



Pre-election Press Statement on the 2019 Bayelsa Governorship Election Thursday, November 14, 2019 Delivered at the Matho Crystal Hotel, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives us great pleasure to welcome you to the YIAGA AFRICA **Watching The Vote (WTV) Pre-Election Press Briefing** on the 2019 governorship election in Bayelsa State. This press briefing is the first in a series of press conferences to be hosted by YIAGA AFRICA WTV during the 2019 Bayelsa Governorship election.

On November 16, 2019, the people of Bayelsa state will go to the polls to elect a Governor that will lead the state for the next four years. In what promises to be a keenly contested election with forty-five political parties contesting for the governorship election of which three (3) are women. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Bayelsa State has a total of 923,182 registered voters, out of which 889,308 Permanent Voters Card (PVC) which is 96.3% have been collected.

In addition, this is one of two off-cycle elections to be conducted by INEC since the 2019 general elections. Those elections failed to meet the expectations of many Nigerians. With the experience of the 2019 elections still fresh in the minds of the people, not only INEC, but also the security agencies and critically, political parties are once again in the limelight to inspire confidence in the electoral process by ensuring the perennial challenges witnessed in the 2019 general elections are addressed and that the process is credible.

As one of Nigeria's largest non-partisan and independent movements of citizens observers committed to promoting electoral integrity, YIAGA AFRICA's WTV will be providing systematic, accurate and timely information on the election day process. YIAGA AFRICA will be the only observer group that can independently determine if the official results announced reflects the total votes cast. If the announced results have been manipulated and do not match the results posted at polling units, then YIAGA AFRICA will expose it.

YIAGA AFRICA's Watching the Vote is "Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!"

Watching the Vote Pre-Election Observation

As part of our efforts to deepen electoral integrity, YIAGA AFRICA commenced its Pre-Election Observation (PREO) from September 2019 with 21 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) deployed across the 8 LGAs. This statement highlights summary findings of the pre-election period, which focused on assessing the level of INEC's preparation, political party campaigns, voter education, activities of marginalized groups and early warning signs of electoral violence. The pre-election environment revealed amongst other things commercialization of the political process, violent campaign rhetoric and hate speech, excessive show of force by political parties especially the APC and the PDP and unhealthy electoral competition resulting to deaths, arson and violence. Beyond the electoral campaign, our findings indicate early commencement of election activities



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by INEC in line with the timetable and schedule of activities issued by the commission. INEC and civil society organizations including religious/faith-based organizations were visibly involved in voter education and citizen mobilization. Consistent trends in the pre-election environment include:

1. **Pre-election violence:** Incidents such as violent physical or verbal attacks, vandalism or destruction of properties and candidates' posters, inflammatory or inciting statements and recruitment of political thugs were recorded across all four reporting periods. With the most recent being, the violent clash between the APC and PDP in Nembe LGA observed on November 13, 2019. In addition, there were reported cases of sporadic shootings in Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa LGAs.
2. **Violation of Electoral Laws:** Throughout the reporting period violations like voter inducement through the distribution of money, gift items and its kinds by candidates or their supporters was observed and remained consistent in the four reporting periods. In addition, was the report on buying and selling of PVC and voters' details. This report was received more from Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa LGAs.
3. **Election Preparatory Activities:** Election activities were undertaken by INEC across the state. This includes targeted engagements with critical stakeholders, the distribution of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) in September 2019. Voter education activities by INEC were undertaken in all 8 LGAs as well as election observation kits distribution. YIAGA AFRICA's WTV also confirms the deployment of non-sensitive materials in all of the 8 LGAs.
4. **Political Parties' Campaigns:** Campaign rallies have dominated the political space in the state. By the fourth reporting period, the dominant political parties in the state (Accord, APC, PDP and SDP) have extended their campaign rallies across the state with APC and PDP seeking to hold rallies in all LGAs.
5. **Participation of Special Groups:** the reports highlighted that youth and women groups were increasingly engaging the political space by campaigning and canvassing for votes for political parties and candidates.
6. **Violence Against Women:** Elections remain a civil process that requires the participation of all sections of society. Reports were received on violence against women in the electoral process with more reports coming in from Ekeremor and Southern Ijaw LGAs.

