credibility
- 4 High Credibility
- 3 Moderate Credibility
- 2 Low Credibility
- 1 Very Low Credibility

The aggregate score provides an overall THRIVE Credibility Index for the election.

6.2 Transparency (T)

Conceptual Understanding

Transparency refers to the openness, accountability, accessibility, and verifiability of electoral processes. Transparent elections enable stakeholders to observe, understand, verify, and trust electoral procedures and outcomes.

According to Norris (2014), transparency is one of the strongest predictors of public confidence in elections. Citizens are more likely to accept election outcomes when electoral processes are visible, understandable, and independently verifiable.

Key transparency indicators include:

- Accessibility of electoral information.
- Openness of voter registration processes.
- Transparency of candidate nomination.
- Public availability of election data.
- Transparency of voting and result management.
- Communication by electoral authorities.
- Stakeholder access to electoral processes.

Assessment of Transparency in the 2026 Ekiti Election

Several factors support transparency:

Electoral Technology

The deployment of BVAS and IReV enhances transparency through:

- Biometric voter verification.
- Reduction of multiple voting.

- Electronic result uploads.
- Public access to polling unit results.

The positive experience from the 2022 election provides a strong foundation for the 2026 election.

Election Observation

The anticipated presence of domestic and international observers enhances accountability.

Active Media Environment

Ekiti benefits from extensive media coverage and public scrutiny.

Civil Society Engagement

Civil society organisations continue to monitor electoral developments and provide independent assessments.

Transparency Risks

Despite these strengths, several concerns remain:

Public Trust Deficit

The controversies surrounding recent national elections have reduced public confidence in electoral institutions.

Information Gaps

Some citizens remain inadequately informed regarding electoral procedures.

Result Transmission Expectations

Any perceived failure of technology may generate credibility concerns.

Misinformation

False information circulating through social media could undermine confidence in election outcomes.

Transparency Score

Score: 4.0/5

Rating: High Credibility

6.3 Healthy Environment (H)

Conceptual Understanding

A healthy electoral environment exists when citizens can participate freely without fear, intimidation, coercion, violence, or discrimination.

The United Nations (2021) identifies peaceful political participation as a fundamental democratic right.

Key indicators include:

- Security.
- Freedom of movement.
- Freedom of association.
- Freedom of expression.
- Absence of violence.
- Respect for political rights.

Assessment of Electoral Environment

Ekiti State generally enjoys relative political stability compared to many parts of Nigeria.

Positive factors include:

Limited Insurgency Threat

Unlike some regions, Ekiti is not significantly affected by insurgency.

Strong Community Structures

Traditional institutions contribute to peacebuilding and conflict management.

Security Preparations

Security agencies have experience managing previous governorship elections.

Active Civil Society Monitoring

Civil society organisations actively monitor political tensions.

Risks to a Healthy Environment

Political Intimidation

Competition among political actors may increase tensions.

Vote Buying Networks

Vote buying undermines voter freedom and compromises electoral integrity.

Misinformation

Social media disinformation could inflame political tensions.

Localised Violence

Political clashes remain possible in highly competitive areas.

The election security assessment identifies these risks as requiring proactive management.

Healthy Environment Score

Score: 3.5/5

Rating: Moderately High Credibility

6.4 Reforms (R)

Conceptual Understanding

Electoral reforms strengthen institutions, improve procedures, and address weaknesses identified in previous elections.

According to IDEA (2022), electoral reforms are most effective when they enhance transparency, participation, accountability, and public trust.

Reform Assessment

The Electoral Act 2022 introduced significant reforms including:

Legal Recognition of Technology

BVAS and electronic result management received statutory backing.

Improved Electoral Timelines

Clearer timelines improve predictability.

Strengthened Candidate Nomination Rules

Political parties are required to comply with stricter procedures.

Enhanced Voter Accreditation

Biometric verification reduces opportunities for fraud.

Reform Limitations

Several reform gaps remain:

Electoral Offences Commission

The proposed commission has not yet been established.

Campaign Finance Enforcement

Weak enforcement continues.

Vote Buying Prosecution

Convictions remain rare.

Internal Party Democracy

Party primaries continue to face credibility challenges.

Reform Score

Score: 4.0/5

Rating: High Credibility

6.5 Inclusivity (I)

Conceptual Understanding

Inclusivity measures the extent to which all citizens can participate equally in electoral processes regardless of gender, age, disability, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or political affiliation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise inclusive institutions and political participation.

Assessment

Gender Inclusion

Previous elections demonstrated encouraging levels of female participation among election officials and voters.

Youth Participation

Young people remain politically active and constitute a significant proportion of voters.

Disability Inclusion

The Electoral Act 2022 provides stronger protections for persons with disabilities.

Challenges

Women Candidates

Women remain underrepresented among political candidates.

Financial Barriers

High campaign costs limit participation.

Accessibility

Polling unit accessibility remains problematic for some persons with disabilities.

Youth Representation

Youth participation remains stronger among voters than among candidates.

Inclusivity Score

Score: 3.0/5

Rating: Moderate Credibility

6.6 Voter and Political Education (V)

Conceptual Understanding

Voter and political education equips citizens with the knowledge necessary to participate effectively in democratic processes.

According to Bratton (2008), informed citizens are less vulnerable to manipulation and more likely to make independent electoral choices.

Assessment

Positive factors include:

High Literacy Levels

Ekiti has one of the highest literacy rates in Nigeria.

Active Civil Society

Several organisations engage in voter education.

Media Coverage

Extensive media engagement promotes awareness.

Community Mobilisation

Faith-based organisations and traditional institutions support civic education.

Challenges

Voter Apathy

The 2022 turnout of only 36.5 percent indicates declining participation.

Misinformation

Social media continues to facilitate false information.

Distrust of Political Actors

Many citizens express scepticism regarding politicians and political parties.

Vote Buying Culture

Financial inducements weaken issue-based voting.

Voter and Political Education Score

Score: 3.5/5

Rating: Moderately High Credibility

6.7 Equipment Functionality (E)

Conceptual Understanding

Equipment functionality refers to the reliability and effectiveness of electoral technologies, logistics systems, communication systems, transportation arrangements, and polling materials.

Assessment

BVAS

The BVAS system has significantly improved voter accreditation.

IReV

Electronic result management enhances transparency.

Election Logistics

INEC has accumulated valuable experience from previous elections.

Staff Capacity

Election officials have increasing familiarity with electoral technologies.

Risks

Technical Failures

Equipment malfunction remains possible.

Connectivity Challenges

Network limitations may affect result uploads.

Logistics Delays

Late deployment of materials could undermine public confidence.

Cybersecurity Risks

Technology systems require strong protection.

Equipment Functionality Score

Score: 4.0/5

Rating: High Credibility

6.8 THRIVE Credibility Index Scorecard

Dimension	Score
Transparency	4.0
Healthy Environment	3.5
Reforms	4.0
Inclusivity	3.0
Voter & Political Education	3.5
Equipment Functionality	4.0

Total Score

22.0 out of 30

Percentage Score

73.3%

6.9 Overall THRIVE Credibility Rating

Using the Centre LSD THRIVE Index, the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election receives an overall score of:

73.3%

Overall Rating:

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

This rating indicates that:

- The election possesses relatively strong institutional and legal foundations.
- Electoral reforms have improved transparency and accountability.
- Technology is likely to enhance electoral integrity.
- Civil society engagement remains strong.

However:

- Vote buying remains a major threat.
- Inclusivity challenges persist.
- Voter turnout remains low.
- Public trust requires strengthening.
- Campaign finance transparency remains weak.

6.10 Key Drivers of Credibility

The strongest contributors to electoral credibility are:

1. Electoral Act 2022 reforms.
2. Deployment of BVAS and IReV.
3. Relative security stability.
4. Active civil society engagement.
5. High political awareness among citizens.
6. Strong media presence.

6.11 Major Threats to Credibility

The greatest threats include:

1. Vote buying and monetisation of politics.
2. Campaign finance opacity.
3. Declining voter turnout.
4. Misinformation and disinformation.

5. Accessibility barriers for vulnerable groups.
6. Potential technology failures.
7. Public distrust in political actors.

6.12 Conclusion

The THRIVE Index assessment demonstrates that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election possesses a reasonably strong foundation for credibility. Compared to previous electoral cycles, improvements in legal reforms, technology deployment, stakeholder engagement, and election administration have strengthened the prospects for credible elections.

Nevertheless, the election cannot yet be considered fully credible. Significant threats remain, particularly in relation to vote buying, campaign finance transparency, voter participation, inclusion, and public trust. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action by INEC, political parties, security agencies, civil society organisations, media institutions, development partners, and citizens.

The next chapter presents a comprehensive Security Threat Assessment of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election, examining potential risks, conflict drivers, hotspot areas, and mitigation strategies required to safeguard electoral credibility.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SECURITY THREAT ASSESSMENT OF THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

7.1 Introduction

Security is one of the most critical determinants of electoral credibility. Elections can only be regarded as credible when citizens are able to participate freely without fear of violence, intimidation, coercion, harassment, or disruption. The presence of a peaceful and secure environment enhances voter confidence, facilitates participation, protects electoral officials and materials, and promotes acceptance of election outcomes.

Globally, electoral security has become an increasingly important aspect of election management. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2009) defines electoral security as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders, facilities, materials, and activities against threats, violence, and intimidation throughout the electoral cycle. Electoral security extends beyond election day and encompasses the pre-election, election-day, and post-election periods.

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is taking place within a relatively stable security environment compared to many parts of Nigeria. Nevertheless, the election remains vulnerable to several threats including political violence, vote buying networks, youth mobilisation by political actors, misinformation, cyber threats, electoral intimidation, and post-election disputes. The security threat assessment conducted ahead of the election identifies a number of vulnerabilities that require proactive interventions to ensure peaceful elections.

