



Pre-election Press Statement on the 2020 Ondo Governorship Election Thursday, October 8, 2020 Delivered at the Bliss World Hotel, Ijapo, Akure, Ondo State

Introduction

On October 10, 2020, the people of Ondo state will go to the polls to elect a governor in what promises to be a keenly contested election and the second governorship election conducted by INEC amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Seventeen (17) political parties are on the ballot having fulfilled all conditions for candidates' nomination. One million four hundred seventy-eight thousand four hundred sixty, representing 81% of registered voters have collected their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs), are expected to participate in the election. As indicated in Yiaga Africa's first pre-election observation report, three political parties dominated the political campaigns in the build-up. They are the All Progressives Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP).

Yiaga Africa's pre-election observation findings revealed a consistent trend of violence and arms stockpiling across some local government areas in the state. More worrisome is the attack on some female party supporters in Oba-Akoko who were allegedly beaten and stripped naked for wearing politically branded t-shirts and fez caps of one of the candidates. Notable LGAs where violence and arms gathering incidents were observed include **Akoko South West, Akure South, Akure North, Akoko South-East, Akoko North-West, Irele, Idanre, Ese-Odo, Okitipupa, Ilaje, and Owo**. Yiaga Africa considers these LGAs as potential hotspots for violence in this election. The organization is further concerned that election-day violence may occur in these locations if the security threats are not neutralized. The organization is further concerned with the security agencies' seeming failure to curb acts of lawlessness and impunity perpetrated by armed political thugs and political actors during campaigns. Given the background of pre-election violence and gangster politics, the state may witness a further decline in voter turnout. The low turnout may further enhance chances for electoral manipulation in the strongholds of the major political parties, particularly in rural areas where election rigging usually takes place.

Yiaga Africa notes that INEC has demonstrated commitment and readiness for the election. The level of preparations increased in all 18 LGAs based on reports from Yiaga Africa's Long-Term Observers deployed in the LGAs. Yiaga Africa commends INEC for its resilience and determination to proceed with the election despite the 5000 smart card readers destroyed under a questionable fire incident at the INEC office in Akure, which appears like an attempt to scuttle the Commission's preparations and undermine its ability to conduct the polls. Yiaga Africa is however, concerned with INEC's reliance on members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) for deploying sensitive election materials on election day. Given the partisan



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background of some members of the Union, they could be used by politicians to undermine the election by deliberately causing late commencement of polls due to delay/refusal to convey election officials and materials to the polling units. Yiaga Africa observed this in the recent Edo election, where members of the NURTV refused to deploy early to the registration area camps citing reasons such as inability to fuel their cars and renegotiate on the contract sum on the day of the election.

Summary of Findings from the Yiaga Africa Pre-Election Observation

Yiaga Africa commenced its Pre-Election Observation (PREO) from August 2020 with 28 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) deployed across the 18 LGAs. The LTOs systematically collect information on the pre-election environment and monitored electoral activities of stakeholders like INEC, political parties, National Orientation Agency (NOA), civil society groups, etc. The observation period's findings showed increased acts of violence and heightened risks of politically motivated violence triggered by verbal and physical attacks during rallies, vandalism, or the destruction of properties belonging to candidates and their supporters, and attacks intimidation of candidates/party supporters. The pre-election environment was signposted by violent campaign rhetoric and hate speech, excessive use of force by political parties, 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:** INEC demonstrated commitment and readiness in conducting the 2020 Ondo governorship election. The Commission successfully implemented activities in the election timetable and schedule within limits imposed by COVID-19 protocols. Yiaga Africa notes INEC's consistency with stakeholder engagement across all 18 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. Yiaga Africa received reports on the conduct of voter education activities by INEC in all LGAs. Yiaga Africa notes INEC's quick response to the fire outbreak that gutted its Akure office and destroyed over 5000 card readers. The response averted the negative impact of losing a vital technological tool for voter accreditation and limiting electoral malpractices.



