



Elections, Democracy and **COVID-19** in **West Africa**



JUNE, 2020



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

CSIS

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



Summary

Based on its analysis of elections conducted so far in West Africa during the current pandemic, the Centre for Democracy and Development outlines the following considerations to guide the conduct of elections under the pandemic:

The guidance and protocols issued by national governments, public health authorities, and national task forces on the movement and safety of people should inform the decisions taken by governments and electoral management bodies to either postpone or hold elections. Actors should prioritize conducting the full gamut of electoral activities (voter registration, procurement, political campaigning, and electoral crisis management).

Decisionmakers must consider the constitutional significance of elections and the original scheduled dates by comparing the advantages and disadvantages of holding or postponing an election during the pandemic. This is important if the legitimacy of the elections is not to be questioned or diminished.

Postponement should result from consultation and be undergirded by consensus, if possible, among all political parties and the national EMB. Unilateral or arbitrary postponement would deepen the existing trust deficit between ruling and opposition parties. It would also erode the legitimacy of the results.

Executives must not abuse their power to declare a state of emergency to erode human rights such as press freedom, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, press freedom. Executives should also refrain from repressing opposition candidates and their supporters and challenging the jurisdiction of courts to entertain challenges to their misbehaviour.

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Open until 7:30 p.m. on Election Night
This ballot drop box is for:
• Vote-by-Mail ballots
• Vote-by-Mail applications
• Voter registration forms
Monitored by 24-hour video surveillance

VOTE



Recommendations

In view of the findings summarized above, CDD and CSIS recommend the following:

EMBs

- 1 Pre-elections, actors must enhance and support media coverage nationally and allow all candidates to have direct and equitable access to all media outlets.
- 2 EMBs must continuously communicate clearly their intolerance for electoral malpractices since the probability for malpractice may be higher than before the outbreak of the pandemic.
- 3 Disseminate timeously and in an easily accessible manner, information about its guidelines and planning, including voter education on the elections, via mass media, WhatsApp, and other digital/telephonic /electronic mediums. The goal should be to enhance participation and inclusion in the electoral process amidst emergency and public health risks posed by the pandemic. For example, Mali made electricity free for consumers, which enhanced citizen access to digital information—citizens could charge their radios, phones etc. Increase the number of polling stations and the hours polling stations will open on election day.

Arrangements could be done as in South Africa, which regularly allows elderly and disabled citizens to vote before the general population.

Member Countries

- 4 Enact legislation to regulate activities and ensure public health safety during the pandemic. Member countries must also enforce them transparently and not for partisan advantage.
- 5 Initiate meetings of all political parties, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to address election-related issues arising from the pandemic. These meetings should aim to reach consensus on the way forward.
- 6 Security agents must be properly outfitted to secure the electoral process, especially to prevent electoral violence on election day.

- 7 If elections due under the pandemic are postponed, the duration of the postponement should be clearly stated and agreed upon, particularly by all political parties. Conditions for an extension of the postponement should be clearly stated.
- 8 Provide the appropriated election budget timeously and provide special guidelines for the speedy procurement of necessary election materials.

Political Parties

- 9 Agree on and commit to a Code of Conduct for elections.
- 10 Practice internal party democracy.
- 11 Educate the electorate on their rights and obligations to ensure credible elections.
- 12 Comply with guidelines and regulations in the electoral law and issued by the EMB on conduct of elections generally and in particular under the pandemic.

Civil Society Organizations

- 13 Engage in dissemination and advocacy activities to enlighten the electorate about their rights and obligations to ensure credible elections.
- 14 Support the work of the EMB through monitoring party political activities, especially campaigns, to ensure compliance with the electoral law and EMB regulations and guidelines.