This chapter analyses the security environment surrounding the election, identifies key threats, assesses their likelihood and potential impact, evaluates the preparedness of security institutions, and proposes mitigation measures necessary to safeguard electoral credibility.

7.2 Conceptual Framework for Electoral Security

Electoral security refers to the protection of electoral processes from threats that could undermine their integrity, legitimacy, and credibility.

According to Fischer (2002), electoral security has three interrelated objectives:

1. Protect electoral stakeholders.
2. Protect electoral processes.
3. Protect electoral outcomes.

Electoral stakeholders include:

- Voters.
- Candidates.
- Political parties.
- Election officials.
- Security personnel.
- Election observers.
- Journalists.
- Civil society organisations.

Threats to electoral security may emerge from:

- Political actors.
- Criminal groups.
- Violent extremists.
- Ethnic or communal groups.
- State institutions.
- Cyber actors.
- Misinformation networks.

The Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework considers electoral security a fundamental pillar of election credibility because insecurity directly affects voter participation, public confidence, and acceptance of election outcomes.

7.3 Security Context of Ekiti State

Ekiti State is generally regarded as one of the more peaceful states in Nigeria.

Several factors contribute to this relative stability:

Strong Community Structures

Traditional institutions remain influential and often intervene to resolve disputes before they escalate.

High Literacy Levels

Political disputes are more frequently expressed through public debate, litigation, and advocacy rather than violent confrontation.

Homogeneous Population

The relatively homogeneous ethnic composition reduces the likelihood of ethnic conflict.

Effective Local Governance Structures

Community leadership structures contribute to social cohesion and conflict management.

Limited Presence of Insurgency

Unlike parts of North-East and North-West Nigeria, Ekiti is not significantly affected by insurgency or large-scale armed banditry.

Despite these strengths, electoral competition can create security vulnerabilities that require careful management.

7.4 Electoral Security Trends in Previous Elections

The history of elections in Ekiti reveals both positive and negative experiences.

Positive Trends

- Generally peaceful voting processes.
- Professional deployment of security personnel.
- Relatively low incidence of large-scale violence.
- Acceptance of many election outcomes.

Negative Trends

- Political intimidation.
- Vote buying networks.
- Destruction of campaign materials.
- Isolated clashes among party supporters.
- Tensions surrounding election results.

The 2022 Governorship Election was generally peaceful and benefited from extensive security deployment. More than 26,000 security personnel were reportedly deployed to support election security operations.

This demonstrates the importance of proactive security planning and inter-agency collaboration.

7.5 Electoral Security Risk Mapping

The security threat assessment identifies several categories of threats.

Category One: Political Violence

Description

Political violence refers to the use or threat of physical force by political actors or their supporters to influence electoral outcomes.

Examples include:

- Assaults.
- Clashes among supporters.
- Destruction of property.

- Disruption of rallies.
- Attacks on opponents.

Likelihood

Moderate.

Impact

High.

Credibility Implications

Political violence suppresses participation, undermines public confidence, and damages electoral legitimacy.

7.6 Category Two: Vote Buying Networks**Description**

Vote buying has become one of the most significant threats to electoral integrity in Ekiti State.

Vote buying networks often involve:

- Political actors.
- Community brokers.
- Polling agents.
- Local intermediaries.

Observers documented multiple incidents of vote buying during previous elections.

Likelihood

Very High.

Impact

Very High.

Credibility Implications

Vote buying compromises voter freedom and undermines democratic choice.

Risk Rating

Critical.

7.7 Category Three: Voter Intimidation**Description**

Voter intimidation occurs when individuals are threatened, harassed, or pressured to vote in a particular manner or refrain from voting.

Potential forms include:

- Physical threats.
- Psychological intimidation.

- Community pressure.
- Political coercion.

Likelihood

Moderate.

Impact

High.

Credibility Implications

Intimidation violates the principle of free choice and undermines election legitimacy.

7.8 Category Four: Youth Mobilisation for Violence**Description**

Youth are frequently mobilised by political actors for:

- Crowd disruption.
- Intimidation.
- Campaign confrontations.
- Election-day disturbances.

Economic hardship and unemployment increase vulnerability to political recruitment.

Likelihood

Moderate.

Impact

High.

Credibility Implications

Youth-related violence can escalate rapidly and discourage participation.

7.9 Category Five: Misinformation and Disinformation**Description**

The increasing influence of social media has expanded opportunities for misinformation and disinformation.

Examples include:

- Fake election results.
- False allegations.
- Manipulated videos.
- Hate speech.
- Rumour campaigns.

Likelihood

High.

Impact

Moderate to High.

Credibility Implications

Disinformation can erode public trust and generate unnecessary tensions.

7.10 Category Six: Cybersecurity Threats**Description**

Growing dependence on election technology creates vulnerabilities.

Potential threats include:

- Hacking attempts.
- Data breaches.
- Website disruptions.
- Manipulation of digital information.

Likelihood

Moderate.

Impact

High.

Credibility Implications

Any compromise of election technology could trigger disputes and undermine confidence.

7.11 Category Seven: Attacks on Electoral Infrastructure**Description**

Electoral infrastructure includes:

- INEC offices.
- Polling units.
- Election materials.
- Communication systems.

Although Ekiti has not experienced widespread attacks on electoral infrastructure, isolated incidents remain possible.

Likelihood

Low to Moderate.

Impact

High.

Credibility Implications

Disruption of electoral infrastructure can delay voting and affect results.

7.12 Category Eight: Post-Election Conflict

Description

Post-election disputes may arise from:

- Rejection of results.
- Allegations of fraud.
- Litigation.
- Political grievances.

Likelihood

Moderate.

Impact

Moderate to High.

Credibility Implications

Failure to manage post-election tensions could undermine acceptance of outcomes.

7.13 Election Security Hotspots

Based on historical patterns and political competition, security agencies should pay particular attention to:

Urban Centres

- Ado-Ekiti.
- Ikere-Ekiti.
- Ikole-Ekiti.
- Ijero-Ekiti.

These areas typically experience:

- High voter concentration.
- Intense party competition.
- Greater media attention.

Competitive Local Government Areas

Local governments with histories of close electoral contests may require additional monitoring.

High-Risk Polling Units

Polling units previously associated with:

- Vote buying.
- Political tensions.
- Security incidents.

should receive targeted attention.

7.14 Security Stakeholder Assessment

Nigeria Police Force

The Police remain the lead agency for election security.

Strengths:

- Extensive presence.
- Experience in election management.
- Existing command structures.

Challenges:

- Resource constraints.
- Perceptions of political influence.
- Capacity gaps.

Department of State Services (DSS)

Strengths:

- Intelligence gathering.
- Threat monitoring.

Challenges:

- Coordination with other agencies.

Civil Defence Corps

Strengths:

- Community-level presence.
- Infrastructure protection.

Military

The military may provide support where necessary but should avoid excessive visibility to prevent perceptions of militarisation.

7.15 Security Preparedness Assessment

The security architecture for the election demonstrates several strengths:

Strengths

- Prior experience from previous elections.
- Existing inter-agency collaboration mechanisms.
- Security threat assessments.
- Availability of deployment plans.

Weaknesses

- Resource limitations.
- Logistical constraints.
- Potential political pressures.
- Public distrust in some institutions.

Overall Security Preparedness Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

7.16 Risk Matrix

Threat	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Level
Vote Buying	Very High	Very High	Critical
Political Violence	Moderate	High	High
Voter Intimidation	Moderate	High	High
Youth Mobilisation	Moderate	High	High
Misinformation	High	Moderate	High
Cyber Threats	Moderate	High	High
Infrastructure Attacks	Low-Moderate	High	Medium
Post-Election Conflict	Moderate	High	High

7.17 Security Implications for Electoral Credibility

The assessment reveals several implications:

First, vote buying represents a greater threat to electoral credibility than physical violence.

Second, public confidence in security agencies is essential for voter participation.

Third, misinformation may become a major source of instability if left unchecked.

Fourth, early warning and early response systems are necessary.

Fifth, election security must focus not only on preventing violence but also on protecting voter freedom and democratic choice.

7.18 Recommendations

For Security Agencies

- Strengthen intelligence gathering.
- Enhance inter-agency coordination.
- Maintain neutrality.
- Increase visibility in hotspot areas.
- Protect vulnerable groups.

For INEC

- Share election plans with security agencies.
- Strengthen communication channels.
- Improve contingency planning.

For Political Parties

- Sign and comply with peace accords.
- Discourage violence and intimidation.
- Sanction supporters involved in misconduct.

For Civil Society

- Support peacebuilding initiatives.
- Monitor security incidents.
- Promote early warning systems.

For Media

- Avoid inflammatory reporting.
- Verify election information.
- Counter misinformation.

7.19 Security Credibility Rating

Using the Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework, the security environment for the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is assessed as:

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

This rating reflects the relatively stable security environment in Ekiti State while recognising significant threats relating to vote buying, intimidation, misinformation, and political competition.

7.20 Conclusion

Security remains one of the most important determinants of electoral credibility in the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election. Although the state enjoys a relatively peaceful environment and benefits from experienced security institutions, several threats continue to pose risks to electoral integrity. Vote buying, political intimidation, misinformation, youth mobilisation, and post-election disputes represent the most significant challenges.

Effective management of these threats will require coordinated action by security agencies, INEC, political parties, civil society organisations, traditional institutions, media organisations, and citizens. If these stakeholders fulfil their responsibilities effectively, the security environment is likely to support a credible and peaceful election.

The next chapter examines Gender, Youth, Disability and Social Inclusion in the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election, assessing the extent to which the electoral process promotes equal participation and representation of all segments of society.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GENDER, YOUTH, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

8.1 Introduction

The credibility of elections is not measured solely by the accuracy of voting and result management. It is also determined by the extent to which all eligible citizens are able to participate equally in the electoral process regardless of gender, age, disability status, socio-

economic background, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. Elections that exclude significant segments of the population cannot be regarded as fully democratic or credible.

