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Advocacy Memo

**What Nigeria's Recent Off-Cycle Elections
Reveal About the Implementation of INEC's
Existing Electoral Systems Ahead of 2027**





Memorandum

What Nigeria's Recent Off-Cycle Elections Reveal About the Implementation of INEC's Existing Electoral Systems Ahead of 2027

Evidence from EiE Nigeria's 2026 Off-Cycle Election Observation, RSVP Campaign and Stakeholder Engagements

To:

The Chairman
National Commissioners
Resident Electoral Commissioners
Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

From:

Enough is Enough Nigeria (EiE)

Date:

September 25, 2026

Introduction

The credibility of an election depends not only on the rules governing the electoral process but also on whether those rules, procedures, and institutional systems work as intended when citizens encounter them.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has developed an extensive architecture for managing elections. This includes the Election Monitoring and Support Centre (EMSC), the INEC Citizens Contact Centre (ICCC), election technology and readiness-testing processes, observer accreditation and reporting mechanisms, election-security coordination structures, and a framework for the participation of persons with disabilities.

The EMSC tracks more than 35 electoral processes and over 700 key performance indicators across Green, Amber and Red monitoring zones, providing the Commission with information on election readiness, risks and implementation gaps. INEC describes the EMSC as an early-warning system and an enabler for mobilising response and mitigation measures.

The ICCC provides citizens with channels to submit enquiries, incident reports, complaints, and queries, and is intended to deliver real-time responses. INEC also maintains a formal system for accrediting domestic and international observers and recognises their right to observe polling and counting and to call irregularities to the attention of election officials.



The question before the Commission, therefore, is not whether these systems exist. The more important question is whether they are consistently translating into the experience citizens encounter at the point of participation.

Nigeria's recent off-cycle elections provide an important opportunity to answer this question before the 2027 General Elections. Unlike the 2027 national elections, off-cycle elections provide the Commission, political actors, civil society and citizens with opportunities to observe how electoral systems perform in specific contexts, identify recurring implementation gaps and make corrections before those systems are deployed at national scale.



Ufuoma Nnamdi-Udeh, ED EIE Nigeria at the Ekiti State Election Observers Mission

EiE Nigeria's experience across the 2026 off-cycle electoral cycle provides evidence from multiple points in this process. Four complementary sources inform this memo:



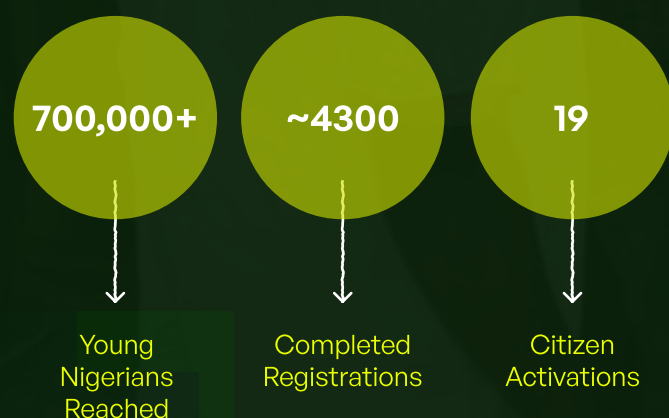
■ **The RSVP (Register, Select, Vote, Protect) Campaign**, through which EiE worked directly with INEC State offices in the South-West to reduce barriers citizens face in voter registration and participation.

■ **EiE's stakeholder engagements**, through which the organisation raised and discussed citizen-facing and electoral-process concerns with relevant institutions and stakeholders.

■ **EiE's observation of the Ekiti State Governorship Election**, which provided early field-level evidence of how electoral systems were functioning.

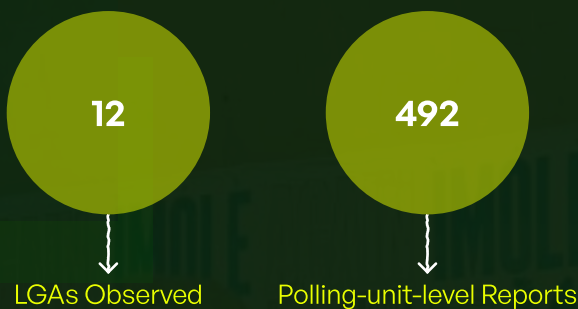
■ **EiE's observation of the Osun State Governorship Election**, which generated detailed polling-unit-level evidence of the implementation of INEC's systems during the latest major off-cycle governorship election before 2027.