- 15 Monitor the unfolding of the pandemic and responses of various stakeholders, especially state actors. Assess the implications for derogation from the civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights of the citizen guaranteed under national constitutions and in African regional and continental codes and standards, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001, and the ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

ECOWAS

- 16 Monitor the unfolding of the pandemic and responses of various stakeholders, especially state actors. Assess implications for derogation from the civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights of the citizen guaranteed under national constitutions and in African regional and continental codes and standards.
- 17 Provide experience-sharing support from within the ECOWAS Region to help solve elections-related problems arising from the threat posed by the pandemic.
- 18 In the case of heightened political tensions or a constitutional crisis arising from the holding or not of elections, send in a delegation to mediate.

International Government and Donor Agencies

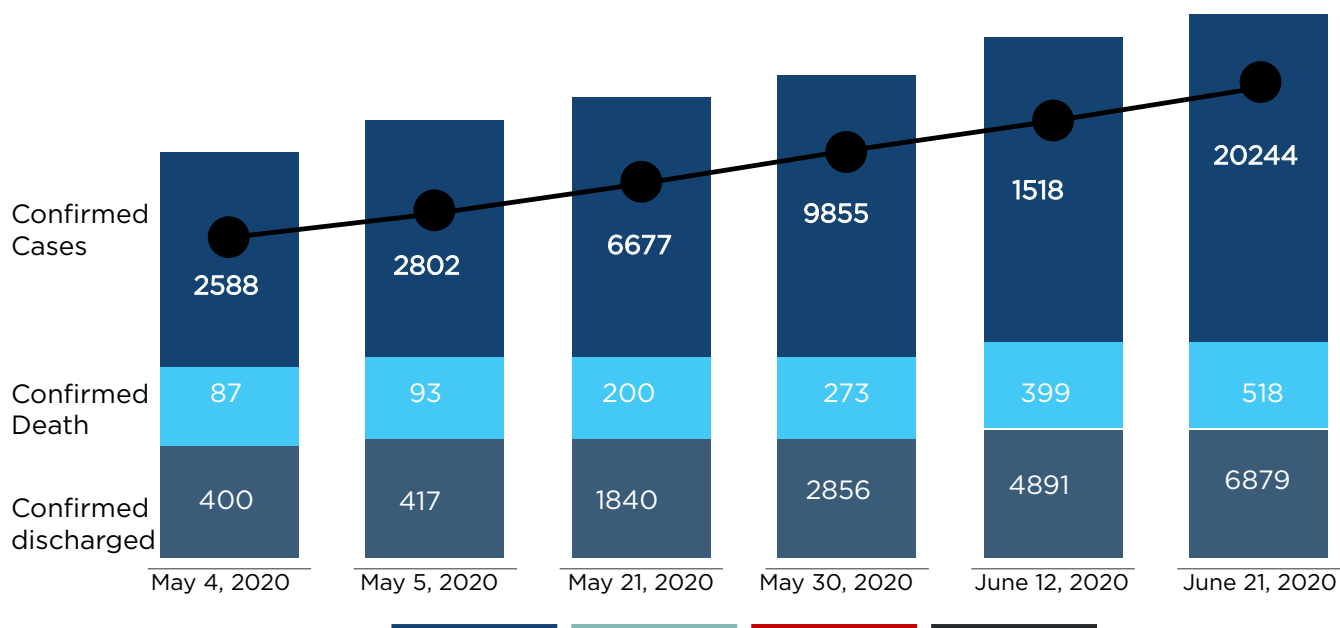
- 19 Support civil society in deploying technological solutions for voter education.
- 20 Provide traditional and online platforms to better connect political candidates with their electorates.
- 21 Support EMBs efforts to deploy technology for voter education, voter registration, and voter identification and verification, as well as electronic voting and counting.
- 22 Support EMBs by donating PPEs, handwashing stations and hand sanitizers, as well as facilities to continuously disinfect polling stations.
- 23 Exert diplomatic pressure on States to prevent the executive or legal action that impinges on electoral integrity or threatens the fundamental rights of citizens.
- 24 Refuse to recognize any elections not conducted in accordance with international best practices.



