



EDO STATE CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM



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EDO STATE CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORT

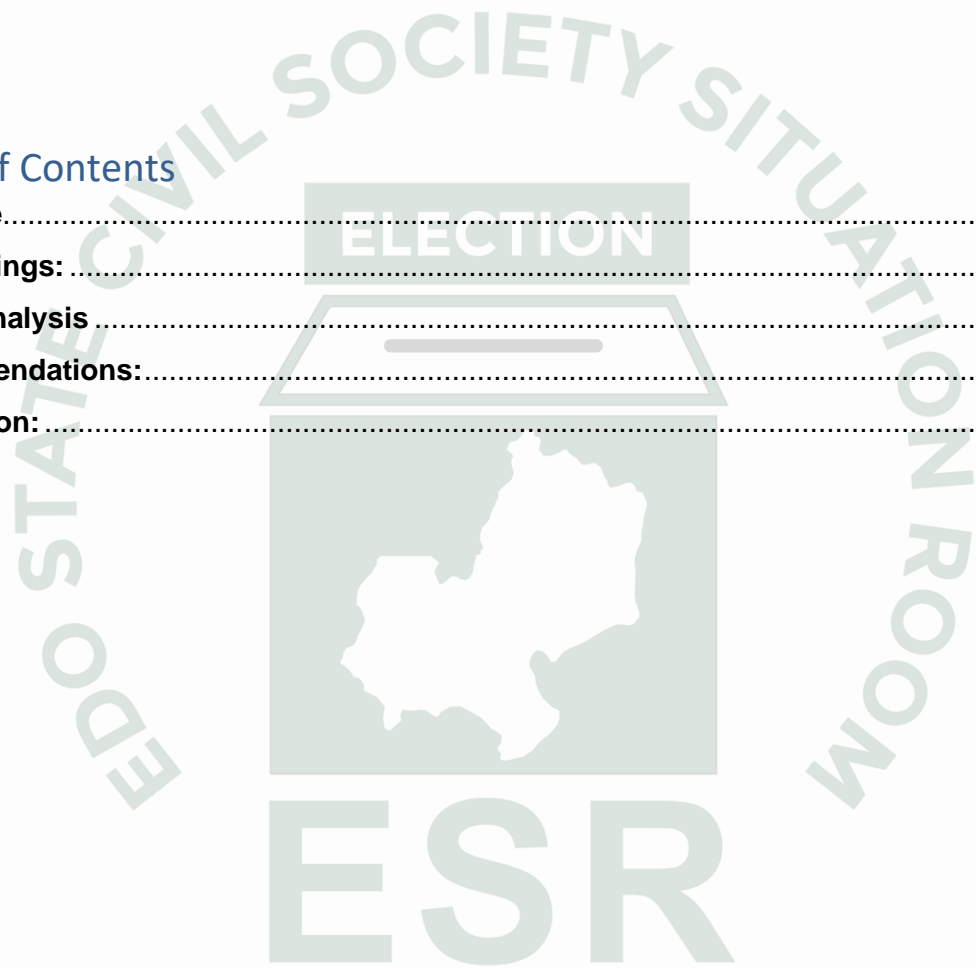


***Edo State Civil Society Situation Room Edo State Election Observation
Report***



Table of Contents

Preamble	1
Key Findings:	1
Result Analysis	2
Recommendations:	3
Conclusion:	4



Preamble

The Edo State Civil Society Situation Room (ESSR), was established by five organisations: The Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) Caritas, Benin, Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations (CONGOs), Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) Caritas, Uromi and Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), Edo State Chapter. We had our secretariat and Situation Room located at the Justice Development and Peace Centre (JDPC) Benin City, and we deployed 50 domestic and 190 citizen observers across 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) to monitor the 2024 Edo State Governorship Election held on September 21, 2024.

Our role was to ensure the integrity of the electoral process by observing key elements such as the arrival and performance of INEC officials, the deployment and functionality of electoral materials and the BVAS machines, security arrangements, and voter conduct. Despite some challenges, the ESSR was able to collect and analyze real-time data from the field.

Key Findings:

- 1. Voter Turnout:** The ESSR observed a notably low voter turnout predominantly in the youth population, which can be attributed to several key factors. Public trust in both government and political parties remains low, as many voters still hold the belief that their votes do not count. Additionally, heavy rains across most parts of the state prevented voters from coming out and there was no provision of canopies to shield electorates from the heavy downpour in most polling stations covered by our observers. Also, widespread economic hardship made it difficult for many voters to travel to their polling centres far from their residences to exercise their franchise. The overwhelming presence of security forces, although aimed at ensuring peace, heightened anxiety among the electorate, further discouraging participation.
- 2. Commencement of Voting:** In 68.75% of polling units observed, INEC officials arrived on time, and accreditation and voting commenced simultaneously within the expected timeframe. However, in about 31.25% of units, delays occurred due to logistical issues, bad weather, and in some cases, the absence of security personnel to escort INEC officials to the polling unit which is part of arrangement for the election.
- 3. Electoral Materials and BVAS Functionality:** The ESSR noted that in 98.4% of polling units observed, election materials were adequately deployed. However, some units reported technical issues with the BVAS machines. A significant delay was noted in PU058, Ward 2, Oredo LGA, where a faulty BVAS machine was only restored after 3 p.m., causing long delays in the accreditation process and reducing the number of voters' participation as some had already left the venue.
- 4. Security Presence:** There were security presence in 93.7% of polling units observed, contributing to a generally peaceful atmosphere. However, a lack of security personnel in 6.3% of units led to isolated conflicts, particularly in Owan East LGA where clashes between party supporters occurred. Despite the deployment of over 40,000 security personnel to safeguard the electoral process, observers noted inconsistencies in their presence across various polling units.