Emerging Concerns on the 2019 Governorship Election

1. **High Security threats, Recruitment of Thugs and Arms stockpiling:** Bayelsa state has a history of electoral violence engineered by politicians who want to win elections at all costs in the state, especially with the battle for the control of the riverine areas. The recruitment of thugs and militants and the gathering of arms to deploy violence is a major threat to a credible election. More reports on this were received from Southern Ijaw, Brass, Sagbama and Yenagoa. In addition to this, is the threat of community conflicts that may impact on the election especially with the recent incident in Ekeremor LGA



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where a clash over a community election led to a major crisis with some houses burnt. The recent violence clashes between PDP and APC supporters resulting in the death of 3 citizens in Nembe when PDP attempted to hold a campaign rally in Nembe LGA also posed an additional challenge.

2. **Buying of PVCs and Vote Buying Prevalent:** The buying and selling of PVCs was one of the predominant election malpractices recorded in the pre-election environment. The findings from all four observation reports revealed that PVC were purchased for N500. The implication of this includes the possible attempt to undermine the credibility of the process by manipulating the process of accreditation and voting, it can also be a tool to wither down the voting strength of a particular party or region.
3. **Community Collusion:** With the identification of certain voting blocs in different communities and the show of intolerance to opposing political views, WTV findings indicate the possibility for some communities to collude in flouting the election guidelines to put the party of their choice at an advantage.
4. **Displacement of Voters Due to Flooding:** The issue of flooded communities remains one of the major challenges in the elections especially considering that there is poor documentation or data showing where voters in flooded communities are located or relocated to. However, the report shows that some polling units in communities within the Kolokuma/Opokuma, Southern Ijaw, Ekeremor, Sagbama, Yenagoa LGAs are affected and demands that INEC provides some alternative for voters from affected communities.
5. **Logistical Concerns:** INEC has consistently had logistical challenges on election day. Election day logistics for the Bayelsa elections will be even more difficult given the likelihood of rain before and on election day as well as the difficult terrain. However, these are not the first elections that INEC has conducted in Bayelsa and voters have the right to expect polling units to open on time.

Summary Recommendations

INEC:

- INEC should continue to act with utmost professionalism and impartiality. This requires strict compliance with the regulatory framework of the election in all circumstances, no matter the odds or pressures from any quarters.
- INEC must ensure it has an effective oversight mechanism to guarantee compliance with electoral law and guidelines especially in the administration of the election. This includes ensuring that there is uniformity of practice and that voters' accreditation process is secured.
- INEC must show utmost professionalism in the timely, effective and secure deployment of its staff, materials (sensitive and insensitive) and other resources needed for the election will enable early commencement of polls.



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- INEC should ensure that there is proper coordination with security agencies for effectiveness and safety of personnel and materials deployment. This includes ensuring safe delivery of personnel and materials after the election.
- INEC ad hoc staff must ensure that polling units are located in areas that are accessible to all voters, especially PWDs in order not to disproportionately disenfranchise voters or limit their rights to participation.
- INEC needs to urgently communicate its plans to conduct elections in communities affected by flooding to ensure that voters are able to vote.

Security:

- Early warning signs of election violence should be addressed by relevant security agencies to avoid escalation or spillover on election day. These issues should be addressed in a professional and civil manner.
- Security agencies should ensure protection for vulnerable voters especially women and persons with disability, they must enforce appropriate sanctions to any form of violation of rights to vote.
- Deployment of personnel and logistics should be all-round and not restricted to certain parts of the state.
- There should be proper coordination between all the security agencies deployed for the election, proper lines of communication and rules of engagement should be adhered to. The security agencies must remain non-partisan and professional in their conduct and operations.

Political Parties:

- Political parties, candidates and their supporters should show commitment to electoral accountability by respecting the rules governing the conduct of the elections and refrain from deploying violence and to win the election at all cost.
- Political parties, candidates and their supporters must refrain from vote buying and the related practice of compromising the secrecy of the ballot so that the voters of Bayelsa state are free to vote their preference for governor.
- Political parties, candidates and supporters should show political tolerance and reject community collusion by allowing voters to cast ballots for whichever candidate they prefer.
- Political parties, candidates and supporters who are required to be mobile on election day should only do so in clearly marked vehicles with numbered license plates.