The **RSVP (Register, Select, Vote, Protect)** campaign is EiE Nigeria's flagship voter mobilisation campaign, established in 2010 to support Nigerians in registering, becoming informed, and participating in elections. During the 2026 Register phase, the campaign conducted 19 citizen activations, reached more than 700,000 young Nigerians and supported approximately 4,300 completed voter registrations. EiE also provided continued support through its Call Centre and community WhatsApp networks, alongside sustained engagement with INEC at the state and federal levels.



Separately, EiE physically monitored the **Ekiti and Osun State off-cycle elections** as critical milestones in electoral readiness following the enactment of the 2026 Electoral Act and ahead of the 2027 General Elections. The Ekiti observation provided early evidence of operational and accessibility challenges, including difficulties with BVAS facial authentication for some elderly voters, gaps in access to voter information and documentation, questions processes between completion of Form EC8A and its publication on IReV, and accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities and other voters requiring assistance.

The experience from Ekiti was followed by EiE's observation of the **August 15, 2026 Osun State Governorship Election**. EiE deployed trained citizen observers across 12 Local Government Areas, supported by four accredited EiE staff participating through the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room. The exercise generated 492 polling-unit-level reports covering polling-unit readiness, accreditation, voting, technology, security, ballot secrecy, accessibility and counting.



The majority of polling units monitored were peaceful and orderly. However, the observation also identified recurring problems, including late arrival of election officials, materials or security personnel; BVAS and other technology failures; alleged vote buying; threats to ballot secrecy; accessibility gaps; and inconsistent responses to voter intimidation and violence.

These observations are not interpreted as statistically representative of every polling unit in Ekiti or Osun States, nor as establishing that any particular irregularity determined an election's outcome. They provide, however, specific field-level evidence of where citizens encountered difficulties during elections in which INEC's existing systems were intended to operate.

EiE Nigeria's central position is therefore that the effectiveness of electoral systems must ultimately be measured by what citizens experience at the point of participation.

The 2026 off-cycle electoral cycle gives INEC an opportunity to do more than document individual election-day incidents. It provides a basis for examining whether its existing systems detect problems early enough, respond effectively when problems occur, incorporate lessons from one election into the next, and translate institutional commitments into consistent citizen experiences.

With the 2027 General Elections approaching, the priority should be to convert these lessons from the off-cycle elections into practical improvements that can be tested, monitored and implemented before the national election.



Election Day Preparations at a Polling Unit in Osun State

SECTION 02



Why the Off-Cycle Elections Matter for 2027

Off-cycle elections should not be treated solely as isolated governorship contests. They are also opportunities to test electoral systems under real conditions before the greater and more complex demands of a General Election.

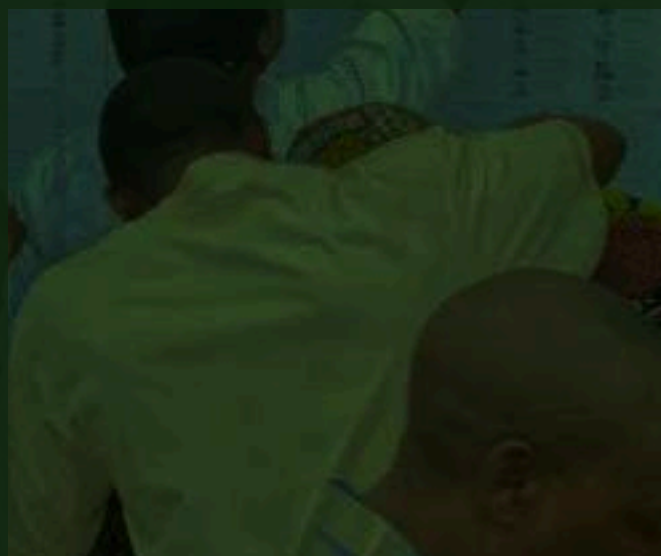
The 2026 Ekiti and Osun governorship elections provided two successive opportunities to examine how INEC's existing systems performed, including election readiness, voter accreditation, election technology, accessibility, security, ballot secrecy, results management and citizen engagement.

