



Pre-election Press Statement on the 2020 Edo Governorship Election Thursday, September 17, 2020 Delivered at the HomeVille Plus Hotel, Benin, Edo State

Introduction

It gives us great pleasure to welcome you to the Yiaga Africa **Watching The Vote (WTV) Pre-Election Press Briefing** on the 2020 governorship election in Edo State. This press briefing is one in a series of press conferences hosted by Yiaga Africa WTV during the 2020 Edo Governorship election.

The 2020 Edo Governorship Election will be the first state-wide election to be conducted by INEC amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The election will be regulated by new sets of guidelines and policies developed by the Commission following the Coronavirus outbreak. With the state ranking fifth (as at September 16, 2020) amongst states with the highest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, INEC and other stakeholders face a huge challenge of safeguarding public health while not compromising on electoral integrity. In line with the new norm of social or physical distancing, INEC introduced online submission of party candidates' list and online accreditation of observers and media organizations. These technologically driven solutions minimized physical contact remarkably. Also, an election result viewing portal was introduced by INEC to facilitate public access to polling unit results to enhance the transparency of election results management.

Clearly, the stakes are high in the September 19 governorship election as typified by the spate of pre-election violence and the level of desperation on the part of political actors to not only delegitimize the process but ensure they secure political power at all cost. According to INEC, fourteen parties are on the ballot having fulfilled all conditions for candidates' nomination. Yiaga Africa noted in its first pre-election observation, that the electoral campaigns had been dominated by two parties – the All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP). Sadly, the competition was reduced to a contest between personalities instead of a competition of ideas, issues, and proposals for sustainable growth and development. Two-thirds of LGAs in the state were classified as hotspots and flashpoints of violence by Yiaga Africa due to the frequency of violence, arms proliferation, and a spike in cult groups' activities in those LGAs. The violence rhetoric and strongarm tactics employed by the two major parties for campaigns created a tense atmosphere and a climate of fear. This informed peace talks initiated by the Oba of Benin, His Royal Majesty Oba Ewuare II and the signing of the Peace Accord convened by the National Peace Committee. Yiaga Africa commends the peace building initiatives led by the Oba of Benin, Oba Ewuare II, and the National Peace Committee, headed by the former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar.

As one of Nigeria's largest non-partisan and independent movements of citizens observers committed to promoting electoral integrity, Yiaga Africa WTV will be providing systematic, accurate, and timely information on the election day process. Specifically, Yiaga Africa will



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provide accurate information on the quality of the election day process and ascertain if the official results announced by INEC reflects the total votes cast. **If the announced results have been manipulated and do not match the polling units' results, Yiaga Africa will expose it. If the official result announced reflects the polling unit's votes, Yiaga Africa would confirm it.**

Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote is **“Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!”**

Summary of Findings from the Pre-Election Observation

Yiaga Africa commenced its Pre-Election Observation (PREO) from July 2020 with 25 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) deployed across the 18 LGAs. The LTOs systematically collect information on the pre-election environment and monitor electoral activities of stakeholders like INEC, political parties, National Orientation Agency (NOA), civil society groups, etc. The pre-election environment revealed violent campaign rhetoric and hate speech, excessive use of force by political parties, especially the APC and the PDP, and unhealthy electoral competition. Beyond the electoral campaign, our findings indicate early commencement of election activities by INEC in line with the timetable and schedule of activities issued by the Commission. INEC, NOA, and civil society organizations, including religious/faith-based organizations, were visibly involved in voter education and citizen mobilization. Comprehensive reports of our pre-election observation can be downloaded from our website – www.yiaga.org or www.watchingthevote.org. Here are key trends in the pre-election environment as reported by Yiaga Africa citizens observers;

