



## ***Pre-Election Observation (PREO) Statement on the 2024 Edo State Governorship Election***

Friday, September 13, 2024

Delivered at the Homeville Hotel,  
Benin, Edo State

### ***Edo 2024: Election Amidst Insecurity, Economic Hardships, and waning Confidence***

#### **Introduction**

On 21 September 2024, Edo state will go to the polls to vote in the next governor of the state. The major political parties have ramped up their campaigns across more local government areas in the contest to win the people's votes. While the Electoral Act provides a legal premise for the conduct of campaigns, parties have deployed both legal and underhand tactics towards securing electoral victory. The Edo election is a pivotal moment not only for the fulfilment of the democratic principle of periodic elections at all levels of government but also as a crucial battleground for political parties. With 18 political parties contesting in the election, Yiaga Africa pre-election observation notes the All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as top contenders in the elections. This election is significant as these parties compete to assert their dominance in national politics.

With just eight days to the Edo Governorship election, the political and security situation has remained tense and unpredictable. Yiaga Africa's pre-election reports have revealed the activities of cultists and political thugs in some local government areas (LGA) that, if not contained, could threaten the peaceful and credible conduct of the election. The current economic situation has also created an unconducive environment for voter education and voter mobilisation. Economic factors like the high fuel costs and rising costs of goods are growing impediments to voters' participation. In addition, tensions continue to rise, especially between the APC and PDP. The rivalry between these parties has intensified, with both engaging in character assassination and the use of hate speech and 'blame-game politics.' On each side, there are accusations of alleged interference with the process and the use of institutions to manipulate the elections and outcome. This tension was extended to the Peace Accord signing convened by the National Peace Committee, as the PDP refused to sign the Peace Accord if certain demands were not attended to by the time of the signing of the Accord. The Peace Accord has become an important part of Nigeria's electoral process and is significant in committing the political parties to peaceful conduct during the election.



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Yiaga Africa has trained 25 Long Term Observers (LTO) deployed to the 18 LGAs to observe the pre-election environment until September 20, 2024. Based on the observations, some emerging concerns requiring attention ahead of the September 21, 2024, governorship election include:

### **Emerging Concerns**

#### **1. Political Thuggery and Activities of Cultists:**

Edo State's security condition is still unstable. According to reports from Yiaga Africa's pre-election monitoring, there have been kidnappings and a rise in cult activities that have resulted in violent fatalities. Most of this is not covered by the mainstream media. Citizens are at risk from insecurity, which also provides a window of opportunity for political manipulation of the precarious security environment. These cases were mostly reported by the WTV LTOs in Egor, Esan South East, and Etsako East LGAs.

The integrity of the voting process and its peaceful conduct may be threatened by the unregulated proliferation of such activities, according to reports from the LGAs.

#### **2. Increasing Desperation of Political Actors**

Yiaga Africa is worried about some of the state's politicians' crass and careless remarks as they attempt to win over people. Before the election, these frantic remarks from well-known people demonstrate a lack of discretion and sportsmanship. This kind of behavior has the potential to inflame political tensions and scare off prospective voters. We implore these public personalities to exercise moderation and tell their followers to follow the rules.

#### **3. Physical violence and verbal attacks during party rallies/meetings/on campaign trails:**

Yiaga Africa's WTV observed that while political campaigning in Edo has been generally peaceful, there have been several instances of verbal violence and attacks. Tensions are still rising in Edo State as the election draws near,



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particularly between the APC and PDP. Both of these parties are using hate speech and character assassination as evidence of their growing competition. The general climate of animosity has the potential to cause violent conflicts, disturb public confidence, and upset the democratic process. It is imperative to resolve these conflicts in order to guarantee a credible and tranquil election. We received significant reports from Ikpoba/Okha, Oredo, and Ovia South West LGAs, concerning acts of physical violence or verbal abuse during campaign rallies or party events.

#### **4. Permanent Voters Card Collection Rate**

We commend INEC for its efforts in keeping both new and old registrants in the PVC collection activity, particularly for extending the deadline from September 8 to September 15. We urge the commission to release the official LGA and polling unit disaggregated data on the PVC collecting rate prior to the election, in the spirit of accountability and transparency.

#### **5. Poor Participation in the Mock Accreditation Exercise**

Yiaga Africa applauds INEC's determination to guarantee enhanced operation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) by holding a mock accreditation exercise on September 11, 2024, in a few voting places spread throughout the state's six LGAs. We are worried, nonetheless, about the low participation rate among Edo State citizens, which could be related to the commission's inconsistent or insufficient information about the exercise provided by the commission.

### **Summary of Observation Findings**

#### **1. INEC Remains Consistent in Implementing Election Preparatory Activities**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had progressively carried out the activities outlined in the electoral calendar in order to prepare for the governorship election in Edo. According to the commission, they completed 11 of the 13 activities on the timetable. Notably, there are only two things left to do: the election day itself and the conclusion of the campaign,



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which will conclude on election eve. Non-sensitive items are being stocked and catalogued in the INEC's LGA offices, as disclosed by INEC. The commission obtained more BVAS units from neighbouring states and retrieved approximately 3,817 BVAS units that were affected by the flooding incident in May 2024 in Benin City. Additionally, September 15 is the new deadline to collect Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) at the INEC LGA offices. The commission tested the BVAS in 12 locations across 6 LGAs through a mock accreditation process in advance of the election.