Context

West Africa has had previous experience with conducting elections during an epidemic, from which it can draw during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Liberia and Guinea conducted elections during the Ebola virus outbreak in 2014, although the outbreak was not of the magnitude of the current pandemic because its nature and mode of transmission make the Ebola outbreak pale in comparison with current one. Unlike the Ebola outbreak, the

COVID-19 pandemic is spreading like wildfire at a time when West Africa faces a busy election schedule in 2020 [See Table I for trends in the spread of the pandemic in Nigeria between May 4, 2020 and June 21, 2020]



Source: The Guardian, Lagos, Nigeria, from daily figures for the period, announced by Nigeria's National Centre for Disease Control

Between March and May 2020, Guinea, Mali, and Benin conducted general and local government elections. In Nigeria, local government elections were conducted in a number of states of the Nigerian Federation, during the same period. Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, Ghana, and Niger are scheduled to conduct presidential elections later in 2020, and are planning to do so; while Nigeria is also set to conduct party primaries and elections to the office of Governor in two states of the Nigerian Federation, in addition to several federal and state legislative and local government elections, also later in 2020. [See Table II for scheduled elections in West Africa for 2020]

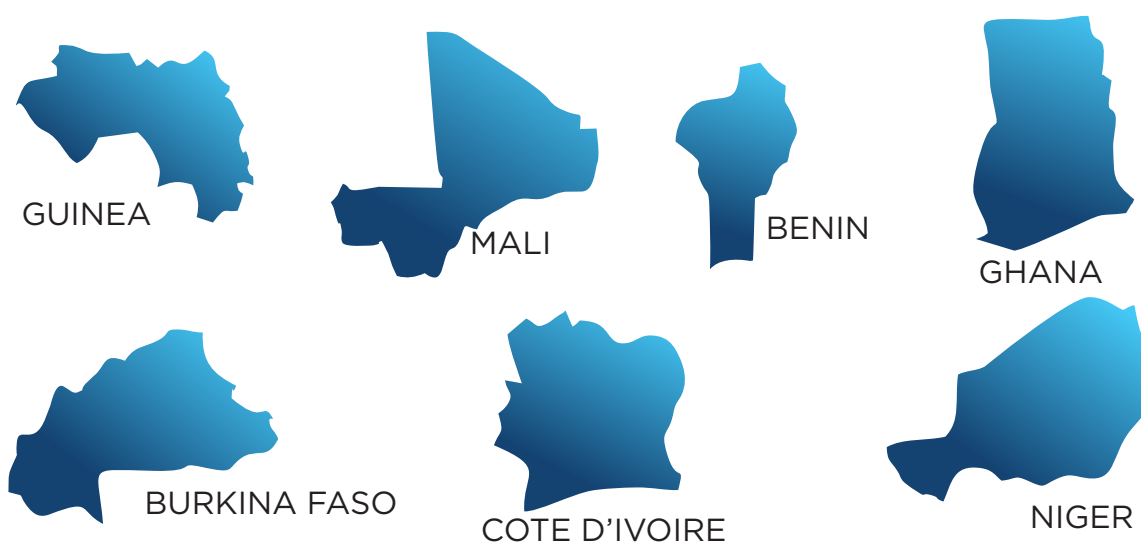












Table II: Scheduled Elections in West Africa, 2020

Country	Type of Elections	Date/Comments
Benin 	Local (communal and municipal)	May 17, 2020 (conducted)
Burkina Faso 	Presidential and National Assembly	December 7, 2020
Cote d'Ivoire 	Presidential	October 2020 (date yet to be determined)
Ghana 	Presidential and National Assembly	December 27, 2020
Guinea 	a) National Assembly b) Presidential	a) March 22, 2020 (earlier postponed from Jan/Feb.2019) b) 2020 (date yet to be determined)
Mali 	a) National Assembly b) Presidential	a) March 29, 2020 held, earlier postponed from June 29, 2020 b) May 2020
Niger 	a) Local b) Presidential	a) November 1, 2020 b) 27 December, 2020; run off 21 February 2021)
Nigeria 	a) Governorship Election: Edo state (end of first fixed 4 year tenure) b) Governorship Election: Ondo state (end of fixed four year tenure) c) several by-elections in several states	a) September 2020 b) November 2020 c) to be announced
Senegal 	a) Local	Late 2020 (postponed from December 2019)
Togo 	Presidential	22 February, 2020

