

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON OBSERVATION OF THE EDO HELD SEPTEMBER 21, 2024 BY CENTRE FOR TRANSPARENCY ADVOCACY

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 21, 2024

Preamble:

The 2024 Edo state Gubernatorial election, the first in the round of off-cycle election in 2024, held on 21st September 2024. The election was preceded by reports of violence, incidences of hate speech by gladiators from across the major political parties. In addition, there was a report of the killing of a policeman.

The Centre for Transparency Advocacy was duly accredited by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a domestic observer group for the September election. The CTA dutifully observed the election held on September 21, 2024.

CTA Pre-Election Activities

As is customary, the CTA set up its Situation Room in Benin where real time reports from observers deployed were collated, analyzed, and cascaded in real time.

The CTA deployed 50 independent observers who observed the election throughout the 18 Local Government areas of the state. They were trained and sent out by the CTA. The training emphasized the importance of following INEC election guidelines.

The CTA in line with its traditional mode of engaging in the electoral process convened stakeholder meetings ahead of the September 21 election. The CTA conducted in-depth discussions with a variety of important stakeholders at these meetings, including INEC, security agencies, political parties, media, civil society organisations, religious leaders, leaders of traditional institutions and professional bodies.

Therefore, this preliminary statement sums up our findings on the election.

Logistics

The CTA noted early deployment of materials to hard-to-reach areas especially in Edo State 24 hours ahead of the election. Our field observers report indicated that polling in many of the polling units commenced around 9.00am. We hope the INEC will do better in the Ondo Gubernatorial and other future elections.

Presence/Performance of Security Agents

According to the report from our observers, security personnel typically arrived early at the voting places except in few instances like in Ward 7, unit 029 with 238 registered voters in Egor Local Government leaving the voters with no security. The security personnel behaved professionally, particularly when it came to upholding law and order.

However, several of the security staff stationed at various check point were overzealous. Our observers were harassed by some Police personnel on their way to polling units. We call on the leadership of

Security agencies to train their personnel on the role and importance of election observers. Even when poll observers are properly identified, they are frequently harassed by security personnel while performing their duties or even while traveling to their duty posts. This incident was seen in Benin along Sapele Road, as well as at a few other locations in the states.

Voter Turnout/ Conduct of Voters

Overall, poor voter turnout was reported by our observers. Raised fears of insecurity, "dashed expectations from the 2023 Presidential Election result", inadequate voter education, and the heavy downpour in the state were all connected to the indifference among voters.

We call on the political parties and INEC to enhance voter education. It is necessary to educate voters about the significance of elections.

Nonetheless, CTA applauds voters for their peaceful and orderly conduct throughout the election, many of whom came out despite the heavy downpour

Performance of BVAS/Conduct of INEC Officials

According to field reports, BVAS operated flawlessly in the state. Voters typically were accredited within two minutes.

With regards to INEC officials conduct, the CTA is pleased with the performance of the electoral officials 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 properly trained ad hoc employees are used.

Vote Buying and Selling and Other Malpractices

In our elections, vote buying is fast becoming a norm that involves majority of political parties and their operatives. In the Edo gubernatorial election, it was not any different. 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. Clear examples of vote buying were observed in Ward 6, Unit 7, Ikpoba Okha Local Government where a party was arrested by EFCC operatives with a cache of cash meant for vote buying. Also, in Ward 1, Unit 5, Esan North-East Local Government, a party loyalist was recorded to have publicly announced the payment of N20,000 to any voter who votes for his party's candidates.

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

Regrettably, the political elite remains the weakest link in our endeavor to introduce electoral reforms. The political parties are still inclined to use violence and coercion to influence the electoral process. In the Edo election, the parties again lived up to their negative reputation as seen in Ikpoba Okha Local Government (Ward 6, Unit 46) where ballot box was snatched by suspected political thugs. 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 of Results

We commend the functionality of the INEC Result Viewing Portal (I-ReV) in the Edo Gubernatorial Election. We do hope this will be replicated in the Ondo and other subsequent elections.

The real time uploading of results from the polling units help to strengthen public trust in the electoral process and in INEC as an institution. As at 4.21pm, 62 % of the results had been uploaded and available for public viewing

PWDs

We acknowledge the recruitment and deployment of persons with disabilities as ad hoc staff. We also acknowledge efforts made to ensure that PWDs find it easy to vote. However, it must be stated that despite the Resident Electoral Commissioner's engagement with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities last week Thursday 12th September, we noticed most of the polling centers were not disability friendly in terms of accessibility. Additionally, we noticed the absence of sign language interpreters for the deaf in most of the centres visited.

Recommendations and Conclusion

1. Vote trading (buying and selling) is constantly diminishing the small progress in the election process, therefore INEC, the Security Agencies, and other relevant parties must devise effective strategies to combat this unwholesome 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. There is also the need for INEC to increase the recruitment of PWDs, Sign language interpreters and also to carry out proper delimitation of polling units so as to evenly distribute PWDs to disability friendly polling units.
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 note the improvements the general conduct of the election by INEC. We hope that the peaceful atmosphere witnessed will be sustained as we look forward to Ondo State Governorship Election and other off-cycle elections.

Thank you.

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