### **2. Voter Education/Information Campaigns by INEC, NOA, and CSOs**

Throughout the state, there was an increase in voter education and information initiatives in the last month. According to reports received from all the 18 LGAs, citizens were encouraged by CSOs, INEC, and NOA to collect their permanent voter cards as well as to go out and cast their ballots on September 21. Stakeholders conducted workshops and community outreach in locations like the marketplaces. Particularly in 10 of the 18 LGAs—Igubeben, Etsako East, Etsako West, Owan East, Owan West, Ikpoba/Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Ovia North East, and Uhunmwonde LGA—the WTV LTOs reported having heard about or been exposed to voter education messages by INEC. This was similarly recorded by NOA in 4 LGAs only— Esan South East, Akoko Edo, Egor, and Ovia South West; and by CSOs in 3 LGAs— Etsako East, Oredo, and Orhionmwon.

### **3. Campaign Activities by Political Parties**

WTV LTOs maintained close tabs on political parties' events, including rallies and party campaigns, the presence of billboards and posters by candidates, door-to-door campaigns, market exhibits, and media advertisements. All political parties running for office are being monitored by Yiaga Africa's pre-election observation efforts, however the APC, LP, and PDP have remained at the forefront of the political campaign scene since the commencement of political campaigns. There was an increase in market shows, door-to-door campaigning, and political rallies in the period thus far. The WTV LTOs have been informed of or have seen campaigns connected to the PDP in all 18 LGAs in the state during the past two weeks, by APC in all the LGAs with the



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exception of Akoko Edo LGA and Esan South East LGA. Meanwhile, fifteen LGAs—aside from Esan Central, Akoko Edo, and—saw or heard about the LP campaign.

#### **4. Indicators of Voter Inducement**

Yiaga Africa's LTOs witnessed and documented political parties and politicians distributing cash, presents, and food items to entice voters throughout the pre-election campaign. Election mandates are becoming less credible as a result of this sad trend.

These incidents were primarily noticed or heard about in the Uselu market, Egor LGA, where market women received monetary gifts ranging from N1000 to N2000 from the APC and PDP parties during their campaign tours. Similarly, PDP campaigners gave wrappers to women who joined the campaign gathering in the Amiebonkhian community of Esan North East LGA. In the Ubiaja community of Esan South East LGA, PDP campaigners also gave several store owners shirts, caps, umbrellas, and as much as N2000.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)***

1. Yiaga Africa commends INEC for implementing the preparatory activities and calls on INEC to provide better oversight over the activities ongoing at the LGA levels.
2. To increase electoral transparency and accountability, INEC should make the PVC collection data public in the state and make the information available on its website.
3. The commission should improve communication on its processes and procedures before the elections to avoid misinformation, especially regarding deploying technologies and applying the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in the election.



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### ***Security***

4. Given the sensitivity of the concerns raised by the PDP at the September 11 meeting with stakeholders in Benin, we urge the IGP to convene a meeting to address and resolve the issues raised by the aggrieved parties.
5. As the elections draw near, security agencies working on the elections should ensure that all deployed personnel are adequately trained and operate with a sense of responsibility, professionalism, and neutrality.
6. 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.
7. Security agencies, especially the police, should publicise hotlines for citizens to make complaints, report incidents, or access information on the election.
8. Security agencies should ensure transparency and timeliness in the payment of and provision of welfare packages for security personnel deployed before the election. In addition, there is a need for uniformity in payment for security personnel of the same cadre across the different agencies deployed for the election.

### ***Political Parties***

9. Yiaga Africa calls on all political parties to engage in issue-based campaigns and shun luring voters with unsustainable gifts that would not lead to the economic development of the State.
10. Political parties and candidates should disengage themselves from encouraging thuggery and cultism through monetary gifts during campaigns as it encourages violence.
11. Political parties should adhere to their commitment to the Peace accord and promote peaceful participation of their supporters in the election.

### ***Media***

12. Media organisations should ensure fair coverage of all the candidates/parties contesting in the election without bias or prejudice.



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**CSOs**

13. CSOs in Edo should continue to engage in get-out-the-vote campaigns to mobilise citizens to participate in the electoral process. Specifically, they should engage more in targeted campaigns to increase the participation of women, youth and PWDs.

**Citizens**

14. Yiaga Africa is urging all registered voters in Edo State who still need to collect their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) to do so. The collection of PVCs is currently taking place at all INEC Local Government Area (LGA) offices to ensure that everyone can vote on election day.

15. Yiaga Africa calls on citizens to shun all forms of voter inducement, as they undermine the democratic process.

Thank you, and God bless Edo State.

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