

# 2020 ONDO GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

Yiaga Africa First Pre-election  
Observation (Preo) Report

September 28, 2020



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## Executive Summary

As political activities gather momentum ahead of the October 10 Ondo governorship election, Yiaga Africa Watching The Vote is observing the political environment and conduct of political stakeholders as part of its Pre-Election Observation. The Pre-Election Observation commenced in August 2020 with the deployment of Long-Term Observers (LTOs) in all eighteen LGAs of the state. These LTOs are observing campaign activities and preparatory activities of INEC, security agencies, National Orientation Agency and civil society groups. Given the fact that electoral politics in Nigeria is traditionally characterized by a tension-soaked atmosphere, outbreaks of violence, coupled with zero-sum politics which are high stakes and confrontational in nature, the PREO also identified potential security threats prior to the October 10 election.

The October 10 election is the fifth off-cycle election in the state since the transition to civil rule in 1999. Seventeen political parties are contesting for the highest political office. The campaigns have been dominated by the incumbent Governor Rotimi Akeredolu, SAN of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and his rival, Eytayo Jegede, SAN of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Like the recently concluded Edo election, the Ondo election is a two-horse race between the APC and PDP candidate. With the emergence of the incumbent Deputy Governor, Agboola Ajayi as the candidate for the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) it might become a three-horse race.

The findings in this first reporting phase reveal heightened levels of political intrigues, counter strategies and violence. Whilst INEC has shown commitment and readiness for the election, key contenders and political actors have advanced narratives that forewarn of breakdown of law and order including alleged threats to deploy state and non-state instruments of force and armed violence. This could affect the efficiency and credibility of electoral management processes if not curtailed. For instance, the destruction of 5,000 Smart Card Readers under a questionable fire incident at the INEC office in Akure on September 10, 2020 is considered an attempt to

scuttle the commission's preparations and undermine its ability to conduct the polls. Yiaga Africa is concerned that the election may become a replay of undesirable events given the attitude of some political gladiators in the state.

As part of preparations for the election, INEC is visibly conducting voter education, recruitment and training of election officials and stakeholder engagement. These are preparatory activities monitored by Yiaga Africa LTOs. Although political activities such as campaigns and rallies have dominated the political space, they, however have been plagued with acts of violence. Yiaga Africa LTOs reported incidences of violent verbal and physical attacks, vandalism and destruction of properties, attacks and intimidation of political opponents from different Local Government Areas (LGAs). The LGAs with a high incidence and indicators of violence are Akure South, Akoko South-East, Idanre, Owo and Akoko South West. Specific cases of voter inducement were reported in Akoko South West, Akure South, Akoko South-East, Akoko North West, Ifedore and Odigbo LGAs.

Only 39% (1,822,346) of the entire population are registered to vote, a good number of registered voters 1,478,460 (81.1%) have collected their PVCs. This implies that only about 31.6% of the populations are eligible to participate in this year's governorship poll. Since 2011, voter turnout has not exceeded 35% in Ondo state. In the 2011 presidential election, turnout was 31% while in the 2016 governorship election it was 35%. In 2019, it was 21% for the presidential election and 29.3% for the state assembly election. Given the background of pre-election violence and gangster politics, the state may witness a further decline in voter turnout during election. This is exacerbated by the failure of security agencies to curb acts of lawlessness and impunity perpetrated by armed political thugs and political actors. Low voter turnout may further enhance chances for electoral manipulation in the strongholds of the major political parties particularly in the rural areas where election rigging usually takes place.

