



Yiaga Africa Watching The Vote PVT 2023 Presidential Election Preliminary Press Statement

Delivered at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja

(As of 10:00 am Sunday 26 February 2023)

Introduction

On 25 February, Yiaga Africa deployed 3,836 observers across the country including 3,014 parallel vote tabulation (PVT) observers who deployed early in the morning in pairs to a random, representative statistical sample of 1,507 polling units where they remained throughout the day. This methodology enables Yiaga Africa to independently assess the quality of the process and verify the accuracy of the official presidential election results announced by INEC.

At this time, Yiaga Africa is able to provide preliminary statistically accurate data on the conduct of the election as of 25 February 2023 - from the opening of polling units through accreditation, voting and counting until the posting of results – in addition, we have independent projections of the vote shares that each candidate should receive based on the ballots cast at polling units. If INEC's results fall within Yiaga Africa's estimated ranges, then the public, political parties and candidates should have confidence that the official results reflect the ballots cast at the polling units. However, if the official results are manipulated at any point in the process we will be able to expose it. Only INEC has the legal mandate to announce the election results. As soon as INEC announces the official results, Yiaga Africa will convene a press conference to share its own statement on the accuracy of the election results and will publicize these projections.

As Yiaga Africa noted in its mid-day statement, there were once again significant logistics challenges which delayed opening of polls across the country. Once again INEC has fallen short of expectations. As a result, elections didn't hold in some polling units due to INEC's inability to deploy, insecurity, disruption or malfunctioned BVAS. Yiaga Africa notes that in 18 sampled polling units elections were not conducted. Yiaga Africa also received reports from two polling units in Kano and Delta states where voting were suspended and INEC indicated the process will continue on Sunday, 26th February. Yiaga Africa has redeployed observers and they are currently at these polling units waiting on the polling officials to hold the elections.

Yiaga Africa expressed concerns about the unexplained delay in uploading polling unit results for the presidential election on the INEC Election Results Viewing Portal (IREV). As of 10 pm on election day, results for the Presidential election were not uploaded on the INEC portal after voting and counting ended in several polling units. At 9:00 am on 26th February, INEC uploaded only 25,503 results for the Presidential elections on the INEC portal. The delay in uploading the results undermines public confidence in the results transmission process as it deviates from the guidelines for the elections and it failed to meet citizens expectations.

Thus far, the 2023 presidential elections are once again a missed opportunity. The currency crisis created unnecessary challenges for voters, political parties and civil society to engage in the electoral process as well as for INEC to conduct the elections. Logistical shortfalls by INEC caused confusion and unacceptable delays in polling units opening - most notably in South East and South South geopolitical zones. The failure of the IREV system, intended to enhance transparency could potentially impugn the integrity of the elections.

This Preliminary Process Statement draws on findings as of 10:00 am on 26 February 2023, with complete observer reports received from 1,358 of the 1,507 sampled polling units representing 90% of polling units. Yiaga Africa is currently observing the results collation in all LGAs and State Collation Centers. Additional updates will be provided on other critical aspects of the elections.

Yiaga Africa’s Watching The Vote Preliminary Findings

Accreditation and Voting, and Counting of the Presidential Results

1. **The Functionality of the BVAS:** Yiaga Africa observed the deployment of the BVAS across the polling units observed. At 99% of polling units, the BVAS was used throughout the day for the accreditation of voters. In 88% of polling units, the BVAS functioned properly. However, in 9% of polling units, the BVAS malfunctioned, and it was fixed and in 2% of the polling units, it malfunctioned and was replaced.

Adherence to Election Procedures and Additional Process Findings

2. In 93% of polling units, the details of registered voters were systematically checked against the register of voters.
3. Observers in over 9% of polling units reported that INEC polling officials were unprofessional and partisan.
4. Upholding the Secrecy of Ballots and Attempts to Influence Polling Officials. In 5% of polling units, there were no voting cubicles. Similarly, 13% of polling units were set up in a way individuals could see how the voters marked their ballot papers.