Source: EISA, [https://www.eisa.org.za/calendar 2020.php](https://www.eisa.org.za/calendar%202020.php)



PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF THE PANDEMIC.

The pandemic is heightening the already burdensome challenges of conducting credible elections, under generally hostile material and political environment that makes it difficult to conduct elections that satisfy African regional and continental, as well as international standards for electoral integrity in the region.

The pandemic poses daunting options that governments, but particularly electoral management bodies (EMBs), in the region must choose from, in deciding whether to proceed with or postpone the elections. Fundamentally, the options involve delicate trade-offs between postponing or conducting scheduled elections during the pandemic, and weighing their respective implications or consequences for consolidating democracy and for public health and human security challenges posed by the pandemic.

For example, decision makers must decide between two equally tough decisions. Either to conduct scheduled elections, when due, and risk the spread of the virus and further endangering public health safety and human security. Or postpone the elections and possibly trigger a constitutional crisis, revolving around the following concerns about: (a) deepening the trust deficit in government among citizens; (b) for how long the elections should be postponed; (c) creating a precedent for future use of emergency situations on a scale similar to the pandemic to postpone other elections; (d) using the pandemic or similar emergency situation as an excuse to curtail civil and political rights, and the cultural and socioeconomic rights of citizens unnecessarily or arbitrarily, including hiding under the pandemic to elongate fixed term tenure for reasons that are not, in such cases, in the public interest, thereby likely to precipitate a crisis of legitimacy.



**Elections conducted
under the pandemic
(March-May 2020)**

The following West African countries conducted presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections between March and May 2020, and Nigeria conducted local government elections during the period. What are the lessons from the elections?



President Alpha Conde was elected in 2010, under constitutional provisions which provided two consecutive fixed terms of 5-year each. At the end of his first term, he ran and was re-elected for a second final 5-year term. However, before his second term ended, he sought and was able to get the country's constitution amended in a referendum conducted in March 2020. The amendment changed the presidential fixed term tenure to a new limit of two consecutive fixed six-year term each.

With the amendment, President Conte could run for reelection at the end of his current and final 5-year fixed term for the first of the two consecutive fixed six-year term under the amendment. The referendum, conducted alongside parliamentary elections on March 22, 2020, took place when there were public health and human security concerns about the escalating COVID-19 pandemic, with little observance of social distancing and wearing of face masks at crowded polling stations. Under such circumstances, marked by little consultations and with President Conteh putting considerations of his personal interest to proceed with the referendum and the parliamentary elections above the public interest, serious concerns were raised about the legitimacy of the results of the referendum, and the parliamentary elections.



Mali conducted its long-awaited first-round of parliamentary elections on March 29, 2020, with a second round conducted on 19 April, 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the kidnap of a leading opposition figure. The threat posed by the long festering Jihadist insurgency, that emerged in the North of the country in 2012, spreading to Bamako, the capital, led to the postponement of the parliamentary elections initially fixed for November 25, 2018 and December 16, 2018. The elections were later postponed to April 2019, then to June 2019, and then to 2020, when it coincided with the outbreak

of the COVID-19. Despite the escalation of the insurgency, the public safety health risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public protests against the conduct of the parliamentary elections, the government went ahead to conduct the elections. The voter turnout for the two elections in March and April 2020 was about 35.7%, due to the escalating insurgency across the country and the public safety threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Political tension, marked by public protests, has trailed Benin's controversial communal and municipal elections conducted on May 17 2020, despite calls for delay because of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Shortly before the elections, the country had recorded 337 cases of the COVID-19, 2 deaths from it, and when the initial outbreak occurred in mid-March 2020, the authorities placed restrictions on movement in the most affected municipalities; the country's electoral commission restricted political campaigns to the media but violations occurred. The national Council of Physicians complained about, and condemned glaring violations of social distancing and wearing of face during public campaigns and elections, with some civil society organizations alleging an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases after the elections.

