

'A fight to the finish'

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Three Nigerians are currently vying for votes in Mulhuddart - a constituency with a significant ethnic population - but it is far from certain if any of them will win a seat on 5 June. VIKTOR POSUDNEVSKY reports on the growing tension

According to the 2006 Census, around 20 per cent of Mulhuddart's population were born outside Ireland. "But only a fraction of them are registered to vote," notes Adeola Ogunsina, who is running as a local election candidate in the area with Fine Gael.

All three migrant candidates in the Mulhuddart constituency happen to come from Nigeria. And all three have conducted energetic registration drives in an effort to boost the number of migrant voters. According to Ogunsina, 5,000 residents are now registered to vote. "Even if there's a turnout of 60 per cent. you can get a seat just on the back of that vote," he says.

But it is far from certain that either Ogunsina or either of his Nigerian rivals will manage to secure voters' preferences. The immigrant vote is divided, the candidates acknowledge, but all three maintain that this division is not based on nationality, but rather on politics.

"It's perfectly normal to have three Nigerians running in one constituency," says Ignatius Okafor, an independent candidate. "We're all very different candidates and we represent different parties."

Okafor chose to run as an independent because "party politics restricts you," he says. "Currently no councillor wants to take responsibility for some very important issues in the area. That's why I didn't align myself to any of them." These issues, he says, include careless development, lack of facilities and traffic chaos.

He says he works hard on his campaign and has already canvassed in more than 10,000 homes. "From what I heard at the doors and from the support I'm getting, I'm in a good position to get a seat," he enthuses.

The third Nigerian is Fianna Fáil's Idowu Olafimihan, who has worked with the party since 2004. At the local elections five years ago he campaigned for party candidate Michael Smyth, who lost at the polls. And with the tide now seeming to turn against the 'soldiers of destiny' across the country, Olafimihan admits he is in for a difficult ride.

"Everyone is complaining about Fianna Fail," he says. "And I think people have a right to be angry. But the question is: what to do next? I think the Government is trying to find a solution."

Olafimihan comes from Nigeria's Yoruba tribe, as does Ogunsina, whereas Okafor is an

Igbo. Both tribes are well represented in Mulhuddart, and some are expecting the vote to split accordingly. But Idowu Olafimihan dismisses this as “groundless speculation”.

“Modern politics is about real competence,” he says. “It’s about choosing the right person for the job. Creed, race or tribe is not relevant.” However, he hastens to add that many Igbo people are working in his campaign.

Ogunsina laments “the lack of unity” among immigrants in the area, and accuses some candidates of stirring tensions. Moreover, the lack of unity may even result in the failure of all three candidates, Ogunsina says.

“Now more than ever our community needs a representative in Irish politics. We can’t wait another five years. Yes, we come from different backgrounds, but the main issue for all of us is a better and fairer future for our children. That’s what should unite us.”

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