The value of these elections lies not only in the individual findings from each state, but also in what the sequence reveals.



Ekiti provided an early opportunity to identify operational challenges. Osun provided an opportunity to assess whether those lessons had translated into improved implementation, while also revealing additional gaps requiring attention before 2027.

EiE's RSVP campaign and stakeholder engagements provide a complementary perspective. They demonstrate the challenges citizens encounter before reaching the polling unit, including the need for practical information, registration support and accessible channels for resolving questions and concerns. The election observations then show how citizens experience the electoral system upon arriving at the polling unit.



Together, these four sources of evidence point to a common issue:

The effectiveness of an electoral system depends not only on the existence of procedures but also on whether those procedures are implemented consistently throughout the electoral cycle.

This is particularly important ahead of 2027. The General Elections will place significantly greater demands on INEC's personnel, technology, logistics, citizen support mechanisms, security coordination, and results management systems.

The lessons from the off-cycle elections therefore provide an opportunity to identify weaknesses while they remain manageable, test corrective measures and strengthen institutional processes before they are required to operate at national scale.

The Osun State Governorship Election is particularly significant in this broader process because it was the most recent major governorship election before the 2027 General Elections. It provides the most recent field-level evidence of how INEC's existing systems performed and therefore offers a useful basis for examining whether earlier lessons were incorporated and what additional improvements are required.

The purpose of this memo is not to suggest that the off-cycle elections demonstrate systemic failure. Rather, it is to identify the implementation gaps revealed across the electoral cycle and recommend how INEC can use the remaining period before 2027 to address, test and institutionalise improvements.



Citizens at a polling unit during the Osun State Governorship Election



What the Off-Cycle Experience Reveals

EiE's experience across the 2026 electoral cycle suggests that the key challenge ahead of 2027 is not necessarily the absence of electoral systems, but the consistency, responsiveness and institutional learning associated with those systems.

01 ▪ Systems must be tested against actual citizen experience.

The RSVP campaign demonstrated that citizens respond to practical support when barriers to electoral participation are identified and addressed. The election observations subsequently demonstrated that participation does not end with registration. Citizens must still be able to access polling units, complete accreditation, vote freely and safely, and have confidence in the processes that follow.

02 ▪ Lessons from one off-cycle election must inform the next.

The Ekiti election provided early evidence of challenges involving BVAS authentication, voter information, accessibility, and the results process. The recurrence of certain operational challenges in Osun underscores the importance of ensuring that post-election findings are systematically translated into subsequent testing, training, and deployment.

03 ▪ Institutional engagement must connect to implementation.

EiE's stakeholder engagements provided opportunities to raise concerns, seek clarification and engage institutions responsible for different parts of the electoral process. Such engagements are most valuable when concerns raised by citizens and civil society can be connected to operational decisions, corrective action and subsequent assessment.

04 ▪ Independent observation should contribute to institutional learning.

The 492 polling-unit-level reports generated during the Osun election provide detailed evidence of what happened at the point of participation. This evidence, together with credible reports from the Civil Society ecosystem, while not replacing INEC's own data or internal assessments, can complement them and help identify issues that may warrant further review.

The remainder of this memo drills down into the Osun observation as the most recent and detailed field-level test of these systems.

Evidence from the Osun Election

A

■ Election Readiness: From Monitoring to Response

EiE observers reported instances in parts of Osogbo, Ife Central, and Olorunda where election officials, materials, or security personnel arrived after the scheduled start of voting, with voters already waiting.

This represents a concern given the relatively strong logistics performance recorded during the 2022 Osun governorship election. Yiaga Africa reported that in 2022, INEC officials had arrived at 78% of observed polling units by 7:30 a.m., and 96% had commenced accreditation and voting by 9:30 a.m.

