



Preliminary Statement on 2021 Lagos Local Government Council Elections

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Introduction

On Saturday, 24 July 2021, Yiaga Africa's Watching the Vote (WTV) deployed trained and accredited roving observers to observe the process across the 20 LGAs and 37 LCDA in the State. Though Yiaga Africa did not deploy the Parallel Votes Tabulation (PVT) Methodology for the Lagos LGA elections, it deployed a robust election observation methodology that includes observation of the election day process (from opening and setup of the polling units, accreditation, voting, announcement and posting of the official results) at the polling units and the result collation process at the 20 LGAs Results Collation Centres. This is the Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote preliminary assessment of the Lagos state local elections. Yiaga Africa will issue a comprehensive assessment of the elections with recommendations will be shared at a later date.

Lagos State LGAs elections were characterized by similar shortcomings observed in other elections in Nigeria. These include; late opening of polls and deployment of election materials, disregard for the electoral guidelines, confusion over the non-inclusion of a contesting party on the ballot, non-deployment of political party agents and voter apathy.

Voter participation in these elections is abysmally low as citizens showed lack of interest in the process. This presents a disturbing trend in a state like Lagos with **6,570,291** registered voters and poses a major challenge to the practice of democracy in the state and Nigeria. With the level of turnout in the LGA elections, governance at the local levels in the state for the next four years will be by individuals who are elected by a very small fraction of the voting population. Local government elections are closest to the people and remain important in establishing a political culture of democratic governance and active citizens participation at the local government level.

Beyond the abysmally low turnout of voters, the elections revealed a persisting capacity deficit with respect to human and financial resources and technical expertise required for successful election administration at the local level. It also revealed the absence of a robust legal framework for LGA elections that can sufficiently guarantee electoral integrity, enable political inclusion and regulate political party conduct in the elections. The election also raises major concerns on; the quality of leadership at the local level, the independence and autonomy of local government structure and key institutions like the State Independent Electoral Commission.

However, July 24, 2021 elections in Lagos state showcased the important role of election management commissions in entrenching women's participation in the process. Yiaga Africa commends the Lagos State Independent Electoral Commission's (LASIEC) deliberate deployment of women as polling officials across the LGAs and LCDAs. As reported by Yiaga Africa's Watching the Vote, on average, 1 of 2 polling officials at the polling units observed was a woman. While the LASIEC may have achieved the successful deployment of female officials, there are still opportunities to deepen women's participation in the electoral process, especially by the political parties.

Watching The Vote Findings

The findings presented in this statement are based on information received from the WTV observers from the polling units observed across the LGAs and LCDAs and from the LGA results collation centres.

1) *Late deployment of polling materials and opening of polls:* Elections logistics management remains a critical aspect of election administration that has the potential to impact the quality of the election and citizens' confidence in the process. Early deployment of election officials and materials is an important determinant of the quality of election logistics and operations management. As observed on election day, majority of polling units visited were yet to be set up as of 8:30 am with some polling units without polling officials present by 8:30 am. Yiaga Africa WTV observers reported that no polling official was seen in 61 of the polling units visited by 8:30 am. The late opening and commencement of polls was a general observation across the state. Specifically, Mushin LGA recorded late deployment. Election officials were still waiting to be deployed to their assigned polling units by 8:16 am. By 10:00 am, only 17 of the polling units visited had polling officials present.

2) *Secrecy of the ballot not guaranteed:* The secrecy of the ballot remains a cardinal feature of democratic elections. Secrecy of the ballot in this election was undermined in most of the polling units visited. Yiaga Africa notes that polling units were not set up in a manner that could guarantee the secrecy of ballots. In polling units visited, voting cubicles were placed in positions that enabled voters and party agents to see how ballot papers were marked.

3) *Essential election materials were adequately deployed:* WTV tracked the presence of essential materials such as the register of voters, polling official stamp, voting cubicle, ink pad, ballot boxes, incident form and polling unit booklet in polling units. These materials and many more were seen in most of the polling units that were opened. However, the WTV observers reported that the majority of the Smart Card Readers were not fully charged. In addition, the reports indicate that the Smart Card Readers were not used in some of the polling units visited. Yiaga Africa notes the non-use of the Smart Card Readers in some polling units is directly related to the quality of election officials' training.

The LGA Results Collation Process Findings:

As part of the comprehensive observation of the electoral process, WTV also deployed observers to the 20 LGA results collation centres. Findings from the LGA collation centres reveal the following.

1. ***Compliance to COVID-19 public health protocols:*** 47% of WTV collation observers reported that there were designated areas in the collation centres for implementing COVID-19 safety and health measures such as hand sanitizing, compulsory wearing of face masks and body temperature checks.
2. ***Late Commencement of the LGA collation process:*** Only 4 LGA collation centres had commenced the results collation process by 4:00 pm, however by 9:00 pm, 13 of the 20 LGA collation centres had begun the results collation.
3. ***Adequate deployment of Collation Officials:*** An average of 6 results collation officials were seen in the LGA collation centres of which an average of 2 were women.
4. ***Deployment of Security Officials:*** WTV observers reported the presence of security officials in all collation centres except in Lagos Island LGA collation centre.
5. ***Adequate deployment of Political Party Agents:*** WTV observed an average of 3 party agents were present at the LGA collation centres.

6. **Compliance with the use of election results forms:** In all LGA collation centres that reported, collation officials entered the results for the chairmanship election in the original form LASIEC II in figures.
7. **Two political parties majorly countersigned result forms:** In LGA collation centres that opened and WTV observed, LASIEC collation officers requested party agents present to countersign the results form. In 100% and 75% of those LGA collation centres, APC and PDP party agents present countersigned results summary forms respectively. PDP party agents did not countersign the results summary forms in Epe, Ibeju/Lekki and Ifako Ijaye LGAs. The LASIEC officials also distributed copies of the results form to the party agents and security agents present.