Globally, the principles of inclusion and equal participation are recognised as fundamental pillars of democratic governance. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities all affirm the right of citizens to participate fully in public affairs and electoral processes.

Nigeria's Constitution and the Electoral Act 2022 similarly provide legal guarantees for equal political participation. In recent years, efforts have been made to increase the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in elections through legal reforms, advocacy campaigns, voter education programmes, and institutional measures introduced by INEC.

Despite these efforts, significant barriers remain. Women continue to be underrepresented in elective offices and political party leadership. Young people remain underrepresented in governance despite constituting a large proportion of the electorate. Persons with disabilities continue to face physical, informational, institutional, and financial barriers to participation.

This chapter assesses the inclusiveness of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election and examines the opportunities and challenges facing women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

8.2 Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Elections

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2017), inclusive elections are elections in which all eligible citizens have equal opportunities to:

- Register as voters.
- Obtain voter information.
- Contest elections.
- Participate in campaigns.
- Vote freely and secretly.
- Access electoral justice.
- Influence public decision-making.

The Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework considers inclusion a critical determinant of electoral integrity because exclusion undermines democratic legitimacy and weakens public confidence in governance.

An inclusive election should therefore ensure:

- Equal participation.
- Equal representation.
- Equal access.
- Equal protection.
- Equal opportunity.

8.3 Gender and Electoral Participation in Ekiti State

Historical Context

Women have historically played important roles in the social, economic, and political development of Ekiti State. However, as in many parts of Nigeria, political representation remains disproportionately male.

Although women participate actively as voters, community leaders, civil servants, professionals, and political supporters, they remain underrepresented among:

- Candidates.
- Elected officials.
- Political party executives.
- Campaign managers.
- Political decision-makers.

This disparity reflects broader structural inequalities within Nigeria's political system.

8.4 Women's Participation as Voters

Evidence from previous elections indicates that women participate actively in electoral processes.

Observer reports from the 2022 Governorship Election found that female voter participation was generally high and that women constituted a substantial proportion of voters in many polling units. Furthermore, women played visible roles as polling officials across several Local Government Areas.

Several factors support women's participation:

High Female Literacy

Educational attainment among women in Ekiti is relatively high compared to many parts of Nigeria.

Strong Women's Associations

Community-based organisations and faith-based groups provide platforms for mobilisation.

Civic Awareness

Women actively participate in public affairs and local governance processes.

Political Interest

Women continue to demonstrate strong interest in governance and development issues.

These factors create opportunities for increased participation in the 2026 election.

8.5 Barriers to Women's Political Representation

Despite strong voter participation, women's representation as candidates and elected officials remains limited.

Financial Constraints

Campaigning requires substantial financial resources, which many women lack.

Patriarchal Norms

Traditional perceptions regarding leadership continue to disadvantage women.

Violence and Intimidation

Women are often discouraged from participating because of hostile political environments.

Party Structures

Political parties remain largely dominated by men.

Limited Access to Networks

Women often have less access to political patronage networks than men.

These barriers contribute significantly to low levels of female political representation.

8.6 Assessment of Gender Inclusion

Strengths

- Active participation of women as voters.
- Increasing representation among election officials.
- Growing advocacy for gender equality.
- Supportive legal framework.

Weaknesses

- Low representation among candidates.
- Financial barriers.
- Male-dominated party structures.
- Limited influence in political decision-making.

Gender Inclusion Rating

MODERATE

8.7 Youth Participation in the Electoral Process

Demographic Significance

Young people constitute one of the most important demographic groups in Ekiti State and Nigeria as a whole.

Nigeria's youthful population has increasingly become a major political force. The "Not Too Young To Run" movement and growing youth activism have contributed to increased awareness regarding youth political participation.

The 2023 General Elections demonstrated the growing political consciousness of young Nigerians, many of whom actively engaged in voter registration, civic mobilisation, election monitoring, and political advocacy.

8.8 Youth Participation Opportunities

Several factors support youth participation in the 2026 election:

Education

Ekiti's strong educational tradition enhances political awareness among young people.

Digital Connectivity

Young people dominate social media platforms and online political engagement.

Civic Activism

Youth-led organisations increasingly engage in governance and accountability initiatives.

Electoral Technology

Technology-based electoral systems appeal to younger voters and enhance participation opportunities.

8.9 Challenges Facing Youth Participation

Unemployment

High unemployment levels create vulnerability to political manipulation.

Vote Buying Networks

Economic hardship increases susceptibility to inducement.

Political Exclusion

Youth remain underrepresented among candidates and party leaders.

Political Violence

Young people are often recruited for political violence and electoral misconduct.

Limited Resources

Campaign financing remains a major obstacle.

These challenges continue to constrain meaningful youth participation.

8.10 Assessment of Youth Inclusion

Strengths

- High political awareness.
- Strong voter mobilisation potential.
- Extensive digital engagement.
- Active civil society participation.

Weaknesses

- Underrepresentation in leadership.
- Economic vulnerability.
- Limited access to political financing.

Youth Inclusion Rating

MODERATELY HIGH

8.11 Persons with Disabilities and Electoral Participation

Legal Framework

The Electoral Act 2022 contains important provisions aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Nigeria's Disability Act and international commitments further reinforce these protections.

The law requires electoral institutions to take reasonable measures to ensure accessibility and inclusion.

8.12 Progress Recorded

Significant improvements have occurred in recent years.

Examples include:

Disability-Sensitive Policies

INEC has introduced measures to improve accessibility.

Increased Awareness

Public recognition of disability rights has improved.

Civil Society Advocacy

Disability-focused organisations continue to engage electoral stakeholders.

Electoral Guidelines

Specific provisions have been incorporated into election management procedures.

8.13 Persistent Challenges

Observer reports from previous elections identified continuing barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

These include:

Physical Accessibility

Many polling units remain difficult to access.

Transportation Challenges

Travel to polling units remains difficult for some voters.

Inadequate Assistive Devices

Assistive materials are not always available.

Information Accessibility

Election information is not always presented in accessible formats.

Stigma

Social attitudes continue to discourage participation.

8.14 Assessment of Disability Inclusion

Strengths

- Strong legal framework.
- Growing awareness.
- Increased advocacy.

Weaknesses

- Physical barriers.
- Limited assistive support.
- Information accessibility challenges.

Disability Inclusion Rating

MODERATE-LOW

8.15 Inclusion of Other Marginalised Groups

Beyond gender, youth, and disability, electoral credibility requires attention to other vulnerable groups.

These include:

Rural Populations

Rural communities often experience:

- Limited information access.
- Transportation challenges.
- Lower levels of political engagement.

Elderly Persons

Older citizens may face mobility and health challenges.

Low-Income Citizens

Economic hardship increases vulnerability to electoral manipulation.

Minority Political Groups

Smaller parties often face difficulties competing against larger political organisations.

Addressing these challenges is essential for inclusive elections.

8.16 Inclusivity Assessment Using the Centre LSD Framework

The Centre LSD THRIVE Framework evaluates inclusivity based on:

- Participation.
- Representation.
- Accessibility.
- Equality of opportunity.
- Protection from discrimination.

The assessment indicates:

Category	Rating
----------	--------

Women	Moderate
Youth	Moderately High
Persons with Disabilities	Moderate-Low
Rural Populations	Moderate
Elderly Persons	Moderate
Political Minorities	Moderate

Overall Inclusivity Score: 3.0/5

Overall Rating: MODERATE CREDIBILITY

8.17 Risks to Inclusion in the 2026 Election

The major risks include:

High Risk

- Financial barriers to participation.
- Underrepresentation of women.
- Accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities.

Moderate Risk

- Youth disengagement.
- Rural exclusion.
- Information gaps.

Emerging Risk

- Digital exclusion among vulnerable populations.

8.18 Strategic Opportunities

Several opportunities exist to strengthen inclusion.

For INEC

- Improve accessibility standards.
- Expand disability-sensitive voter education.
- Enhance outreach to women and youth.

For Political Parties

- Increase female candidacy.
- Promote youth leadership.
- Reduce nomination costs.

For Civil Society

- Conduct targeted voter education.
- Monitor inclusion indicators.
- Advocate inclusive policies.

For Development Partners

- Support inclusion programmes.
- Fund accessibility initiatives.
- Strengthen civic engagement.

8.19 Implications for Electoral Credibility

The assessment demonstrates that inclusion remains one of the weaker dimensions of electoral credibility in the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election.

Although important progress has been made, significant barriers continue to affect participation and representation.

Failure to address these barriers could:

- Reduce voter participation.
- Undermine legitimacy.
- Weaken democratic accountability.
- Exclude vulnerable groups from governance processes.

Conversely, improvements in inclusion would significantly strengthen electoral credibility and democratic legitimacy.

8.20 Conclusion

The assessment of gender, youth, disability, and social inclusion reveals a mixed picture. Women participate actively as voters and election officials but remain underrepresented among candidates and political leaders. Youth demonstrate high levels of political awareness but continue to face barriers to leadership and representation. Persons with disabilities benefit from stronger legal protections but still encounter significant accessibility challenges.

Overall, the inclusiveness of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is assessed as moderate. Significant opportunities exist to improve participation, representation, and accessibility before election day.

The next chapter examines Campaign Finance, Vote Buying, Political Competition and Electoral Integrity, which has emerged as one of the most significant determinants of electoral credibility in Ekiti State and Nigeria generally.

CHAPTER NINE

CAMPAIGN FINANCE, VOTE BUYING, POLITICAL COMPETITION AND ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

9.1 Introduction

Campaign finance, vote buying, and political competition are among the most significant determinants of electoral credibility in contemporary democracies. While elections are intended to provide citizens with an opportunity to freely choose their leaders, the increasing influence of money in politics has created serious challenges for electoral integrity across the world. In many developing democracies, including Nigeria, political competition has become

increasingly monetised, resulting in unequal access to political opportunities, the distortion of voter preferences, and the weakening of democratic accountability.

