



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

Situational Statement on the Set up and Opening of Polls

(As at 1:30 pm Saturday 23 March 2019)

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests – welcome to the YIAGA AFRICA Watching The Vote (WTV)'s Situational Press Conference on Opening and Set-Up of Polling Units for the March 23, 2019 governorship supplementary elections. This briefing is the second in a series of three planned press conferences to be hosted by YIAGA AFRICA. We equally invite you to join us at the same location on Sunday, March 24 2019 at 2:00pm when YIAGA AFRICA will share its findings from the observation of the conduct of the elections in each of the states affected.

For the Governorship supplementary elections, YIAGA AFRICA deployed 258 stationary polling unit observers, 6 roving observers and 97 LGA results collation centre observers. The observers were properly trained to observe the entire election day process from opening and setup of the polling units, accreditation, voting, announcement and posting of the official results. All reports are sent via coded text messages to the National Data Centre to enable YIAGA AFRICA provide timely information on the conduct of elections in the polling units observed.

Watching the Vote Findings

This report contains initial WTV findings as at 1:30 pm, with complete reports received from her observers in 225 Polling units in 89 LGAs in the 5 states where the Governorship Supplementary Elections are being conducted.

1. As at 7:30 am, YIAGA AFRICA WTV observers reported that INEC officials had arrived at 83% of 23 PUs in Bauchi, 46% of 65 PUs in Benue, 68% of 28 PUs in Plateau, 48% of 85 PUs in Kano and 98% of 45 PUs in Sokoto state.

2. At 9:00 am, 100% of 22 PUs in Bauchi, 71% of 56 PUs in Benue, 100% of 27 PUs in Plateau, 78% of 76 PUs in Kano and 100% of 39 PUs visited in Sokoto had commenced accreditation and voting.
3. 100% of the polling units visited in Bauchi, Benue, Plateau and Sokoto states had both APC and PDP agents present. While 97% of polling units in Kano had APC agents and 87% had PDP agents.
4. All the polling units visited in Bauchi, Benue, Plateau, Kano and Sokoto state had 4 or more polling officials present. At least 1 in 4 of the officials is a female. When compared to other states, the polling units visited in Bauchi state had fewer women as polling officials. In addition, not less than 96% of polling units visited in these states, had security personnel present.
5. One or more essential materials like register of voters, indelible ink/marker pen, polling official stamp, voting cubicle, ink pad, gubernatorial ballot box and polling unit booklet, were not seen in 10% of 59 PUs in Bauchi, 37% of 23 PUs in Benue, 33% of 28 PUs in Plateau, 18% of 79 PUs in Kano and 9% of 40 PUs visited in Sokoto state. More importantly, Smart Card Readers were present in 100% of polling units in Benue, Plateau and Sokoto state and were not present in 2% of 57 PUs in Bauchi and 1% of 79 PUs in Kano state.
6. Polling units were set up so that voters could mark their ballot paper in secret without exposure in: 87% of 23 PUs in Bauchi, 95% of 57 PUs in Benue, 85% of 26P Us Plateau, 81% of 79 PUs in Kano and 90% of 40 PUs visited in Sokoto states.

Critical Incidents

YIAGA AFRICA has received the following critical incidents from her observers;

1. **Voter Suppression and Intimidation:** YIAGA AFRICA received reports on voter suppression manifested in the form of denying voters access to polling units by political thugs. This was prevalent in Kano State in the specific locations;
 - In Kofa Gida Allahrama PU 008, Kanawa Cikin Gari Ward 05, in Sumaila LGA; Zango PU 021, Karaye ward 03, Karaye LGA; and Agawawa, PU 012, Bichi ward 02, Bichi LGA in Kano state, voters believed to be supporters of one of the major parties were harassed by party thugs. In some cases, the thugs chased out the voters from the polling unit.

2. **Intimidation of Observers and media reporters:**

- In PUs 008 and 010, Kwarkiya Ward of Minjibir LGA Kano state, WTV Observers' Election Observation Checklist were snatched and destroyed by thugs alleged to be supporters of the All Progressives Congress (APC).
- Observers were also chased away in polling unit 008, Kanawa ward; Cikin Gari ward 05, in Sumaila LGA; and PU 07, Batayya ward 02, Albasu LGA in Kano state. In Zango PU 021, Karaye ward 03, Karaye LGA in Kano state, observers and media reporters were chased away by political party thugs.