But the tension runs deeper than the public health safety concerns raised by the elections. The tension grew out of the controversial April 2019 parliamentary elections results in the country that virtually turned the country into a single-dominant party state, with no opposition party winning a parliamentary seat, following the revision by the National Assembly in 2019 of provisions in the 2018 electoral law and the Charter on Political Parties, that allegedly favoured the country's President and his ruling party. There were political concerns raised about the inclusive and participatory nature of the elections. Ruling on a case brought before it, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights ruled that Benin should suspend the electoral process and organize a more inclusive one. On April 21, 2020 Benin withdrew from the protocol allowing its citizens and non-governmental organizations bring cases directly before the Court. The Benin Constitutional Court also ruled that the additional protocol of ECOWAS stipulating that citizens can bring cases directly before the Constitutional Court was no longer enforceable against the country.

The developments raised over the conduct of the communal and mayoral elections during the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for delay, both of which the government ignored, amidst boycott of the elections by the key opposition parties, and calls on voters to do the same. With no opposition party represented in parliament, and the only opposition party, the Forces Cauris Emergent Benin (FCEB) that contested the communal and municipality elections in May 2022 falling short of the number of mayorships (winning only 7) and parliamentarians---at least 16 parliamentarians and/or mayors---required to nominate candidates for the presidential elections in 2021, it is understandable why political tension has persisted after the communal and municipal elections in the country.



**Lessons of the
Elections: Response
to the pandemic**

With the lessons learned from the three countries, Guinea, Mali and Benin, that have conducted elections during the COVID-19 Pandemic in mind, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in partnership with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), organized an online discussion, with five democracy and elections experts as lead speakers, on June 9, 2020 to discuss the situation in West Africa since the outbreak of the pandemic: the risks its spread poses for the conduct of scheduled elections, while it is still spreading, and the trade-offs that should be considered in deciding either to postpone or go ahead with the elections.

The presentations by the experts and the interventions of participants in the on-line discussion revolved around the following issues:

A Participation: Encouraging voter participation in the electoral processes, particularly by voting on election day; putting in place health guidelines and protocols to protect voters from contracting COVID-19.

B Competitiveness of the Elections: Legislating binding fair competition rules, under the pandemic, through enforcing a level playing field for all political parties taking part in the elections.

C Legitimacy: making sure that the process of voting and the announcement of results under conditions of the pandemic, conforms with the requirements for electoral integrity. The discussion around each issue is summarized, under the following sub-headings:

The discussions major findings about the outcomes of the elections in Guinea, Mali, and Benin between March and May 2020 point to the following problems that the COVID-19 pandemic poses for the conduct of elections:

- (a) the grave public safety risks and logistic constraints about how to enforce social distancing and the wearing of face masks during the pandemic, and the elections conducted under it. The fears over the risks are confirmed by the death of the Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission in Guinea, allegedly from contracting the coronavirus, during the elections, the concerns raised by Benin's National Order of Physicians about violations of protocols on wearing face masks and social distancing; and the fears or allegation expressed by some civil society organization in Benin about an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases after the elections;
- (b) Lack of trust, responsible for difficulty to reach agreement or consensus among the stakeholders, notably the governing and opposition parties, and the civil society over the appropriateness of conducting elections under such public health safety risks and the consequential planning and logistics problems they pose for the planning and conduct of elections during the



- pandemic;
- c) failure to address and resolve the larger political and constitutional implications of postponing elections, during pandemics, such as abuse of the emergency situation brought about by the pandemic for partisan party advantage by the governing parties, as part of a negotiated consensus to proceed with or postpone the elections;
 - (d) low voter turn-out, reflecting broad support by the electorate for calls to boycott the elections by opposition parties, and some civil society organizations; and
 - (e) the marginal or secondary role the EMBs play in the decisions to proceed with or postpone the elections.
- With these findings and lessons as a point of departure, what follows is an elaboration of the issues surrounding Participation; Competitiveness; and Legitimacy to inform future elections during the pandemic in 2020 and beyond.