In recent electoral cycles, Ekiti State has emerged as one of the states where concerns about vote buying and excessive campaign spending have attracted significant national and international attention. Although electoral reforms and technological innovations have helped to reduce traditional forms of electoral fraud such as ballot stuffing and multiple voting, the problem of money politics has continued to evolve. Consequently, many observers now regard vote buying as one of the most serious threats to the credibility of elections in Nigeria.

The Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework identifies campaign finance transparency and vote buying as critical indicators of electoral integrity because elections cannot be considered truly free and fair when voters are induced, coerced, or influenced through financial incentives rather than policy preferences and democratic convictions.

This chapter examines the political economy of campaign finance, the nature and evolution of vote buying in Ekiti State, the dynamics of political competition leading to the 2026 Governorship Election, and the implications of these developments for electoral credibility.

9.2 Conceptual Framework

Campaign Finance

Campaign finance refers to the resources used by political parties, candidates, and political actors to conduct election campaigns. According to International IDEA (2022), campaign finance includes:

- Donations.
- Party funding.
- Campaign expenditures.
- Political advertising.
- Mobilisation costs.
- Fundraising activities.

Campaign finance systems seek to ensure that political competition is fair and transparent while preventing undue influence by wealthy individuals, corporations, and special interests.

A credible campaign finance system should promote:

- Transparency.
- Accountability.
- Fair competition.
- Equal opportunity.
- Compliance with electoral laws.

Vote Buying

Vote buying occurs when money, goods, services, or promises of future benefits are exchanged for electoral support.

Nichter (2018) defines vote buying as a transaction in which politicians provide material inducements in exchange for electoral behaviour.

Vote buying may take several forms:

Direct Cash Payments

Voters receive money before, during, or after voting.

Material Incentives

Food items, clothing, transportation, and household goods are distributed.

Community-Based Patronage

Projects and benefits are promised in exchange for electoral support.

Employment Promises

Political actors offer jobs or appointments.

Conditional Social Benefits

Access to welfare programmes is tied to political loyalty.

Vote buying undermines the principle of free choice and compromises democratic legitimacy.

9.3 Legal Framework Governing Campaign Finance in Nigeria

The Electoral Act 2022 contains provisions regulating campaign finance and political funding.

Key provisions include:

Campaign Expenditure Limits

The Act prescribes spending limits for candidates seeking elective office.

Disclosure Requirements

Political parties are required to disclose sources of campaign funding.

Prohibition of Illegal Donations

Anonymous and prohibited contributions are restricted.

Monitoring Responsibilities

INEC is empowered to monitor campaign finance activities.

Sanctions

The law provides penalties for violations.

Despite these provisions, enforcement remains weak.

Several studies have noted that campaign finance regulations in Nigeria are often honoured more in breach than in compliance (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

9.4 Political Competition in the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election

The 2026 Governorship Election is expected to be highly competitive.

Several factors contribute to this situation:

Strategic Importance of Ekiti State

The election is viewed as a significant political contest ahead of the 2027 General Elections.

Incumbency Dynamics

The performance of the incumbent administration is likely to influence voting behaviour.

Opposition Mobilisation

Opposition parties are expected to invest significant resources in the election.

National Political Interests

National political actors are likely to become involved due to the symbolic importance of the election.

Competitive Electoral History

Ekiti's tradition of political competition increases uncertainty regarding electoral outcomes.

Highly competitive elections often generate positive democratic engagement. However, they may also increase incentives for:

- Vote buying.
- Political intimidation.
- Campaign finance violations.
- Misinformation.
- Electoral disputes.

9.5 Evolution of Vote Buying in Ekiti State

Historical Context

Vote buying is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian politics. However, its scale, sophistication, and visibility have increased significantly in recent years.

Historically, electoral malpractice in Nigeria was associated primarily with:

- Ballot stuffing.
- Multiple voting.
- Result falsification.
- Violence.

The introduction of improved election technologies has reduced opportunities for some of these practices.

As a result, political actors increasingly rely on financial inducements to influence electoral outcomes.

The Ekiti Experience

Ekiti State has frequently been cited in discussions about vote buying.

The 2018 Governorship Election attracted widespread attention due to reports of "see-and-buy" practices in which voters allegedly displayed evidence of their voting choices before receiving payments.

The 2022 Governorship Election also witnessed documented incidents of vote buying.

Election observers reported 45 separate incidents across monitored polling units.

This indicates that despite reforms, vote buying remains deeply embedded within electoral competition.

9.6 Drivers of Vote Buying

Several factors contribute to the persistence of vote buying.

Economic Hardship

Economic vulnerability increases susceptibility to financial inducements.

High inflation, unemployment, and declining purchasing power make many voters vulnerable to short-term incentives.

Weak Enforcement

Although vote buying is prohibited by law, enforcement remains weak.

Arrests rarely result in prosecution or conviction.

High-Stakes Politics

Political office in Nigeria is associated with significant power and access to resources.

Candidates therefore have strong incentives to secure electoral victory by any means necessary.

Voter Distrust

Some citizens perceive elections as opportunities to extract benefits from politicians.

This perception weakens issue-based voting.

Political Culture

Repeated exposure to inducements has normalised vote buying in some communities.

9.7 Methods of Vote Buying Likely in the 2026 Election

The assessment identifies several methods that may be deployed.

Polling Unit Payments

Cash transfers linked directly to voting behaviour.

Electronic Transfers

Use of mobile banking and digital payments.

Community Brokers

Intermediaries acting on behalf of candidates.

Distribution of Goods

Food items, clothing, and household products.

Group-Based Mobilisation

Payments to community associations and interest groups.

Transportation and Logistics Support

Provision of transport allowances linked to voting expectations.

These methods may become increasingly sophisticated as enforcement efforts intensify.

9.8 Campaign Finance Transparency Assessment

The transparency of campaign finance remains one of the weakest dimensions of electoral integrity.

Major concerns include:

Undisclosed Funding Sources

Many campaign contributions are not publicly disclosed.

Weak Reporting Systems

Financial reporting requirements are not rigorously enforced.

Limited Monitoring Capacity

INEC faces resource constraints in campaign finance monitoring.

Use of Third Parties

Campaign expenditures are often channelled through intermediaries.

Abuse of Incumbency

Public resources may be used for political purposes.

These challenges undermine public confidence and create unequal political competition.

9.9 Implications of Money Politics for Electoral Credibility

The growing influence of money politics has several implications.

Distortion of Voter Choice

Financial inducements weaken independent decision-making.

Reduced Accountability

Candidates may feel accountable to financiers rather than citizens.

Unequal Competition

Wealthier candidates gain unfair advantages.

Exclusion of Qualified Candidates

Competent candidates without financial resources face disadvantages.

Erosion of Public Trust

Citizens lose confidence in democratic processes.

Increased Corruption

Politicians may seek to recover campaign expenditures after assuming office.

These outcomes undermine democratic governance and electoral integrity.

9.10 Political Parties and Campaign Conduct

Political parties play central roles in shaping electoral integrity.

Positive responsibilities include:

- Candidate selection.
- Voter mobilisation.
- Policy development.
- Civic engagement.

However, parties may also contribute to electoral risks through:

- Vote buying.
- Hate speech.
- Disinformation.
- Campaign finance violations.
- Political intimidation.

The behaviour of political parties during the campaign period will therefore significantly influence the credibility of the election.

9.11 Media, Campaign Finance and Electoral Competition

Media institutions perform important oversight functions.

Their responsibilities include:

- Monitoring campaign spending.
- Investigating financial irregularities.
- Fact-checking campaign claims.
- Providing balanced coverage.

However, unequal access to media platforms can create unfair advantages for wealthier candidates.

Social media has also increased opportunities for covert political spending and digital influence operations.

9.12 Risk Assessment

The major risks associated with campaign finance and political competition are summarised below.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Rating
Vote Buying	Very High	Very High	Critical
Undisclosed Campaign Funding	High	High	High

Abuse of Incumbency	Moderate-High	High	High
Digital Financial Inducements	High	High	High
Political Intimidation	Moderate	High	High
Campaign Finance Violations	High	High	High
Candidate Exclusion Due to Cost	High	Moderate	High

9.13 Credibility Assessment

Using the Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework:

Campaign Finance Transparency

Score: 2.0/5

Rating: LOW CREDIBILITY

Vote Buying Prevention

Score: 2.0/5

Rating: LOW CREDIBILITY

Fairness of Political Competition

Score: 3.0/5

Rating: MODERATE CREDIBILITY

Overall Chapter Rating

Score: 2.3/5

Rating: LOW TO MODERATE CREDIBILITY

This makes campaign finance and vote buying the weakest dimensions of the electoral credibility assessment conducted so far.

9.14 Recommendations

For INEC

- Strengthen campaign finance monitoring.
- Publish campaign finance disclosures promptly.
- Collaborate with anti-corruption agencies.
- Increase monitoring of election-day vote buying.

For Security Agencies

- Investigate vote-buying networks.
- Prosecute offenders.
- Monitor financial inducement activities around polling units.

For Political Parties

- Adopt transparent funding mechanisms.
- Enforce internal codes of conduct.
- Discourage monetisation of politics.

For Civil Society Organisations

- Monitor campaign finance activities.
- Conduct anti-vote-buying campaigns.
- Promote issue-based voting.

For Citizens

- Reject inducements.
- Report electoral offences.
- Participate in civic education programmes.

For Development Partners

- Support campaign finance transparency initiatives.
- Fund anti-vote-buying programmes.
- Strengthen citizen monitoring mechanisms.

9.15 Conclusion

Campaign finance, vote buying, and political competition constitute one of the most significant challenges to the credibility of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election. While legal reforms and technological innovations have improved several aspects of election administration, they have not adequately addressed the growing influence of money in politics.