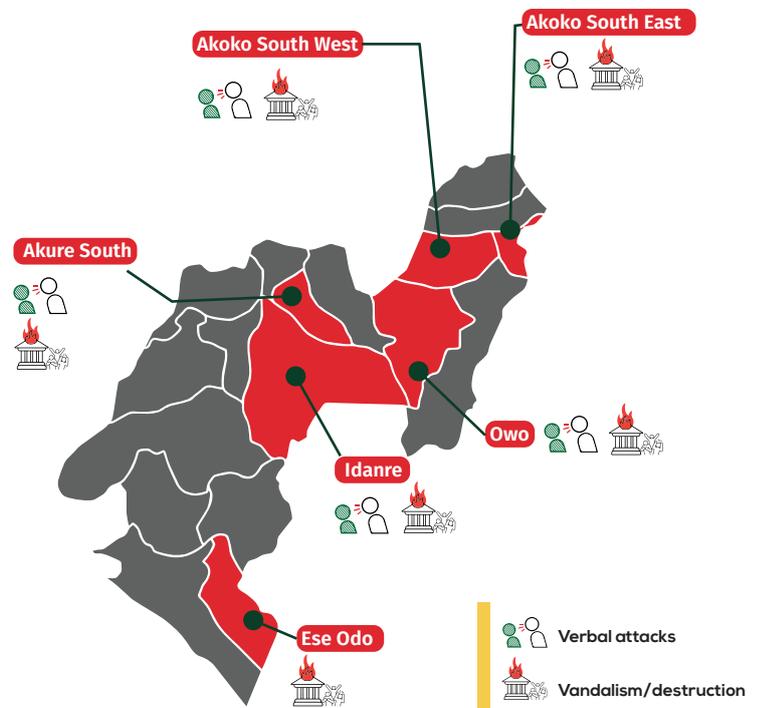
# Key observation findings

## State of INEC's preparedness

In this reporting phase, Yiaga Africa LTOs noted an appreciable level of preparation in all LGAs save for Idanre, Ileoluji/Okeigbo and Okitipupa. The commission has activated key preparatory activities recruitment and training of election officials, meetings or consultations with electoral stakeholders, as well as voter education programs. Despite the fire incident that destroyed 5000 card readers, the Commission has mobilized replacements from neighboring states within a short time frame.

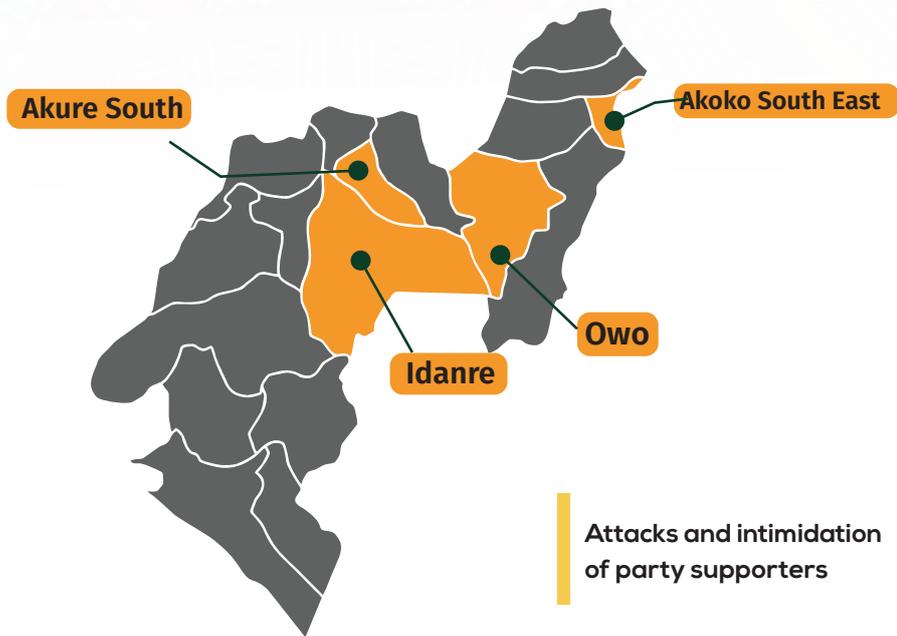
## A Rising Wave of Pre-Election Violence Trail Political Campaigns

At the beginning of political campaigns, Yiaga Africa observers reported incidents of physical violence and verbal attacks trailing political party campaigns. At least one incident of physical and/or verbal attacks during political party rallies, meetings and campaigns occurred in Akoko South-West, Akure South, Idanre, Owo and Akoko South-East LGA. In addition, there were reports of vandalism/destruction of properties such as cars, belonging to candidates and/or supporters, by perceived opponents. Findings from this observation phase reveal that APC, PDP and ZLP candidates and supporters are primarily victims and perpetrators of these acts of vandalism or destruction of properties. Akoko South-West, Akure South, Idanre, Owo, Akoko South-East and Ese-Odo are considered hotspots and flashpoints of violence due to the prevalence of pre-election violence.