Reported Critical Incidents

1. **Confusion over the inclusion of a Party's name on the ballot:** There was violent disruption of the accreditation and voting process across polling units in Shomolu LGA; this was fueled by the confusion over the inclusion of a party name on the ballot. The name printed on the ballot was YP which is not one of the officially recognized political parties. In a few of the polling units observed, the YPP supporters protested the non-inclusion of their party on the ballot and asked voters to boycott the election.
2. **Attack on WTV Observer:** In PU 008, Ward B Badagry, an observer was beaten up for recording an attempt to snatch a ballot box by a party agent.
3. **Partial announcement of official results or not conducting LGA Level Results Collation:** WTV received reports that results from the **Eti-osa, Lagos Island** and **Surulere** LGA collation centers were not announced at the collation centers. The collation centers for **Ajeromi/Ifelodun, Oshodi/Isolo, Shomolu** and **Mushin** LGAs were not activated. Results for **Ikeja** and **Kosofe** LGAs were partially announced at the collation centers. In **Ikeja** and **Kosofe** LGA collation centers, only results for the APC and PDP were announced, the total number of registered voters, total number of accredited voters, total valid and rejected voters were not announced.

Recommendations

Lagos State Independent Electoral Commission (LASIEC)

1. Yiaga Africa commends LASIEC for working with technical partners to deploy the Election Operations Centre set up at the LASIEC office. This is a good practice that requires further development and adaptation to promote efficiency and strengthen the oversight system of LASIEC.
2. Yiaga Africa calls on LASIEC to review its Guidelines for elections to ensure clarity and uniformity of practice in election administration.
3. LASIEC should also review its Guidelines for election to ensure that the guidelines do not introduce undue limitations to participation, especially the participation of young people as candidates. This includes reviewing its guidelines to remove the eligibility age for contesting for elections at the local level.
4. Yiaga Africa calls on LASIEC to review its guidelines to make better provisions to enable the free participation of persons with disabilities in the elections.
5. Data remains crucial in election administration, Yiaga Africa hereby calls on LASIEC to adopt a more data-driven approach to election administration. This includes the need for data disaggregation of candidates list to include gender, age and disability.
6. Yiaga Africa recommends the need for peer review and learning opportunities between LASIEC and other States Independent Electoral Commission.

7. Yiaga Africa calls on the LASIEC to investigate reports of electoral fraud and malpractices especially perpetrated by their officials and ensure disciplinary actions are duly taken.
8. Yiaga Africa strongly recommends that LASIEC develop and adopt a strong strategic communications and voter education plan.
9. In line with the principles of open elections data, Yiaga Africa calls on the LASIEC to ensure early release of candidate lists and other information on the election on its website and through other communication channels in formats that are readable and analyzable.

Lagos State House of Assembly

10. The Lagos State Assembly should review the Electoral law for Lagos state to ensure key amendments that will guarantee credibility in the process, provide clarity with respect to timelines for election activities like the nomination of candidates, submission and/or withdrawal of candidates by political parties.
11. The Electoral Law of Lagos State should also be amended to enable the deployment of technology for accreditation of voters, voting and transmission of results to enable credibility and transparency in the process. This will also inspire citizens' confidence in the process.
12. The Electoral law should be reviewed to introduce a system of review of results declared by the returning officers which were not declared voluntarily or which were not declared in accordance with the Electoral Law and guidelines.

Political Parties

13. Yiaga Africa calls on the political parties to be magnanimous in their victory and calls on parties with any grievances in the process to seek redress in the Election Tribunal.
14. Political parties should create more opportunities for women, youth and persons with disabilities to participate actively in their parties, including as leaders and candidates for public office.

National Assembly

15. Yiaga Africa calls on the National Assembly to as a matter of urgency pass the bill amending the constitution to guarantee LGA autonomy and independence.

Civil Society Organisation and Development Partners

16. Civil society organizations and development partners should actively engage the States Independent Electoral Commission to promote the credibility of elections at the local level.

Media

17. The Media should use their various platforms to enable citizens participation by educating voters on their democratic rights

Conclusion

Yiaga Africa commends the LASIEC for the efforts to deploy the smart card readers for the accreditation of voters and for the initiative to seek technical support from INEC. As a more sustainable plan, Yiaga Africa recommends the need for an efficient system of technical partnership between INEC and States Independent

Electoral Commission to ensure that elections at all levels are conducted according to the standards of electoral integrity.

Yiaga Africa commends the people of Lagos State, LASIEC and security agencies for the peaceful conduct of the elections. Yiaga Africa commends Nigerians across the state who volunteered as citizen observers for the Lagos state LGA Elections. Yiaga Africa also appreciates the collaboration of our development partners and the supportive role the international community has played in promoting credible and peaceful elections. Yiaga Africa appreciates the supportive role played by the media. Most importantly, Yiaga Africa lauds the voters who went out to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

Finally, Yiaga Africa calls on citizens in Lagos state and across Nigeria to wake up to their civic responsibilities and exercise their rights to vote as citizens. Nigeria's democracy can only be safeguarded if citizens actively participate and hold the government accountable. Voting remains a fundamental and the only determinant of the representatives who represent the people in government.

Yiaga Africa is committed to driving reforms in improving the quality of local government elections and remains resolute in promoting credible elections by providing independent information on the conduct of elections.

The Watching The Vote project is “**Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!**”

Thank you and God Bless Nigeria.

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