

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON OBSERVATION OF THE ONDO STATE GOVERNORSHIP
ELECTION HELD NOVEMBER 16, 2024 BY CENTRE FOR TRANSPARENCY ADVOCACY
RELEASED NOVEMBER 16, 2024

Preamble:

The 2024 Ondo state Gubernatorial election, the second in the round of off-cycle election in 2024, held on 16th November 2024. The election was preceded by a general atmosphere of peace in the state, except a few reports of violence in Idanre local government area which led to seven persons being seriously injured. This is in addition to reported acts of destruction of campaign billboards and other publicity materials by supporters of rival parties. The Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA) had in our pre-election assessment report raised concern over this violence, and called on all stakeholders to ensure a peaceful election.

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 November 16, 2024.

CTA Pre-Election Activities

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

The CTA deployed 70 independent observers who observed the election throughout the 18 Local Government areas of the state. They were trained and assigned to specific PUs while the expert team were assigned to different LGAs where they observed by roaming across different PUs. The training emphasized the importance of following the constitution, Electoral Act 2022, INEC election guidelines and keeping to the observer's code of conduct.

The CTA in line with its traditional mode of engaging in the electoral process convened stakeholder meetings ahead of the November 16 election. The CTA conducted in-depth discussions with a variety of important stakeholders at these meetings, including security agencies, political parties, media, civil society organisations, and professional bodies.

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

Logistics

The CTA noted early deployment of materials. Our field observers report indicated that voting in many of the polling units commenced around 8:30am. We see this as an improvement over the just conducted Edo Election even though there were still some challenges, we hope that INEC will learn from this election and continue on this trajectory as logistics has been a major challenge in our elections.

However, at Akure South, from RAC 006, our observers report inadequate vehicles for transporting election materials, forcing ad-hoc staff to resort to use of motorcycles to transport Ad-hoc staff and materials. This in addition to other logistical materials that were not adequately provided for or not provided for including tables, chairs and event tents in voting units situated in open places.

Presence/Performance of Security Agents

According to the report from our observers, security personnel typically arrived early at the voting places. The security personnel behaved professionally, particularly when it came to upholding law and order as well as their relationship with election observers. We commend the DSS for their vigilance and professionalism that lead to the arrest of a vote buyer.

However, in a number of polling units such as St. James Ward 06, unit 004 in Akure South police officers were reported to be soliciting for money from party agents.

We call on the leadership of Security agencies to continue to train their personnel on their role and importance of their duties on election and how to maintain neutrality.

Voter Turnout/ Conduct of Voters

Overall, voter turnout was on the general, low as reported by our observers. We call on the political parties and INEC to continue to enhance voter education. It is necessary to educate voters about the significance of elections and their right to hire and fire. We commend the participation of the elderly in the process as was reported in Akure South RA 004; PU 006/007 where three elderly women aged

80,85 and 90 casted their votes. When asked for how long they had participated in voting, they explained that they have been voting since their youth and when asked why, they responded that they look forward to a better Nigeria. CTA applauds voters for their peaceful and orderly conduct throughout the election but frowns at their willingness to sell their votes.

Performance of BVAS/Conduct of INEC Officials

According to field reports, BVAS operated mostly flawlessly across the state. Voters typically were accredited within one minute, however, at Unit 026, Ward 5. Ala Close, Sijuede area of Akure South the BVAS machine was taking about 5 minutes to capture.

With regards to INEC officials conduct, the CTA is pleased with the performance of the ad hoc electoral officials throughout the election. Poll workers demonstrated professionalism and a thorough understanding of their responsibilities in the majority of polling units that our observers visited. We urge INEC to continue the practice of making sure that only trained adhoc staff are deployed for election duty.

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 Ondo gubernatorial election, it was not any different. According to our observers, vote buying and selling were rampant and brazen, despite the presence of security agents. In one instance at Ward 5, Unit 026 Akure South LGA, voters openly displayed their ballot papers to party agents after voting. The situation caused some rancour as other voters protested such action. Voting had to be suspended temporarily and police reinforcement was called in before the process could recommence. The same was observed in the two polling Units 025 A and B and Unit 026 Oke Aro/Uru, Ijoka area, where the polling booths became a bazaar of vote buying and selling.

At St Steven Anglican Primary School, PU 006 AND 007, RA 004, Akure South LG, our observer reported the arrest of a political party agent cum vote buyer with two bags of money and machete in his car.

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 political 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 coercion and vote buying to influence electoral outcomes. In the Ondo election, the parties again lived up to their negative reputation as seen in the impunity in their action on vote buying.

Our observers also reported that in majority of the polling units, many of the party agents were absent. In most cases, only party agents from two of the political parties were on ground. CTA had in our earlier statement noted the absence of some political parties' agents during inspection and the deployment of sensitive materials at the CBN. We are concerned with this nonchalant attitude of politicians/political parties towards ensuring the credibility of the process.

The critical importance of deploying party agents by political parties to monitor the electoral process, especially deployment of materials and election at polling units and eventual collation is important in our collective effort to boost electoral transparency. Political parties must play their part to ensure that we improve our electoral process.

Uploading of result on IReV

We commend the functionality of the INEC Result Viewing Portal (I-ReV) in the Ondo Gubernatorial Election. We do hope this will be replicated in 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 4.26pm, 60 % of the results had been uploaded and available for public viewing.

Recommendations and Conclusion

1. Vote trading (buying and selling) is constantly diminishing the small progress in the election process, therefore the Security Agencies must take the lead in

collaboration with other relevant parties in checkmating and devising 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. INEC must disaggregate PWDs according to disability for ease of application of assistive devices.

6. Citizens are enjoined to take advantage of the newly created polling units and transfer to vote in less congested polling units for future elections.

7. 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 in the general conduct of the election by INEC. We hope that the peaceful atmosphere witnessed will be sustained as we look forward to Anambra State Governorship Election and other off-cycle elections.

Thank you.

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