INEC's existing EMSC is specifically designed to monitor electoral activities and key performance indicators, provide visibility into election readiness, identify implementation gaps and support early response. INEC's 2023 General Election Report also shows that the EMSC monitored the deployment of personnel and materials to polling units, the opening and closing of polls, accreditation, counting and collation, as well as other readiness indicators.

The Osun observations therefore raise a practical question:

78%

↓
INEC officials arrived
by 7:30am

96%

↓
Accreditation by
9:30am

2022 Osun comparison — Yiaga Africa



What did INEC's existing readiness systems record about these delays, and what explains the apparent gap between the logistics performance recorded in 2022 and the delays observed in 2026?



Polling unit activity during the Osun State Governorship Election

EiE recommends that INEC:

Review the performance of its existing election-readiness and early-warning mechanisms against polling-unit-level evidence from Osun, and incorporate the identified gaps into its 2027 deployment, monitoring, and escalation procedures.

A post-election review should examine:

- What caused the reported delays;
- Whether they were identified before voting commenced;
- What escalation or response was triggered;
- How long it took to resolve the problem; and
- Whether the causes point to changes required in deployment planning for 2027.

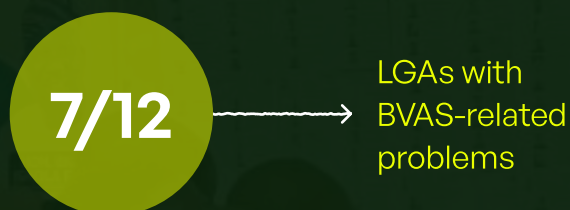
The purpose is not simply to document late openings after the fact. It is to determine whether the Commission's readiness architecture is sufficiently sensitive and responsive to problems as they occur.



Voters participating in the electoral process during the Osun State Governorship Election

B Election Technology: Learning From Specific Failure Modes

EiE observers reported BVAS-related problems in **seven of the 12 LGAs observed**.



The reported problems included devices failing to start, interruptions during accreditation, slow processing, and difficulty capturing facial data from elderly voters. Observers also reported faulty thumbprint pads at two polling units in Ife Central.

Similar BVAS-related challenges were reported during the Ekiti governorship election earlier in the year, including difficulties with facial and fingerprint authentication, device malfunctions, and accreditation delays.

The recurrence of these issues in Osun, despite INEC having had the opportunity to identify and address them following the Ekiti election, raises questions about how effectively lessons from the earlier election were incorporated into subsequent BVAS testing and deployment.

INEC has an established process for configuring and testing BVAS before elections.

In February 2026, the Commission conducted a mock accreditation exercise across 289 polling units in the FCT as part of election preparedness. Ahead of the August 2026 Osun State governorship election, INEC also

conducted a mock accreditation exercise across 36 polling units in 12 LGAs, using the exercise to identify and resolve BVAS issues before election day. INEC has also used mock exercises and practical BVAS training in previous elections



The issue raised by the Osun evidence is therefore not whether INEC tests its election technology, but whether the specific failure conditions experienced in the field, either during voter accreditation or results management, are being systematically captured and fed back into subsequent testing, configuration and deployment decisions.

A system can perform successfully under general test conditions and still encounter difficulties in specific field conditions. The Osun observations provide examples that should be incorporated into this learning process.

EiE recommends that INEC:

1. Conduct a structured technical review of technology failures reported during the Osun election.
2. Categorise failures by device, location, stage of accreditation and type of failure.
3. Determine whether recurring failure patterns existed.
4. Assess whether failures were associated with equipment, deployment, power, connectivity, operator competence or other operational conditions.
5. Incorporate identified failure modes into future mock accreditation and technical stress-testing exercises.
6. Communicate, at an appropriate level, the corrective actions arising from the review.

The objective is to ensure that documented failure modes become inputs into the next round of testing, training and deployment.



Citizens at a polling unit during the Osun State Governorship Election



Citizen Complaints: From Reporting to Institutional Learning

Citizens need practical channels to report problems during elections and to receive information or assistance.

