



CENTRE LSD INTERIM REPORT ON THE BAYELSA AND KOGI STATES GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION HELD NOVEMBER 16, 2019.

Preamble

The Bayelsa and Kogi States gubernatorial election held 16th November 2019 as scheduled by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In Bayelsa State, 45 political parties fielded candidates (42 males and 3 females) in the election, Whereas Kogi State, had 24 political parties with 24 governorship candidates made up of 21 males and 3 females. Total number of registered voters in Bayelsa is put at 923,182 and 96.3% of the registered voters according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), collected their Permanent Voters Card (PVC). Total PVCs collected in Kogi State prior to the election totaled 1,485,928. The Kogi West Senatorial election was held alongside the governorship election. The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Centre LSD), as an accredited INEC domestic election observer organization, deployed a team of trained observers to the states to observe and provide factual election day reports. The report of the Centre's observation is presented below:

INEC Logistics arrangement

In Bayelsa State, INEC logistics arrangement was commendable. Kits and non-sensitive materials were properly arranged. But INEC officials and voting materials did not get to all the polling units visited early. Reports across the state indicated that the average time of arrival of INEC officials was about 9:00am. Unlike Bayelsa, INEC officials and materials arrived their different units at 8.a.m in Kogi State.

Accreditation and voting process:

Set up was concluded before 9.55am in 70% of the polling units in Bayelsa State. The Polling Officers before commencement informed the voters that accreditation and voting will take place simultaneously. The exercise was scheduled to end once the last person on the queue was accredited. Elderly people, pregnant women, and nursing mothers were given consideration during

the accreditation and voting process. In Kogi State, accreditation and voting started at 8.30am. Preferences were not given to the aged, pregnant women and the physically challenged persons in the voting process. The accreditation however was slow.

Security of the process:

Even though the Nigeria Police Force had initially reported that 31,041 personnel will be deployed to maintain law and order in Bayelsa State, this number was not visible at the polling units, and this paved way for different levels of disruptions by party agents and voters during the voting process. As the voting process progressed in some of the locations in Kogi State, armed men in security outfits moved from polling units to polling units shooting into the air, scaring off voters and snatching ballot boxes. Where boxes could not be carted away by the armed men, voting was disrupted, and ballots destroyed.

Functionality of the Card Reader

The card readers were problematic in some of the voting locations in both States. The card reader read most of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) presented by voters but failed to authenticate their fingerprints. The INEC officials were knowledgeable in the operation of the card readers and were able to manage the process, including the failed authentications. In cases where the card reader malfunctioned like in some Kogi locations, manual accreditation was used.

Challenges:

Some challenges observed in both States were;

- a) Absence of facility for physically challenged persons.
- b) Snatching and destruction of ballot boxes.
- c) Challenges with smart card readers in some polling units.

- d) Inability of security operatives stationed at the polling units to repel attack by armed gun men and thugs who disrupted the process.
- e) Late arrival of INEC personnel and materials in some locations.

Recommendation;

Based on the challenges observed above, the team recommended the following:

- i. The peculiar mobility needs of people with disabilities should be considered when selecting the locations of polling units.
- ii. Security personnel deployed to polling units should be properly trained on their roles and responsibilities. Routine monitoring of personnel should be carried out by a dedicated team of senior officers to ensure that they are alive to their responsibilities.
- iii. The slow performance of the card reader should be addressed to gain time in future elections.
- iv. INEC should make deliberate efforts to improve on its logistics and ensure that she adhere to the time scheduled for electoral processes.

Conclusion

INEC deserve commendation for making improvements in certain areas, particularly; the provision of braille for voters with visual impairment, training of polling officials in managing the electoral process, and the distribution of PVCs, kits and non-sensitive materials. However, the commission should make efforts to address the challenges mentioned above. There is need to up security during and after the Elections and stakeholders should continue to cooperate with INEC to enable it to improve the processes, procedure and the activities of the Commission.

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