THE ADAOBI ENEMUOH INITIATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT (The AID) PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE CONDUCT OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS.



1st from the Right: The AID 2023 General Election Observation Head of Mission - Pastor Constant Nosa Olotu with some Team Abuja Observers on the Field as #Nigeriadecides2023.

INTRODUCTION

- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted the Presidential and National Assembly Elections on Saturday, February 25th, 2023.
- On election day, Nigerian citizens came out en masse to vote their preferred candidate irrespective of unfavorable factors like electoral violence and bad weather that affected parts of the country.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Pre - election, the electoral environment was largely peaceful.
- Increased voter education by INEC and Civil Society Groups (CSOs) heightened the voters' involvement and confidence in the electoral process.
- Compared to previous elections, there was a spike in the registration and collection of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) across the nation.
- However, electoral stakeholders faced logistics constraint because of Fuel and Naira scarcity. The naira scarcity was due to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)'s Currency Redesign Policy.
- Some electoral Stakeholders accused the ruling class of implementing the currency redesign at a wrong time, indirectly influencing their campaign.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- President Muhammadu Buhari signed the amended electoral bill into law on February 25th, 2022.
- The law allows for technological innovations like the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS).
- The BVAS allows for real time viewing of election results at the Polling Unit level, using the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV).
- Pre - 2023 General Elections, the technology was tested and trusted in two off season elections held respectively in Ekiti and Osun States on June 18th and July 16th, 2022.
- The IREV introduction was welcomed by all electoral stakeholders, consolidating the nation's faith in INEC's preparedness for the general election.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

- There were 18 presidential candidates from 18 political parties.
- To ensure a violence free campaign, the candidates signed a Peace Accord organized by the National Peace Committee (NPC).
- Unfortunately, there were few cases of electoral violence recorded during the campaign season.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA, RELIGION AND GEOPOLITICAL ZONES

- Social Media, Print Media and Broadcast Houses played a key role in shaping the electoral environment of the Nation.
- On one hand, they helped to promote the candidates' vision/mission.
- On the other hand, they incited the electorate against some candidates, dividing their campaigns along geopolitical and religious lines.
- Since the new democratic era, candidates' religion and geopolitical zone has played a key role in determining the balance of power during presidential primary elections.
- For this election cycle, on the religious line, the four major tickets included: a Muslim/Muslim ticket, two Muslim/ Christian tickets, and a Christian/ Muslim ticket.
- On the geopolitical line, the four major tickets included candidates from the Southeast/Northwest zones, Southwest/Northeast zones, Northwest/Southsouth zones, Northeast/Southsouth zones.

THE ROLE OF THE SECURITY AGENCIES

- In recent times, Nigeria has been plagued with insecurity across the nation.
- Kidnappings, robberies, destruction of INEC and other government offices, assassinations, killing of Military men, attacks on candidates, Farmers/ Herdsmen/ Unknown gunmen crises, etc. are some examples of insecurities witnessed pre-election.
- To manage electoral violence, the Nigerian Police, in conjunction with the military, deployed over 300,000 thousand personnel.
- These personnel were assigned to various locations to curb pre-, during, and post-electoral violence.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS (CSOs)

- On January 9th, 2023, INEC accredited 196 domestic and 33 foreign civil society groups (including The AID) to observe the 2023 general elections.
- These civil societies played a significant role in ensuring the credibility of the electoral process.

THE AID ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION

The AID deployed 22 teams of accredited observers across 12 states of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to observe the election. The observation mission was led by Pastor Constant Nosa Olotu.

- The primary objective of the mission was to observe and ensure the transparency and credibility of the electoral process.
- On election day, The AID roving observers visited over 500 polling units across the nation.
- Based on The AID observation checklist, the missions' emphasis on the field centered around poll opening and closing times, voter turn-out, voting process, adherence to INEC rules and regulations, incidence of violence at and around the polling units, vote buying, role of security and party agents, counting procedures, result transmission, and the general election day environment.

Opening and closing time of polls.

- According to INEC, polls were to commence at 8:30 am, and end at 2:30pm.
- However, only about 35% of polling Units visited by The AID opened on time.
- Poor logistics, late arrival of polling officials and materials, etc. were some factors that affected the opening of polls.
- Some polls opened as late as 12 noon; while election did not hold in some polls because of violence, and absence of voting materials.
- Late opening of polls affected some polling unit closing times; especially those with over 750 registered voters.
- Voting continued past 2.30pm on the 25th of February 2023; and ended as late as 4:00 am on the 26th of February 2023, in some polling units.
- As a result, INEC officially extended voting to the 26th of February 2023.

Voter Turnout and Demographics

- According to INEC, the number of registered voters for the 2023 General Election was 93,469,008 and the total number of collected PVC was 87,209,007.
- Most polling units visited by the AID showed a low voter turnout as there was a significant decrease in the ratio of the number of accredited voters to registered voters.
- In Urban areas, the voting demographics in polling units visited by the AID include 2% of Persons Living with Disability (PWD), 60% women and 70% young people (youths).
- In rural areas, the voting demographics in polling units visited by the AID include 3% PWD, 65% women, and 60% of young people (youths).