PARTICIPATION

The existing harsh material and political environment for the conduct of credible elections in West Africa has worsened considerably since the COVID-19 pandemic, making prospects for a more inclusive, participatory and cost-saving electoral process more daunting.

For example, in Guinea, legislative elections and a referendum on the constitution were held in March 2020 but were boycotted by opposition parties, because they felt the incumbent president, Alpha Conde, was taking advantage of the pandemic to change the constitution not only to enable him run for and secure a third presidential fixed term but also to expand presidential powers.

Registered voters in the country were likely not motivated enough to go out and vote given, the public health safety risks of the pandemic. Coupled with the boycott, the risks contributed to the reduction in voter turn-out from 75 percent in previous elections to 61 percent.

The book of guidelines issued by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is a commendable one that comprehensively addresses the problems posed for the conduct of participatory and inclusive elections during a pandemic, such as COVID-19. Some relevant provisions in the guidelines itemised in Box I:

Box I: Some INEC Guidelines for Conduct of Elections during the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 Policy Statement

Conducting elections in a pandemic such as COVID-19 is yet uncharted waters. Only very few jurisdictions have any experience with this. That notwithstanding, the Commission is committed to conducting all elections that are due within the extant legal framework. However, in so doing it will put a premium on public safety and mitigation of health risks from COVID-19. Citizens must be assured that they will be safe while participating as voters, candidates and officials.

3 Legal Issues

The Commission will engage relevant authorities, including the legislature, to designate election as an essential service to enable the Commission function effectively in times of national emergency

4 Planning Elections

Undertake strategic consultation and consensus building with stakeholders on key changes in its procedures due to the

2 Health Issues: General Protective Measures

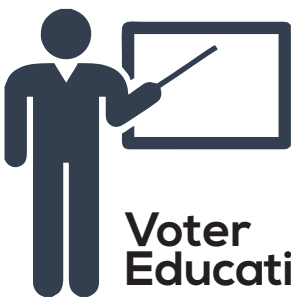
a) Infrared thermometers will be supplied and used at the Registration Area Collation Centres, the Local ; Government Area Collation Centres and the State Collation Centres; b) the use of face masks is mandatory for all involved in the election process and must be worn at all election locations; c) the Commission shall provide face masks for all election officials; d) alcohol based hand sanitizers will be provided for election officials at the polling units; e) methylated Spirit and cotton wool will be provided for the disinfection of the Smart Card Readers (SCRs) after the fingerprint of each voter is read; f) the rules of physical distancing shall be enforced at all election activities including stakeholder engagements, training, queuing at Polling Units, etc.; g) The Commission shall work with the PTF and health authorities to have in place a system of voluntary COVID-19 testing for INEC staff before and after deploying for elections.

5 Election Day Activities



a) The Polling Unit layout shall be redesigned by the Commission to ensure substantial compliance with the protocols established by health authorities. b) Social distancing, general hygienic conduct and enforcement of COVID-19 prevention protocols shall be emphasized. Face masks shall be mandatory at Polling Units and all election locations. c) There shall be periodic disinfection of chairs, tables and work areas, as well as adequate ventilation at the Polling Units. d) The SCR shall be cleaned with the prescribed disinfectant after each voter's fingerprint is real and e) Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) and other safety materials shall be provided for polling staff.

6 Voter Education



Engage with the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other health authorities to develop relevant messaging on COVID-19 and the electoral process.

