

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE 2019 SUPPLEMENTARY GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS



23rd March, 2019

The Centre for Democracy and Development's (CDD) Election Analysis Centre (EAC) deployed trained observers to five states (Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Plateau and Sokoto States) where supplementary governorship elections held on March 23, 2019. The observers were tasked with observing and reporting on the polling process, including opening times, accreditation and voting, the collation processes, and the level of compliance of INEC ad-hoc staff, voters, security operatives, politicians and their supporters, and other stakeholders with the 2019 INEC electoral guidelines and regulations, extant electoral laws and international standard for conduct of credible elections. CDD-EAC comprises of leading experts on elections and democracy. The experts reconvened to provide a rigorous analysis of the supplementary elections process. This preliminary report highlights our key findings from their observations.

PREAMBLE

Our observers reported that on average, accreditation and voting processes commenced in earnest between the hours of 8:00 – 8:30 am in the majority of polling units across the five states. However, in some polling units the late arrival of materials delayed the start of the process. In Kano's Karaye Ward and LGA, for example, electoral materials had not arrived by 10:02 am in Magajin Gan polling unit (PU) 011. In Benue's Konshisha Ward, PU 005, polling materials arrived at 9:08 am.

The supplementary elections saw an impressive turn-out of voters particularly in Sokoto, Bauchi, Plateau and Kano. This, coupled with the crowds who gathered near voting areas, and poor voting logistics (space), constituted an operational challenge. In PU 012, ward 11, Sokoto South LGA, where the total registered voters are 585, the electoral officials battled to organise the queue within the narrow space provided for the polling. Similar situations were recorded in PU009, Magaji Gari B in Plateau's Jos North LGA, and in PU 014, Jenta Mangoro ward 006, with a total of 2,017 registered voters.

We commend the turn-out of women and persons with disabilities and all Nigerian citizens who voted in the elections. The bright spot for us in these elections are the voters. In Kagadama PU in Bauchi, citizen power maintained law and order. They ensured that politicians who tried to skew the process were not just prevented from doing so but peacefully escorted out of the polling unit.

Violent Disruption of Election

Our observers reported incidents of violence and disruption of the voting process in Kano, Sokoto, Benue and Bauchi states.

In Kano, violence and disruption of polling was widespread as an army of thugs reportedly took over polling activities in several LGAs, including Nasarawa, Dala, Karaye and Gaya. Our observers noted such incidents in PU 011, Kwanyawa ward and PU 002, Chede ward, both in Karaye LGA; and PU 001 and PU 034-036, Gama ward of Nasarawa LGA. As our preliminary report stated, Gama ward in Nasarawa LGA is very strategic to winning the supplementary elections in Kano. The total number of registered voters 40,821 represents 31.8% of the 128,324 total registered voters in places where the supplementary vote was held. It is distressing that political thugs took over the elections in this LGA, with reports that they were forcing voters to vote for a particular party, physically attacking them and violently disrupting the polls.

In Sokoto, particularly in Bodinga LGA, Bodinga ward (PU11), a dispute between the agents of the two leading parties over attempts by a party agent to assist voters in voting disrupted the election. Elsewhere in Sokoto, our observers reported how the actions of APC and PDP chieftains at Magajin-Gari ward 'B', Shiyar Danfarijo's PU005 and PU11 in Sokoto LGA halted polling for about three hours. Thankfully, in this instance, the intervention of police led to a de-escalation of the situation.

Initial evidence suggests there was a deliberate deployment of political thugs in the supplementary elections, to suppress voters, intimidate officials and skew the polls in favour of some political actors. This new 'weaponisation of thuggery' is extremely concerning and disappointing following twenty years of uninterrupted democracy in the country. The way thuggery was instrumentalised in these elections raises questions about the role of security agents in protecting voters and the electoral process. In several instances, the security forces were reported to have turned a blind eye to the acts of brigandage perpetrated by political thugs.