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- 2. Political campaigns signposted by violence:** Yiaga Africa received reports of physical violence during political party rallies, meetings, and campaigns in Akoko South West, Okitipupa, Akure South, Akoko South-East, and Akoko North West LGA; and verbal attacks during political party rallies, meetings and campaigns at Akoko South West, Akoko South West, Akure South, Akure North, Okitipupa Akoko South-East, Akoko North West and Irele LGA. Yiaga Africa also notes the incident that started on October 3, along Oba Adeshida in Akure South LGA between supporters of the two leading parties resulting in the death of two citizens. Yiaga Africa also received a report of another violence that erupted in the Ipele community of Owo LGA; thugs attacked party supporters for chanting party songs. Vandalism and destruction of property belonging to a candidate or their supporters occurred in Akoko South West, Akure South, Akoko South-East, Akoko North West, and Idanre LGA. Yiaga Africa LTOs also heard candidates inciting or encouraging their supporters to commit acts of violence in Akoko South West, Akoko South-East, Akure North, and Ese-Odo.
- 3. Assault on freedom of association and expression:** Yiaga Africa is concerned with the assault on the freedom of association and expression of citizens, especially those wearing apparels laced with their preferred candidate or political party's symbol. Yiaga Africa received reports of attacks and intimidation of party supporters, especially in Akoko South-West, Akure South, Owo and Idanre LGA. In Oba Akoko, a branded campaign vehicle was ambushed and set ablaze. Women occupants were allegedly beaten and stripped naked for wearing politically branded t-shirts and fez caps promoting one of the aspirants. Similarly, political thugs attacked a party chairmanship aspirant and party supporters in Idanre LGA. A party supporter wearing a face cap was killed in Idanre by political thugs. Political thugs also attacked and injured a party's supporters in what appears to be a coordinated attack in Owo LGA. Yiaga Africa finds that most of the victims and perpetrators of the attacks and intimidation are supporters of the APC, PDP, and ZLP.
- 4. Campaigns as avenues for voter inducement, not issued-based engagement:** In clear violation of the Electoral Act, political parties engaged in the distribution of money and gift items in a bid to curry the support of voters. The campaigns were a contest of the highest spender as opposed to debates on policies and manifestoes. In most cases, the parties negotiated with the voters on the amounts to pay on election day for their votes. Voter inducement was prevalent in 12 LGAs, namely Akoko South West, Akoko South-



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East, Akure North, Akoko North West, Okitipupa, Akure South, Odigbo, Ese-Odo, Irele, Ifedore, Ondo East, and Ilaje LGA.

- 5. Non-compliance with COVID-19 Public Health Protocols:** Even though INEC developed a policy guide on conducting elections in the COVID-19 pandemic, Yiaga Africa observed non-compliance with public health protocols during campaigns as party supporters flouted the public health guidelines by not wearing face masks or maintaining social distancing. Political parties do not have any concrete plan for ensuring adherence to COVID-19 public health protocols.

Matters Arising on the 2020 Ondo Governorship Election

- 1. Logistics deployment in riverine communities of Ilaje and Ese Odo Local Government Areas:** Yiaga Africa calls the attention of INEC and security agencies to notorious blind spots in riverine communities of Ilaje and Ese-Odo LGA known for election rigging, perennial logistics challenges, and threats to polling officials and election materials posed by activities of militants in the region. To ensure the early commencement of polls in those areas, INEC should ensure adequate logistics preparations coupled with heightened security deployment to protect election materials and officials. The Commission needs to increase its oversight in those areas to ensure consistency in applying election guidelines. This call is consistent with Yiaga Africa's recommendation in the 2016 Ondo and 2019 Bayelsa governorship election observation report on election in riverine communities.
- 2. Election logistics and early commencement of polls:** In the recent governorship election, Yiaga Africa reported the late opening of polls in several polling stations. Yiaga Africa Edo PVT findings show that only 4% of polling units commenced accreditation and voting at 8:30 am. Although INEC has shown readiness to deploy its officials and materials early to the polling units, Yiaga Africa is concerned with the Commission's reliance on the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) to transport election materials and personnel to the polling unit. Some members of the NURTW are reported to have endorsed some candidates in the election. These political endorsement puts their integrity and neutrality to question. Yiaga Africa fears that partisan and comprised NURTW members will deliberately cause delays in the commencement of polls in some battleground LGAs by either refusing to deploy or give reasons to delay the process.



