



YIAGA AFRICA Watching The Vote 2019 Governorship and State Assembly Supplementary Elections

Pre-Election Press Statement (Friday, 22 March 2019)

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests – welcome to the YIAGA AFRICA Watching The Vote (WTV)'s Preliminary Press Conference on the observation plans for the governorship and state assembly supplementary elections scheduled for March 23, 2019 and the pre-election environment leading up to the elections. This briefing is the first in a series of three planned press conferences to be hosted by YIAGA AFRICA in this election. We equally invite you to join us at the **Watching The Vote Data centre, Floor 01, Niger/Enugu Hall, Transcorp Hilton**, Abuja on Saturday 23 March 2019 at 2pm when YIAGA AFRICA will share its Situational Statement on the set up and opening of polls and on Sunday 24 March 2019 at 2:00 pm when YIAGA AFRICA will share its Preliminary Statement on the conduct of the elections.

On March 9, 2019, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted Governorship and State House of Assembly elections across the federation. Although there was an improvement with the management of election logistics, the election was fraught with egregious violations of electoral guidelines, intimidation, vote buying, violence and disruption by thugs and some security personnel resulting to inconclusive elections in some states. These inconclusive elections have become a subject of litigation resulting to several court injections restraining INEC from concluding the election in some states like Adamawa and Bauchi states. Notwithstanding, INEC has fixed March 23, 2019 to conclude the governorship elections in **Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Plateau and Sokoto states** and State Assembly elections in **Adamawa, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Edo, Imo, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Lagos, Nassarawa, Osun, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba** and FCT Area council elections in Abaji, Bwari, Gwagwalada and Kuje.

YIAGA AFRICA Watching The Vote Observation of the 2019 Governorship and State Assembly Supplementary Elections

On March 23, 2019, YIAGA AFRICA will deploy duly trained and accredited stationary and roving observers to observe the conduct of the supplementary elections in the affected polling units and states. YIAGA AFRICA will deploy **258 stationary observers** and **6 roving observers. 97 LGA results collation centre observers.** Our observers will observe the entire election day process from setup of the polling units, accreditation, voting, announcement and posting of the official results and will send in periodic reports to the Watching the Vote National Data Centre located **at Floor 01, Niger/Enugu Hall, Transcorp Hilton, Abuja** where they will be processed and analyzed. This deployment will enable YIAGA AFRICA to provide the most timely and accurate information on the governorship rerun elections in the 5 states.

Matters Arising

- 1. Judicial interference with the electoral process:** Following the March 9 elections, political parties have resorted to procuring court injunctions to restrain INEC from concluding the elections in states like Adamawa and Bauchi. YIAGA AFRICA is concerned with the manner some judges have granted applications without recourse to judicial precedent and extant laws. For instance, Justice Abdulaziz Waziri of the Adamawa State High Court issued an injunction restraining INEC from conducting rerun elections in Adamawa following an application by the Movement for Restoration and Defence of Democracy (MRDD), a political party that never presented a candidate in the main election. Similarly, Justice Inyang Ekwo of Federal High Court in Abuja also issued an order restraining INEC from continuing with the collation of results in Bauchi state based on an ex parte motion initiated by the All Progressive Congress (APC) and its candidate Mohammed Abubakar. This emerging trend undermines democratic institutions like INEC and could dampen citizens confidence in the judiciary. The National Judicial Council (NJC) should without further delay caution members of the bench to refrain from interfering with the electoral process through the issuance of questionable orders and injunctions.

2. **INEC's Information management and communication:** YIAGA AFRICA notes the confusion and misinformation in public domain with respect to states and polling units where rerun governorship elections will be conducted. YIAGA AFRICA believes this confusion was informed by INEC's poor data management and timely dissemination of information on the supplementary elections. This we believe, may affect turnout of voters for the supplementary elections. YIAGA AFRICA reiterates that openness and transparency are a pre-requisite for boosting stakeholder confidence in the electoral process.
3. **Election Security:** Nigerians have received assurances from security agencies on their non-partisanship and professionalism in the management of election security operations. INEC also informed stakeholder that it has received assurances of support from the security agencies. YIAGA AFRICA has received reports of heavy deployment of security personnel to the states with governorship rerun elections. It is our considered opinion that security deployment for elections should be commiserate with level of threats.
4. **Heighten incidence of voter inducement:** In an attempt to woo voters, politicians have resorted to voter inducement using gift items, suspicious community empowerment programs and cash handouts in locations considered to be swing wards and polling units. From all indications, the supplementary elections in some states will be determined by the highest bidder. This is worrisome and poses a huge threat to Nigeria's democracy and political legitimacy.

Recommendations

Electoral transparency

1. INEC should make public the data on PVC collection rates in the affected polling units. This information should be shared with stakeholders and posted on all INEC's online and offline media platforms.
2. INEC should ensure accurate and timely deployment of election materials to affected polling units on election day.
3. It is important to note that these supplementary elections were occasioned by the non-use of card readers or failure to deploy them to affected polling units. With this in mind, INEC must insist on electronic accreditation of voters using the Smart Card Readers and PVC.

4. In view of the contentious nature of the elections in some states, INEC should strengthen its oversight on the electoral process especially the results collation process. There should be strict compliance with the Regulations and guidelines for the elections. Where INEC officials misapply the guidelines, the Commission should ensure timely reversal of such misapplication and communicate its decision in a timely manner. Also, election officials who disregard electoral guidelines should be sanctioned appropriately.
5. INEC should maintain its periodic briefing with election stakeholders on the elections at the National and state levels. INEC's online and offline media platforms should be utilized in sharing information with the public.

Improved election Security

1. YIAGA AFRICA calls on the security agencies to ensure proper coordination and collaboration in the management of election security. The Nigerian Police is the lead security agency responsible for election security therefore, sister agencies should respect proper lines of communication and rules of engagement. Security agencies must at all cost remain non-partisan and professional in their conduct and operation.
2. Security agencies should ensure election officials and materials are adequately secured. YIAGA AFRICA reiterates the need for security agencies to respect the rights of Nigerians in the light of series of harassment and intimidation of voters that characterized the recently conducted elections.

Political Parties and candidates

1. YIAGA AFRICA calls on all political parties contesting in the supplementary elections to ensure they encourage their supporters to come out and vote within the ambit of the law and to refrain from vote selling and violence.
2. YIAGA AFRICA also calls on all Political parties to refrain from deploying thugs or promoting any disruptive action that would lead to violence or halt the conclusion of the elections.

Voters:

YIAGA AFRICA calls on Nigerian citizens who are the biggest stakeholder in this election to turn out in their numbers and cast their votes by properly thumbprinting the ballot to reduce the number of rejected/invalid votes.

YIAGA AFRICA undertook the Watching The Vote project to provide Nigerian voters, governorship candidates, political parties, civil society and INEC with independent information on the conduct of the elections. The Watching The Vote project is “**Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!**”

Thank you and God Bless the people of Nigeria!

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