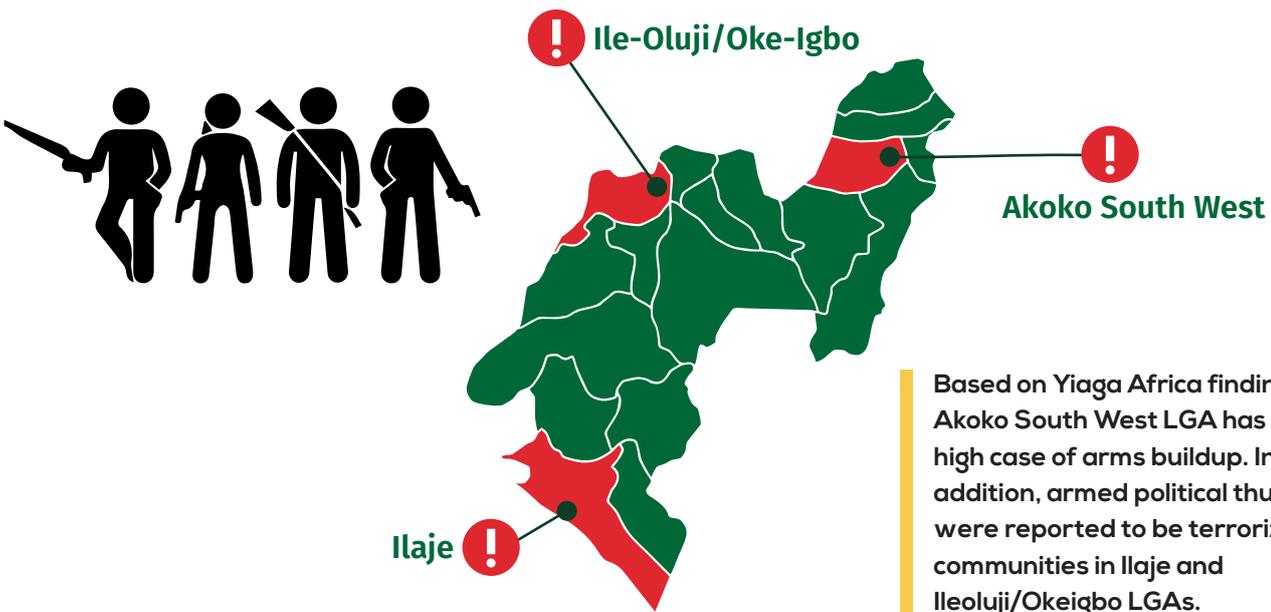
## Assault on the freedom of association and expression

Yiaga Africa is concerned with the assault on the freedom of association and expression of citizens especially those wearing apparels laced with the insignia of their preferred candidate or political party. 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, an Aketi-Ayedatiwa 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 the SDP party chairmanship aspirant and party supporters in Idanre LGA. A supporter of ZLP wearing a ZLP face cap was also macheted to death in Idanre by political thugs. Political thugs also attacked and injured supporters of the PDP in what appears to be a coordinated attack in Owo LGA. Yiaga Africa findings that most of the victims and perpetrators of the attacks and intimidation belong to the APC and PDP.



