



Centre for Democracy & Development  
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement



**CSOs' ROUNDTABLE ON  
THE 2020  
OFF-CYCLE  
GOVERNORSHIP  
ELECTION IN EDO STATE**

**COMMUNIQUE**

August 6, 2020

Vichi Gates Hotel and Suites, Benin City, Edo State

# COMMUNIQUE

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## Preamble

On Thursday, August 6 2020, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa), an independent, not-for-profit, research, training, advocacy, and capacity building organisation, held a day meeting with civil society actors ahead of the off-season governorship election in Edo State. The meeting held at Vichi Gates Hotel, Benin City. It was organised to examine the unfolding political events characterising the election, the impact(s) of these events, and to proffer practical ways to promote electoral integrity. It also created a platform for civil society actors to interface with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on its preparedness in the lead up to the election. The meeting brought together civil society across the 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State.

Organisations represented at the meeting included the Community Based Initiatives (CBI), Solomon Sheperd Foundation (SSF), Willi Johnson Foundation (WJF), Association of Professionals for Family Health, Empowerment and Community Development (APFFHECOD), Unique Love for PWDI, Josemaria Escrivia Foundation (JOSEF), Edo Civil Society Organization (EDOCSO), Wise Sisters Charity Organisation, Initiative for Girls and Women Empowerment, Kairos Youth Empowerment Initiative, Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC Benin), Indomitable Youths Organisation (IYO), SOTHAWACA, Take a Cue Development Initiatives, Youth Empowerment Project, African Women Empowerment Guild (AWEG), Lift Above Poverty (LAPO), National Council for Islamic Affairs (NCIA), amongst others.

Participants at the meeting made the following observations:

1. That political campaigns ahead of the forthcoming election should be issue-based. However, the participants observed that presently, hate speech and character assassination characterise political campaigning in the State. There is a deliberate and sustained effort by political parties and their candidates, particularly the incumbent and the leading opposition candidates, to damage the reputation and credibility of individuals, rather than to engage in issue-based campaigns.



2. Political activities in the lead up to the off-season election are somewhat marred by violence, especially in situations where supporters of the main political parties meet in the public domain. Citing the ugly violence that occurred around the Palace of Royal Majesty, Oba of Benin, and counter-attacks that ensued afterwards, civil society actors warned that politicians should not see violence as the only way of winning elections or keeping a grip on the levers of power.

3. That the INEC has not adequately engaged CSOs in Edo State in the planning and implementation of its voter education programmes, CSOs have historically played a crucial role in empowering citizens to participate in elections. Unlike CSOs, INEC does not have a broad reach of citizens, especially in hard-to-reach locations in the State. As such, sustained interaction with the actors is crucial to ensuring improved voter education and enhanced voter participation in the election.
4. That the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the economic livelihood of ordinary citizens in Edo State, money already plays a significant role in Nigeria's politics. The new circumstances, therefore, heighten the susceptibility of voters and electoral officials to vote-buying and bribery, respectively.
5. That there is a lack of enforcement and strict compliance to health protocols issued by the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to curtail the spread of coronavirus in the State. The participants observed that many residents of Edo State move around town without wearing facemasks, and hardly maintain social distancing in their everyday lives. As such, it may be unlikely that, if not strictly enforced, the electorate will comply with measures put in place by the INEC, FMOH and the NCDC to curb the spread of the infectious disease on the Election Day.
6. That political accountability is crucial to achieving electoral integrity. Therefore, relevant authorities (including INEC, the Police, and other regulatory agencies) must ensure that political actors and their supporters conduct themselves in line with the provisions of existing laws, rules, and regulations governing the conduct of the election.
7. That civil society organisations need to demand accountability from the State government. The pre-election period presents an opportunity for CSOs to engage political actors in a robust debate around manifestos, as well as an opportunity to painstakingly track and document the policy preferences of all political parties and their candidates. This would serve the purpose of holding whosoever emerges victorious in the election accountable to his/her commitments.
8. That security agencies have failed to successfully prosecute those who commit electoral offences, particularly those who perpetrate electoral violence during elections. Electoral violence has become a recurring decimal in Nigeria's elections. If laws are consistently undermined by influential individuals whose interests are served by electoral violence, the peaceful conduct of the election is threatened.
9. That the commitment of the Nigeria Police to mop up illegal arms and ammunitions in the State ahead of the election is a welcome development. However, the security agency must 'walk the talk' rather than make mere pronounce-

ments.

To address the challenges mentioned above, participants suggested the following:

### Political Parties should:

1. Comply with the rules and regulations governing the conduct of elections, in Nigeria
2. Agree to sign a peace treaty ahead of the off-season governorship election and mobilise their supporters across the State to comply with the agreement fully. This is central to mitigating violence during the election.
3. Engage in issue-based campaigns rather than in activities that may potentially incite violence. There should be a move away from character assassinations and an increased focus on engaging and developing the State.



### Security agencies (particularly the Police) should:

1. Hold perpetrators of the ongoing pre-election violence accountable as a necessary condition to encourage participation in the elections and prevent election violence. The participants, in particular, called on the Nigeria Police to immediately arrest those who sponsored and participated in the violence around the Palace of Royal Majesty, Oba of Benin.
2. Prioritise intelligence gathering and commit to mop up the Small arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) currently circulating in the State.
3. Resist political influence. Security agencies should be wary of allowing the undue interference of political actors in the management of security situation, as this would impact the peaceful conduct of the election.
4. Make necessary arrests in cases of organised violence stemming from political parties. This would set a clear precedent on the consequences of engaging in violent activity.



## INEC should:

1. Implement a robust voter education programmes to promote the participation of voters at the polls.
2. Strengthen its engagement with CSOs in planning and implementing voter education programmes, as well as creating avenues for CSO actors to support the conduct of a credible election.
3. Communicate frequently and in a sustained manner, with relevant stakeholders (including traditional rulers, CSOs, political parties, etc.) on any matter relating to the preparations for the forthcoming election.
4. Work with NCDC, FmoH and the security agencies to enforce compliance to the INEC Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Strict measures should be put in place to ensure full compliance of voters, ad-hoc staff and other actors in the election. These include the use of PPE materials, social distancing, infrared thermometers, and the provision of on-site health officials to inspect persons who display any symptoms of COVID-19.
5. Ensure the strict implementation of INEC Framework On Access And Participation Of Persons With Disabilities (PWDS).



## CSOs should:

1. Facilitate the signing of a peace treaty by political parties and their candidates ahead of the governorship election.
2. Observe the strict implementation of the peace pact signed by the candidate.
3. Support the INEC in its voter education programmes to enlighten eligible voters on participating in the elections, and to dissuade individuals against election violence.
4. Demand accountability from INEC, especially in the face of continued problems around the conduct of elections.
5. Prioritise civic education that focuses on mandate protection. Power belongs to people, and exercise of the political rights should not be threatened at all.

## Traditional and Religious Leaders should:

1. Desist from making political statements or from publicly expressing support for any political parties and their candidates. Such public statements could deepen the tensions that already characterise the election.

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The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organisation

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