7 Engagement with political parties



The Commission shall, as appropriate, combine physical and online engagements with political parties and their officials. However, whenever the former is adopted all the protocols for COVID-19 prevention shall be strictly followed. ational emergency

Source: Summarized from, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Abuja: INEC, June 2020

Competition

The COVID-19 pandemic also worsens prospects for the competitiveness of elections. In Guinea, Mali, and Benin mass political campaigning and rallies were discouraged and/or prohibited because of protocols requiring social distancing, the wearing of face masks, and prohibition of large gathering beyond a certain number during the pandemic. There are alternatives: political parties could hold smaller gatherings, and use radio and TV as campaign platforms. For example, Nigeria's INEC guidelines "encourage political parties to develop appropriate Guidelines and Regulations for conduct of Party Primaries that take into account the COVID-19 prevention protocols." To ensure "crowd control." INEC also suggests that campaigning can be done mostly via social media and traditional media outlets.

As the case of Benin, referred to above illustrates, the health concerns with open public campaigning could be exploited for partisan party electoral gains. In the country, public open-air rallies and gatherings of over 50 people were banned, and candidates' campaign schedules were controlled and curtailed. For these to be good practice, they have to be supplemented with unrestricted and equitable access for citizens to hear the programmes and manifestoes of opposition parties, in countries where not only are public mass media are under the control of the government but also private ones are afraid of , or are under government, or self-imposed censorship.

Legitimacy

The final issue is about legitimacy of process and acceptance of results of elections conducted under the pandemic. In the Mali legislative elections, overall participation was recorded at 35 percent, but the Northern region recorded more than 85 percent turnout with some deputies elected with 91 or 97 percent of the vote, which led some to conclude that electoral irregularities account for the results from the Northern Region. Where citizens are confronted with a lot of concerns—in Mali, insecurity and COVID-19—there are questions about the legitimacy of the process. Similarly, in the Benin situation, media coverage was

limited, ostensibly due to the pandemic. However only certain journalists were cleared to cover the event, and these were perhaps unsurprisingly only pro-government media sources. When and where public rallies are banned and campaign resources are curtailed, citizens need access more than ever to unbiased media coverage.

In Benin, the decision was taken to hold communal and municipal elections despite calls from a human rights group against conducting elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some observers saw this as a push for political advantage, as two opposition political parties had not

yet been cleared to run. The elections were also seen as preparation for President Patrice Talon's re-election bid in 2021. Thus, questions about whether to reschedule elections slated to hold under the pandemic, and, if so, under what conditions, may, if not transparently addressed, create political uncertainty and tension, and trigger a constitutional crisis, as Benin is experiencing, in the aftermath of the May 2020 communal and municipal elections

In Mali, the prospects of further electoral delay or postponement of legislative elections that should have been held in November and December 2018, that were initially postponed to April 2019, and then to June 2019, led to heightened tension and anxieties, while also fuelling distrust. Pressures against another postponement and the fact that the elections were part of the process for implementing a peace agreement led the government to hold the elections in March and April 2020. However, observers alleged that the government delayed the announcement of the first COVID-19 cases till after the first round of voting was held to pre-empt calls for another postponement, if the cases were announced publicly.

But this lack of transparency deepened the trust deficit of the public in the government and the credibility of the elections. Delaying the elections is not necessarily bad but using it for partisan political advantage breeds distrust and diminishes the integrity of the electoral process. The political tension that surrounded the March and April 2020 elections in Mali is yet to abate, with rallies and protest marches demanding that President Keita step down ahead of the scheduled Presidential elections on a date

to be determined later in 2020. The deepening tension has raised concerns within ECOWAS, which recently sent a delegation, led by Niger's Foreign Minister to the country, to intercede and help douse the tension. The delegation urged the country to "avoid violence as a means to solve the crisis," "restore confidence between parties," and review the outcome of the parliamentary elections held in March 2020, including if necessary, conducting another vote in some districts.

