



# **Closing Civic Space, Citizens' Distrust and Insecurity Ahead of Imo 2023 Election**

**Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote Second  
Pre-Election Observation Report**

**October 2023**

# Introduction

The effective management of democratic elections is a multi-layered responsibility that is dependent on several factors and the actions of respective institutions. The Imo governorship election is expected to be conducted in a volatile security environment with some of the local government areas (LGAs) and some communities more prone to violence. Accordingly, the successful administration of a peaceful and transparent election will be dependent on the collaborative action and effective coordination of respective institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigeria Police and other Security Agencies. In addition, is the political will of both the Federal and State governments to ensure access to required resources for both INEC and the Security agencies for the election while guaranteeing non-interference with the process. The security context in Imo state has a grave impact on the quality of participation in the election as it potentially limits the extent of civic engagement, voter education and political party/candidate campaigns.

Beyond the complexity in the recurring insecurity and spate of violence, the pre-election observation in Imo also revealed the deep sense of citizens' distrust, apparent fear of intimidation, voter fatigue and loss of faith in elections as a means to achieving democratic leadership. These factors will largely determine the quality of participation and the quality of the elections. For participation, the pre-election observation projects a likely low voter turnout in the State. With about 2,318,919 voters who have collected their PVCs expected to vote in the election, the indicators in the pre-election environment suggest that only a fraction of this number will be voting. While INEC continues with its preparations for elections with an improvement and voter education and voter outreach initiatives, inspiring faith in our

elections requires improved communications from INEC and due compliance with the legal framework for elections.

Similarly, as political parties round up their campaigns, the major questions are the effect of their campaigns in convincing voters to vote without inducement and the extent of their campaigns as it relates to interacting with voters across the 27 LGAs. However, the observation indicates an unequal playing field concerning campaigns by other political parties in the state. For instance, campaign posters of the All Progressive Congress (APC) seem to be more visible in the state as posters of other political parties and candidates are sparsely seen. This apparent absence may not be unconnected to the exorbitant fees by the state government demanding that political parties must obtain a 54 million naira permit before erecting campaign structures, such as billboards, posters, and other campaign means according to a state circular distributed by Imo Signage and Advertisement Agency. It was observed that there were more posters and billboard campaigns of the incumbent governor, with few or no sightings of campaign materials from the other contenders/parties.

Yiaga Africa notes an increasingly volatile pre-election environment with increased spates of attacks in LGAs such as Oguta and heightened tension in other LGAs. Oguta LGA (which shares a boundary with Anambra, Delta and Rivers states) for instance has a riverine community with some polling units where a majority of its residents who are farmers were threatened not to vote. Although there have been assurances from the security agencies on improved security measures, the worrying trend poses a threat to citizens' participation in the election. The commission had announced that it would conduct elections in all of the 27 LGAs including in *Orsu*

LGA. Orsu LGA which was noted in the first Pre-election report, was identified as more volatile with communities vacated by the citizens for their safety and INEC temporarily relocated the Orsu office to the Owerri office. As noted in the previous pre-report, the LGA's with more reports of insecurity and threat of

violence include: Orsu, Orlu, Oru East, Oru West, Okigwe, Ehime/Mbano and Oguta LGAs.

This report contains key findings of the first observation period (between October 1, 2023, and October 26, 2023) and it is based on reports received from 27 LGAs in Imo State.

# How a winner emerges in a governorship election?



There are two conditions a candidate vying for the governorship office must fulfill.

1



First, he or she **must have the highest number of votes cast at the election or what you can also call the majority of votes.**

2

However, it's not enough to declare a governorship candidate winner because he or she polled the highest number of votes – which brings us to the next condition, **The candidate is expected to have a spread. He or she must garner not less than one-quarter of all the votes cast in each of at least two-thirds of all the local government Areas in the state.**

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### So for instance

In a state with 20 local government areas, a governorship candidate will only be declared the winner if he or she has polled the highest number of votes, and garnered 25% of votes cast in each of at least 13 of the 20 local governments in the state.



Well, it's possible that after the first round of election no candidate meets the requirements of the majority of votes cast and the electoral two-thirds.

# 21

**DAYS LIMIT**

In that case, a run-off election will be organized by the commission within 21 days in line with the provisions of Section 179 of the 1999 Constitution, as amended.