EiE's RSVP experience demonstrated the value of sustained citizen support through its Call Centre and community WhatsApp networks. During the Osun election, EiE observers subsequently documented problems involving technology, delays, accessibility and voter intimidation.

INEC already operates the **INEC Citizens Contact Centre (ICCC)**. The Commission

describes the ICCC as a daily Situation Room that provides the public with access to real-time responses to enquiries, incident reports, complaints and queries concerning the electoral process.

The existence of this channel creates an opportunity for greater institutional learning.

For example, an aggregated review of reports received during an election could help INEC identify recurring problems, distinguish isolated incidents from systemic issues and determine where corrective action is required.

EiE recommends that INEC:

Publish or otherwise make available an aggregated post-election assessment of citizen complaints and incident reports received during the Osun election, subject to appropriate confidentiality and ongoing-investigation requirements.

Where feasible, the assessment should indicate:

- Major categories of complaints;
- Volume of reports received;
- Issues escalated to relevant departments or agencies;
- Resolution status;
- Recurring issues; and
- Corrective measures arising from the reports.

This would make citizen feedback a more visible input into post-election review and institutional learning.

D ■ Inclusivity & Accessibility: Implementing Existing Commitments

EiE observers documented accessibility challenges in Olorunda and Ejigbo, including physically inaccessible polling locations and instances where EC40H forms were unavailable to voters requiring assistance.

INEC already has a **Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process**, adopted in 2018. The Commission identifies accessible polling units and assistive devices as measures to promote participation by persons with disabilities.

INEC's election-official materials also provide procedures for assisting voters with disabilities and require relevant information to

be captured through election forms.

The Osun evidence therefore points to a question of implementation, but also of planning:



Does INEC have sufficiently disaggregated data on voters with disabilities to anticipate their needs and make appropriate arrangements at the polling-unit level?

EiE recommends that INEC:

Undertake a review of its existing accessibility framework and implementation ahead of 2027, including:

- Review and segment voter-register data, where disability information has been voluntarily provided, to identify polling units with registered voters with disabilities and enable targeted accessibility arrangements;
- Assess polling units where physical access remained a problem and make necessary adjustments ahead of 2027;
- Ensure required assistance materials, including EC40H forms, are available at polling units where they may be needed;
- Assess whether polling officials understand their responsibilities for assisting voters with disabilities;
- Determine whether identified accessibility challenges were known before election day and, where applicable, why they were not addressed; and

- Identify corrective measures for logistics, polling unit preparation, and official training ahead of the 2027 General Elections.

INEC should also convene consultative engagements with organisations working in the area of inclusion and other relevant stakeholders to identify practical measures for making the electoral process more inclusive.

Given that the existing accessibility framework was adopted in 2018, a review of the framework's effectiveness and continued relevance is also warranted.

The objective should be to move from a general commitment to accessibility to **data-informed, polling-unit-level preparation**, ensuring that where INEC has information indicating that voters with disabilities are registered at a polling unit, appropriate arrangements are made to enable their participation.



Polling unit activity during the Osun State Governorship Election

E ■ Ballot Secrecy and Voter Protection: Consistency at the Polling Unit

EiE observers documented instances in Ilesha East, Ilesha West, among others, where party agents or suspected loyalists pressured or monitored voters' ballot choices.

In Atakumosa West, observers reported voters being assaulted by thugs while police and NSCDC personnel were present but did not intervene. In Olorunda, observers reported a contrasting instance in which security personnel responded promptly to a comparable threat and made an arrest.

INEC's election-official guidance establishes

roles of party agents, observers and security personnel. Party agents are not permitted to interfere in the conduct of polls, while security agents are responsible for maintaining security at polling stations and ensuring that voting and counting take place without disturbance or threat to peace.

The contrasting observations from Osun suggest that the challenge is not simply the absence of rules, but **consistency in their application and response**.

EiE recommends that INEC:

Use the Osun incidents as part of its post-election review of election-day protection and security coordination, examining:

- How polling officials identify and respond to interference with ballot secrecy;
- How incidents involving voter intimidation are documented and escalated;
- Whether existing election-security procedures were followed;
- Where coordination between election officials and security personnel broke down; and
- What lessons should inform 2027 training and inter-agency planning.