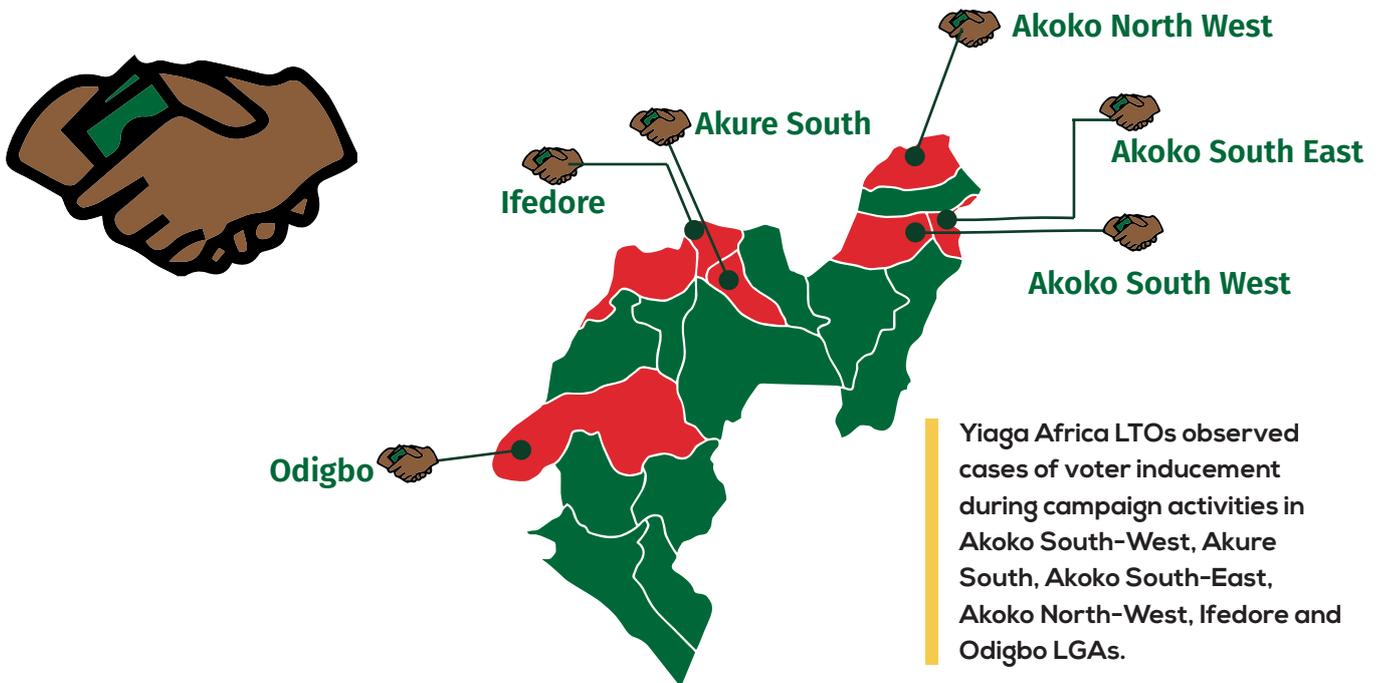
### Proliferation of Small and Light arms

Yiaga Africa LTOs reported cases of political thugs brandishing arms and weapons during political campaigns without restraint from security agencies. Based on Yiaga Africa findings, Akoko South West LGA has a high case of arms buildup. In addition, armed political thugs were reported to be terrorizing communities in Ilaje and Ileoluji/Okeigbo LGAs. These unrestrained acts of lawlessness and impunity creates apprehension which could lead to low turnout of voters during the election.