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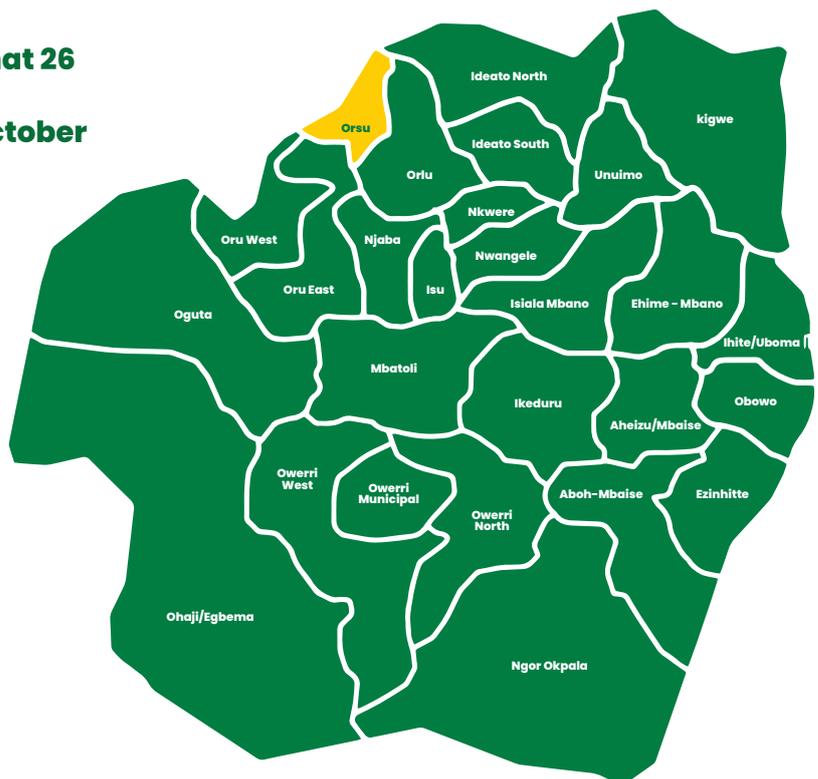
# Key Findings

## Election Preparatory Activities by INEC



Yiaga Africa WTV LTOs reported that 26 LGAs in Imo State had election preparations underway as of 31 October 2023, except for Orsu LGA. Activities such as CSO stakeholders meetings, sensitization drives in collaboration with CSOs across the 27 LGAs targeted specifically for PWDs, youth and women and training of ad hoc staff. INEC has also had a series of engagements with security agencies under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), political parties and their agents, traditional rulers and their executive cabinets, religious leaders and faith-based groups. In addition, INEC has deployed and batched non-sensitive materials by polling units.

**Yiaga Africa WTV LTOs reported that 26 LGAs in Imo State had election preparations underway as of 31 October 2023, except for Orsu LGA.**





**46%**

**WTV  
observers  
witnessed or  
heard of  
voter  
information  
campaigns  
by INEC.**



**50%**

**WTV  
observers  
witnessed or  
heard of  
voter  
information  
campaigns  
by NOA.**



**77%**

**WTV  
observers  
witnessed or  
heard of  
voter  
information  
campaigns  
by CSOs.**

## **Voter Education/Information**

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The long-term observers (LTOs) tracked and reported voter education activities conducted by key election stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Orientation Agency (NOA), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) across some LGAs in Imo. This includes voter education messaging targeted at mobilising and sensitising citizens, especially the marginalised groups such as Youth, Women and Persons Living with disabilities (PWD) to participate in the electoral process. There is currently a sensitization drive (Grassroot awareness for Imo Governorship Election) in collaboration with CSOs organised by INEC.

The LTOs reported general voter information dissemination activities conducted in 23 LGAs (Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbasie, Ikeduru, Mbatoli, Ngor Okpala, Owerri North, Owerri West, Ehime Mbano, Ihitte Uboma, Isiala Mbano, Obowo, Okigwe, Onuimo, Ideato North, Isu, Njaba, Nkwerre, Nwangele, Oguta, Ohaji Egbema, Orsu, Oru West).

46% of Yiaga Africa's observers were exposed to vote education/information campaigns conducted by INEC, 50% of Yiaga Africa's observers were exposed to vote education/information campaigns conducted by NOA and 77% were exposed to voter education/information campaigns as conducted by CSOs.

## Voter Information Campaigns Targeted at Marginalised Communities

WTV LTOs also observed that specific voter information campaigns targeted at women, youth, and Persons with Disability (PWDs) were very low across the state. Voter information campaigns targeted at women by INEC, NOA and CSOs were recorded only in 20 LGAs (Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbasie, Ikeduru, Mbatoli, Owerri North, Owerri West, Ehime Mbano, Obowo, Okigwe, Onuimo, Ideato North, Isu, Njaba, Nkwerre, Nwangele, Oguta, Ohaji Egbema, Orsu, Oru West).