INEC should undertake this review through its existing election-security coordination structures, including the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES). INEC's own materials emphasise the importance of rapid response, communication and coordination among security agencies during elections.

Where incidents fall within the operational or prosecutorial mandate of security agencies, INEC should refer to and follow up with the relevant agency, rather than substitute its role for that of the agency.

Voter protection is meaningful only when the rules protecting voters are consistently applied at the polling unit.



Voters at a polling unit during the August 15, 2026 election



■ Vote Buying: Strengthening Documentation and Follow-Through

EiE observers reported alleged vote buying in **five of the 12 LGAs observed**, with Irepodun recording the most concentrated activity. Some observer reports described the activity as “massive”, while others reported suspected use of digital payment channels.

These observer reports should not be treated as established criminal findings without investigation. They nonetheless warrant attention because vote buying undermines the principle of free choice at the ballot box.



The relevant institutional question is not simply whether allegations are reported, but whether credible reports are documented, referred to the appropriate authorities and incorporated into future election planning and prevention strategies.

EiE recommends that INEC:

Within the limits of its legal mandate and without prejudicing ongoing investigations, **provide an aggregated account of electoral-offence reports relating to vote buying received during the Osun election**, including where feasible:

- Categories and volume of reports;
- Referrals to relevant enforcement agencies;
- Geographic patterns in reported incidents; and
- Lessons identified for future election planning.

INEC should also use documented patterns from Osun to inform its engagement with relevant enforcement agencies through existing election-security structures ahead of 2027.

Reporting an electoral offence is the beginning of an accountability chain. Its value depends on what happens after the report is made.



Voters participating in the electoral process in Osun State Governorship Election



Citizen Observation: Turning Independent Evidence Into Institutional Learning

EiE generated 492 polling-unit-level reports during the Osun election.

492

→ Polling-unit-level reports

The observation took place within INEC's established accreditation framework. INEC's 2026 process for the Osun governorship election required observer organisations to submit documentation and deploy accredited field observers in accordance with its prescribed procedures.

INEC also expressly recognises that accredited observers have the right to observe the voting and counting processes and to bring irregularities to the attention of election officials.

The opportunity, therefore, is to strengthen the **feedback loop between observation and institutional learning**.

