



Preliminary Statement on the March 2023 Governorship Election

Sunday, March 19th, 2023
Delivered at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja

1. Introduction

During the Saturday, March 18 governorship elections, Yiaga Africa deployed the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology to observe the elections in Benue, Delta and Kano States. A total of 900 stationary observers were deployed to a representative randomly sample of 300 polling units for each of the states, and 97 roving observers. With this methodology, Yiaga Africa can confidently assess the set-up of the polling unit, voter accreditation and voting, counting and independently verify official results for Benue, Delta and Kano states announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In addition to the PVT methodology, Yiaga Africa deployed 550 observers in the other 25 states where the governorship elections were conducted to observe the process and results collation.

This report is an update on the mid-day situational statement issued on election day.

2. General Observations

Yiaga Africa commends INEC for the significant improvement in the management of election logistics especially the early commencement of polls due to the prompt arrival of election officials in a majority of polling units. Unlike the February 25 presidential election, the INEC Election Results Viewing (IReV) portal functioned optimally enabling citizens to download polling unit-level results. Electronic accreditation using the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) was successfully implemented in a significant number of polling units observed by Yiaga Africa.

Yiaga Africa commends the resilience of voters for participating in the election despite the tense election climate, and trust deficit in the electoral process. The elections benefited from the vigilance and resilience of citizens who expressed determination to vote and reported cases of manipulation, violence and intimidation.

The governorship/state assembly elections were signposted with voter suppression, electoral violence, electoral impunity, vote buying and capture of the results management by political thugs in Delta, Lagos, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Kano, and Taraba states. Yiaga Africa is saddened by the cases of attacks on voters, INEC officials, journalists, election observers and personnel of the EFCC by political thugs. These stakeholders suffered grievous bodily harm and psychological trauma. Reports also indicate that at least eight fatalities were recorded within the last 24hrs. These election-related deaths are unacceptable and highly condemnable. It is important for security agencies to hold the political thugs and their sponsors accountable for these deaths and attacks.

Yiaga Africa condemns in unequivocal terms acts of voter suppression fuelled by ethnic profiling, political thuggery and desperation to secure electoral victory at all costs. In flagrant abuse of the constitution and the 2022 Electoral Act, registered voters and fellow citizens were denied the right to vote in some states. Voting is a constitutionally guaranteed right of voters that requires free and fair participation of all eligible voters in safe and secure environment. A denial of this right undermines the credibility of electoral outcomes. Yiaga Africa further condemns the cases of voter inducement reported across the country in the election as this act perpetuates electoral corruption and political inequality.

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3. Key Findings on Election Day Process in Benue, Delta and Kano

The preliminary statement is based on reports from 275 of 300 (91%) sampled polling units in Benue, 263 of 300 (87%) sampled polling units in Delta and 285 of 300 (95%) sampled polling units in Kano. Reports indicate that there was no voting in 3% of polling units in Delta state. The following are additional key observations on election day processes.

Deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

1. **The Functionality BVAS:** Yiaga Africa observed that the BVAS was deployed across all the polling units observed in Benue, Delta and Kano polling units.

In 88% of polling units in **Benue**, the BVAS functioned properly. However, in 10% of polling units, the BVAS malfunctioned, and it was fixed and in 1% of the polling units, it malfunctioned and was replaced.

In 88% of polling units in **Delta**, the BVAS functioned properly. However, in 11% of polling units, the BVAS malfunctioned, and it was fixed.

In 80% of polling units in **Kano** state, the BVAS functioned properly. However, in 19% of polling units, the BVAS malfunctioned, and it was fixed and in 1% of the polling units, it malfunctioned and was replaced.