The Voting Process

- In most Polling Units visited by the AID, voting procedures were properly implemented according to the INEC guidelines.
- However, in states like Adamawa, Lagos, and Rivers States, it was observed that some presiding officers did not follow INEC guidelines during the accreditation and voting process.
- Upon further enquiry, the mission observed that some polling officials lacked knowledge of the BVAS usage.
- The BVAS failed to accredit some voters' PVC; as a result, they were disfranchised.

- There were instances where voters were not properly accredited but were allowed to vote.
- This observation goes against the confines of the Electoral Act, 2022 which requires technological accreditation of voters' PVC before voting, using the BVAS.
- Some polling units were overcrowded; as a result, the setup did not guarantee the secrecy of the ballot.
- Also, contrary to the provisions of the Electoral Act, there were instances where electoral stake holders influenced the voters' choice at the polling units, by publicly displaying their thumb printed ballots.

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AT THE POLLS

- Elections were peacefully conducted in most polling units visited by The AID.
- However, irrespective of the strong military deployment, thuggery, ballot box snatching and burning, voter and polling official intimidation, polling unit destruction, etc. were vices observed in some polling units across the nation.
- Electoral stakeholders accused opposing parties of inciting violence in their strongholds to ensure that based on the electoral act, INEC cancels the elections held in the said polling units.
- Unfortunately, in most cases, innocent citizens were casualties of such vices.

VOTE BUYING

- Cash scarcity due to CBN's Naira Redesign Policy, EFCC's determination to arrest vote buyers, and some citizens' resolve not to sell their vote contributed to the reduction of vote buying at polling units on election day.
- Some voters were allegedly paid before election day, while some were promised to be paid through electronic transfer after the voting exercise.
- Party agents caught in some polling units engaging in vote buying were arrested by the police.

CLOSING, COUNTING AND COLLATION OF RESULTS

- Most polling units did not close at 2:30pm, the INEC stipulated time.
- Voters who were on the polling queue on or before 2:30 pm were allowed to vote irrespective of the closing time.
- The counting procedures began as soon as the last person on the queue voted.
- In most polling units, the counting procedure was open and observable. The results were entered into the result sheet, signed by all party agents, the collected data was uploaded into the BVAS machine, and the result sheet pasted was on the polling unit wall.
- However, in polling units across some states like Lagos, while the National Assembly election result data could be entered into the BVAS's IREV portal at the polling unit, there was a mass failure of the feature in the collation of the Presidential Election data.
- Contrary to its promise to provide real time data to the electorate, INEC "…regretted the setback…". The commission maintained that the problem was due to some 'technical

hitches' related to scaling up the IReV and resorted to offline and /or manual collation of results in the presidential election.

- By doing so, INEC made the results vulnerable to Electoral fraud.
- This development reduced the voters' confidence in INEC's commitment to make every vote count and consolidate the nation's democracy.

RESULT ANNOUNCEMENT

- Announcement of the National Assembly results were held in the State collation Centers, while the Presidential Election results were held at the National Collation Center in Abuja.
- Announcement of the National Assembly election result held at various collation centers observed by The AID were mostly peaceful.
- However, announcement of the presidential election result held at the National Collation Center was not peaceful.
- Some electoral stakeholders accused INEC of manipulating the results. They called for a halt of the announcement and demanded that INEC fixes the 'hitches' in their server and upload all polling unit results to ensure transparency.
- INEC insisted that the 'hitches' in the electronic transmission of results was not sufficient to stop announcement.
- To show their grievances, the opposing electoral stakeholders staged a walkout, and called for cancellation of the polls.
- Amidst tension, INEC announced the election result of all states, and declared a winner on Wednesday, March 1st, 2023.

CONCLUSION

- Based on the conduct of all electoral stakeholders, INEC's implementation of the 2022 electoral act, and the performance of the BVAS IReV feature, The AID observed that in some parts the country, the Nigerian Presidential and National Assembly Election held on the 25th of February 2023 was not transparent.
- As transparency is a necessary step towards credibility, The AID observation mission concludes that the election was not credible.

COMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The AID commends INEC, the Government, and the People of The Federal Republic of Nigeria for conducting its 7th General Election since 1999.
- The AID commends all electoral stakeholders for their participation and commitment to ensure that the Nation's Democracy is sacrosanct.
- The AID recommends that INEC, in conjunction with the Federal Government must ensure that pre-elections, during elections, and post elections, all principles of the Electoral Act, 2022 is respected and implemented accordingly.
- The AID recommends that the Federal Government must tailor its policies to aid better electoral logistics in future elections.

- The AID recommends that for better implementation of the Electoral Act,2022 in future elections, rather than the status quo, INEC must recruit, train, and retain permanent staff to serve as Presiding Officers; and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members to serve as Assistant Presiding Officers. This will decrease the lack of knowledge displayed by poll officials in some polling units.
- The AID recommends that INEC partners with adequate network providers to provide sufficient and reliable data service and other switching solutions that will ensure real time transmission of data, and a more transparent electoral process.
- The AID recommends that INEC must commit to reviewing, improving, and implementing better electoral practices to ensure transparency and credibility of the polls.

NB: This is a preliminary report on the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Election. The AID observation mission will continue to observe the electoral process. A detailed report will be published as soon as all phases of the electoral calendar has been implemented.