- 1. State of INEC’s preparedness for the election:** INEC is successfully implementing activities contained in the election timetable and schedule within the limits imposed by COVID-19 protocols. Yiaga Africa notes the high level of preparedness by INEC for the election and its consistency with stakeholder engagement across all the LGAs. Yiaga Africa observed key preparatory activities such as voter education, distribution of voter register to political parties, recruitment and training of polling officials staff, and distribution of election observation kits. This LTOs reported voter education activities by INEC in all LGAs.
- 2. Violence-stricken Pre-election context:** All forms of brigandage and violence defined the pre-election context. Yiaga Africa report show that the incidents of violence were prevalent in thirteen (13) of the 18 LGAs. The LGAs considered hotspots include; Etsako West, Etsako East, Etsako Central, Owan West, and Akoko-Edo in Edo North Senatorial district. In Edo South Senatorial district, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Egor, Ovia North East, and Ikpoba-Okha LGAs in Edo Central Senatorial district, Esan Central, Esan North East, and Esan



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West. The spate of violence and insecurity in the pre-election period may discourage voters from turning up to vote on election day.

- 3. Voter Inducement:** In the run-up to the election, voters' inducement took the center stage at the expense of issue-based politics. Since Yiaga Africa commenced the PREO in July 2020, voter inducement has been a recurring decimal. Political parties, especially the APC and PDP, are investing in the distribution of money and gift items as a strategy to swing voters. Within this reporting period, LTOs reported incidences of voter inducement in Igueben, Oredo, Ikpoba/Okha, Etsako Central, Owan West, Ovia South West, Egor, Ovia North East, Esan West, and Esan South East LGA. These incidences occurred during campaign rallies.
- 4. Non-compliance with COVID-19 Public Health Protocols:** INEC developed a policy guide on conducting elections in the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy articulated general protective measures to prevent the spread of the virus during the electoral period. The policy encouraged political parties to develop appropriate guidelines for the conduct of party primaries and campaigns that take into consideration COVID-19 health preventive measures. During the pre-election period, Yiaga Africa received reports of non-compliance to public health protocols during campaigns as party supporters flouted the public health guidelines by not wearing face masks or maintaining social distancing.

Emerging Concerns on the Edo 2020 Governorship Election

1. An election defined by strongarm tactics and violence?

In past elections, inflated votes and manufactured results have been declared under the cover of contrived confusion and violent attacks aided by partisan security agents. For this election, Yiaga Africa is concerned with the entrenched subculture of violence built around well-known strongmen, thugs, gangsters, and cultists and the widespread belief that elections cannot be won without strongarm tactics and the support of powerful thugs. These concerns are fuelled by the reports of violent arms stockpiling, recruitment of thugs, vandalism, and a surge in cult groups' activities in battleground LGAs. Experience from previous elections like the 2019 Kogi and Bayelsa election show that politicians deploy thugs to disrupt elections in battleground LGAs and marked polling units in their opponent strongholds. This is a deliberate strategy aimed at diluting or suppressing votes cast in areas where their opponents enjoy popular support. Politicians also rely on Section 68 of the Electoral Act to circumvent election by compelling INEC officials to declare false results



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under duress or at gunpoint. The section confers finality on decisions made by Returning Officers and such decisions can only be reviewed by a Tribunal or Court. If immediate actions are not taken by the relevant security agencies to neutralize evident security threats, Yiaga Africa fears that the September 19 election will not be determined by votes cast but strongarm tactics and violence.

2. Consistency in applying guidelines on cancellations of votes and margin of lead:

Given the context for this election and the early warning signs of violence, Yiaga Africa is concerned that Returning, Collation, and Presiding officers if not monitored will misapply election guidelines in relation to cancellation of votes, entering of zero votes, and application of the margin of lead. As noted by Yiaga Africa in previous elections, compromised election officials deliberately misapply election guidelines to suppress votes and manipulate elections.

3. Voter Turnout for the election

Since 2003, turnout in Nigeria's federal and state elections has declined substantially. Voter turnout trends for Edo state indicate low turnout for elections since 2011. Edo recorded 38.4% voter turnout in the 2011 Presidential election; 32% in 2016 governorship election; 28% in the 2019 Presidential election and 32.8% for the state assembly election. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the looming climate of insecurity in the lead up to the September 19 polls, there is overwhelming concern among stakeholders that registered voters in Edo may not be motivated to vote. Findings from a pre-election survey conducted by Yiaga Africa and NOIPolls reveal that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 71% of registered voters are likely to vote in the elections. However, they expressed concerns about insecurity and violence. Approximately one-in-ten respondents have directly experienced violence and intimidation related to the elections. The spate of violence and insecurity may discourage voters from turning up to vote on election day.

