



# Pre-election Press Statement on the 2024 Ondo State Governorship Election

Thursday,  
November 14,  
2024

Delivered at the  
Dejavu Hotel,  
Alagbaka, Akure,  
Ondo State

## Introduction

On November 16, 2024, eligible voters in Ondo State will head to the polls to elect their governor in an election defined by the late commencement of political public campaigns. The election will be determined by 85.6% of the two million, fifty-three thousand and sixty-one (2,053,061) registered voters in the state who have collected their PVCs. Specifically, one million, seven-hundred fifty-seven thousand, two-hundred and five (1,757,205) registered voters have collected their PVCs. While this number seems impressive, the election is anticipated to witness a low voter turnout. The major election campaigns before the governorship election commenced late. Yiaga Africa's pre-election assessment revealed that the campaigns were more of a clash of political heavyweights than a competition of ideas and issues, with money playing a prominent role. The allegations of election rigging between the political parties and the conversation of new rigging tactics remain topical in the pre-election phase. The defining issues in the pre-election phase indicate a worrying trend in elections in Nigeria and demand a review of the approach to engaging and assessing the electoral process. Accordingly, the independent assessment of the Ondo election will be determined by three critical tests: an integrity test for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), an impartiality test for security agencies and a resilience test for citizens. The Ondo election will evaluate the determination of key stakeholders and the determination of citizens to promote electoral integrity and sustain democratic processes in Nigeria.

Yiaga Africa observed the pre-election environment, and reports indicate that Ondo experienced a relatively peaceful pre-election environment. Security concerns leading up to the election in Ondo State have remained low, with a few incidents reported, primarily involving the destruction of billboards and denial of access to public facilities. INEC has conducted and completed most of its preparatory activities in Ondo, including training its personnel and deploying non-sensitive and sensitive materials. The Commission assured the public of its commitment to enhancing voter accreditation, results uploading, and logistical processes. We commend INEC for its proactive measures and collaboration with security agencies to ensure a smooth electoral process.

Yiaga Africa commends INEC for the release of voter registration and Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) collection rates at the polling unit level, as this transparency is vital for building public trust in the electoral process. As revealed by INEC, 85.6% of permanent voter cards (PVC) were collected ahead of the election; however, the election outcome will be determined by voters with PVCs who turn out to cast their votes. The disaggregated data in PVC collection rate by LGA, however, indicates concerning high PVC collection rates in the following LGAs: Ondo East (97.3%), Ilaje (97.3%), Ese-Odo (96.2%) and Odigbo (94.4). We encourage the commission to provide context and clarity on what may have motivated the high collection rates in these LGAs.

As election day approaches, we urge all stakeholders to commit to a peaceful, fair, inclusive and credible electoral process. We commend the 18 governorship candidates for signing the Peace Accord and the National Peace Committee, led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, for facilitating this important agreement. The signing of the Peace Accord is a significant commitment to peace and an important step towards ensuring a violence-free election.

### **Key Pre-Election Observations**

1. INEC preparedness for the election: Yiaga Africa observed INEC's preparatory activities. Some of the key activities include training election officials, briefing meetings with stakeholders, and distributing non-sensitive election materials. Furthermore, the commission conducted a mock accreditation exercise across 12 polling units in 6 LGAs. The commission also tested the functionality of the over twelve thousand Bimodal Voter Accreditation Systems (BVAS) that will be deployed for the election, including the 4,002 deployed to the polling units and 8,012 in its reserve.
2. Deployment of Election Materials: Yiaga Africa acknowledges the ongoing deployment of sensitive election materials across the state's local government areas (LGAs). We urge the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance coordination and communication with the transport companies and unions that provide logistics support. It is essential to ensure the timely delivery of materials to the Registration Area Centers (RACs) and to facilitate the early deployment of materials and personnel to polling units on election day. This approach will help to address the issue of late commencement of polls that has been observed in previous elections.
3. Increasing Desperation by Political Actors: As the Ondo State governorship election approaches, there is a noticeable desperation by political actors. This desperation is evident in various ways, including heightened rhetoric, aggressive campaigning, the spread of misinformation, and personal attacks aimed at undermining opponents.

Such behaviour can create a tense and volatile atmosphere leading up to the election, which may escalate into violence on election day. For instance, Yiaga Africa's observers reported instances where candidates encouraged or incited their supporters to commit acts of violence in the Idanre, Ifedore, and Irele Local Government Areas. Encouraging or inciting supporters to engage in violence is unacceptable and should be strongly condemned. It undermines the democratic process and poses a threat to the safety and security of all citizens. Political leaders and candidates are responsible for promoting peace and ensuring that activities on election day adhere to the rule of law and respect the rights of others.

