

CENTRE FOR TRANSPARENCY ADVOCACY (CTA) PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE OBSERVATION OF THE CONDUCT OF THE BAYELSA, IMO AND KOGI STATES GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS HELD ON NOVEMBER 11TH 2023

Owerri: November 11, 2023

Gentlemen of the Press

Introduction

The Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states Gubernatorial election, one of the off-circle elections in Nigeria's electoral calendar held on November 11th 2023. The off-circle election was foreshadowed by controversies following the conduct and results of the Presidential elections.

The election however, presented the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with another opportunity to consolidate on the gains made during the February general election and also show to the Nigerian people and indeed the entire world its commitment to continue to conduct credible, free and fair elections in Nigeria.

According to statistics from INEC; Total registered voters for the three states, 5,409,438. For Bayelsa, 1,056,862, Imo 2,419,922, and Kogi 1,932,654 respectively. Total number of PVCs collected 5,169,692- Bayelsa 1,017,613, Imo – 2,318,919, Kogi- 1,833,160. The total number of LGAs in these states is 56. Bayelsa has 8 LGAs, 27 in Imo and 21 in Kogi with a total of 10510 polling units; 2244 for Bayelsa, 4758 for Imo and 3508 for Kogi. However, voting did not happen in 40 polling units, 38 in Imo and 2 in Bayelsa as it recorded no voters.

CTA pre-election activities

In line with our usual practice, the CTA situated its Situation Room in Owerri to liaise with our observers and coordinators in the other states of Bayelsa and Kogi. Prior to this election, we held stakeholders meetings across the three states. We held stakeholders meeting in Imo, Kogi and Bayelsa in October. At these meetings, we had robust conversations with the diverse critical stakeholders including security agencies, media and traditional leaders.

The CTA trained and deployed 212 independent observers who were accredited to observe the election across the length and breadth of the three states of Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi States. These observers were trained on Election Observation and adherence to INEC Election Guidelines.

This preliminary statement therefore represents our initial observations on the conduct of the election.

Logistics

Our field observers report indicated that polling officials arrived early in most of the polling units, with many of the polling units opening around 8.30am This is an indication of improvement with regards to election logistics arrangement on the part of INEC. We hope this improvement will be consolidated upon in off-circle election in Edo and future elections.

Presence/performance of Security Agents

Our observers' report indicated that security agents generally arrived early at the polling units and were professional in their conducts especially in the maintenance of law and order. We further observed that there was synergy and networking among the various security agencies.

Voter Turnout/ Conduct of Voters

From our observers' report, voter turnout was generally low. The voter apathy is not unconnected with heightened fear of insecurity and poor voter education in the three states.

CTA observed that many voters showed lack of concern with governorship elections as compared to their enthusiastic turnout during the presidential election.

We therefore recommend that political parties and INEC improve on voters education. Voters must be educated to understand the importance of governorship elections.

CTA however, commends voters for their orderly and peaceful conduct during the election.

Performance of BVAS/Conduct of INEC Officials

From field reports, with few exceptions, BVAS worked perfectly well in the three states with voter accreditation taking between 1 to 3 minutes on the average. We also note that INEC made good its promise to deploy at least two BVAS machines in polling units where they have more than a thousand voters

On conduct of INEC the CTA notes with satisfaction the performance of INEC officials during the election. In most of the polling units covered by our observers, polling officials exhibited professionalism and knowledge of their duties. The lapses identified in previous elections can be traced to the deployment of untrained ad hoc staff. We encourage INEC to ensure that only trained ad hoc staff are deployed for subsequent elections.

As we give this preliminary report, 69.70% of results have been uploaded for Bayelsa. For Imo, 66.86% and Kogi 61.63% results have been uploaded as at 6:30pm

Vote Buying and Selling and Other Malpractices

Our observers reported that vote buying, and selling were rife with the major parties deploying new vote buying schemes/tactics to evade security operatives. Nigerians, the INEC, the Security

Agencies and other stakeholders need to work out measures to effectively address this ugly phenomenon. Political parties should be made to understand that encouraging vote buying is a criminal offence while the security agencies should make party officials liable for the vote buying activities of their agents.

Conduct of Political Parties/ Political Party Agents

Unfortunately, the political class continues to be the weakest link in our push for election reforms. The tendencies to manipulate the process through inducement and violence, still remains. We recommend that the Peace Accord usually signed by parties/candidates as mere ritual, be made justiciable. Parties and contestants must be made to swear to an affidavit using the peace accord.

Conclusion

We noted improvement with general conduct of the elections by INEC in the three states. So far, preliminary reports from iREV portal have been very encouraging. We hope that the peaceful atmosphere so far will be sustained until the competition of the process.

Thank you.

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