



CENTRE LSD REPORT ON THE BAYELSA STATE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION HELD ON NOVEMBER 16, 2019.

PREAMBLE

The Bayelsa State gubernatorial election was held on the 16th of November 2019 as scheduled by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). 45 political parties fielded candidates (42 males and 3 females) for the election, making a 125% increase from the number of candidates that contested for the position in 2015. The state has a total number of 923,182 registered voters out of an estimated population of 1.8 million. According to INEC, 96.3% of the registered voters collected their Permanent Voters Card (PVC) before the election day.

The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Centre LSD), as an accredited INEC domestic election observer, deployed a team of trained observers to the state to observe and provide factual election day reports from Yenagoa Local Government Area.

The report of the Centre's observation is presented below:

INEC Logistics arrangement

The logistics arrangement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was commendable. The distribution of Kits for election observations and non-sensitive materials was properly arranged. However, INEC officials with their materials did not get to all the polling units visited early. This led to late commencement of voting. Reports from across the state show that the average time of arrival of INEC officials was about 9:00am. At Amawere Primary School Epie 11 ward 4 PU 017, no INEC official was on ground at 8.30am. At Theresa Centre Ede-epie ward 4, no INEC official was around as at 11.50am. At Makadiari (Azivie) open space Epie 1 ward 4 PU12, INEC officials arrived at about 9.00am. At Ogbobiri Community Primary School Epie 1 ward 4 PU10, INEC officials

arrived at 9.30am. At Okoria Market Square Epie 1 ward 4 PU13, INEC officials arrived at about 9.50am. At Biogbolo Primary school Epie 1 ward 04 PU08, INEC officials arrived at 9.30am.

Materials at the polling units were adequate but the officials and security personnel were overwhelmed by the massive turn-out of voters. The electoral officials were alive to their responsibilities but most of the security personnel were not doing enough to coordinate the voters.

Accreditation and voting process:

Set up was concluded before 9.55am in 70% of the polling units visited. 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. In all the stations visited accreditation and voting were done simultaneously. Elderly people, pregnant women, and nursing mothers were given consideration during the voting process.

Card Reader

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.

Security of the process:

The polling units had an average of 5 security personnel from Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), Federal Road safety Corps, Nigeria Immigration Service, and Nigeria Prisons Service. Operatives of the Department of State Security (DSS) were present in only one the 7 polling units visited. The security deployment was not laudable. Even though the Nigeria Police Force had initially reported that 31,041 personnel will be deployed to maintain law and order during the electoral process in Bayelsa state, this number was not visible in all the polling units visited as we experienced different levels of disruptions by party agents and voters during the voting process. Military personnel were not sighted at any polling unit but were seen positioned at strategic locations across the State.

General participation:

The turnout was high and impressive, the electorates came out in their numbers to vote. Political party agents were not well represented as only agents from two political parties were seen in most of the polling units visited. The system adopted for accreditation and voting was quite useful for time management. There was no underaged voters. Voters consisted mainly of elderly people and adults in their late 20s and above. Youths in their teens and early twenties were not well represented. Foreign, domestic observers, and media were seen in two of the seven polling units visited.

Women participation:

The participation of women both as voters, INEC officials, and security personnel was notable. An interesting observation was that the Polling Officers (POs) in all the polling units visited were women. Younger women voters were not well represented, albeit, there was massive turnout of elderly women.

Participation of People with Disabilities (PWD):

Provisions were made for the blind as voting materials in braille was displayed in almost all the polling units visited. However, most of the polling units were located in places that are difficult to access with wheelchairs and crutches.

Vote buying:

Conversation on voter's inducement was heard between party agents and a couple of voters. However, the team did not witness any actual exchange of money between voters and party representatives in all the polling units visited as vote buying seemed to be done in secrecy.

Challenges:

Some of the challenges observed during the exercise include:

- i. **Inactive and Inadequate security personnel:** The number of security personnel in most of the polling units were inadequate. Even in places where they were present, most of them were not responding to the security challenges. This could be due to lack of proper briefing on their roles and responsibilities in polling units.
- ii. **Accessibility of polling stations:** Most of the polling units visited were not accessible to persons living with disabilities.

- iii. **Vote buying:** Although vote buying was done in secret, party representatives were seen influencing the choice of voters in most of the polling units visited.
- iv. **Late arrival of INEC officials:** INEC officials arrived late in all the polling units visited.

Recommendation:

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

- i. 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.
- ii. The peculiar mobility needs of people with disabilities should be considered when selecting the locations of polling units.
- iii. Effective sanctions on Political parties who engage in voter inducement and vote buying should be introduced to discourage the practice.
- 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 aforementioned challenges in subsequent elections.

Majority of the challenges experienced in the electoral process in Nigeria is from security and logistics. Migration to 100% e-voting will completely eliminate or reduce these challenges to the barest minimum. INEC is therefore encouraged to champion the necessary amendments to the electoral law to enable her to begin a gradual migration to e-voting.