Misconduct at the Polling Units

5. At 6% of polling units, WTV observers reported that voters faced intimidation, harassment or assaulted.
6. At 7% of polling units, WTV observers reported situations that were identified as likely voter inducement.

Counting

As noted in the mid-day statement of February 25th, party agents were sighted across most of the polling units with Yiaga Africa observers. During counting All Progressives Congress (APC) party agents were sighted at 97% of polling units, Labour Party (LP) polling agents were sighted at 67% of polling units, New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) polling agents were sighted at 51% of polling units, and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) at 99% of polling units.

7. At 98% of polling units, the polling officials obtained the number of accredited voters from the BVAS and recorded it on form EC.8A

8. At **98%** of polling units, the polling officials showed how every ballot paper was marked to the party agents.

Polling Units Level Results Transmission

9. In **83%** of polling units, the Presiding Officer used the BVAS to scan/take a snapshot of the results sheet (Form EC 8A).
10. In **69%** of polling units, the Presiding Officer attempted to transmit/send the polling unit result image to the INEC's online database (IReV).

Critical Incidents

Yiaga Africa established a critical incident desk as part of its national data centre to receive urgent messages from its observers. Over the course of Saturday, 25 February 2023 Election Day, Yiaga Africa confirmed **135** incidents witnessed by WatchingTheVote citizen observers.

The most frequent incident reports recorded by Watching The Vote Observers related to Polling units not opening (18 reports), malfunctioning of the BVAS (9 reports), Ballot box snatching (8 reports), Insufficient election materials (3 reports) and disruption of the voting process (5 reports).

Turnout

Belatedly INEC has made available PVC distribution data available by polling unit. Yiaga Africa is currently analyzing this data.

A number of ongoing challenges around the election likely resulted in low voter turnout. This continues to undermine the legitimacy of our democratic system. Regardless of the outcome of this election, all stakeholders, political parties, INEC and civil society, must work to ensure that our elections fully engage all citizens and provide a genuine opportunity for them to participate.

As with the official results, Yiaga Africa will independently verify the official turnout once announced by INEC.

In view of the foregoing, Yiaga Africa makes the following additional preliminary recommendations:

Additional preliminary recommendations

1. Yiaga Africa calls on the commission to provide clear communication on locations where the election did not hold and ensure the process is concluded in those location before returns are made.
2. INEC should be transparent and communicate the challenges faced during the deployment of the IReV.
3. INEC should publicly make available all BVAS accreditation data by polling unit, including the number of voters accredited by finger vs facial recognition.

4. Protect the transparency of the result collation process by ensuring accredited observers and party agents are granted access to the collation centers.
5. Strict adherence to the provisions of the 2022 Electoral Act and INEC regulations and guidelines on the collation of results. As provided in Section 64 of the Act, collation officers and returning officers are required to compare the number of accredited voters and election results recorded on the hardcopy result sheet and scanned images on the BVAS.
6. Yiaga Africa calls on INEC and security to ensure proper security for citizens especially the polling officials and collation officials especially as results collation progresses and as INEC commences the announcement of results to ensure that no life is further lost in these elections.

Yiaga Africa reminds all Nigerians that the process is not yet over. They should remain peaceful while waiting on INEC to announce the official results and refrain from any acts that could incite violence. Political leaders should urge their supporters in particular to calmly await the official results and take appropriate actions against any party members who engage in violence or incitement to violence.

The Watching The Vote is “Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!” Yiaga Africa continues to receive reports from its observers and monitor the process, including deploying observers to all State Collation Centres. Yiaga Africa will issue additional updates as appropriate and will convene a press conference following INEC’s announcement of the official results to release its own estimates. If the announced results reflect the ballots cast at polling units, then we will confirm the outcome. If the announced results have been manipulated and do not match the results posted at polling units, then Yiaga Africa will expose this.

Thank you and God Bless the people of Nigeria!

Yiaga Africa’s Watching the Vote is “Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!”

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