The assessment demonstrates that vote buying remains the single greatest threat to electoral integrity in Ekiti State. The persistence of financial inducements, weak enforcement of campaign finance regulations, and increasing monetisation of political competition undermine democratic choice and weaken public confidence in elections.

Unless decisive measures are taken by INEC, security agencies, political parties, civil society organisations, media institutions, and citizens, campaign finance abuses and vote buying could significantly diminish the credibility of the 2026 election. Conversely, effective interventions in these areas would substantially strengthen electoral integrity and public trust.

The next chapter examines Election Technology, Election Administration, Voting Processes and Results Management, focusing on BVAS, IReV, logistics, operational preparedness, and the integrity of election-day processes.

CHAPTER TEN

ELECTION TECHNOLOGY, ELECTION ADMINISTRATION, VOTING PROCESSES AND RESULTS MANAGEMENT

10.1 Introduction

Election technology, election administration, voting processes, and results management constitute the operational backbone of electoral credibility. While legal frameworks, political competition, campaign conduct, and voter participation are important, the integrity of elections

ultimately depends on the ability of electoral institutions to effectively administer voting processes and accurately capture, transmit, collate, and declare election results.

In recent years, Nigeria has undertaken significant electoral reforms aimed at improving transparency, accountability, efficiency, and public confidence in election administration. The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) represents one of the most important developments in Nigeria's electoral history. These innovations were designed to address longstanding concerns regarding voter accreditation, multiple voting, ballot stuffing, and result manipulation.

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election will be conducted within a context of heightened public expectations regarding electoral technology. Citizens, political parties, civil society organisations, development partners, and the media increasingly view technology as a critical mechanism for safeguarding electoral integrity. Consequently, the effectiveness of election technology and administration will be one of the most important determinants of the credibility of the election.

This chapter examines the preparedness of election administration systems, assesses the deployment of electoral technologies, analyses voting and results management processes, identifies operational risks, and evaluates their implications for electoral credibility.

10.2 Conceptual Framework

According to Norris (2014), election administration refers to the processes through which electoral institutions organise, manage, and oversee elections.

Election administration encompasses:

- Voter registration.
- Polling unit management.
- Recruitment and training of personnel.
- Procurement and deployment of election materials.
- Accreditation of voters.
- Voting procedures.
- Result collation.
- Result transmission.
- Election-day logistics.
- Stakeholder communication.

Electoral technology refers to the use of digital, biometric, electronic, and information management systems to improve electoral processes.

The Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework recognises election administration and technology as critical components of the Equipment Functionality dimension of the THRIVE Index.

10.3 Evolution of Election Technology in Nigeria

Election administration in Nigeria has undergone significant transformation since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

1999–2007 Period

The electoral process relied largely on manual systems.

Challenges included:

- Multiple voting.
- Ballot stuffing.
- Voter impersonation.
- Result manipulation.
- Weak record management.

2011–2019 Period

Technological innovations gradually emerged.

Examples included:

- Electronic voter registers.
- Smart Card Readers.
- Digital voter databases.

Although these innovations improved electoral administration, significant challenges remained.

Electoral Act 2022 Era

The Electoral Act 2022 provided legal backing for more advanced technologies.

Major innovations included:

- BVAS.
- IReV.
- Digital election monitoring systems.
- Improved voter registration databases.

These reforms significantly enhanced transparency and accountability.

10.4 Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

Overview

BVAS is a technological device used by INEC for voter accreditation.

The system verifies voter identity through:

- Fingerprint authentication.
- Facial recognition.

The objective is to ensure that only eligible voters participate in elections.

Importance of BVAS

BVAS addresses several historical weaknesses.

Prevention of Multiple Voting

The system reduces opportunities for individuals to vote more than once.

Prevention of Voter Impersonation

Biometric verification strengthens voter identification.

Improved Accreditation Accuracy

The system enhances the reliability of voter authentication.

Increased Public Confidence

Citizens perceive biometric verification as more credible than manual procedures.

Lessons from the 2022 Ekiti Election

The 2022 Governorship Election was among the first major elections to utilise BVAS.

Observer reports indicated that BVAS contributed significantly to improving accreditation procedures and reducing electoral fraud.

The technology enhanced transparency and strengthened confidence in the voting process.

Risks Associated with BVAS

Despite its benefits, BVAS faces several risks.

Device Malfunction

Technical failures may delay voting.

Power Constraints

Battery limitations may affect operations.

Connectivity Challenges

Network issues may affect data synchronisation.

Human Capacity Gaps

Inadequately trained officials may encounter operational difficulties.

Public Misunderstanding

Limited voter knowledge may create confusion.

These risks require effective mitigation measures.

10.5 INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV)

Overview

The IReV platform allows polling unit results to be uploaded electronically and viewed by the public.

The system was introduced to:

- Enhance transparency.
- Reduce opportunities for result manipulation.
- Improve public confidence.
- Facilitate independent verification.

Credibility Benefits

Public Visibility

Citizens can access polling unit results directly.

Independent Verification

Political parties and observers can verify results.

Reduced Manipulation

Electronic uploads reduce opportunities for tampering.

Increased Accountability

Election officials become more accountable for results.

Lessons from Previous Elections

The deployment of IReV in recent elections demonstrated its potential to improve transparency. However, controversies surrounding result uploads in some elections highlighted the importance of:

- Technical reliability.
- Effective communication.
- Public expectations management.

The experience underscores the need for robust testing and contingency planning before the 2026 election.

10.6 Voter Registration and Voter Database Management

A credible election begins with a credible voter register.

INEC has invested significantly in:

- Continuous Voter Registration (CVR).
- Biometric databases.
- Data cleaning processes.
- Register verification exercises.

These initiatives have contributed to improved voter register integrity.

However, challenges remain:

Uncollected PVCs

Many registered voters fail to collect their voter cards.

Public Awareness Gaps

Some citizens remain unaware of registration opportunities.

Data Accuracy Issues

Continuous updating remains necessary.

Voter Apathy

Registration does not always translate into participation.

The integrity of the voter register remains fundamental to electoral credibility.

10.7 Recruitment and Training of Election Personnel

Election personnel are central to election administration.

Categories include:

- Presiding Officers.
- Assistant Presiding Officers.
- Supervisory Presiding Officers.
- Collation Officers.
- Returning Officers.

The quality of election administration depends heavily on:

Professionalism

Officials must perform duties impartially.

Technical Competence

Personnel must understand election technologies.

Ethical Conduct

Election officials must resist political influence.

Operational Readiness

Adequate preparation is essential.

Training therefore remains a critical determinant of election quality.

10.8 Election Logistics and Material Deployment

Election logistics involves:

- Transportation.
- Distribution of election materials.
- Deployment of personnel.
- Communication systems.

Historically, logistical failures have undermined electoral credibility in Nigeria.

Common challenges include:

- Late arrival of materials.
- Inadequate transportation.
- Poor coordination.
- Equipment shortages.

Observer reports from the 2022 election indicated significant improvements in polling unit opening times and deployment processes.

Maintaining these improvements will be essential for the 2026 election.

10.9 Voting Processes

A credible voting process should be:

- Transparent.
- Accessible.
- Efficient.
- Secure.
- Inclusive.

The voting process involves:

Accreditation

Verification of voter identity through BVAS.

Ballot Issuance

Distribution of ballot papers.

Voting

Secret casting of ballots.

Ballot Sorting and Counting

Transparent counting procedures.

Polling Unit Documentation

Completion of result forms.

Each stage must be carefully managed to ensure credibility.

10.10 Results Management

Results management is one of the most sensitive stages of the electoral process.

Public trust in elections often depends on confidence in result management procedures.

Key stages include:

Polling Unit Collation

Results are recorded and announced at polling units.

Ward Collation

Results are aggregated at ward level.

Local Government Collation

Ward results are consolidated.

State Collation

Final results are compiled and declared.

Transparency at each stage is essential.

10.11 Risks to Results Management

Several risks could undermine credibility.

Human Error

Mistakes during collation may create disputes.

Technical Failure

Technology malfunction could delay result transmission.

Misinformation

False result announcements may generate confusion.

Political Pressure

Attempts to influence officials remain possible.

Cyber Threats

Digital systems may be targeted.

Poor Communication

Information gaps can fuel speculation and distrust.

Mitigating these risks requires proactive planning.

10.12 Assessment of Election Administration Preparedness

Strengths

- Established electoral framework.
- Experience from previous elections.
- Availability of BVAS and IReV.
- Improved voter register management.
- Enhanced training systems.
- Better logistics planning.

Weaknesses

- Public trust challenges.
- Technology-related risks.
- Connectivity concerns.
- Operational dependence on temporary personnel.

Opportunities

- Increased transparency.
- Improved accountability.
- Greater citizen participation.
- Enhanced observer engagement.

Threats

- Vote buying.
- Misinformation.
- Cybersecurity vulnerabilities.
- Political interference.

10.13 Technology Risk Assessment

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Rating
BVAS Failure	Moderate	High	High
Connectivity Challenges	Moderate	Moderate	Medium
IReV Disruption	Moderate	High	High
Cyber Attacks	Moderate	High	High
Logistics Delays	Moderate	High	High
Human Error	Moderate	Moderate	Medium
Public Mistrust	High	High	High

10.14 Credibility Assessment

Using the Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework:

Election Technology

Score: 4.0/5

Rating: HIGH CREDIBILITY

Election Administration

Score: 4.0/5

Rating: HIGH CREDIBILITY

Voting Processes

Score: 4.0/5

Rating: HIGH CREDIBILITY

Results Management

Score: 3.5/5

Rating: MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

Overall Chapter Rating

Score: 3.9/5

Rating: HIGH CREDIBILITY

10.15 Implications for Electoral Credibility

The assessment reveals several important implications.