3. **Disruption of the Electoral Process:** YIAGA AFRICA also received reports of destruction of the election materials, clash between political party agents and political thugs which resulted in disruption of the process. For instance

- Election materials for Azendi-Eshi Council Ward-02 of Ukum LGA in Benue state were burnt before deployment to polling units. This affected the commencement of the elections in all the polling units under this ward.
- In Tse Akough- Near Tse Ak Polling unit 012, Yaav Ward, Kwande LGA in Benue state, a political party thug attempted to snatch the ballot papers and it resulted to a fracas between party agents at the polling unit. The security officials intervened by providing security for INEC officials.
- A clash between APC and PDP supporters disrupted the process and threatened voters and observers access to Naadatul Islam primary school polling unit, Gwammaja ward 21, Dala LGA and PU 021 (Zango 4), Karaye ward of Karaye LGA, Kano state. This was later resolved after the police intervened.
- In Kofar Gidan Litti Kulku I, PU 020, Yelwa ward 12 of Dala LGA, Kano state, voting process commenced after 10am due to disruption of the electoral process and determination of political party thugs to prevent commencement of polls. Voting was also disrupted in Dudu PU 010, Rara ward 03, Raba LGA in Sokoto as political thugs were reported to have snatched the ballot box for the polling unit.

4. **Vote Buying:** Widespread reports of vote buying and selling were received from polling units in Plateau, Kano and Benue states.

5. **Bribery and Conspiracy:** YIAGA AFRICA received reports of bribery of polling officials and security officials in Angwa Kasua 001 PU, ward 11, Mangu LGA in Plateau State. In PU 001, Kodape Primary School, Karu, Nassarawa state,

security agents particularly the Nigerian Police received bribes from party agents. Embarrassingly, the negotiation for the bribe resulted in a brawl between police and party agents.

6. **Threat to Secrecy of the Ballot:** In PU 011 Darki Zango Islamiya, ward Darki, Wudil LGA in Kano State, voting was conducted without a voting cubicle, with party agents allowed to cross-check how each voter voted.

Preliminary Observation

1. YIAGA AFRICA notes the resilience demonstrated by registered voters in some states to cast their vote in the supplementary elections. Kano, Bauchi and Sokoto recorded an appreciable level of turnout of women and youths for the election.
2. YIAGA AFRICA condemns the deployment of thugs by the two major political parties in the elections. Despite huge deployment of security personnel for the elections, political thugs visibly attacked voters and disrupted elections in some polling stations in Kano and Benue states without any resistance or reprimand from security agencies. This is worrisome and raises serious questions on the effectiveness of security deployment for the supplementary elections.
3. Proliferation of small and light arms: YIAGA AFRICA notes with concern the possession of small and light arms by political thugs in the election. This illegal possession of arms poses a threat to political stability and human rights. There's need to investigate the illegal possession of arms by political thugs and hold their sponsors to account.
4. In view of the contentious nature of the elections in some states, INEC should strengthen its oversight on the results collation process. Judging from experience, collation and returning officers should be put under strict supervision as the collation process begins to halt any attempt to cancel votes arbitrarily. Where returning and collation officials misapply the electoral guidelines, the Commission should ensure timely reversal of such misapplication and communicate its decision in a timely manner. This is essential for boosting stakeholder confidence in the elections.
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. YIAGA AFRICA reiterates its earlier call to INEC to make public the data on PVC collection rates in the affected polling units.

6. YIAGA AFRICA urges security agencies to perform their functions within constitutional limits. We reiterate our call on security agencies to provide adequate security for election materials and officials, accredited observers, media personnel and voters. Also, security agents must remain non-partisan and professional throughout the election. We call on the leadership of the Nigerian police to investigate reports of bribery and corruption against police officers on election duty.

YIAGA AFRICA will continue to observe the elections in the 5 states where her observers are deployed. As noted earlier, YIAGA AFRICA will deploy 97 LGA results collation centre observers to monitor the results collation process. We urge INEC to ensure the results collation centers are accessible to observers, media and party agents. As an independent election observer group, we will provide a detailed assessment report of the result collation process in the 5 states with governorship rerun elections.

YIAGA AFRICA is undertaking 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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