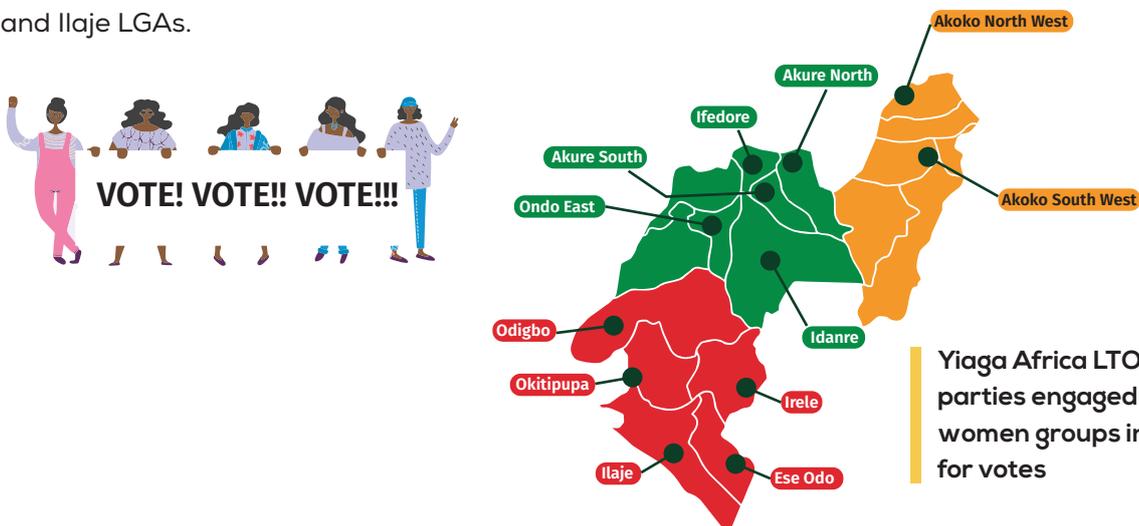
## Voter Inducement persists

Ahead of the election day, political parties and candidates have resorted to inducing voters with cash gifts and food items in a bid to secure their support. Yiaga Africa LTOs observed cases of voter inducement during campaign activities in Akoko South-West, Akure South, Akoko South-East, Akoko North-West, Ifedore and Odigbo LGAs. These acts were perpetrated by both the APC and PDP.



## Inclusive Participation of the Marginalized Groups (Women, Youth and PWDs)

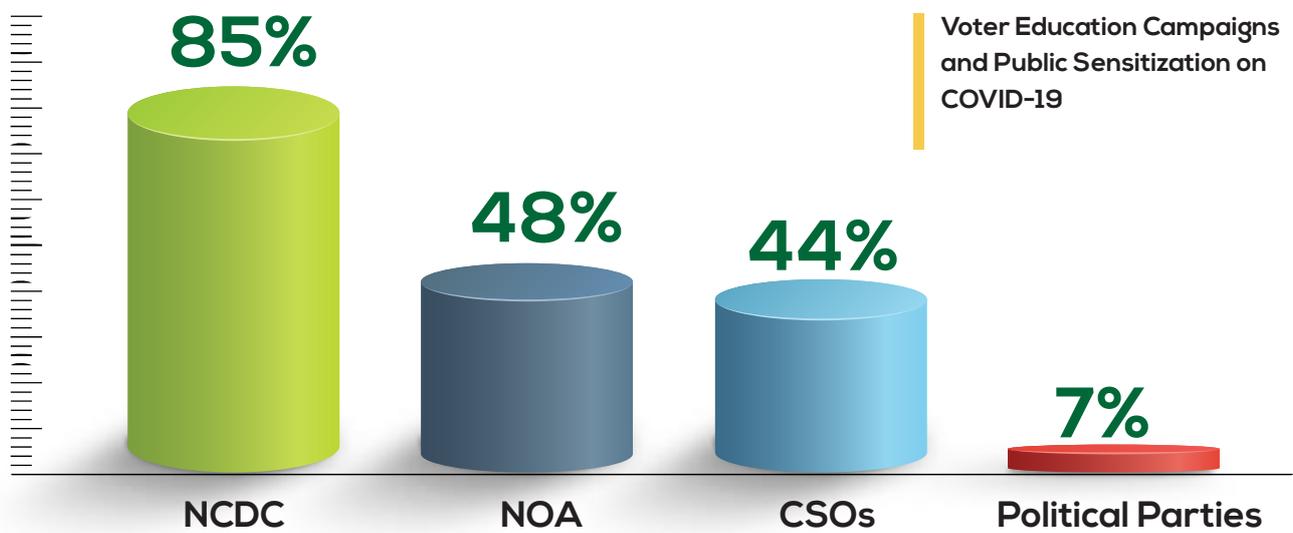
Of the 17 parties fielding candidates in the election, only one party, Labour Party nominated a female candidate. This has widened the political inequality gap in the state. Yiaga Africa LTOs noted that parties engaged women and women groups in canvassing for votes especially in Akure North, Akure South, Idanre, Ifedore, Ondo East, Akoko North-West, Akoko South-West, Ese-Odo, Ilaje, Irele, Odigbo and Okitipupa LGAs. Youth groups were also involved in campaigns and mobilization for parties in Akure North, Akure South, Idanre, Ifedore, Ondo East, Akoko North-West, Akoko South-West, Ese-Odo and Ilaje LGAs.



## Voter Education Campaigns and Public Sensitization on COVID-19

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of Yiaga Africa LTOs were exposed to or heard of voter information campaigns on the INEC guideline for voting during COVID-19. In addition, 52% of the LTOs reported exposure to information on the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Precisely, 85% of the LTOs were exposed to COVID-19 prevention massaging by NCDC, 48% by NOA, 44% by CSOs and 7% by political parties.