First, election technology has significantly improved the prospects for credible elections in Ekiti State.

Second, BVAS and IReV have strengthened transparency and accountability.

Third, public confidence remains dependent on consistent technology performance.

Fourth, communication and stakeholder engagement are essential to managing expectations.

Fifth, operational excellence remains necessary to complement technological innovation.

Technology alone cannot guarantee credible elections. Credibility depends equally on institutional integrity, professionalism, and stakeholder trust.

10.16 Recommendations

For INEC

- Conduct comprehensive pre-election testing of BVAS and IReV.
- Strengthen training of election personnel.
- Improve stakeholder communication.
- Publish contingency plans.

For Political Parties

- Educate agents on technology procedures.
- Avoid spreading misinformation.
- Support peaceful voting processes.

For Security Agencies

- Protect election infrastructure.
- Safeguard digital assets.
- Support logistics operations.

For Civil Society

- Conduct voter education on election technology.
- Monitor technology deployment.
- Support independent verification efforts.

For Media

- Provide accurate information.
- Counter misinformation.
- Explain technology processes to citizens.

10.17 Conclusion

Election technology, election administration, voting processes, and results management constitute one of the strongest dimensions of the credibility assessment of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election. The introduction of BVAS and IReV has significantly enhanced transparency, accountability, and public confidence. Lessons from previous elections demonstrate that technology can reduce opportunities for electoral fraud and strengthen trust in electoral outcomes.

Nevertheless, significant risks remain. Technical failures, logistical challenges, misinformation, cyber threats, and public distrust could undermine the credibility gains achieved through reform efforts. Consequently, sustained investment in operational preparedness, stakeholder communication, and institutional accountability remains essential.

Overall, this chapter assesses election technology and administration as possessing High Credibility Potential, provided that identified risks are effectively managed.

The next chapter presents the Credibility Scorecard, Scenario Analysis and Overall Credibility Rating of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election, bringing together the findings from all preceding chapters into an integrated assessment.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CREDIBILITY SCORECARD, SCENARIO ANALYSIS AND OVERALL CREDIBILITY POTENTIAL OF THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

11.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the findings from the preceding chapters and presents an integrated assessment of the credibility potential of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election. The chapter combines the findings from the Centre LSD Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators, the THRIVE Index Assessment, the Security Threat Assessment, the Inclusion Assessment, and the analysis of campaign finance, vote buying, election technology, and election administration.

The objective is to provide an evidence-based judgment regarding the overall credibility prospects of the election and identify the most likely scenarios that may emerge before, during, and after election day.

The chapter also identifies critical drivers of electoral credibility, major risks, and possible outcomes under different conditions.

11.2 Framework for Credibility Assessment

The Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Framework evaluates elections across two complementary dimensions:

A. The Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators

1. Electoral Legal Framework
2. Independence and Accountability of INEC
3. Voter Register Integrity
4. Polling Unit Accessibility
5. Internal Party Democracy
6. Campaign Finance Transparency
7. Voter Education
8. Inclusivity
9. Electoral Security
10. Accreditation, Voting and Result Management
11. Election Dispute Resolution
12. Media Fairness and Information Integrity

B. The THRIVE Index

T – Transparency

H – Healthy Environment

R – Reforms

I – Inclusivity

V – Voter and Political Education

E – Equipment Functionality

Together, these indicators provide a comprehensive basis for assessing electoral credibility.

11.3 Summary of Findings from Previous Chapters

The assessment reveals a mixed but generally positive outlook for the election.

Major Strengths

The election benefits from:

- A relatively strong legal framework.
- Electoral reforms introduced through the Electoral Act 2022.
- Deployment of BVAS and IReV.
- A politically aware electorate.
- Active civil society engagement.

- Vibrant media participation.
- Relatively stable security conditions.
- Previous experience with off-cycle elections.

Major Weaknesses

Important weaknesses remain:

- Vote buying.
- Campaign finance opacity.
- Weak internal party democracy.
- Declining voter turnout.
- Accessibility barriers.
- Public distrust in political actors.
- Misinformation and disinformation.

11.4 Twelve Electoral Credibility Indicators Scorecard

The table below summarises the findings from Chapter Five.

Indicator	Rating	Score (5)
Electoral Legal Framework	High	4.0
Independence and Accountability of INEC	Moderately High	3.5
Voter Register Integrity	High	4.0
Polling Unit Accessibility	Moderate	3.0
Internal Party Democracy	Moderate-Low	2.5
Campaign Finance Transparency	Low	2.0
Voter Education	Moderately High	3.5
Inclusivity	Moderate	3.0
Electoral Security	Moderately High	3.5
Accreditation, Voting and Result Management	High	4.0
Election Dispute Resolution	Moderately High	3.5
Media Fairness and Information Integrity	Moderately High	3.5

Aggregate Score

Total Score = 40.0

Maximum Score = 60

Percentage Score = 66.7%

Rating

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

11.5 THRIVE Index Scorecard

The THRIVE assessment conducted in Chapter Six produced the following results:

THRIVE Dimension	Score
Transparency	4.0
Healthy Environment	3.5
Reforms	4.0
Inclusivity	3.0
Voter & Political Education	3.5
Equipment Functionality	4.0

Total Score = 22.0

Maximum Score = 30

Percentage Score = 73.3%

Rating

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

The THRIVE assessment indicates that the strongest dimensions are:

- Transparency.
- Reforms.
- Equipment Functionality.

The weakest dimension remains:

- Inclusivity.

11.6 Integrated Centre LSD Credibility Index

To generate an overall credibility rating, the results of the Twelve Indicators Assessment and the THRIVE Assessment are combined.

Combined Score

Twelve Indicators Score = 66.7%

THRIVE Index Score = 73.3%

Average Score:

$$(66.7 + 73.3) \div 2 = 70.0\%$$

Overall Centre LSD Credibility Index

70.0%

Interpretation

Using the Centre LSD Credibility Scale:

Score	Rating
81–100%	High Credibility
61–80%	Moderately High Credibility
41–60%	Moderate Credibility
21–40%	Low Credibility
0–20%	Very Low Credibility

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election receives an overall rating of:

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

11.7 Key Drivers of Electoral Credibility

The assessment identifies six major drivers likely to strengthen electoral credibility.

1. Electoral Reforms

The Electoral Act 2022 provides a stronger legal and institutional framework than previous electoral laws.

2. Election Technology

BVAS and IReV significantly improve transparency and accountability.

3. Political Awareness

Ekiti citizens remain among the most politically conscious electorates in Nigeria.

4. Active Civil Society

Civil society organisations continue to engage in voter education, election observation, and accountability initiatives.

5. Media Engagement

The media environment remains vibrant and relatively diverse.

6. Relative Security Stability

Compared to many states, Ekiti enjoys a relatively peaceful political environment.

11.8 Major Threats to Electoral Credibility

The assessment identifies six major threats.

1. Vote Buying

Vote buying remains the most serious threat to electoral integrity.

Observer reports documented multiple incidents in previous elections.

Risk Rating: Critical.

2. Campaign Finance Violations

Weak transparency and enforcement continue to undermine fairness.

Risk Rating: High.

3. Low Voter Turnout

The 2022 turnout of 36.5 percent indicates declining citizen participation.

Risk Rating: High.

4. Misinformation and Disinformation

Digital platforms may be used to spread false information.

Risk Rating: High.

5. Accessibility Barriers

Persons with disabilities continue to face obstacles to participation.

Risk Rating: Moderate.

6. Public Distrust

Public confidence in political actors remains fragile.

Risk Rating: Moderate to High.

11.9 Scenario Analysis

Three scenarios are considered.

Scenario One: High Credibility Election

Description

The election is peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and professionally managed.

BVAS and IReV function effectively.

Vote buying is significantly reduced.

Political parties respect electoral rules.

Security agencies remain neutral.

Citizens participate actively.

Characteristics

- High voter turnout.
- Minimal violence.
- Effective technology deployment.
- Broad acceptance of results.
- Limited litigation.

Probability

Moderate.

Credibility Rating

High Credibility.

Scenario Two: Moderately Credible Election

Description

The election proceeds largely according to plan but experiences some challenges.

Vote buying occurs but does not fundamentally alter outcomes.

Technology performs reasonably well.

Political competition remains intense.

Some disputes emerge.

Characteristics

- Moderate voter turnout.
- Isolated incidents of misconduct.
- Some technology-related complaints.
- Limited violence.
- Moderate litigation.

Probability

High.

Credibility Rating

Moderately High Credibility.

Scenario Three: Low Credibility Election

Description

The election experiences serious challenges.

Vote buying becomes widespread.

Technology failures occur.

Political violence escalates.

Results become heavily contested.

Characteristics

- Low voter turnout.
- Significant disputes.
- Widespread allegations of malpractice.
- Extensive litigation.
- Public distrust.

Probability

Low to Moderate.

Credibility Rating

Low Credibility.

11.10 Most Likely Scenario

Based on available evidence, the most likely scenario is:

Scenario Two: Moderately Credible Election

This assessment is based on:

Positive Factors

- Stronger legal framework.
- Electoral technology.
- Experienced election administrators.
- Active stakeholder engagement.

Negative Factors

- Persistent vote buying.
- Campaign finance opacity.
- Declining voter participation.
- Inclusion challenges.

The election is therefore likely to be credible in many respects but still affected by significant integrity challenges.

11.11 Credibility Potential by Electoral Phase

Pre-Election Phase

Rating: Moderately High

Strengths:

- Reforms.
- Stakeholder engagement.
- Election planning.

Risks:

- Party primaries.
- Campaign finance.
- Vote buying.

Election Day

Rating: High

Strengths:

- BVAS.
- Security deployment.
- Election administration.

Risks:

- Logistics failures.
- Polling unit vote buying.

Post-Election Phase

Rating: Moderately High

Strengths:

- Judicial mechanisms.
- Observer reports.