Citizens:

- Voters and citizens should be security conscious and report any suspicious movement or threat to violence to the appropriate security agencies.
- Voters in Bayelsa state should come out in their numbers and cast their votes. Elections will be decided by only those who come out to vote.



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- Voters should reject efforts by political parties to buy their votes, remember that their vote is their secret and regardless they should vote their conscious when in the voting booth.
- Individuals should reject efforts by political parties to entice them to vote on behalf of another individual with a purchased PVC.
- Communities should not engage in collusion and should let members of the community vote for whichever candidate they prefer.

CSOs:

- CSOs should intensify on the *get out the vote* (GOTV) campaigns to encourage and mobilize eligible voters to participate in the exercise.
- There is a need for proper coordination and collaboration between observer groups in ensuring that high standards and the global principles of election observation are adhered to.

WTV Election Day Observation

YIAGA AFRICA's WTV Election Day deployment adopts the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology for election day observation at the polling units and will also be deploying observers to the LGA collation centers. The PVT is a proven and advanced observation methodology that employs well-established statistical principles and utilizes sophisticated information technologies. YIAGA AFRICA's WTV provides timely and accurate information on the conduct of accreditation, voting, and counting as well as independently verifies the official governorship results as announced by the INEC. PVTs are not exit polls. WTV citizen observers do not ask voters for whom they cast their ballot. Instead, the PVT relies on the official results from polling units for which there have been observers watching the entire process. This tested and proven election observation methodology has been deployed in over 50 countries around the world including Nigeria - most recently by YIAGA AFRICA for the 2019 presidential election. For the November 16 Bayelsa Governorship Election, WTV will deploy **500 stationary observers to a representative statistical sample of 250 polling units and 21 mobile observers located in all 8 LGAs of Bayelsa state.** WTV will also **deploy 8 collation center observers** to each of the LGA Collation Centres. The sampled polling units were determined by established statistical principles to ensure the resulting information is representative of the state and unbiased. The PVT sample of polling units was drawn according to well established statistical principles and is truly representative of all of the polling units because the percentage of sampled polling units for each LGA is similar to the percentage of all polling units for each LGA. For example, Brass LGA has 8.80% of all the polling units in Bayelsa (159 of 1,804) and 8.80% (22 of 250) of the sampled polling units are in Brass LGA. While not identical, the percentages for every LGA are very close, clearly demonstrating that the PVT sample is representative of the entire state (Appendix I demonstrates the representativeness of sampled polling units).



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YIAGA AFRICA's WTV 500 stationary observers, 21 mobile observers and 8 collation center observers were carefully recruited according to established criteria and carefully trained to ensure that they are non-partisan and independent. All YIAGA AFRICA citizen observers had to sign a pledge of neutrality and were given a code of conduct to which they have to adhere when observing. All YIAGA AFRICA citizen observers have been accredited by INEC to observe at polling units or collation centers.

On Election Day, WTV observers will report to their assigned polling units at 7:00 am and remain there throughout setup, accreditation and voting, counting and the announcement and posting of the official results. Throughout the day, every citizen observer at sampled polling units will send in eleven coded text messages to the WTV Data Centre in Bayelsa, located here at Matho Crystal Hotel, Yenagoa. Coded text messages sent by WTV citizen observers will provide detailed information on the conduct of the process as well as the official results for the polling unit as announced by the polling officials. Over the course of Election Day, YIAGA AFRICA's data center in Bayelsa will receive 5,000 text messages containing approximately 73,500 individual pieces of information about the 2019 Bayelsa governorship election. Once the text messages are received at YIAGA AFRICA's data center, they will be processed and reviewed to ensure the information is complete, authentic and accurate.