In Ghana, where national assembly and presidential elections are due on December 27, 2020, the major concerns revolve around questions about the legitimacy of the elections raised by the introduction of a biometric register of voters. The questions triggered allegations that the biometric register used in 2012 and 2016 was manipulated, with the result that it contained names of foreigners and was bloated. The dispute has resurfaced with the decision of the country's Electoral Commission to start compiling a new register in June 2020, on the ground that it has discovered "36 challenges" or flaws in the present one. The opposition parties have raised objections to the decision, arguing that there was no need to create a new register but to "clean" up the current one.

The dispute has raised other issues in Ghana, over which there are strong opposing views. For example, there is dispute over the requirement that the documentary proof of eligibility to register to vote will exclude one of the key documents used to register voters in the past—an existing voters' card. Now, the acceptable documents are a Ghanaian passport and a national ID (although the

country has not fully issued national IDs yet). In the absence of that, a prospective voter who wants to be on the voter register would need a registered voter to act as guarantor. The matter is now before the Supreme Court in Ghana for adjudication.

The voter registrar issue appears to have a more fundamental undertone: the dispute between the opposition parties and the ruling party over the independence of the country's Electoral Commission. After the 2016 elections, the previous Chairperson of the Electoral Commission and two other members, who had tenure till retirement age, were removed through an impeachment processes introduced by a citizen petition.

Constitutionally, the President chooses replacements. President Akufo-Addo, who won the 2016 presidential elections in 2016 and had queried the voters' register used for the elections appointed a new Chairperson and two other members in July 2018. The major opposition party finds it difficult to believe that the Electoral Commission will

be impartial when the Chairperson and other members are appointed by the President, who supports the new voters' register while the opposition is against it.

It is also glaring that the President is behind the revamp of the electoral register, while the opposition is against it, with some arguing that this was why the impeachment of the Chairperson and two the members of the Electoral Commission was engineered in 2018, ahead of the 2020 presidential and national assembly elections in 2020, as part of the agenda of the President to influence the elections for partisan electoral advantage. The controversy over the register was simmering when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out to complicate it.

Finally, in Nigeria, where governorship elections are scheduled for two states of the Nigerian Federation (Edo State in September 2020, and Ondo State, in November 2020), as planned, the elections are holding amidst escalating cases of the pandemic. Table I shows the trend in Nigeria, and the 2 states between May 4, 2020 and June 21, 2020.

Table I: Trends in Spread of COVID-19 in Edo State and Ondo State of the Federation

Nigeria/States	May 4, 2020 confirmed Cases	May 21, 21- Confirmed Cases	June 12, 2020 Confirmed Cases	June 21, 2020 Confirmed Cases
Nigeria	2558	6677	15181	20244
Edo State	52	119	518	784
Ondo State	13	20	62	134

Source: Abstracted from: [The Guardian, Lagos, Nigeria](#)



The ruling parties in both Edo and Ondo are facing internal party crises, increasing political tension, and the high stakes in the elections. The Governor and Deputy Governor of Edo State have resigned from the ruling party in the state and have joined the opposition party, the Peoples Democratic Party, under whose banner they hope to run for re-election; while in Ondo State, the Deputy Governor has resigned from the ruling APC to join the opposition, PDP in the state, on whose ticket he is likely to run for the governorship elections in the state.

The possibility that the parties will exploit the pandemic for partisan political advantage is high. The Governor of Edo

State is using his executive powers to demand that the APC, from which he has resigned, must seek permission from the state government to hold its direct primaries to select the party's governorship candidate, but the party denies he has such rights and plans to go ahead with the primaries on June 22, 2020. But the fears are that the Governor, while holding on to the office of Governor, will use his powers under the pandemic for partisan party-political advantage. The country's electoral commission has indicated it will exercise its powers to cancel any of the elections, if violence is of such magnitude and effect as to deserve a cancellation of the elections.



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