Risks:

- Result disputes.
- Political tensions.
- Litigation.

11.12 Implications for the 2027 General Elections

The Ekiti election provides important lessons for Nigeria.

A successful election would:

- Increase confidence in electoral reforms.
- Strengthen trust in technology.
- Provide a model for other elections.
- Inform preparations for 2027.

Conversely, major failures would:

- Increase public scepticism.
- Undermine confidence in reforms.
- Intensify calls for additional reforms.

The election therefore has significance beyond Ekiti State.

11.13 Centre LSD Early Warning Indicators

The following indicators should be monitored before election day:

Red Flags

- Escalation of vote buying.
- Increased political violence.
- Delayed deployment of election materials.
- Technology testing failures.
- Hate speech.
- Misinformation campaigns.

Positive Indicators

- Increased voter mobilisation.
- Effective voter education.
- Peace accords.
- Successful technology demonstrations.
- Strong observer deployment.

11.14 Overall Credibility Potential

Based on all available evidence and analysis, the Centre LSD assessment concludes that:

Overall Credibility Score

70.0%

Overall Credibility Rating

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

This rating reflects the fact that:

- The institutional framework for credible elections largely exists.
- Electoral technology has improved transparency.
- Security conditions remain relatively favourable.
- Stakeholder engagement is strong.

However:

- Vote buying remains a critical challenge.
- Campaign finance transparency remains weak.
- Voter turnout remains low.
- Inclusion gaps persist.

Accordingly, the election possesses significant credibility potential but requires deliberate interventions to address identified risks.

11.15 Conclusion

The credibility assessment indicates that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election has a reasonable prospect of meeting acceptable standards of electoral integrity. The election benefits from important reforms, technological innovations, improved election administration, and a politically aware electorate. Nevertheless, credibility is not guaranteed. Persistent challenges

relating to vote buying, campaign finance opacity, misinformation, voter apathy, and inclusion continue to threaten electoral integrity.

Overall, the election is assessed as having **Moderately High Credibility Potential**, with the most likely outcome being a generally credible election affected by manageable but significant risks.

The final chapter presents the report's conclusions, strategic recommendations, reform priorities, and action agenda for INEC, political parties, security agencies, civil society organisations, media institutions, development partners, and citizens.

The next chapter is Chapter Twelve: Conclusions, Recommendations and Action Agenda for Strengthening Electoral Credibility in the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION AGENDA FOR STRENGTHENING ELECTORAL CREDIBILITY IN THE 2026 EKITI GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

12.1 Introduction

This report set out to assess the credibility prospects of the Ekiti State Governorship Election scheduled for 20 June 2026 using the Electoral Credibility Index developed by the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). The assessment adopted the Centre LSD THRIVE Framework, which evaluates electoral credibility through six dimensions— Transparency, Healthy Environment, Reforms, Inclusivity, Voter and Political Education, and Equipment Functionality—and complemented this framework with twelve electoral credibility indicators covering the entire electoral cycle.

The assessment was informed by a review of electoral laws, election observation reports, electoral reform literature, election security assessments, media reports, civil society publications, and lessons from previous elections in Ekiti State, particularly the 2022 Governorship Election. The report also considered emerging political, institutional, technological, security, and socio-economic dynamics likely to influence the credibility of the forthcoming election.

The findings demonstrate that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election possesses significant credibility potential. Electoral reforms introduced through the Electoral Act 2022, improvements in election administration, deployment of election technology, active civil society engagement, and a relatively stable security environment provide a strong foundation for credible elections. However, major challenges remain, particularly in relation to vote buying, campaign finance transparency, voter apathy, inclusion, misinformation, and public trust.

This concluding chapter summarises the key findings, draws overall conclusions, and proposes an action agenda for strengthening electoral credibility before, during, and after the election.

12.2 Major Findings

12.2.1 Electoral Credibility Outlook

The assessment found that the overall credibility potential of the election is positive but not guaranteed.

Using the Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Index, the election received an overall score of 70 percent, placing it within the category of **Moderately High Credibility**.

This rating reflects significant progress in electoral reforms and administration while recognising the persistence of important threats to electoral integrity.

12.2.2 Legal and Institutional Framework

The Electoral Act 2022 provides a stronger legal foundation than previous electoral frameworks.

Important reforms include:

- Legal backing for BVAS.
- Strengthened voter accreditation procedures.
- Improved result management systems.
- Enhanced transparency provisions.
- Better electoral timelines.

However, implementation and enforcement remain critical challenges.

12.2.3 Election Technology

The deployment of BVAS and IReV represents one of the strongest dimensions of electoral credibility.

These technologies have:

- Reduced opportunities for multiple voting.
- Improved voter authentication.
- Enhanced transparency.
- Increased accountability.
- Strengthened public confidence.

Nevertheless, technology alone cannot guarantee credible elections. Institutional integrity, professionalism, and public trust remain essential.

12.2.4 Security Environment

The security environment is generally favourable compared to many parts of Nigeria.

However, several risks remain:

- Vote buying.
- Political intimidation.
- Misinformation.
- Youth mobilisation for violence.
- Election-related tensions.

The assessment found that vote buying poses a greater threat to electoral credibility than physical violence.

12.2.5 Inclusion

Progress has been recorded in the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

However:

- Women remain underrepresented among candidates.
- Persons with disabilities face accessibility challenges.
- Youth participation in leadership remains limited.

Consequently, inclusivity remains one of the weaker dimensions of electoral credibility.

12.2.6 Campaign Finance and Vote Buying

The assessment identified vote buying as the single greatest threat to electoral credibility.

Evidence from previous elections suggests that vote buying has become increasingly sophisticated and institutionalised.

Weak campaign finance regulation and enforcement continue to undermine electoral integrity.

12.2.7 Voter Participation

Declining voter turnout remains a major concern.

The 2022 Governorship Election recorded only 36.5 percent turnout.

This trend raises concerns regarding:

- Public trust.
- Democratic legitimacy.
- Political engagement.
- Citizen confidence in elections.

12.3 Overall Conclusions

Based on the findings presented in this report, five broad conclusions emerge.

Conclusion One

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election possesses stronger credibility foundations than previous electoral cycles due to reforms introduced through the Electoral Act 2022 and improvements in election administration.

Conclusion Two

Election technology has significantly improved transparency and accountability, but technology must be complemented by institutional integrity, stakeholder trust, and operational excellence.

Conclusion Three

Vote buying and the growing influence of money in politics constitute the most serious threats to electoral credibility.

Conclusion Four

The election is likely to be generally peaceful, but proactive measures are required to prevent political intimidation, misinformation, and election-related tensions.

Conclusion Five

The credibility of the election will depend less on legal provisions and more on the behaviour of political actors, electoral officials, security agencies, civil society organisations, media institutions, and citizens.

12.4 Strategic Goal

The strategic goal for all stakeholders should be:

To ensure that the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election is free, fair, peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and credible and that the outcome reflects the genuine will of the people of Ekiti State.

12.5 Strategic Action Agenda

The report proposes a multi-stakeholder action agenda organised around the six dimensions of the Centre LSD THRIVE Framework.

12.6 Transparency Agenda

Objective

Strengthen openness, accountability, and public confidence.

Priority Actions

INEC

- Publish detailed election procedures.
- Conduct regular stakeholder briefings.
- Provide timely election information.
- Ensure transparency in result management.

Civil Society

- Establish election transparency monitoring mechanisms.
- Publish periodic election integrity reports.
- Conduct independent audits of election preparedness.

Media

- Provide fact-based election coverage.
- Investigate electoral misconduct.
- Counter misinformation.

Expected Outcome

Increased public confidence in the electoral process.

12.7 Healthy Environment Agenda

Objective

Promote peaceful participation and protect electoral rights.

Priority Actions

Security Agencies

- Deploy personnel professionally and impartially.
- Establish election security coordination centres.
- Strengthen intelligence gathering.
- Respond rapidly to threats.

Political Parties

- Sign and comply with peace accords.
- Discourage inflammatory rhetoric.
- Sanction violent supporters.

Traditional and Religious Leaders

- Promote peace messaging.
- Facilitate conflict resolution.
- Encourage responsible participation.

Expected Outcome

Peaceful elections with minimal violence and intimidation.

12.8 Reform Agenda

Objective

Strengthen institutional and legal foundations.

Priority Actions

National Assembly

- Accelerate the establishment of an Electoral Offences Commission.
- Strengthen campaign finance provisions.
- Clarify legal provisions regarding election technology.

INEC

- Review operational guidelines.
- Strengthen monitoring systems.
- Improve election management procedures.

Expected Outcome

Stronger electoral institutions and enhanced accountability.

12.9 Inclusivity Agenda

Objective

Promote equal participation and representation.

Priority Actions

Political Parties

- Increase opportunities for women candidates.
- Encourage youth leadership.
- Reduce nomination fees.

INEC

- Improve accessibility at polling units.
- Expand disability-sensitive voter education.
- Strengthen outreach programmes.

Civil Society

- Monitor inclusion indicators.
- Support women and youth candidates.
- Advocate accessibility improvements.

Expected Outcome

More inclusive electoral participation.

12.10 Voter and Political Education Agenda

Objective

Increase voter participation and democratic awareness.

Priority Actions

INEC

- Intensify voter education campaigns.
- Provide clear information on voting procedures.

Civil Society Organisations

- Conduct community voter education programmes.
- Promote issue-based politics.
- Counter vote buying.

Media Organisations

- Organise candidate debates.
- Provide civic education programmes.
- Promote voter awareness.

Expected Outcome

Increased voter turnout and informed participation.

12.11 Equipment Functionality Agenda

Objective

Ensure reliable and efficient election administration.

Priority Actions

INEC

- Conduct comprehensive testing of BVAS and IReV.
- Strengthen logistics planning.

- Train election officials extensively.
- Develop contingency plans.

Security Agencies

- Protect election infrastructure.
- Secure communication systems.

