

Talking Points

- Despite concerns over the heavy deployment of security agents, very few incidents of intimidation and violence have been reported defying the context of fear and uncertainty that preceded election day.
- Security agents were frequently absent at the commencement of accreditation in several pollings units, which likely heightened uncertainty among voters and officials.
- Persistent incidents of the failure of the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BIVAS) across numerous polling units, have impaired the smooth conduct of the elections, and will likely disenfranchise some intended voters.
- The lateness of officials in commencing accreditation and polling has left many voters frustrated, necessitating INEC's extension of the voting period till 4pm.
- Incidents of electoral malpractice including vote-buying have been widespread and will likely impact the credibility of results.

Welcome remarks

Gentlemen and women of the press. On behalf of the Centre for Democracy and Development, I welcome you to this Press Briefing on the 2021 Anambra State governorship election.

Introduction

Earlier today, voters across the 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Anambra State, headed to the polls to elect their next governor. CDD deployed its trained and non-partisan observers across all the LGAs in the state to keep a close watch on the electoral process and its outcomes. CDD's Election Analysis Centre (EAC) has been receiving reports from field observers from the commencement to the end of voting. This preliminary statement provides an overview of our initial findings on the conduct of the election, and the extent to which poll officials, voters, and security officials adhered to key processes governing the conduct of the election.

Security Situation

Despite threats by non-state armed groups and concerns over the heavy deployment of security agents, very few incidents of intimidation and violence have been reported defying the context of fear and uncertainty that preceded election day. Despite the heavy deployment of state security agents, observers have noted a surprisingly scanty presence of security personnel in numerous reports from across the state. Where security agents have been present, reports indicate that they have largely respected rules of engagement and acted with professionalism. This is highly commendable and we hope that this mode of engagement with voters is sustained

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INEC Logistics

Reports from CDD's observers indicate widespread delays in the commencement of accreditation and voting as a result of late arrival of poll officials. For instance, at 9:55am, CDD observers reported that INEC officials had not arrived at Otolu Ward 2, Nnewi North LGA. Likewise, in Ihiala LGA, observer reports indicate that INEC officials and electoral materials had not arrived at 1pm. The lateness of officials in commencing accreditation and polling has left many voters frustrated, necessitating INEC's extension of the voting period till 4pm and possibly till tomorrow. This will likely contribute to the late closing of the polls and the delayed announcement of the election results.

Malfunctioning BVAS

One repeated occurrence that threatens to mar the quality of the election outcome has been the widely reported failure of the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BIVAS) across numerous polling units in the state. In several instances, the BVAS failed to recognize voters' faces and fingerprints, and those affected were asked to wait until the challenge was resolved. CDD's EAC observers also reported malfunctioning of the BVAS in Ayamelum LGA with three polling units affected.

The wider security atmosphere leading up to the polls has likely impacted INEC's preparedness, particularly its capacity to train Ad-Hoc staff on the use of the BIVAS technology. In some polling units, INEC officials resorted to the manual methods of accreditation and voting. This was observed in Awka South, Akwa North, Idemili North, Idemili South, and Anambra West. CDD observers further reported that in cases where the BIVAS worked, its pace was frequently slow, leading to longer wait times than necessary for voters. In several reported cases, frustrated voters were forced to return home without casting their votes. The resort to manual voting will likely generate uncertainties about the validity of votes cast. This will likely also open up the election to petitions and questions regarding its legitimacy.

Low Turnout of Voters

As expected, CDD observers recorded a low turnout of voters across the state. This reflects the climate of uncertainty leading up to the election, as well as the historically high levels of voter apathy that have been recorded in the state. The heightened voter apathy will likely be accentuated in several polling units as news spreads about the disruptions caused by the malfunctioning of the BIVAS.

Conduct of Security

Although there have been pockets of reports indicating the absence or low presence of security officials, there have been no widespread reports of misconduct by security officials deployed for the elections. This is a noteworthy development considering that the expectation of intimidation and abuse from state security officials was a source of heightened concern ahead of the elections. We commend security agencies for the high level of professionalism they have so far shown, and once again urge them to sustain this humane approach to election security through the voting, collation, and announcement of results.

Vote Buying

We have also noted widespread incidents of vote-buying that will likely negatively impact the credibility of the election result. CDD observers reported numerous not-so-discreet cases of "see-and-buy" in polling units across the 21 LGAs of the state. In many reported cases, police officers have been alleged to have looked the other way, likely as a result of having themselves

been compromised. This practice, which appears to cut across party lines, has been an increasing feature of Nigerian elections and requires more concerted remedial efforts by INEC and other critical stakeholders.

Finally, we sue for all actors to prioritize peace before, during, and after the polls. Noting that there can be no progress without peace, we affirm that the embrace of armed opposition and the imposition of enforced restrictions on the constitutional right of citizens to choose their leaders will only serve as a further obstacle to the developmental aspirations of Anambra state, the Southeast, and Nigeria as a whole.

Ultimately the task of ensuring that a peaceable and credible election takes place rests on the shoulders of Anambra voters. While remaining vigilant and keeping safe, we urge the electorate to not be intimidated by threats to their hard-fought democratic franchise. We also urge relevant state and civic actors to play their role in ensuring that the desires of the electorate are reflected in the ultimate outcome of the polls.

May we conclude by wholeheartedly wishing the good people of Anambra State a peaceful and credible governorship election. Thank you for your time and attention.

Recommendations

- We call on security agencies to continue to respect human rights and standard rules of engagement and to secure voters as well as INEC staff and infrastructure.
- We call on civic and pro-democracy groups to remain vigilant, especially during the collation and announcement of voting results.
- We urge INEC and its officials to ensure the diligent accounting of votes, especially since voting collation will likely stretch into the night.
- We urge INEC to properly train its officials in the use of its BVAS devices.
- We implore voters to remain calm and, where possible, to monitor the outcome of the polls up to the announcement of the results.
- We call on political parties to remain calm and to do nothing to compromise the integrity of the election.

Signed:

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