



Preliminary Statement on the 2026 FCT Area Council Elections

Saturday, 21st February 2026 | Delivered at the Treasure Suites, Abuja

Introduction

On Saturday, 21 February 2026, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted elections for the positions of Chairman across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and for sixty-two Councillorship seats. Yiaga Africa deployed trained and duly accredited roving observers to systematically monitor the conduct of the elections. Observers were deployed by 7:30 a.m. and covered polling units across the sixty-two wards of the FCT. Their mandate included observing key aspects of the voting process, including opening procedures, accreditation, voting, and counting.

Following the conclusion of voting and declaration of polling unit results, Yiaga Africa's Collation Observers will deploy to the Ward Collation Centres and the Area Council Collation Centres to observe the results collation process. The observers will transmit real-time reports to ensure systematic documentation and independent assessment of the integrity of the results management process.

Yiaga Africa's Watching the Vote (WTV) preliminary statement is grounded in reports received from its trained observers and reflects findings on key process-related indicators observed on Election Day. It is important to note that **Yiaga Africa did not deploy the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology for the FCT Area Council elections.** Consequently, this statement is limited to process observation and does not provide an independent statistical verification of the official election results. **At the end of results collation, Yiaga Africa will release its findings on the collation of results.**

General Assessment

Overall, the election was conducted in a largely peaceful atmosphere. Voters who presented themselves at polling units were afforded the opportunity to exercise their franchise without widespread disruption. Notwithstanding this enabling environment, voter turnout was generally low, with most polling units recording poor turnout.

Logistical challenges adversely affected the timely commencement of polling, particularly in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), where delays in the deployment of personnel and materials contributed to late opening in several locations. Furthermore, the relocation of certain polling units coupled with inadequate and untimely communication of these changes to voters generated confusion and may have resulted in voter disenfranchisement. Such administrative lapses have significant implications for electoral access and public confidence in the process.



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Preliminary Findings

These are preliminary findings as of 1:00 pm on election day with reports received from WTV observers roving in the 6 Area Councils.

- 1. Late Opening of Polling Units:** Yiaga Africa observers reported a delayed commencement of polling in several polling units, primarily attributable to logistical inefficiencies and, in some instances, election security-related challenges. As of 9:00 a.m., set-up activities were still ongoing in the majority of polling units observed, indicating that essential preparatory procedures had not been completed within the timeframe prescribed by electoral guidelines. In the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), particularly in Wuse and Gwarinpa wards, several polling units opened significantly behind schedule. Observers noted that polling officials were still arranging materials and organizing the voting environment as at 9:00 a.m., with accreditation and voting commencing only after 10:00 a.m. On average, across the sampled polling units observed, accreditation and voting began at approximately 10:00 a.m.
- 2. Deployment of Election Materials:** Consistent with the Commission's guidelines, critical election materials including the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) devices and the voter register—were deployed in the polling units observed. However, in Polling Unit 004, Wuse Ward, Zone 2 Primary School, the voter register was not initially available and was only produced after observers raised concerns and voters objected. In addition, essential voting materials were absent in certain locations. Voting cubicles were not observed in PU002 (Ward 09), PU006 (Ward 01), and PU012 (Ward 10) in Abaji Area Council. Furthermore, an ink pad required for the voting process was reportedly missing in one polling unit observed.
- 3. Redistribution of Voters to Newly Created Polling Units without Notice:** Observers reported instances in which voters were reassigned to newly created polling units without prior or adequate notification. While Yiaga Africa acknowledges INEC's efforts to notify affected voters via SMS, many of these messages were delivered on Election Day, with some received hours after polling had already commenced. The lack of timely and effective communication generated confusion at several polling locations, as numerous voters spent over an hour attempting to ascertain their designated polling units. In multiple instances, this administrative shortcoming contributed to congestion and overcrowding, thereby undermining orderly queue management and potentially discouraging voter participation.

The observation further revealed significant disparities in voter distribution within the same polling locations. Such pronounced imbalances raise serious concerns regarding the coherence, and reliability of the Commission's polling unit expansion and voter redistribution framework.



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- 4. Closing of Polling Unit before the official 2:30pm:** Observers reported some polling units closing the polling process before the official 2:30pm close time. While some polling units experienced poor voter participation, the guideline requires the polling unit to remain open until 2:30pm or the last person on the queue votes.
- 5. Security Deployment and Observer Access:** Yiaga Africa observed heavy security deployment in certain locations, which, in some instances, impeded the movement of accredited election observers and restricted access to polling units. Observers further noted that the heightened security presence created barriers for citizens attempting to access polling units to exercise their right to vote.
- 6. Vote Buying:** The persistent menace of vote buying once again manifested during the election. Yiaga Africa observers documented incidents of vote buying at polling units, underscoring the continued vulnerability of the electoral process to monetary inducement. Despite prior assurances and directives issued by INEC to security agencies to identify and apprehend both vote buyers and sellers, these illicit practices reportedly continued in several locations.

Preliminary Recommendations

Yiaga Africa calls on all eligible voters who have not yet cast their ballots to come out and exercise their constitutional rights to vote for their preferred candidates.

INEC

- INEC officials must ensure that the Form EC 60E which is the People Results sheet is posted in the polling units and that the BVAS is used to upload all the PU results sheet Form EC8A to the IReV and properly transmitted to the ward collation centres. This measure is critical to strengthening transparency, building citizens' trust in the election management process and reducing suspicion of manipulation.
- INEC officials must conduct the collation and declaration of results with the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and professionalism. This requires strict adherence to established legal and procedural guidelines governing results collation to safeguard the credibility of the outcome.
- INEC should undertake a comprehensive nationwide public engagement campaign to clearly communicate the redeployment of voters to newly created polling units. This should include timely voter education, accessible verification tools (such as SMS and online polling



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unit locators), and collaboration with media, political parties, and civil society to prevent confusion and reduce the risk of voter disenfranchisement in future elections.

Security Agencies

4. Security agencies should ensure that their personnel conduct themselves with the highest level of professionalism and maintain strict impartiality during the other aspects of the elections, especially, at the collation centres. Their role should be limited to safeguarding voters, election officials, and materials, while refraining from any actions that could compromise the integrity, transparency, or credibility of the election.

Political Parties

5. Yiaga Africa calls on political parties, candidates and their supporters to refrain from disrupting the process and attempts to undermine the elections.

Conclusion

Yiaga Africa WTV remains committed to providing accurate and credible information on the process and will continue to watch the process until the end of voting and the posting of results. In addition, Yiaga Africa observers will be at the result collation centers to observe the process and provide information on the results collation. Yiaga Africa will also observe the INEC results portal to track the efficiency of the portal.

We call on all those participating in the process, especially voters not to be deterred by the challenges but rather remain patient until they cast their votes.

We call on all citizens, political parties and candidates, INEC and the security agencies to play their parts to ensure a peaceful, credible and conclusive process.

The Watching The Vote project is **“Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!”**

Thank you and God Bless the people of FCT.

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