Attack, harassment and intimidation of INEC ad-hoc official, voters and journalist

The The 2019 electoral cycle has seen significant intimidation, harassment and attacks on voters, journalists, observers and INEC officials. In the Kano supplementary elections, party agents and thugs intimidated and attacked voters and observers in the course of exercising their franchise or monitoring the process. A CDD observer in Gama LGA, Gwagwarwa 5 centre, PU 010 A & B, with 756 registered voters was harassed by a sizeable crowd when he tried to take pictures of the voting process. In Gama LGA, KofarMazugal, Masaka Primary School centre PU 051 with 752 registered voters, stones were thrown at our observers to prevent them from observing the voting process.

Our observers reported that APC party agents were in large numbers compared to few PDP

agents across Kano state. The intimidating presence of political party agents made polling units unsafe for voters and stakeholders alike. The huge disequilibrium in terms of the relative amounts of agents could present a risk factor to the voting process. However, in Gama Tudu Primary school PU 015 with 909 registered voters, a sufficient security cordon around the school, and a well enforced process that allowed only voters with PVC and party agents into the premises, reduced the risk posed to the process by large crowds.

Elsewhere, there were clear instances of party agents and thugs coercing and intimidating voters into casting a ballot for their candidates. In PU 034, Gama ward of Nasarawa LGA for example, we received a report that party agents were campaigning and dissuading voters from voting for candidates of their choice. In PU 006 in the same ward, we also gathered that political thugs harassed domestic observers and prevented from performing their function.

The high level of intolerance against poll monitors was not limited to observers. In Minjibir LGA of Kano State, a journalist from the National Television Authority (NTA) was attacked, and his car was vandalised when covering the polling process. Similarly, political thugs harassed a Television Continental (TVC) crew covering the elections. We also received a reports of an an attack on INEC ad-hoc officials and party agents in Zaki Biam, Ukum LGA, Benue state. Also in Benue, polling materials for Azendeshi ward were intercepted and burnt by political thugs, with election officials injured.

Despite several attempts to entrench peaceful electoral democracy in Nigeria, the 2019 elections have been marred by an upsurge of violence.

Trading in votes

The challenge of voter trading and how it impacts on the integrity of elections has been a constant theme of this election. So too is underage voting. Our observers reported underage voting in Plateau, Kano and Sokoto states.

Our observers reported across the five states that the two major political parties are involved in trying to induce voters. In Sokoto vote-buying allegations were laid against the two dominant parties. A voter interviewed during the elections by our observer at the Katta Hakimi polling zone EC 30 B, Gidan Katta area of Illela in Sokoto State, alleged votes were being procured for between N10, 000 and N15,000. According to the voter, before sliding your thumb printed paper into the ballot box, you will have to lift it for the agent to see and nod his head as a sign that you have fulfilled your part of the deal hence qualified for the payment.

There is a need to emphasise that the act of vote buying and selling is an offence punishable under the law. It is unfortunate that despite its routine occurrence, no-one has ever been punished or faced the wrath of the law.

Conclusion

The smart card readers and the welfare of ad-hoc staff continue to constitute challenges to the electoral process. INEC is yet to match commitments with action on prompt payment and adequate welfare for ad-hoc staff. The malfunctioning and deliberate non-usage of the smart card reader continues to hinder the smooth running of the elections. We implore INEC to find a lasting solution to address the perennial card reader challenges and poor handling of the welfare of ad-hoc staff. It is also vital that there is a uniform application of rules on the non-usage of the card reader.

The CDD is immensely worried about the quality of elections, in particular, the renewed thuggery and brigandage being visited on the polity by the political class. These shameful acts are not just capable of truncating our democracy but importantly eroding the trust of the citizenry in the democratic process itself. The ongoing elections have again pointed out the need for a broader electoral accountability framework and in particular the political will to pursue accountability. It is time for Nigeria to put an end to electoral impunity to preserve its democracy.

Signed:

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Centre for Democracy & Development

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