To bring down the barriers that affect the participation of women, youth and persons living with disability, audience specific messaging is required during voter education. Although, INEC makes an effort in ensuring audience specific messaging, Yiaga Africa LTOs, observed low interventions targeted at increasing the knowledge of marginalized groups (women, youth and PWDs) in understanding the upcoming election and voting procedures at the LGA level.



## Political Campaign Activities Amidst COVID-19

Yiaga Africa’s WTV assessed the level of adherence to COVID-19 guidelines by political parties during campaigns. Yiaga Africa LTOs noted that political parties failed to comply with social distancing guidelines in all political party campaigns observed by the citizens’ observers. However, the parties complied with at least one of the COVID-19 health/safety guidelines such as wearing of face masks and use of hand sanitizer in all the LGAs except, Ifedore, Ondo East, Akoko North East, Ileoluji/Okeigbo, and Okitipupa LGAs.

# Key Recommendations

## Federal and state government

1

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.

## Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

2

INEC should collaborate with other stakeholders like the National Peace Committee, traditional/religious institutions, security agencies, media, and CSOs to de-escalate the rising political tension and violence by signing peace accord or pact between the candidates the election.

3

INEC should sustain the use of the election results viewing portal and ensure timely post of the Form EC 8 A at the polling units. Also, INEC should post information on polling unit where elections were cancelled or PUs where elections didn't hold on the results viewing portal.

4

INEC should collaborate with the Presidential Task Force and State Task Force to ensure strict compliance with COVID-19 guidance enunciated in INEC policy on voting amidst COVID-19 and other health safety protocols. Polling officials should be required to undergo COVID-19 testing before and after the election. Public engagement on new health protocols and Voters Code of Conduct should be intensified across LGAs and communities.

5

INEC should take concrete steps to address the perceptions of its lack of independence, impartiality, and professionalism. This will include proactive disclose of election-related information, consistency in the application of electoral guidelines, and transparency in the results collation process.

## Security Agencies

6

Curtailment of proliferation and use of firearms and other weapons and ensure appropriate sanctions for those implicated in thuggery and violence.

7

Employ preventive measures to neutralize existing security threats in Ondo state to enable the voters to exercise their constitutional right to vote in a peaceful and secure environment.

8

Improve inter-agency collaboration and cooperation to forestall rivalry and unhealthy competition in the management of election security.

## Political Parties

- 9** Political parties and candidates should conduct issue-based campaigns rather than engage in voter inducement and recruitment of thugs and cultists for violence.
- 10** Political parties and candidates should subject themselves to public scrutiny on their campaigns manifestoes through debates, town halls, and direct public engagement.
- 11** Political parties should conduct voter education on INEC's policy on voting amidst COVID-19 as part of their role in increasing voter turnout in elections.

## Citizens

- 12** Citizens should work with security agencies by reporting incidents or threats of violence, or perpetrators of violence.
- 13** Voters should exhibit a high sense of responsibility by complying with health safety guidelines before, during, and after the election. This will reduce the prevalence rate of COVID-19 infections in the state.
- 14** Citizens should refrain from perpetrating violence, refrain from hate speech, and not accept gift items in exchange for their votes.

# A note on the PREO Methodology

The PREO involves the deployment of 27 carefully recruited and trained LTOs in each of the 18 LGAs in Ondo State to systematically observe and gather information concerning the pre-election environment as well as early warning signs of conflict and electoral violence. These citizen observers are equipped with a checklist to record the relevant information and provide verifiable findings. Twenty-seven of the LTOs report bi-weekly on a standard set of questions at the local government level. The LTOs are also recruited from their LGA of residence where they are expected to monitor electoral activities such as: voter education and information, political campaign activities, activities of marginalized groups (youth, women, and PWDs) and election-related violence, all around the clock. Additionally, they track 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, analyzed and reported periodically. However, in the case of critical incidents, the WTV project escalates immediately to sister CSOs and Security agencies like; the Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSDC) as well as INEC. The LTO findings are obtained from the entire LGAs within the state and not from a representative sample of the entire state, and provide an indication of emerging trends during the pre-election period.

This PREO report covers findings based on the observation of the Yiaga Africa LTO's covering a period of in the 18 LGAs August 14 to 27, 2020 and the second reporting phase; August 28 to September 10, 2020.

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