4. Non-compliance with COVID-19 health guidelines

Party campaigns were signposted with poor crowd management and reckless breach of COVID-19 safety protocols (wearing face masks, social and physical distancing, and handwashing). Yiaga Africa is concerned that Edo state may experience a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases in the aftermath of the election if health guidelines are not strictly enforced during the election.



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Recommendations

INEC

1. INEC should ensure strict compliance with the electoral laws and guidelines in administering the election amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Polling officials should enforce the use of facemask and gently remove any voter showing the signs of COVID-19 from the polling unit.
2. INEC must show utmost professionalism in election administration and ensure timely, effective, and secure deployment of its staff, materials (sensitive and non-sensitive), and other resources needed for the election to enable early commencement of polls.
3. We urge INEC to ensure transparency and openness in the management of cancellation of votes and determination of the margin of lead in line with extant electoral laws. Uniformity of processes and consistency in applying its guidelines should be maintained across all polling units and LGAs.
4. INEC should ensure proper coordination with security agencies for the effectiveness and safety of personnel and materials deployment. This includes ensuring the safe delivery of personnel and materials after the election.
5. INEC ad hoc staff must ensure that polling units are located in areas accessible to all voters, especially PWDs, to disproportionately disenfranchise voters or limit their rights to participation.

SECURITY AGENCIES

6. Security agencies must maintain the utmost levels of neutrality and professionalism in enforcing election day security. They must respect the law and citizen's constitutional and civic rights and refrain from excessive force.
7. There should be proper coordination between all the security agencies deployed for the election; proper communication lines and engagement rules should be strictly adhered to. Deployment of personnel and logistics should be all-round and not restricted to certain parts of the state.



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8. Early warning signs of election violence should be addressed by relevant security agencies to avoid escalation or spill over on election day. These issues should be addressed in a professional and civil manner.
9. Security agencies should ensure protection for vulnerable voters, especially women and persons with disabilities. Security personnel should enforce appropriate sanctions for any form of violation of the right to vote.

POLITICAL PARTIES

10. 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 employing violence to win the election at all cost. Parties should continue to call on their supporters to shun every form of violence.
11. Political parties, candidates, and supporters should continue to abide by the spirit and letter of the Edo State Peace Accord signed on Tuesday, September 15, 2020.
12. Parties should undertake massive sensitization of their supporters on the elections' guidelines, especially on the margin of lead principle and the constitutional requirement for determining a winner of an election.
13. Political parties, candidates, and their supporters must refrain from vote-buying and the related practice of compromising the ballot's secrecy so that the voters of Edo state are free to vote their preference for governor.

CITIZENS

14. Voters are encouraged to show up at the polling unit and cast their votes in a peaceful manner. Elections are decided by those who come out to vote.
15. Voters should hold the political parties and candidates to account for their commitment to the peace accord. Any party or candidate who defaults in upholding the peace accord is unworthy of public trust.
16. Voters should adhere to COVID-19 public health protocols and INEC's voters' code of conduct for elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Voters should go to their polling



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units wearing their facemasks, practice physical distancing and frequent washing of hands, or use hand sanitizers.

17. Voters should reject efforts by political parties to buy their votes. Remember to uphold the secrecy of the ballot and be guided by conscience as they cast their vote.
18. Communities are encouraged not to engage in collusion and should let members of the community vote for whichever candidate they prefer.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs)

19. CSOs should intensify voter education campaigns to encourage and mobilize eligible voters to participate in the exercise.
20. 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.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

21. Yiaga Africa welcomes the action by the UK and US government to impose sanctions on Nigerians who undermine Nigeria's electoral process and incite violence at elections. These actions are consistent with Yiaga Africa's call on the international community to continually hold political leaders and institutions to account for their commitment to the Nigerian people and the democratic process. Yiaga Africa urges other foreign missions to take similar actions against election riggers and sponsors of violence.