Voter information campaigns targeted at youth by INEC, NOA and CSOs were recorded in 19 LGAs (Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbasie, Mbatoli, Owerri North, Owerri West, Ehime Mbano, Obowo, Okigwe, Onuimo, Ideato North, Isu, Njaba, Nkwerre, Nwangele, Oguta, Ohaji Egbema, Orsu, Oru West)

For voter information campaigns targeted at PWDs by INEC, NOA and CSOs were recorded in 16 LGAs (Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbasie, Mbatoli, Ngor Okpala, Owerri North, Okigwe, Onuimo, Ideato North, Isu, Njaba, Nkwerre, Nwangele, Oguta, Ohaji Egbema, Orsu, Oru West)

**How to keep your PVC Safe**

- No PVC, No Accreditation**
- No Accreditation, No Voting**
- Shield the Card from fire**
- Shield the Card from water**
- Don't manhandle the Card, to avoid breakage**
- Don't deface the Card**
- Do not sell the PVC or disclose your Voter Identification Number (VIN)**

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# Campaign Activities by Political Party

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Yiaga Africa WTV LTOs kept an eye on political parties' events, including rallies and party campaigns, the placement of posters and billboards by candidates, door-to-door campaigns, market exhibits, and media advertisements. For the Pre-Election Observation in Imo state considering their extensive reach and structural coverage throughout the state. Also, other political parties' activities were observed and reported by the LTOs in the state.

The APC has continued to dominate the political campaign landscape across 25 LGAs except in Orsu and Oru East LGAs within this reporting period. While LP campaigns/rallies and meetings were witnessed or heard of in 23 LGAs except in Owerri Municipal, Ihitte/Uboma, Orlu and Orsu LGA's. PDP campaigns/rallies and meetings were witnessed or heard of in 21 LGAs except in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Isiala Mbano, Ideato North, Orlu, Orsu and Oru East LGAs and APGA were only observed in 12 LGAs (Ahiazu Mbaise, Ikeduru, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Owerri North, Owerri West, Ehime Mbano, Obowo, Njaba, Nwangele, Ohaji/Egbema and Oru East) out of 27 LGAs in Imo state.

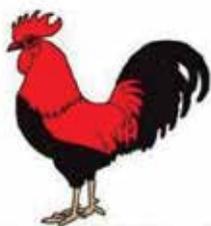
96% of Yiaga Africa's observers witnessed or heard of campaign activities associated with the APC, 46% of observers witnessed or heard of campaign activities associated with the APGA, 88% of observers witnessed or heard of campaign activities associated with LP and 81% were witnessed or heard of campaign activities associated with the PDP.



**The LTOs witnessed and/or heard of political party campaigns conducted by the All Progressive Congress (APC) in 25 LGAs**



**Campaign activities undertaken by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were reported in 21 LGAs.**



**They also reported campaign activities conducted by the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in 12 LGAs.**



**The LTOs reported campaign activities undertaken by the Labour Party (LP) in 23 LGAs**

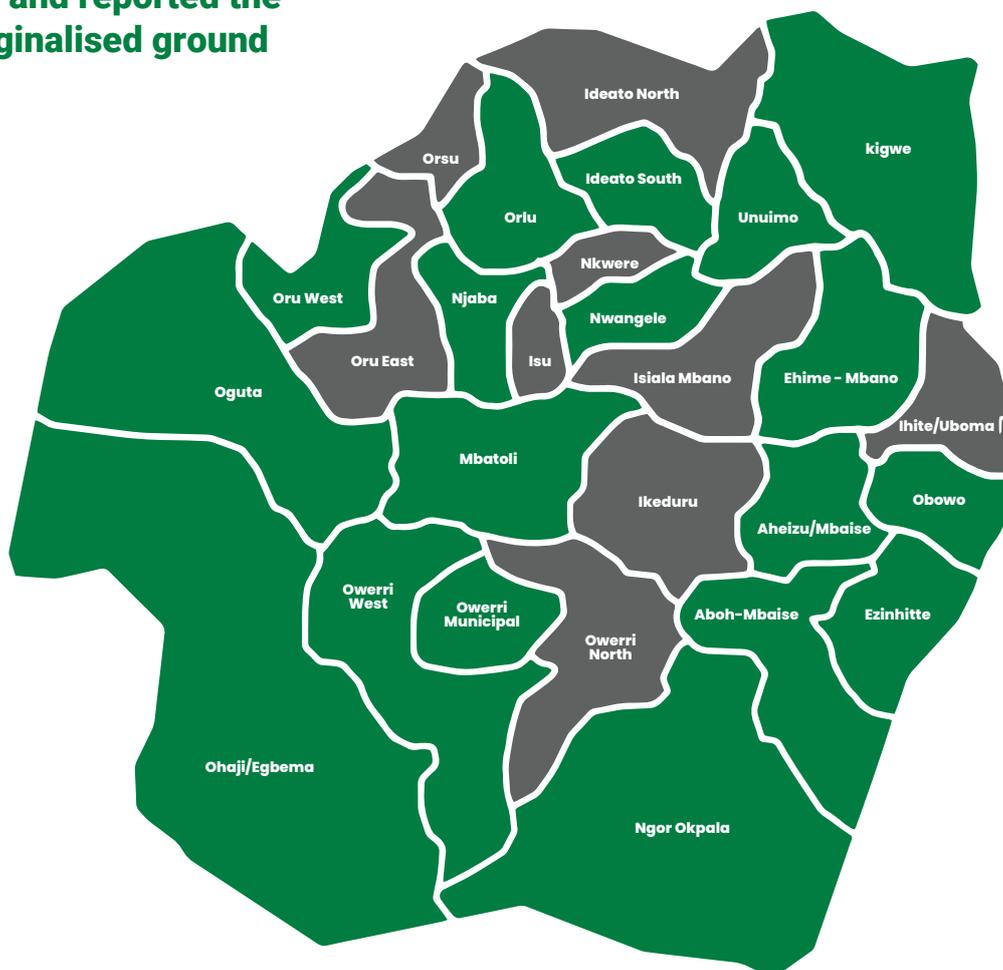
# Inclusive Participation in the Electoral Process