Development Partners

- Support technology audits.
- Strengthen operational preparedness.

Expected Outcome

Efficient election administration and reduced operational failures.

12.12 Stakeholder-Specific Recommendations

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

1. Conduct extensive pre-election testing of BVAS and IReV.
2. Improve communication and stakeholder engagement.
3. Strengthen voter education campaigns.
4. Ensure timely deployment of materials.
5. Enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities.
6. Publish election preparedness reports.
7. Increase transparency in result management.

Security Agencies

1. Maintain strict neutrality.
2. Strengthen intelligence operations.
3. Monitor election hotspots.
4. Prevent voter intimidation.
5. Investigate vote-buying networks.
6. Protect election infrastructure.

Political Parties

1. Conduct issue-based campaigns.
2. Avoid hate speech and violence.
3. Promote women and youth participation.
4. Respect election outcomes.
5. Strengthen internal democracy.

6. Discourage vote buying.

Civil Society Organisations

1. Intensify voter education.
2. Monitor electoral integrity.
3. Track campaign finance activities.
4. Promote inclusion.
5. Strengthen election observation.
6. Counter misinformation.

Media Organisations

1. Provide balanced coverage.
2. Promote fact-checking.
3. Investigate electoral misconduct.
4. Counter fake news.
5. Facilitate informed public debate.

Development Partners

1. Support election observation.
2. Fund voter education programmes.
3. Strengthen inclusion initiatives.
4. Support technology audits.
5. Promote electoral reforms.

Citizens

1. Reject vote buying.
2. Participate peacefully.
3. Verify election information.
4. Report electoral offences.
5. Hold leaders accountable.

12.13 Early Warning and Early Response Framework

Centre LSD should establish an Electoral Credibility Monitoring System focusing on:

Red Flag Indicators

- Escalating vote buying.
- Political violence.
- Technology failures.

- Hate speech.
- Misinformation campaigns.
- Delays in election preparations.

Response Measures

- Rapid stakeholder engagement.
- Public statements.
- Dialogue platforms.
- Election integrity alerts.
- Advocacy interventions.

12.14 Proposed Centre LSD Electoral Credibility Initiative

In view of the findings of this assessment, Centre LSD should establish an:

Ekiti Electoral Credibility Observatory

The Observatory should:

- Monitor election preparedness.
- Produce periodic credibility reports.
- Track THRIVE indicators.
- Monitor vote buying.
- Analyse election risks.
- Engage stakeholders.
- Promote electoral reforms.

The initiative can also serve as a model for the 2027 General Elections.

12.15 Final Assessment

After examining the legal framework, election administration, technology, security, inclusion, political competition, campaign finance, voter participation, and stakeholder preparedness, this report concludes that:

Overall Centre LSD Credibility Score

70 Percent

Overall Rating

MODERATELY HIGH CREDIBILITY

This means that:

- The election is likely to be generally credible.
- The institutional framework for credible elections largely exists.
- Election technology strengthens transparency.
- Security conditions are relatively favourable.

However:

- Vote buying remains a serious threat.
- Campaign finance transparency remains weak.
- Voter turnout remains a concern.
- Inclusion gaps persist.
- Public trust requires strengthening.

12.16 Concluding Reflection

The 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election presents an important opportunity to deepen democratic governance and strengthen public confidence in elections in Nigeria. The election will serve not only as a test of electoral reforms and election technology but also as a test of the commitment of political actors, institutions, and citizens to democratic values.

Ultimately, credible elections are not produced by laws and technologies alone. They are produced by the collective commitment of stakeholders to fairness, transparency, accountability, inclusion, and respect for the will of the people. If these principles guide the conduct of the 2026 Ekiti Governorship Election, the election can become a model for future off-cycle elections and provide valuable lessons for the 2027 General Elections in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

Academic Sources

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Princeton University Press.

Bratton, M. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. *Electoral Studies*, 27(4), 621–632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.013>

Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

European Union Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Nigeria general elections 2023: Final report*. European Union Election Observation Mission.

Fischer, J. (2002). *Electoral conflict and violence: A strategy for study and prevention*. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

International IDEA. (2022). *The global state of democracy report 2022: Forging social contracts in a time of discontent*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

International IDEA. (2022). *Political finance database and campaign finance regulation handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Leftwich, A. (2007). From drivers of change to the politics of development: Refining the analytical framework to understand the politics of the places where we work. *Department for International Development (DFID) Discussion Paper*, 1–38.

Lindberg, S. I. (2006). *Democracy and elections in Africa*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Nichter, S. (2018). *Votes for survival: Relational clientelism in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.

Schedler, A. (2002). The menu of manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 36–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0031>

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2009). *Elections and conflict prevention: A guide to analysis, planning and programming*. United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2017). *Inclusive electoral processes: A guide for electoral management bodies*. United Nations Development Programme.

Books and Publications on Nigerian Elections and Democracy

Aiyede, E. R. (2015). Electoral reforms and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In O. Oyediran & A. Agbaje (Eds.), *Democratic governance and political reform in Nigeria* (pp. 115–136). John Archers.

Ake, C. (2001). *Democracy and development in Africa*. Spectrum Books.

Ayoade, J. A. A. (2008). *Godfather politics in Nigeria*. John Archers Publishers.

Dudley, B. J. (1982). *An introduction to Nigerian government and politics*. Macmillan.

Elaigwu, J. I. (2013). *Topical issues in Nigeria's political development*. AHA Publishing House.

Ibeanu, O. (2007). Elections and the paradox of democratic transition in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Electoral Studies*, 1(1), 1–24.

Igbuzor, O. (2015). *Perspectives on democracy and development in Nigeria*. African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development.

Jega, A. M. (2017). Electoral reforms and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In A. M. Jega & O. Ibeanu (Eds.), *Elections and democratic governance in Nigeria* (pp. 1–24). Safari Books.

Joseph, R. A. (1987). *Democracy and prebendal politics in Nigeria: The rise and fall of the Second Republic*. Cambridge University Press.

Kew, D. (2010). Nigerian elections and the challenge of democratic consolidation. *Africa Today*, 56(4), 1–18.

Nnoli, O. (2003). *Introduction to politics* (2nd ed.). Snaap Press.

Suberu, R. T. (2007). Nigeria's muddled elections. *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), 95–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.0064>

Legal and Policy Documents

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)*. Federal Government Printer.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2022). *Electoral Act 2022*. Federal Government Printer.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2022). *Regulations and guidelines for the conduct of elections 2022*. INEC.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2022). *Manual for election officials*. INEC.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2025). *Timetable and schedule of activities for the 2026 Ekiti State governorship election*. INEC.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2025). *Framework on inclusivity in elections*. INEC.

National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2022). *Electoral Act 2022*. National Assembly.

Election Observation Reports

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). (2022). *Ekiti State governorship election observation report*. Centre for Democracy and Development.

European Union Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Nigeria general elections 2023 final report*. European Union.

Kimpact Development Initiative. (2022). *Observation report on the Ekiti State governorship election*. Kimpact Development Initiative.

National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2023). *Nigeria elections assessment report*. National Democratic Institute.

Yiaga Africa. (2022). *Watching the vote report on the Ekiti State governorship election*. Yiaga Africa.

Yiaga Africa. (2023). *Watching the vote: Final report on the 2023 general elections*. Yiaga Africa.

Reports on Inclusion, Gender and Disability

Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CDD). (2022). *Assessment of disability inclusion in Nigeria's electoral process*. Centre for Citizens with Disabilities.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2021). *Equal access: How to include persons with disabilities in elections and political processes*. IFES.

National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Women's political participation and electoral inclusion in Africa*. National Democratic Institute.

UN Women. (2021). *Women's political participation and leadership in Africa*. United Nations Women.

United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. United Nations.

United Nations. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. United Nations.

Governance, Political Economy and Elections

Department for International Development (DFID). (2009). *Political economy analysis: How to note*. DFID.

Fritz, V., Kaiser, K., & Levy, B. (2009). *Problem-driven governance and political economy analysis: Good practice framework*. World Bank.

Hudson, D., & Leftwich, A. (2014). *From political economy to political analysis*. Developmental Leadership Program.

World Bank. (2017). *Governance and the law: World development report 2017*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2024). *Nigeria development update: Building momentum for inclusive growth*. World Bank.

Security and Electoral Violence

African Union. (2007). *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*. African Union Commission.

International Crisis Group. (2023). *Managing risks in Nigeria's elections*. International Crisis Group.

Nigeria Police Force. (2023). *Election security management guidelines*. Nigeria Police Force.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2019). *Preventing electoral violence and strengthening democratic governance*. UNDP.

Media, Information Integrity and Digital Democracy

BBC Media Action. (2021). *Countering misinformation and strengthening democratic participation*. BBC Media Action.

International Republican Institute (IRI). (2022). *Combatting election misinformation in emerging democracies*. International Republican Institute.

UNESCO. (2023). *Guidelines for regulating digital platforms during elections*. UNESCO.

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe.

Ekiti State and Electoral Context

Ekiti State Government. (2024). *Ekiti State development plan 2024–2027*. Government of Ekiti State.

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2024). *Demographic and socio-economic statistics for Ekiti State*. National Bureau of Statistics.

National Population Commission (NPC). (2023). *Population projections for Ekiti State*. National Population Commission.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2022). *Report of the Ekiti State governorship election*. INEC.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2023). *Review of off-cycle governorship elections in Nigeria*. INEC.

Centre LSD Publications

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). (2025). *Electoral credibility index and THRIVE framework for election assessment*. Centre LSD.

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). (2025). *Improving voter turnout in Nigeria: Policy options and strategies*. Centre LSD.

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). (2026). *Election security threat assessment of the 2026 Ekiti governorship election*. Centre LSD.

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). (2026). *Preliminary credibility monitoring framework for off-cycle elections in Nigeria*. Centre LSD.