Yiaga Africa WTV Election Day Observation

On election day, Yiaga Africa will deploy its Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology for election day observation at the polling units. Citizens observers will also be deployed to the LGA collation centers to track results collation. The PVT is a proven and advanced observation methodology that employs well-established statistical principles and utilizes sophisticated information technologies. It provides timely and accurate information on the conduct of accreditation, voting, and counting and independently verifies the official governorship results as announced by the INEC. PVTs are not opinion polls. Yiaga Africa citizen observers do not ask



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voters for whom they cast their ballot. Instead, the PVT relies on the official results from polling units where observers are deployed to watch 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 in the November 2019 Kogi and Bayelsa governorship elections.

For the September 19 Edo Governorship Election, WTV will deploy **500 stationary observers to a representative statistical sample of 250 polling units and 25 mobile observers located in all 18 LGAs of Edo state.** WTV will also **deploy 18 collation centre observers** to each of the LGA Collation Centers. Yiaga Africa WTV 500 stationary observers, 25 mobile observers, and 18 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. 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. It 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, Akoko Edo LGA has 5.4% of all the polling units in Edo (143 of 2,627), and 5.6% (14 of 250) of the sampled polling units are in Akoko Edo 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) shows the representativeness of sampled polling units).

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 Benin, located here at Home Vile Hotel, Benin. 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 Edo will receive 4,500 text messages containing approximately 56,000 individual pieces of information about the 2020 Edo 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.



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It is important to remember:

- The PVT is an Election Day observation methodology that provides 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, Yiaga Africa WTV also deployed a separate set of observers to monitor the pre-election environment. Yiaga Africa's overall assessment of the election is based on both pre-election and election day data.
- Using statistical principles, the PVT only deploys to a 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 units (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 units 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.

Since PVT 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 Edo will open at 6:00 am and will remain open until the counting has finished at all sampled polling units, and all WTV citizen observers have sent in all eight 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



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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, September 19, 2020, at 10 pm, Yiaga Africa will release its estimated projections based on its preliminary data. On Sunday, September 20, 2020, at HomeVille Plus Hotel, Benin, Yiaga Africa, will share its preliminary WTV findings on the conduct of setup, accreditation, voting, and counting. Immediately after INEC announces the official results for the governorship 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 Edo 2020 governorship election. Yiaga Africa is ready to observe the elections on behalf of the people of Edo and Nigerians to ensure that people's votes are accurately counted.

We call on all Edo people, the parties and candidates, INEC, and the security forces to play their role in ensuring an inclusive, peaceful, credible, and conclusive process.

Thank you, and God Bless the people of Edo State.

Dr. Aisha Abdullahi

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Appendix 1

Distribution of All Polling Units and PVT Sampled Polling Units for the 2020 Edo 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	AKOKO EDO	119,254	143	5.4%	14	5.6%	28
2	EGOR	219,832	170	6.5%	16	6.4%	32
3	ESAN CENTRAL	57,100	90	3.4%	8	3.2%	16
4	ESAN NORTH EAST	84,245	104	4.0%	10	4.0%	20
5	ESAN SOUTH EAST	76,842	100	3.8%	10	4.0%	20
6	ESAN WEST	99,983	114	4.3%	11	4.4%	22
7	ETSAKO WEST	160,137	140	5.3%	13	5.2%	26
8	ETSAKO CENTRAL	50,058	79	3.0%	7	2.8%	14
9	ETSAKO EAST	81,639	89	3.4%	9	3.6%	18
10	IGUEBEN	46,828	48	1.8%	4	1.6%	8
11	IKPOBA/OKHA	315,410	340	12.9%	33	13.2%	66
12	OREDO	313,553	357	13.6%	34	13.6%	68
13	ORHIONMWON	118,672	208	7.9%	20	8.0%	40
14	OVIA NORTH EAST	143,009	144	5.5%	13	5.2%	26
15	OVIA SOUTH WEST	96,409	100	3.8%	10	4.0%	20
16	OWAN EAST	91,841	160	6.1%	15	6.0%	30
17	OWAN WEST	61,193	150	5.7%	14	5.6%	28
18	UHUNMWODE	74,529	91	3.5%	9	3.6%	18
	Total	2,210,534	2,627	100.0%	250	100%	500

Source: Yiaga Africa WTV Edo 2020