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During this reporting period, Yiaga Africa WTV LTOs observed and reported the activities of the marginalised ground (Youth and Women) with respect to canvassing for vote for parties or candidates in their respective communities in the LGAs. The observation shows the active involvement of youth groups canvassing to vote for parties or candidates in 19 LGAs except in Ikeduru, Owerri North, Ihitte/Uboma, Ideato North, Isu, Nkwere, Orsu and Oru East LGAs. However, women groups were observed canvassing votes for parties or candidates in 19 LGAs except in Owerri North, Ihitte/Uboma, Isiala Mbano, Ideato North, Ideato South, Isu, Orsu and Oru East LGAs of Imo State.

## WTV LTOs observed and reported the activities of the marginalised ground (Youth and Women)

- Reported LGAs
- No Activity



# Key Recommendations

## Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

- INEC should intensify the education of citizens and stakeholders engagement, especially before the election, during the Election and after the announcement of election results.
- Yiaga Africa commends INEC for the implementation of the preparatory activities and calls on INEC to provide better oversight over the activities ongoing at the LGA levels, and the deployment of ad-hoc staff.
- INEC needs to ensure better collaboration with security agencies to ensure that election deployment is intelligence-driven to protect election officials, voters, election materials, election observers and other stakeholders during the elections.

## Security

- Security agencies should ensure proper protection of election observation groups deployed to Imo state for the election.
- As the elections draw near, security agencies working on the elections should ensure that all personnel deployed are adequately trained and operate with a sense of responsibility, professionalism and neutrality.
- Security agencies should ensure the arrest and prosecution of all involved in any form of violence and voter inducement in the days leading to the election.

## Political Parties

- Yiaga Africa calls on all political parties to disengage themselves from instigating election violence, encouraging thuggery and distributing monetary gifts during the elections.

## Media

- Media organisations should ensure fair coverage of all the candidates/parties contesting in the election devoid of bias or prejudice.
- Media organisations should ensure evidence-based reporting devoid of political propaganda as the election draws nearer.

## CSOs

- CSOs in Imo should continue to engage in get-out-the-vote campaigns to mobilise citizens to participate in the elections.

## Citizens

- Yiaga Africa calls on citizens to shun all forms of voter inducement as it undermines the democratic process and to come out in their numbers to vote.

# Methodology

Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote recruited, trained, and deployed 28 long-term citizen observers (LTOs) and deployed them across the 27 LGAs of Imo State to systematically observe the pre-election environment in their various local governments. The observation also includes monitoring early warning signs of electoral violence that may influence the election outcome in the State. The observers are equipped with a checklist to record the relevant information and provide verifiable findings of the pre-election happening in their various LGAs. The LTOs send reports of their observation every month on a standard set of questions guiding their observation at the local government level and the state capital. All the 28 LTOs were recruited from their LGAs of residence, where they are expected to monitor all the electoral activities: voter education and information, political campaign activities, activities of marginalised groups (youth, women, and PWDs), election-related violence, and critical incidents all around the clock. Additionally, they track the activities of electoral stakeholders like; INEC, political parties, NOA, CSOs, as well as women, youths, and PWDs.

All findings from the LTOs are transmitted to the WTV data centre via coded SMS and are thereafter analysed and reported periodically. Yiaga Africa PREO findings are obtained from the entire LGAs within the state and not from a representative of the whole state, thus indicating emerging trends during the pre-election period. Unlike the WTV election-day observation methodology that relies on sample-based observation, Yiaga Africa's WTV PREO uses a more traditional approach that investigates the activities in LGAs of Imo State.

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