While some units saw a low number of security operatives, others experienced a complete lack of security.

5. **Vote Buying:** Instances of vote buying were reported in 26 polling units observed, with allegations of party agents offering cash inducements to voters. EFCC officers arrested two women at PU12, Ward 2, Oredo LGA for alleged vote buying. However, our observers did note that armed security personnel were reportedly seen escorting party-sponsored thugs who were allegedly reported to be heavily involved in vote buying where money was distributed in both naira and dollars at various polling units and wards. These actions compromise the credibility of the electoral process.
6. **Inclusivity of PWDs:** The election was generally inclusive, with INEC staff providing assistance to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in most polling units. However, some units did not have the necessary infrastructure, making it difficult for PWDs to vote independently.
7. **Collation of Results:** While the election results were released swiftly, concerns have been raised about discrepancies between the actual results from polling units and the figures being presented by INEC. It is crucial for INEC to uphold its role as an impartial arbiter, ensuring transparency and fairness throughout the electoral process.

Result Analysis

The election results from INEC's state collation centre for the three senatorial districts of Edo State (Edo South, Edo Central, and Edo North) present a diverse political landscape with significant variations in voter preferences. It revealed that Edo North was largely dominated by APC across all LGAs, with a significant lead in some areas like Akoko-Edo and Etsako West. In Akoko-Edo, APC won by a margin of **18,982** votes, while in Etsako West, the margin was **14,624** votes. These results reflect APC's strong performance in both local government areas, reinforcing its dominance in Edo North Senatorial District.

In Edo Central Senatorial District, the PDP held a slight advantage, winning in 3 out of the 5 Local Government Areas (LGAs), while the APC secured victories in Esan West and Esan Central. PDP's strongest showing was in Esan South East, while APC's most dominant performance came from Esan West, where it led by 1,948 votes. Despite PDP winning more LGAs, APC remained competitive by securing key areas, reflecting a closely contested race in the district.

In Edo South Senatorial District, the PDP won in 4 out of the 7 Local Government Areas (LGAs), while the APC secured victories in Egor, Orhionmwon, and Oredo. PDP's strongest showing was in Ikpoba Okha, where it led by 10,044 votes, while APC's most dominant performance came from Oredo, with a lead of 5,842 votes.

After several hours of results collation from each local government area, the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC's Returning Officer for the poll, Prof Faruk Kuta declared Monday Okpobholo of the All Progressives Congress (APC) the winner of the keenly contested Saturday 21, 2024 governorship election at exactly 09:27 pm.

Okpobholo of APC secured 291,667 votes to defeat Asue Ighodalo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who got 247,274 votes and Olumide Akpata of the Labour Party (LP) who came a distant third

in the race with 22,763 votes. Fourteen other candidates contested the seat but got less than the three frontline candidates. The candidate of the PDP, however, raised objection to the announced results alleging that some of the results uploaded on the IREV portal were at variance with the actual results obtained from the polling units.

Recommendations:

- 1. Enhancing Public Trust and Voter Engagement:** To restore trust in the electoral process, there must be sustained efforts by INEC, civil society, and political parties to engage voters. Political parties, civil society, and INEC should intensify efforts to combat the perception that "votes do not count." Regular public messaging showcasing transparent results verification processes is a good start to boost confidence
- 2. Strengthening Security:** A more strategic and even distribution of security personnel across polling units is essential. Areas with historically high electoral tension or violence should receive additional focus in subsequent elections. Also, security officers should be trained to manage potential conflicts and voter anxiety more effectively. Clear protocols should be established for preventing security personnel from being complicit in electoral malpractice, such as vote buying. Furthermore, INEC should introduce monitoring systems to track and report the presence of security personnel in real-time, ensuring all units are adequately covered.
- 3. Combating Vote Buying:** The legal framework should be reinforced with stricter penalties for vote buying and the use of security personnel for partisan activities. EFCC and other anti-corruption agencies must adopt swift legal actions against violators. We further recommend that INEC should assign more election monitors and anti-corruption agents to polling units with histories of vote buying or electoral manipulation, improving monitoring and response capacity.
- 4. Improving BVAS Efficiency:** INEC should ensure that all BVAS machines are thoroughly tested and operational before election day, with technical teams on standby to address issues swiftly and avoid disruptions, particularly in rural and remote areas where connectivity and technical issues are more likely.
- 5. Increasing Inclusivity:** Polling units must be made more accessible to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), with appropriate infrastructure such as ramps, braille ballots, and accessible booths, in place. INEC should also provide additional training for staff to accommodate voters with special needs.
- 6. Enhance Real-Time Results Monitoring:** INEC should provide real-time access to election results from polling units through a transparent online platform, ensuring that the public can verify results as they are collated. Consider deploying independent third-party audits for collation results, particularly in areas with reported discrepancies.

7. **Crises on the announced results:** Following the claims of irregularities in the announced results, we recommend that aggrieved parties should resort to legal means to address such issues.

Conclusion:

The ESSR extends its gratitude to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, our dedicated observers, election analysts, tech team and the media for their tireless efforts in ensuring the smooth conduct and reporting of the election process. Their commitment contributed to the overall success of the process, despite the challenges faced.

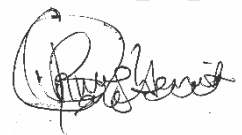
We urge all political parties and candidates who may feel aggrieved by the election outcome to avoid taking the law into their own hands or inciting violence. It is vital to maintain peace and use the appropriate legal channels to express grievances and seek redress. Our democracy thrives when conflicts are resolved through dialogue, not violence.

Signed,



Mrs. Abiola Daisy Igaga,

**Chairperson,
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(ESSR).**



Fr Benedict Onwugbenu,

**Executive Director,
Justice Development and Peace
Commission (JDPC), Benin.**