

FINAL STATEMENT ON OBSERVATION OF THE BAYELSA, IMO AND KOGI STATES GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION HELD ON NOVEMBER 11TH 2023 BY CENTRE FOR TRANSPARENCY ADVOCACY

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Preamble:

The Centre for Transparency Advocacy was duly accredited by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a domestic observer group for the aforementioned elections in the three states of Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi. The CTA observed the elections as that held on November 11, 2023.

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

As is customary, the CTA set up its Situation Room in Owerri to communicate with our coordinators and observers in Kogi and Bayelsa, the other two states. We convened stakeholder meetings in all three states before this election. In October, we gathered stakeholders in Imo, Kogi, and Bayelsa. We conducted in-depth discussions with a variety of important stakeholders at these meetings, including traditional leaders, the media, and security agencies.

The CTA deployed 212 independent observers who were authorized to observe the election throughout the entirety of the three states of Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi States. They were trained and sent out by the CTA. Equally, these observers received election observation training and instruction on following INEC election guidelines.

Therefore, this concluding report sums up our thoughts on how the election was handled.

Logistics

The CTA noted a remarkable improvement in the deployment of personnel and materials across the three states. Of note also is the early deployment of materials to hard-to-reach areas especially in Bayelsa State 24 hours ahead of the election. 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

According to the report from our observers, security personnel typically arrived early at the voting places and behaved professionally, particularly when it came to upholding law and order. We also noticed that the different security agencies were cooperating and networking with one another. However, several of the security staff stationed at polling places had a glaring "I don't care" attitude. This disregard for obvious electoral violations even in the face of such behavior is highly disturbing. In the majority of the polling units throughout the three states, this was apparent. This highlights the need of our ongoing fight for proactive policing, which includes arresting electoral offenders at polling places regardless of whether the Presiding Officer has approved of it or not.

Security agencies should also be well-versed in the functions of election observers. Even when poll observers are properly identified, they are frequently harassed by security personnel while performing their jobs or even while traveling to their duty posts. This incident was seen in Owerri along Wetheral Road, as well as at a few other locations around the three states.

Voter Turnout/ Conduct of Voters

Overall, poor voter turnout was reported by our observers. Out of the three states, Kogi State did register a somewhat higher voting participation. Raised fears of insecurity, "dashed expectations from the 2023 Presidential Election result," and inadequate voter education in the three states were all connected to the indifference among voters. Young people were primarily playing football as witnesses in the Orji neighborhood of Owerri North Local Government Area, Imo State, because they thought their ballots might not actually count.

Thus, we advise political parties and INEC to enhance voter education. It is necessary to educate voters about the significance of gubernatorial elections.

It is also apparent that voters are not utilizing the opportunity to transfer their card to the newly established polling units by INEC. Due to this, there was no deployment of voting materials and personnel distributed to any of the 38 polling units in Imo State and the two polling units in Bayelsa State that were among the newly created polling units by INEC.

Nonetheless, CTA applauds voters for their peaceful and orderly behavior throughout the election.

Performance of BVAS/Conduct of INEC Officials

According to field reports, BVAS operated flawlessly in all three states with very few exceptions, typically requiring one to three minutes for voter accreditation. We further observe that INEC fulfilled its commitment to place at least two BVAS devices in polling units with more than a thousand voters.

Regarding INEC's behavior, the CTA is pleased with how its representatives performed throughout the election. Poll workers demonstrated professionalism and a thorough understanding of their responsibilities in the majority of voting places that our observers visited. The use of inexperienced

ad hoc workers is the reason behind the flaws found in past elections. We urge INEC to make sure that, for future elections, only specially trained ad hoc employees are used.

We equally noted in our preliminary report on election day that , 69.70% of results were uploaded for Bayelsa. For Imo, 66.86% and Kogi 61.63% as at 6:30pm on November 11, 2023.

Vote Buying and Selling and Other Malpractices

In our elections, vote buying has solidified into a crime that involves the majority of political parties and their operatives. According to our observers, vote buying and selling were rampant, with the main parties using inventive vote-buying plans and strategies to elude law enforcement. The three states of Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi were all part of this unpleasant trend. The INEC, security agencies, Nigerians, and other interested parties must devise strategies to deal with this unpleasant occurrence. It is imperative that political parties acknowledge that incentivizing vote buying is illegal, and that security authorities hold party officials accountable for the vote-buying actions of their agents.

Conduct of Political Parties/ Political Party Agents

Regretfully, the political elite remains the most vulnerable component in our endeavor to introduce electoral changes. There are still inclinations to use violence and coercion to influence the process. We suggest making the Peace Accord, which is typically signed by parties or candidates as a formality, subject to legal proceedings. The peace treaty must be used to compel contestants and parties to swear to an affidavit.

Collation and Announcement of Result

The Independent National Electoral Commission has since announced the winners of the Gubernatorial Elections in the three states amid rejections by the opposition parties. Some fracas were witnessed at the various state collation centres climaxing in the forceful removal of the Labour Party agent in the Imo State Collation Centre after several entreaties by the State Returning Officer. The Centre for Transparency Agency does not support such treatment at all. However, party agents should act with decorum when protesting against perceived irregularity and channel their grievances through due process.

In Imo State, it was reported that results from some LGAs were collated and announced whereas there were claims that elections did not hold in such areas due to insecurity. Notably was Orsu LGA that returned results. It is important that INEC thoroughly investigates these results that it was alleged made without recourse to the BVAS to ensure transparency.

Recommendations and Conclusion

1. Vote trading (buying and selling) is constantly demeaning the small progress in the election process, therefore INEC, the Security Agencies, and other relevant parties must devise effective strategies to combat this unsightly occurrence.
2. INEC must continue to show transparency in the electoral process

3. INEC should retain the logistical strategies that worked well during these elections especially the early deployment of materials 24 hours prior to election date in hard-to-reach areas.
4. INEC should investigate irregularities noticed in these elections especially those on over pre-loaded BVAS and election result sheets. Significantly, INEC should investigate the election results from particularly Orsu LGA of Imo State.
5. Citizens are enjoined to take advantage of the newly created polling units and transfer to vote in less congested polling units in future elections.
6. Political parties should tutor their agents on proper conduct at polling units and collation centres. Equally, they should be abreast of INEC Election Guidelines and the Electoral Act.
7. Political parties should at all times mobilize voters instead of waiting to buy votes on election day. This could also reduce voter apathy as witnessed in these elections
8. Security agencies should also be well-versed in the functions of election observers

Conclusion

We noted improvement with general conduct of the elections by INEC in the three states. We hope that the peaceful atmosphere witnessed will be sustained as we look forward to Edo and Ondo States Governorship Elections in 2024...

Thank you.

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