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- 3. Election Day Violence and Security Deployment:** Based on pre-election violence reports, Yiaga Africa is concerned about threats of violence on election day. While the contesting political parties and candidates have committed to a Peace Accord, the security agencies need to deploy with competence, professionalism, and neutrality on election day. Upholding these principles will prevent incidents of violence on election day and secure lives and properties. There are also concerns about the coordination between the federal security agencies and Ondo state-recognized security organizations like the Western Nigeria Security Network, otherwise called Operation Amotekun. The lack of clarity in the role of security outfits recognized by the state on election day could trigger interagency rivalry and make the process prone to violence and manipulation.
- 4. The declining turnout of voters:** Since 2011, voter turnout has not exceeded 43% in Ondo state. In the 2011 presidential election, turnout was 32% while 41% turnout was recorded in the 2015 presidential election. Turnout for the 2015 state assembly election was 34.9%. For the 2016 governorship election, turnout stood at 35%. In 2019, it was 33% for the presidential election and 29.3% for the state assembly election. Based on Yiaga Africa pre-election survey, 87% of respondents expressed willingness to vote, thereby indicating enthusiasm on the part of voters to participate in Saturday's election. However, the pre-election violence has created an atmosphere of apprehension, leading to further decline in voter turnout. This apprehension is affirmed by 53% of respondents who expressed concerns that political parties will deploy violence during the election.

Yiaga Africa Election Observation Methodology

Yiaga Africa is deploying its Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology for Saturday's election. The PVT is an advanced election observation methodology that employs well-established statistical principles and sophisticated information technologies in providing timely and accurate information on the conduct of accreditation, voting, and counting, and it independently verifies the official governorship results as announced by the INEC. The PVTs are not opinion polls. Yiaga Africa citizen observers do not ask voters for whom they cast their ballot. PVT rely solely on official results from polling units. This tested and proven election observation methodology has been deployed in over 50 countries worldwide, including Nigeria - most recently by Yiaga Africa in the November 2019 Kogi and Bayelsa governorship elections where it detected fraud and manipulation of results collation and declined to verify the official results declared by INEC. Yiaga Africa also deployed the PVT in the recent Edo governorship election.



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Yiaga Africa will deploy **600 stationary observers to a representative statistical sample of 300 polling units** and **28 mobile observers located in all 18 LGAs of Ondo state**. WTV will also **deploy 18 collation center observers** to each of the LGA Collation Centers. 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 polling units because the percentage of sampled polling units for each LGA is similar to the percentage of all polling units for each LGA. Over the course of Election Day, Yiaga Africa's data center in Ondo will receive **4,800 text messages containing approximately 85,800 individual pieces of information** about the 2020 Ondo 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.

Since the Yiaga Africa is based on official results from a representative random sample of polling units, Yiaga Africa will 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; however, if the announced results have been manipulated and do not match the polling units' results, Yiaga Africa will expose it.** The PVT is a component of Yiaga Africa's comprehensive election observation methodology spanning the electoral cycle. Therefore, in assessing whether the 2020 Ondo governorship satisfies the electoral integrity test, Yiaga Africa will consider a range of issues such as shortcomings in the pre-election period, the quality of election day processes, and the scale and scope of critical incidents.

Recommendations:

INEC

1. INEC should ensure all vehicles for deploying election materials and personnel are deployed to the Registration Area Camps 24hrs before the commencement of polls.
2. INEC should collaborate with the security agencies, especially the police, to arrest and prosecute any NURTW member who violates the contractual agreement between INEC and NURTW or make any attempt to undermine the election.
3. INEC should ensure timely payment of the allowances of Adhoc officials for the election. All Supervisory Presiding Officers (SPOs) must be tasked to process all payment to Presiding Officers, and Assistant Presiding Officers are processed upon activation of Registration Area Camps (RACs) 24hrs before the commencement of polls.



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4. INEC should sustain the use of the election results viewing portal and ensure timely posting of the Form EC 8 A at the polling units. Also, INEC should in the interest of transparency, post information on polling unit where elections were canceled or PUs where elections didn't hold on the results viewing portal.
5. 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 to enable early commencement of polls. Yiaga Africa calls on INEC to pay special attention to the logistics challenges of riverine areas of Ese-Odo and Ilaje LGAs.
6. 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.

