

April 24, 2026

JOINT STATEMENT ON ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HELD IN BENIN ON APRIL 12, 2026

Introduction

The West African Election Observers Network (**WAEON**), in collaboration with the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (**WADEMOS**), in fulfilment of their objective to promote credible, transparent, and peaceful elections within the West African sub-region, embarked on an election observation mission to Benin. The joint mission collaborated with WAEON member organization Cadre d'Appui aux Processus Electoraux (CAPE), which facilitated the accreditation process and coordination of observers of the mission. The mission met with various stakeholders, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other development partners. The mission also examined the legal framework, including the electoral code and the December 1990 Constitution of the Republic of Benin, amended in March 2024 and December 2025. These documents provide the rules and regulations for the conduct of the April 2026 presidential election.

This statement provides an overview of the observation of the April 12, 2026 presidential election by the joint observer mission.

Background of the Presidential Election

The 2026 presidential election in Benin took place within an evolving constitutional and electoral framework shaped by recent reforms, which provided the legal and institutional basis for the conduct of the election.

Legal Framework

The legal framework for the 2026 presidential election is defined by the Constitution and the Electoral Code, both of which have undergone significant reforms in recent years.

A constitutional amendment adopted in 2025 introduced important institutional changes, including provisions for a transition to a bicameral legislature with the creation of a Senate alongside the National Assembly. However, this reform had not yet been operationalized at

the time of the April 2026 presidential election, and the National Assembly remains the functioning legislative body.

The 2025 constitutional revision also extends the presidential term from five (5) years to seven (7) years, while maintaining the constitutional limit of two terms.

In addition, the Electoral Code provides for a sponsorship (endorsement) requirement for presidential candidates. Under the revised framework, candidates must obtain the endorsement of at least 15% of elected officials (Members of Parliament and/or mayors), with provisions for geographic distribution. This requirement represents an increase from earlier thresholds and has significant implications for candidate eligibility and electoral competitiveness.

Electoral Environment

The environment leading up to the election was generally calm. However, the mission observed that the campaign landscape was characterized by greater visibility of campaign materials for the ruling party candidate.

The mission observed that the candidate sponsorship framework plays a significant role in shaping electoral competition and candidate eligibility. It further noted instances of coordination among political stakeholders in meeting endorsement requirements, underscoring the importance of ongoing efforts to strengthen transparency and public confidence in the process.

Ahead of the election, Benin's legislative election held in January had produced an absolute majority for the ruling party coalition after the opposition failed to garner the required 20% of votes from all electoral constituencies in the country.

Election Day Observation

The joint mission deployed two teams on Election Day, with one team covering selected rural polling stations and the other focusing on urban areas, in order to ensure balanced geographic coverage of the voting process.

Overall, the mission observed that voting took place in a generally peaceful, orderly, and procedurally compliant environment, consistent with the provisions of the Electoral Code of



Benin, which stipulates opening and closing times, voting procedures, and safeguards for ballot secrecy.

Set-Up, Opening, and the Polling

The mission noted that:

- The majority of the observed polling stations visited opened on time (07:00 hours) as prescribed by the Electoral Code, while a small number opened with slight delays (between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m.).
- All essential election materials were available at the polling stations visited.
- Polling stations were staffed in accordance with procedures, with an average of three (3) polling officials per station.
- The design and layout of polling stations generally ensured the secrecy of the ballot, in line with the Electoral Code.
- Voter lists were displayed at all polling stations visited, supporting voter identification and facilitating access to designated voting locations. The registers were organized alphabetically by surname, consistent with established administrative practice.
- Polling stations observed were generally accessible to persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- While the ruling party deployed agents in every polling station observed, agents of the other political party were absent in some of the observed polling stations.
- Voting procedures were generally well observed, and the environment remained calm and orderly throughout the day.
- In some observed polling stations, the mission noted low voter turnout across polling stations, with limited queue formation throughout the day.
- There were no acts of violence, public demonstrations, or intimidation observed inside or near polling stations, and voting proceeded smoothly and without disruption of voting at any point at the polling stations observed.

Closing & Counting:

- The statutory voting period of nine (9) hours was largely respected in the observed polling stations.
- All voters present at closing time were allowed to vote in the observed polling stations.
- At the observed polling stations, counting commenced immediately after closing and was conducted publicly.

Presence of Security Personnel

The Security officers were present at all polling stations observed. In some of the polling stations security officers were armed, however in the majority of the polling stations security officers were unarmed, and they were discreet and non-threatening.

Gender and Youth Representation

In the majority of the polling stations observed, there was a good representation of women and youth as polling officials and as Chairs of the polling stations. This demonstrates commendable gender inclusion in Benin's electoral administration and reflects positive progress toward equitable participation in electoral management structures.

Recommendations

- ❖ The mission encourages the Electoral Management Body, civil society organisations, and relevant State institutions to intensify targeted civic and voter education programmes. These efforts should focus on improving citizen awareness, addressing apathy, and strengthening confidence in the electoral process, particularly among first-time voters.
- ❖ The mission recommends continued dialogue among political and electoral stakeholders on measures that promote a more inclusive and competitive electoral environment. In particular, attention should be given to the practical implications of candidate eligibility and sponsorship requirements to ensure that they are implemented in a manner that supports broad political participation in line with constitutional principles.

Conclusion

The joint election observation mission of WAEON and WADEMOS commends the generally peaceful, orderly, and procedurally sound conduct of the April 12, 2026 presidential election in Benin. In the polling stations observed, voting and counting were carried out in line with the Electoral Code, with timely opening in most locations, adequate materials, proper staffing, and no incidents of violence or intimidation. The presence of security personnel was appropriate

and largely non-intrusive. The mission also notes the participation of women and youth in polling administration.

However, the mission observed relatively modest voter turnout. Recent legal and institutional reforms, particularly on candidate sponsorship requirements, continue to shape the competitiveness and inclusiveness of the electoral process and require sustained stakeholder dialogue to ensure they promote broad political participation.

The mission concludes that the election was conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner in the observed areas, while further efforts are needed to strengthen inclusiveness, participation, and public confidence in future electoral processes.

Signed:

In: Cotonou, Benin

James Lahai

Chairman

West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) and Head of Mission

About WAEON

The West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) is an independent, non-partisan and non-religious organization that aims at strengthening and supporting Citizens' Election Observation Groups (CEOGs) in the sub-region. WAEON comprises independent and non-partisan CEOGs in West Africa that subscribe to the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations. Established in 2010, the Network seeks to strengthen the technical capacities and provide moral support to member organizations to conduct non-partisan citizen election observation, champion electoral reform and advocacy to promote credible elections in their respective countries.

About WADEMOS

WADEMOS is an independent and non-partisan Network of diverse national and transnational civil society organizations and civic groups working to promote and defend democracy, good governance, and inclusive development in the West Africa region. WADEMOS mobilizes, coordinates, and leverages the collective voice and power of civil society and other pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the West Africa region to advance its mission. The current membership of WADEMOS stands at 47 spread across West Africa. The WADEMOS Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana.

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