It is important to remember:

- The PVT is an Election Day observation methodology that provide accurate information on the conduct of voting, accreditation and counting and independently verifies the accuracy of the results. However, elections are more than just election day. To ensure a comprehensive assessment of the entire election process WTV also deployed a separate set of observers to monitor the pre-election environment. YIAGA AFRICA's overall assessment of the election are based on both pre-election and election day data.
- Using statistical principles, the PVT only deploys to representative sample of polling units rather than all polling units. As such the PVT results are statistically valid estimates of what happens at all polling stations (even the ones to which YIAGA AFRICA did not deploy citizen observers). However, as in past elections, in order to capture any critical incidents that may affect the election, YIAGA AFRICA has deployed mobile observers who will visit both sampled and unsampled polling stations across the state on election day.
- As with other citizen observation efforts, PVT observers are deployed inside polling units to observe voting, accreditation and counting. In order to observe what happens outside of polling units, YIAGA AFRICA has, as in past elections, deployed mobile observers who will assess the environment outside of polling units. PVT can provide information on the secrecy of the ballot at polling stations as a sign of vote buying, but no observation effort can provide information on whether individuals chose to vote based on monies paid to them or perceived threats outside the polling unit.



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Since WTV is based on official results from a representative random sample of polling units, YIAGA AFRICA will be able to estimate the state-wide results for the governorship election within a narrow range based on well-established statistical principles. **If INEC's official results fall within YIAGA AFRICA's estimated range, then the public, political parties and candidates should have confidence that the official results reflect the ballots cast at polling units; if the announced official results do not reflect the ballot cast, YIAGA AFRICA will expose it.**

On Election Day, YIAGA AFRICA's WTV Data Centre Bayelsa will open at 6:00 am and will remain open until counting has finished at all sampled polling units and all WTV citizen observers have sent in all ten of their observation reports. YIAGA AFRICA's data center is open to the public and media at all times.

Throughout Election Day, YIAGA AFRICA will provide - as appropriate - updates on the conduct of the election based on the near real-time reports from its observers. These will be released at the data center and posted on social media at YIAGA AFRICA's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/yiaga.org) and YIAGA AFRICA's Twitter page (@YIAGA).

On Saturday, November 16, 2019, at 10 pm, YIAGA AFRICA will release its estimated projections based on its preliminary data. On Sunday, 17 November 2019, at Matho Crystal Hotel, Yenagoa, YIAGA AFRICA will share its preliminary WTV findings on the conduct of set-up, accreditation, voting and counting. Immediately after INEC announces the official results for the gubernatorial election, YIAGA AFRICA will hold its own press conference and issue its election results verification statement. Verification of the election results will be based on the INEC official results as announced by-poll officials at the WTV sampled polling units.

Conclusion

YIAGA AFRICA WTV is fully prepared to observe the Bayelsa 2019 governorship election. To this end, we invite everyone here present to accompany us now on a tour of the Data Center where a live simulation is currently underway to test the functionality of our data management systems and our observers to observe the election.

Currently, all 500 PVT observers are sending in practice reports based on Election Day scenario, which will be duly processed by the data clerks and analysis team. YIAGA AFRICA is ready to observe the elections on behalf of the people of Bayelsa and Nigerians, to ensure to people's votes are accurately counted.

We call on all people of Bayelsa, the parties and candidates, INEC and the security forces to play their parts to ensure a peaceful, credible and conclusive process.

Thank you and God Bless the people of Bayelsa State.



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Learn more about #WatchingTheVote at www.watchingthevote.org or on social media on Facebook at facebook.com/yiaga.org or on Twitter @YIAGA.

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Appendix 1

Distribution of All Polling Units and PVT Sampled Polling Units for the 2019 Bayelsa Gubernatorial Election							
S/No	LGA	Registered Voters	Polling Units	Percent of Total Polling Units	Sampled Polling Units	Percent of Total Sampled Polling Units	Observers
1	BRASS	67,804	159	8.81%	22	8.80%	44
2	EKEREMOR	125,189	198	10.98%	27	10.80%	54
3	KOLOKUMA/OPOKUMA	52,765	144	7.98%	20	8.00%	40
4	NEMBE	92,717	202	11.20%	28	11.20%	56
5	OGBIA	109,903	259	14.36%	36	14.40%	72
6	SAGBAMA	109,460	198	10.98%	28	11.20%	56
7	SOUTHERN IJAW	165,449	425	23.56%	59	23.60%	118
8	BRASS	199,895	219	12.14%	30	12.00%	60
	Total	923,182	1804	100.00%	250	100.00%	500

Source: YIAGA AFRICA WTV BAYELSA 2019