Federal and state government

7. Given the pervasive threat to safety and security in the Ondo election, Yiaga Africa urges the federal and state government to desist from partisan use of the police and security forces to manipulate the electoral process.

Security:

8. In ensuring adequate security for the election, security agencies should manage security operations with the utmost neutrality and professionalism levels. Respect for the law and citizen's constitutional and civic rights should be maintained without excessive use of force.
9. Security agencies should ensure protection for voters, observer groups, media, and vulnerable voters, especially women and persons with disabilities. Voter turnout may increase if the security agencies show the environment is secured for voters to exercise their franchise. It is essential for security agencies to enforce appropriate sanctions for any form of violation of the right to vote.
10. Security agencies should continue to address early warning signs of electoral violence and professionally neutralise security threats to avoid escalation or spillover on election day.

Political Parties:



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11. Political parties, candidates, and supporters should abide by the spirit and letter of the Ondo State Peace Accord signed on Tuesday, October 6, 2020.
12. 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.
13. Yiaga Africa calls on the political parties, candidates, and their supporters to utterly reject the practice of buying and selling of votes. vote buying grossly undermines the democratic process. Political parties should compete based on ideas and their ability to improve the lives of citizens not by buying votes.

Citizens:

14. 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 units wearing their facemasks, practice physical distancing and frequent washing of hands, or use hand sanitizers.
15. Yiaga Africa calls on voters 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.

Conclusion

Yiaga Africa commends the online election results viewing portal piloted by INEC during the 2020 Edo governorship election. The viewing portal is an initiative of the Commission designed to enhance the transparency of election results management. Yiaga Africa calls on INEC to sustain the portal while improving on its usability functions. Yiaga commends the peacebuilding initiative led by the National Peace Committee, headed by the former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The pre-election period incidents of violence necessitated the need for the National Peace Committee to engage political parties and their candidates to sign and pledge to the peace accord.

On Election Day, Yiaga Africa's WTV Data Centre Ondo 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 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



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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, October 10, 2020, at 10 pm, Yiaga Africa will release its estimated projections based on its preliminary data. On Sunday, October 11 2020, at Bliss World Hotel, Akure, 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.

Yiaga Africa appeals to INEC's permanent and ad hoc staff, all security agents, political party candidates and their supporters as well as all Ondo people to work together to ensure that the Ondo governorship election is credible and peaceful. We wish to encourage all registered, PVC-holding voters of Ondo to go out on Saturday, October 10 2020 to vote their choice in the Governorship election

Thank you and God Bless the people of Ondo State.

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

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Appendix 1

Distribution of All Polling Units and PVT Sampled Polling Units for the 2020 Ondo 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 NORTH EAST	80,040	135	4.49%	14	4.67%	28
2	AKOKO NORTH WEST	72,139	166	5.52%	16	5.33%	32
3	AKOKO SOUTH EAST	35,747	76	2.53%	8	2.67%	16
4	AKOKO SOUTH WEST	101,842	168	5.58%	16	5.33%	32
5	AKURE NORTH	74,821	106	3.52%	11	3.67%	22
6	AKURE SOUTH	290,267	302	10.04%	30	10.00%	60
7	ESE-ODO	70,014	126	4.19%	13	4.33%	26
8	IDANRE	82,449	112	3.72%	11	3.67%	22
9	IFEDORE	75,257	151	5.02%	15	5.00%	30
10	ILAJE	132,189	271	9.01%	27	9.00%	54
11	ILEOLUJI/OKEIGBO	73,051	157	5.22%	16	5.33%	32
12	IRELE	66,959	132	4.39%	13	4.33%	26
13	ODIGBO	136,146	210	6.98%	21	7.00%	42
14	OKITIPUPA	110,572	246	8.18%	24	8.00%	48
15	ONDO EAST	50,496	74	2.46%	8	2.67%	16
16	ONDO WEST	172,815	233	7.74%	23	7.67%	46
17	OSE	69,087	126	4.19%	12	4.00%	24
18	OWO	128,455	218	7.24%	22	7.33%	44
	Total	1,822,346	3,009	100.00%	300	100.00%	600

Source: Yiaga Africa WTV Ondo 2020