

CENTRE FOR TRANSPARENCY ADVOCACY (CTA)

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE OBSERVATION OF THE CONDUCT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS HELD ON 25TH FEBRUARY 2023

The Presidential and National Assembly Elections held across Nigeria on the 25th February 2023.

The elections held as scheduled, despite the relative state of insecurity across the country and attacks on at least 52 INEC facilities since 2019 in different locations across the country. Other acts of violence reported in the run up to the elections include the assassination of aspirants and abduction of party stalwarts, disruptions of party campaign events and other acts of violence which created a general climate of fear and uncertainty in the build up to the elections.

However, despite these challenges, CTA noted the efforts of INEC and its officials to perform its constitutional duties of conducting the elections as scheduled.

Recall that in our pre-election assessment, we raised concerns on the preparedness of INEC, logistics, security, and the role of political actors in delivering a free, fair, credible, inclusive and conclusive elections.

The following are the preliminary findings from our field observers deployed across the country:

Time of arrival of INEC Officials and materials/ Commencement of voting

Reports from our field observers deployed indicated that INEC officials and materials generally did not arrive on time at the majority of polling units observed. Although, INEC proposed commencement of accreditation is for 8:30am, on the average, polling officials and materials did not arrive the polling units before 10:30am. As a result of the late arrival of INEC officials and voting materials, the commencement of voter accreditation and voting started after the 8.30am.

However, reports from our observers across 982 polling units so far reported across the country, showed that INEC officials and materials arrived between 7am and 8:30am in 53 percent of the polling units.

The late arrival of INEC officials necessitated the need for the setup of the polling units to be hurriedly done and this, in some cases, made the polling officials to forget to properly brief the electorates on the proper voting procedures.

Presence/performance of Security Agents

While security personnel were expected to be on ground before the commencement of the voting process, our observers noted that in most of the polling units, security personnel were not present until about 9 - 10am. On the average, there were about 4 security personnel in

most of the polling units where our observers were deployed. Generally, observers reported that the security personnel behaved and conducted themselves professionally.

Voter Turnout/ Conduct of Voters

Voter turnout was generally impressive. In most cases, voters came out earlier than the arrival of INEC officials, materials and security personnel. They mostly conducted themselves peacefully and in accordance with voting guidelines.

Performance of BVAS/Conduct of INEC Officials

Our observers reported that INEC officials in line with the electoral guidelines gave preferences to pregnant women, nursing mothers, PLWDs and the elderly. However, our observers also noted that in some cases, INEC ad hoc staff demonstrated insufficient familiarity with the operation of the BVAS. Observers reported that wrong codes and poor network were some of the challenges faced by the ad-hoc staff

Reports from our observers across 982 polling units showed that the BVAS worked well in 76 percent of the polling units. However, there were reported cases of Ad hoc staff not uploading results at the end of polls as stipulated in the guidelines.

Conduct of Political Parties/ Political Party Agents

Reports from the field indicated in some parts of the country, that political parties and their agents were observed to be involved in acts of intimidation and harassment of voters, especially those suspected to be sympathetic to candidates other than theirs. In some of the these cases, these acts were perpetrated in full public glare and in the presence of security personnels.

Vote Buying and Selling and Other Malpractices

Reports from observers indicate that the incidence of open vote buying and selling assumed a new dimension, cash transfers, food vouchers, name and account details collation. This in our view, may not be unconnected with the deployment of the BVAS for the elections and possibly, the effect of the naira redesign policy. Given the mutative nature of vote buying and selling, the phenomenon appears far from being eradicated from the polity.

Violence

In addition to acts of intimidation and harassment, there were cases of violence reported from some states in the country. These include physical injuries and destruction of voting materials.

Conclusion

As the collation process and election in places where elections were rescheduled continue, we urge all stakeholders to continue to conduct themselves in a peaceful and responsible manner. Specifically, we call on INEC to hold itself to the highest level of neutrality and accountability