4. **Political Thuggery and Activities of Cultists:** As election campaigns intensify, some party supporters become less tolerant and engage in physical and verbal altercations to assert dominance. There has been a concerning rise in political thuggery and the activities of cultists. These actions threaten the integrity of the electoral process and the safety of voters. Yiaga Africa's LTO witnessed and heard of physical and verbal attacks during party campaign rallies in Akoko North East, Akoko South West, Akure North, Ifedore, Irele and Ondo East LGAs. Yiaga Africa LTO witnessed or heard of the destruction of properties belonging to parties and their supporters in Akoko South West, Akure South, Idanre, and Ifedore LGAs. These actions threaten the integrity of the electoral process and the safety of voters.
5. **Voter Inducement and Potential Vote Buying on Election Day:** Political parties and candidates have resorted to offering cash gifts and food items to induce voters to secure their support as election day approaches. This practice undermines the integrity of the electoral process and erodes public trust in the democratic system. Yiaga Africa's Long-Term Observers (LTOs) noted instances of voter inducement during campaign activities by both the APC and PDP. They observed that cash gifts ranging from N2,000 to N5,000 were distributed to voters and supporters in 14 local government areas (LGAs): Odigbo, Idanre, Akoko North East, Irele, Ilaje, Okitipupa, Owo, Akoko South West, Ondo East, Ese-Odo, Ifedore, Akoko South East, Akoko North West, and Akure South. Yiaga Africa is concerned that this practice may extend to election day, turning polling units into the epicentre of vote buying. Voter inducement compromises the election's fairness and perpetuates a cycle of dependency and corruption.
6. **Anticipated Low Voter Turnout:** There are concerns about low voter turnout. Several factors contribute to this, including voter apathy, economic concerns, and the influence of political thuggery and cultist activities. These issues can discourage citizens from participating in the electoral process, leading to a lower-than-expected turnout.

## **Pre-Election Recommendations**

Yiaga Africa calls on all stakeholders to collaborate to make the Ondo State election a model for other off-cycle elections, showcasing our collective commitment to democracy and peaceful coexistence. Accordingly, we call on:

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

1. INEC to ensure that the shortcomings observed in the 2020 Ondo governorship elections are adequately addressed before the Governorship election, especially regarding logistics. INEC should ensure efficient management of all logistical arrangements, including distributing election materials and setting up polling units, for instance, addressing logistics challenges observed in the riverine communities of Ilaje and Ese-Odo LGAs during the 2020 Ondo gubernatorial elections.
2. INEC should ensure proper and timely communication with stakeholders on the election day process, communicate challenges experienced, and share immediate plans to address those challenges to inspire citizens' confidence in the process.
3. INEC ad hoc staff should make the electoral process accessible to all persons with disabilities. This includes ensuring that the polling unit set-up is done in a manner that is accessible to voters with disability, providing assistive materials like magnifying glasses and the braille ballot guide and ensuring that the form EC40H is completed in all polling units during the voting process.

### **Security Agencies**

1. We call on security agencies to work closely with the electoral commission to ensure coordinated and efficient logistics management and deployment, timely communication, and collaboration to address any security challenges that may arise.
2. Yiaga Africa also urges security agencies to remain impartial throughout the voting and the results collation process and to deploy early enough to manage the security of election personnel and electoral materials in the elections. We also call on the security agencies to safeguard the media, observers, and election workers.
3. We encourage security agencies to strictly enforce laws and regulations against voter inducement, vote-buying, ballot box snatching and other electoral malpractices. Arrest and prosecute individuals and groups found engaging in illegal activities.

### **Political Parties**

1. Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should show commitment to electoral accountability by respecting the rules governing the conduct of the elections, refraining from deploying violence, and winning the election at all costs.
2. Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should refrain from offering material incentives and vote buying to voters. Instead, focus on presenting clear and compelling policies that address the electorate's needs and concerns.

### **CSOs & Media**

1. We encouraged our CSO partners and election observers to maintain active communication with the Electoral Commission to share findings, recommendations, and concerns and to collaborate with INEC to enhance the credibility and transparency of the election.
2. Yiaga Africa calls on the media to ensure objective and balanced reporting on the electoral process. Avoid sensationalism and disseminating unverified information that could incite violence or unrest.

### **Citizens**

1. We call on voters in Ondo to encourage peaceful behaviour, discourage violence or intimidation and report any suspicious activities to the appropriate authorities.
2. Yiaga Africa urges voters to resist efforts to purchase their votes, turn out in large numbers, and vote according to their preferences on Saturday, November 16.

### **Watching The Vote Observation of the 2024 Governorship Elections**

On November 16, 2024, Yiaga Africa will deploy a total of 324 duly trained and accredited stationary and roving observers to observe the conduct of the Governorship election in Ondo State. Yiaga Africa will deploy the Process & Results Verification for Transparency (PRVT) methodology to observe the Ondo State governorship election. This will involve deploying 300 stationary observers to a representative randomly selected sample of 300 polling units across the 18 LGAs in the State. In addition to the PRVT methodology, at the end of polls, Yiaga Africa observers will deploy to all

LGAs and State's results collation centres to observe and report the results collation process. This deployment will enable Yiaga Africa to provide the most timely and accurate information on the governorship elections in the states.

Using the PRVT, Yiaga Africa will also provide an independent projection of voter turnout in Ondo State. It will be able to project the vote shares that each party should receive within a narrow estimated range. If the official results fall within Yiaga Africa's estimated ranges, then the public, political parties, and candidates should have confidence in the ballots cast at the polling units.

Only INEC has the legal mandate to announce the election results. As soon as INEC announces the official results, Yiaga Africa will follow up with a result verification press conference to share its statement on the accuracy of the election results. Utilizing information communications technology and statistical principles, PRVT is the gold standard for citizen election observation and has been utilized throughout Africa and the world. Yiaga Africa has also deployed this methodology in the 2019 and 2023 Presidential elections and 18 State Governorship Elections.

Yiaga Africa is committed to objective, nonpartisan, and credible election observation. Watching the Vote is **"Driven by Data—For All Nigerians—Beholden to None!"**

Thank you, and God Bless the people of Ondo State!

**Ezenwa Nwagwu**

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