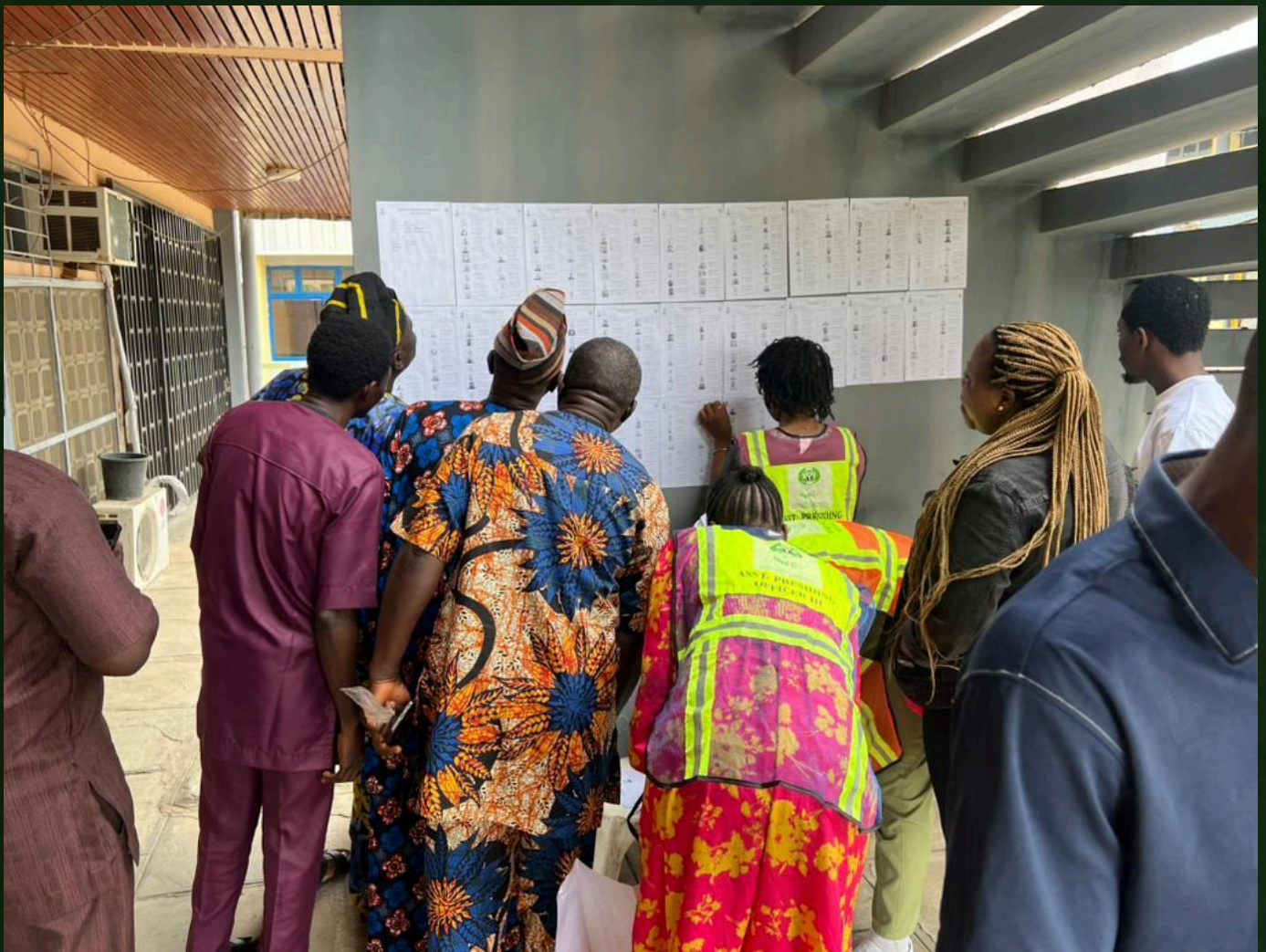
EiE does not expect INEC to accept every observation or recommendation made by civil society. Rather, credible observer evidence should have a clear pathway into the Commission's post-election assessment.

EiE recommends that INEC:

Establish a more structured post-election feedback process for accredited observer organisations, through which submitted findings can be:

- Received and acknowledged;
- Categorised by issue;
- Assessed against INEC's own election data;
- Referred to relevant departments where necessary; and
- Considered as part of post-election reviews and preparation for subsequent elections.

Independent observation is most valuable when evidence generated in the field can contribute to institutional learning while preserving the observer's independence.



Election-day preparations at a polling unit in Osun State



Priority Actions for INEC Ahead of 2027

Based on the evidence from the 2026 off-cycle electoral cycle, with particular attention to the detailed Osun observation, EiE Nigeria recommends that INEC prioritise the following actions:

01 ▪ Test the performance of existing readiness systems against Osun evidence

Review polling-unit-level reports of delayed opening from Osun alongside EMSC and operational data to determine whether readiness risks were identified and appropriately addressed.

More broadly, INEC should compare readiness performance across the 2026 off-cycle elections to identify recurring logistical and operational gaps.

02 ▪ Feed off-cycle technology failures into 2027 testing

Conduct a mock technology exercise by November 2026 as part of INEC's election-readiness protocol, open the exercise to independent observation, and publish the results and lessons as part of its commitment to transparency and accountability.

Publish the election results management protocol, clearly defining what constitutes a technical failure or glitch and the procedures for uploading and verifying results at the Polling Unit, Ward and Collation Centre levels.

03 ▪ Make citizen feedback part of post-election learning

Produce an aggregated assessment of citizen complaints and incident reports received through existing INEC channels during the Osun election, including recurring issues and corrective actions.

The Commission should also consider how lessons from citizen-facing engagements during the off-cycle period can be incorporated into its broader voter-support and communication systems ahead of 2027.