Secrecy of the Ballot

2. **The Secrecy of Ballots:** In 5%, 9% and 21% of polling units in Benue, Delta and Kano states respectively, it was possible to see how a voter's ballot paper was marked. This data especially for Kano state correlates with the data on the absence of a voting cubicle in 32% of the polling units shared in our midday statement.
3. **The professionalism of Polling Officials and Party Agents:** Observers in over 6%, 7% and 3% of polling units in Benue, Delta and Kano respectively reported that INEC polling officials were unprofessional and partisan. In addition, observers in over 13%, 10% and 8% of polling units in Benue, Delta and Kano reported that security personnel were unprofessional and partisan.

Misconduct at the Polling Units

4. In 3%, 2%, and 5% of polling units in Benue, Delta and Kano respectively, voters were permitted to vote without accreditation with BVAS.
5. At 2%, 8% and 9% of polling units in Benue, Delta and Kano respectively, Yiaga Africa observers reported voter intimidation, harassment or assault during voting.

Counting

6. At 97%, 99% and 99% of polling units in Benue, Delta and Kano respectively, counting was done in the same location as accreditation and voting.

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4. Process findings from the other 25 states

Yiaga Africa also received additional reports on the conduct of the elections from the other 25 states from its 550 stationary and mobile observers, these includes:

1. **Deployment of the BVAS:** The BVAS was deployed across all the polling units observed by Yiaga Africa in the 25 states. In 16 polling units, the BVAS malfunctioned and INEC fixed or replaced the faulty devices. In 144 polling units, voters whose names were on the register of voters and absent on the BVAS were denied accreditation.
2. **Secrecy of the Ballots:** In 92 polling units, party agents could see how voters marked their ballot papers.
3. **Professional Conduct:** Yiaga Africa received reports that security personnel were unprofessional and partisan in 26 polling units observed. Yiaga Africa received reports that polling officials were unprofessional and partisan in 21 polling units observed.

5. Critical Incidents Reports

Over the course of Saturday, 18 March 2023 Election Day, Yiaga Africa verified 216 critical incidents witnessed by WatchingTheVote citizen observers. These included:

1. **Violent disruption of the process:** Yiaga Africa WTV observers reported hijack of election materials, and election personnel for Ward 10, Unit 2 in Emohua LGA of Rivers State by thugs. A similar incident was reported in Oshodi/Isolo LGA, Lagos state where armed thugs believed to be affiliated with the APC shot sporadically to disrupt the process in two PUs located inside Okota grammar school and five polling units in the Isolo community. In Lavun collation center, Niger state thugs destroyed all the results sheets from the wards. These disruptions led to the suspension of the process in these locations.

Yiaga Africa also received a report of the disruption of the collation process in Ahoada West LGA, in Rivers state. The Yiaga Africa observer assigned to the center was trapped inside the collation centre with the Electoral Officer after thugs fired gunshots at the centre. Similarly, political thugs numbering about 50 attacked polling units in Warri South LGA of Delta State and disrupted the voting process as they hunted for party agents and election observers in the community. In Oferekpe Igbegu ward 3 in Izzi LGA, Ebonyi State a political thug who attempted to disrupt the voting process using gunshots was apprehended and allegedly killed by security personnel.

2. **Ballot box snatching/destruction:** Yiaga Africa received 19 confirmed reports of snatching/destruction of ballot papers. For instance, armed thugs abducted INEC officials and snatched the ballot box for Unit 1, Ward 7 in Obia/Akpor LGA of Rivers State. Thugs also destroyed ballot papers during the counting of votes in Ungogo Special Primary School in Kano. In Fagei

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Central Store Polling Unit in Yemaltu Deba LGA of Gombe State, thugs believed to be affiliated with APC snatched election materials.