04 ▪ Assess implementation of existing accessibility measures

Review polling-unit-level accessibility challenges against INEC's existing PWD framework, procedures and deployment arrangements and address identified gaps before 2027.

05 ▪ Strengthen consistency in voter protection and security coordination

Review reported incidents of voter intimidation, violence and interference with ballot secrecy against existing election-day procedures and security arrangements, and incorporate lessons into 2027 inter-agency planning and training.

06 ▪ Strengthen the observer feedback loop

Create a structured mechanism through which accredited observer findings can be acknowledged, assessed against INEC's own data and considered in post-election reviews and future election preparation.

07 ▪ Institutionalise off-cycle learning before 2027

Use the 2026 off-cycle elections as a formal learning cycle by documenting lessons from Ekiti and Osun, identifying recurring implementation gaps, assigning responsibility for corrective actions and testing those corrections before the 2027 General Elections.

Call to Action



EiE Nigeria respectfully urges INEC to:

Use the 2026 off-cycle electoral cycle, and particularly the Osun State Governorship Election, as an opportunity for evidence-based institutional learning ahead of the 2027 General Elections.

01 ▪ Review the findings in this memo against INEC's internal operational, technology, readiness, security and citizen-feedback data from the 2026 off-cycle elections, including Ekiti and Osun.

02 ▪ Identify specific implementation gaps and the corrective actions required before the 2027 election cycle.

03 ▪ Communicate, at an appropriate level, the key lessons and corrective measures arising from the review.

04 ▪ Strengthen the mechanisms through which credible citizen and accredited observer evidence contributes to post-election assessment and future election preparation.

05 ▪ Convene an engagement with EiE Nigeria and relevant civil society organisations to review the detailed observation findings and discuss their implications for 2027.



Election day preparations at a polling unit in Osun State

Conclusion



Nigeria does not enter the 2027 election cycle without electoral systems in place. INEC has developed robust mechanisms for election readiness and monitoring, citizen complaints, election technology, observer accreditation, accessibility, and election security coordination. The Commission's own materials demonstrate the breadth of this architecture.

The experience of Nigeria's recent off-cycle elections raises a different and more consequential question:



Are these systems working consistently enough at the point where citizens encounter them?

EiE's experience during the 2026 off-cycle electoral cycle provides four complementary perspectives on this question.

- The **RSVP campaign** demonstrates that citizens can be mobilised to take meaningful steps towards electoral participation when barriers are reduced, and practical support is available.
- The **Ekiti observation** provided early field-level evidence of challenges affecting voter accreditation, information, accessibility and other aspects of election-day implementation.

- EiE's **stakeholder engagements** provided opportunities to raise citizens' concerns, engage with relevant institutions, and understand how issues identified across the electoral cycle connect to institutional processes.

- The **Osun observation** then provided detailed polling-unit-level evidence of how these systems performed during the latest major off-cycle governorship election before 2027.

The evidence does not establish that Nigeria's electoral system failed everywhere. Nor does it suggest that the existence of INEC's systems is itself the problem.

Instead, it identifies specific points at which citizens' experiences did not always align with the systems and safeguards intended to support them.



The significance of the off-cycle elections lies not simply in what happened in Ekiti or Osun. It is whether the lessons from these elections are captured, acted upon and tested before the next election.

This is the opportunity before 2027.

The priority should be to use evidence from the 2026 off-cycle electoral cycle to assess what worked, identify where existing systems did not perform as intended, and make the necessary corrections while there is still time to apply and test them before the 2027 General Elections.

The transition from 2026 to 2027 should

therefore be a transition from observation to institutional learning; from identifying problems to correcting them; and from having systems on paper to ensuring that citizens experience them in practice.

Citizens are being asked to participate in Nigeria's democracy.

The electoral system must be ready when they do, and INEC has both the mandate and the unique positioning to ensure this.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Ufuoma Nnamdi-Udeh

ufuoma@eienigeria.org | +234(0)8128217924

Executive Director, Enough is Enough Nigeria

Elisabeth Agbiti-Douglas

eagbiti-douglas.nyff@leapafrika.org

Program Director, LeapAfrica Nigeria Youth Future Fund

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