3. **Election suspension:** Yiaga Africa observers in Kwande LGA of Benue state reported discrepancies on the printed ballot papers for the two constituencies under the Kwande LGA. This logistics challenge led to the suspension of the election for the entire LGA.
4. **Results manipulation during collation:** In Abia state, Obingwa LGA Results Collation Centre, party agents wearing PDP tags and security agents ordered observers and other party agents (APC, Accord and APGA) to exit the collation centre. Presiding officers were also forced to alter the figures on form EC8A in favour of the PDP. In addition, the PDP agent delegated other unidentified persons to sign the result sheet on behalf of other parties after manipulating the results.
5. **Obstruction of election observation:** In Tarauni LGA of Kano, Yiaga Africa observers and other observers were prevented from observing the LGA collation process by police personnel. A similar incident occurred in Okrika LGA, Rivers state, where only PDP party agents were allowed to observe the process. Political thugs allegedly recruited by the LGA chairman were stationed at the entrance of the collation centre to determine access to the centers. In Gokana LGA, Rivers state, security personnel prevented all observers from observing the collation process. Only party agents for the APC, PDP & SDP were granted access to the collation center. In Otukpo, Benue state, and Ndokwa West, Delta, Yiaga Africa collation center observers were denied access to the LGA collation centre in Otukpo LGA, Benue State.
6. **Intimidation and harassment:** In Mosogar I-Sam-Ogbakpa Primary School, Mosogar, Ethiope West, Delta State, political thugs attacked the polling units and brutalised the INEC officials using cutlasses. The thugs also snatched the materials for the polling unit. Also, in PU 005 of Falagai ward in Bunkure LGA, Kano state, the party agents present took advantage of the absence of security personnel to intimidate the INEC officials and voters. INEC officials suffered the same fate in Langtang South LGA Collation Center where the Chairman of the LGA reportedly intimidated the officials and other party agents.
7. **Vote buying:** Yiaga Africa received **44 reports** of vote buying through cash inducement and distribution of food items. Persons believed to be mercenaries of the PDP were sighted collecting bank account details of voters to process funds transfer in exchange of votes in Polling Unit 002, in Bakura ward, Bakura LGA of Zamfara State. and Polling Unit 006 in ward 8 Ogbomoso North LGA, Ogun State.

Party agents distributed physical cash to voters in Ikenne Town Hall Polling Unit in Ward 2 in Ogun East LGA, Ogun State. In polling unit 003, Gidan Bunu Ward of Zuru LGA in Kebbi, persons wearing APC agents tags openly



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distributed textile clothing to women and rice while fertilizers were given to men (15 persons/bag). Agents believed to be APC agents also distributed textiles to voters in polling unit under tree (021), Gidan Alhazai ward, Wudil LGA in Kano,

Turnout Projection

Yiaga Africa's preliminary estimates indicate that turnout for the March 18 Governorship Elections in Benue will be between **27% and 33%**, the turnout in Delta will be between **19% and 23%**, and the turnout in Kano will be between **34% and 38%**, based on official turnout figures collected from the PVT's representative statistical sample of polling units in the three states. If INEC's official turnout falls within Yiaga Africa WTV's estimated range, then it accurately reflects the turnout at polling units.

Recommendations:

1. Yiaga Africa calls on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure proper oversight of the results collation process and ensure that results declared under duress or in breach of the Electoral Act, INEC Guidelines or Manual are reviewed in line with Section 65 of the Electoral Act.
2. Yiaga Africa calls on the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) agents to ensure effective and adequate deployment of security personnel to the collation centres to properly secure INEC officials, observers, media reporters and party agents deployed and arrest offenders disrupting the process and causing violence.
3. Yiaga Africa calls on political parties, their supporters and voters across the states to remain calm and peaceful as the results collation process is still ongoing.

Conclusion

As INEC continues to collate results, we encourage all citizens, candidates and supporters to remain calm and peaceful, and reject any call for violence. Only INEC has the legal mandate to announce the election results and return a candidate as a winner. We urge all stakeholders to respect the commission's constitutional power and refrain from declaring election results. Yiaga Africa enjoins citizens to remain calm and maintain peace as INEC collates the results. Yiaga Africa continues to monitor the results collation until the final completion. As soon as INEC announces the official results, Yiaga Africa will convene a press conference to share its statement on the accuracy of the election results.

The Watching The Vote project is “**Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!**”

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