



Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP)

Comprehensive Observation **Report** of the **2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS** IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH AND SATURDAY, MARCH 18TH 2023





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INTRODUCTION

- i. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recently accredited the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP) and deployed the Foundation on a short-term Election observation mission to observe the concluded General Elections in Nigeria. The first of the exercise was the Presidential and National Assembly elections while the second and final lap was the Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly elections. After undergoing a thorough training program on election monitoring and observation, COFP's observation team carried out this major assignment of observing the 2023 general elections, keeping its major goals in the forefront, namely, driving social change, conflict resolution, promoting good governance, and enhancing the culture of peace among adherents of different faiths and culture.
- ii. The short-term observation mission deployed by the COFP Foundation for the Presidential elections listed 85 Peace Fellows who served as observers across 30 states in Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory while 84 Peace Fellows were listed to observe the Gubernatorial elections in 30 states of Nigeria, excluding the FCT as it stands as the seat of government and does not come under the leadership of a governor. Based on the training received before the commencement of the general elections, the observation team carried out its mandate in all areas of the electoral process following international standards and commitments for democratic elections and the already binding laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- iii. As part of the methodology for smooth election monitoring, the members of the COFP observation team engaged with key electoral stakeholders including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political party agents, voters, security agencies, representatives of civil society organizations and the media among others.





PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- i. Nigerians flocked out in large numbers on Saturday, the 25th of February 2023 to exercise their franchise. The voters were all set with their PVCs to elect Nigeria's President, Vice-President, Members of the Senate and House of Representatives. It was such a pleasure to see voters display a high degree of resolve and tenacity in a bid to have their voices heard through the ballot, despite the lengthy wait periods due to logistical shortcomings.
- ii. The Presidential elections took place against a backdrop of intense economic challenges, most worthy of note were Naira crunch and fuel scarcity. These however, did not deter the masses. Despite the zeal and positive turnout of voters to exercise their civic rights in the face of economic crises, there was still a great attempt to frustrate their efforts. This was very disheartening to witness, to say the least. Beginning from the late arrival of INEC officials, who were tasked with presiding over the coordination of the polls, to the inadequate supply and poor functionality of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) Machine at polling units, down to suspicious, manipulative and criminal acts displayed by some officials with the untimely upload and transmission of results via the BVAS Machines to the INEC portal.
- iii. Up until the time of compiling this report (Tuesday the 28th of February), none of the results from the presidential election exercise have been uploaded on the INEC election results portal, which was specifically set up for the purpose of ensuring transparency of the entire process. Surprisingly, some of the Senate and House of Representatives results uploaded in the INEC's Irev do not reflect the actual results obtained at the polling units where our delegates carried out the observation exercise.
- iv. Following the Presidential and National Assembly elections were the Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly elections which were initially scheduled to take place on Saturday, 11th

March 2023 across the 36 States of Nigeria. However, only a few days to the said electoral process, the news of its postponement filled the air as the National Commissioner for information of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Barrister Festus Okoye announced a new date for the election in his statement which was released on the night of Wednesday, March 8th 2023. He emphasized that the reason for rescheduling the election was to allow ample time for reconfiguration of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) ahead of the governorship and state assembly elections. He said the decision was necessary to ensure that there was adequate time to back up the data stored on the over 176,000 BVAS machines from the Presidential and National Assembly elections held on the 25th February 2023, and then to reconfigure them for the Governorship and State Assembly elections. Hence, the process was rescheduled for Saturday, 18th March 2023, one whole week from the originally scheduled date.

- v. Voters turned up to elect Governors for their states in all 36 states of Nigeria on the morning of Saturday, 18th March 2023. However, the numerical strength, fervor and zeal with which the electorates turned out during the Presidential and National Assembly elections didn't seem to be present this time. In the voice of one of our observers who observed from Adamawa State;
 - a. The mass ideology that INEC was insincere with the electoral process especially with the events that played out in the presidential elections may have been responsible for the low turnout and general voter apathy for the gubernatorial elections.
 - b. The postponement of the elections by one week may also have affected the morale of voters. Nonetheless, unlike the presidential elections observed by our team, the INEC officials arrived in very good time to oversee and conduct the elections at their various polling units. The BVAS machines also performed well this time with transmission to the INEC Result Viewing portal (IReV) being observed as effective for the most part



VOTER REGISTRATION

- i. A total of 93.5 million eligible voters were registered to vote in the 2023 general elections as against 84 million registered voters in the 2019 elections, which shows an increase of 9.5 million newly registered voters. Despite the increased number of registered voters for this year's poll, about 90% of those registered collected their Permanent Voter Card (PVC). It was also revealed from the data gathered by our observers that only about 60-70% of the registered voters who had collected their PVCs were accredited for the voting exercise during the presidential election. Although this percentage does not seem too discouraging, it is also not particularly positive as we anticipated a greater number at the polls considering the number of voters registered for this exercise. Voter accreditation for Presidential and National Assembly elections commenced late in at least 75% of polling units that we observed. This delayed the entire voting process for virtually all units involved.
- ii. As opposed to the Presidential and National Assembly elections which had about 60-70% of the total number of registered voters turn up for the accreditation and voting exercise (recalling that a sum total of 93.5 million eligible voters were registered to vote in the 2023 general election), only about half the number of voters that showed up to vote in the presidential eventually showed up for the Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections.
- iii. For the Gubernatorial election process, voter accreditation commenced very early in most of the polling units observed as INEC officials arrived in good time in at least 93% of the PU's observed by the COFP Foundation observers.



INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

- i. It would only be fair to applaud the INEC officials who participated in the electoral process, as 95% of the polling units observed by COFP Foundation in both the presidential and gubernatorial elections recorded active inclusive participation of aged, nursing mothers, pregnant women, sick people, and people living with disabilities (PLWD) who were present at their units for the exercise. These groups of people were given priority at the various polling units observed, although some polling units recorded the absence of people living with disabilities.

- ii. However, the COFP Foundation observers deployed to Kaduna South, Kaduna North, Zaria and Kachia during the presidential elections recorded that there were no facilities for people living with disabilities (PLWD), even though preference was given to them. Hence, to encourage a higher turnout especially for this group in subsequent elections, we suggest that INEC should make more provisions for the supply and distribution of assistive voting tools such as braille ballot guides and magnifying glasses for those with albinism and low vision as the tools provided were inadequate on election day to serve all voters with disabilities.



ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION

i. Opening of Polling Units

Polls were scheduled to officially commence at exactly 8:30am by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Unfortunately, this commitment to time was not observed by the INEC officials during the presidential elections, as 75% of all polling stations visited commenced accreditation and voting after 10:30am, a considerable 2 hours behind schedule. As such, the exercise ran into the very early hours of the following day being the 26th February, for at least 22% of the polling units observed by the Foundation, while election did not hold in a few other polling units.

Contrary to the Presidential elections, INEC officials delegated to officiate the gubernatorial election process in at least 93% of the polling units that we observed across the country turned up in good time. As such, most stations were able to begin accreditation and voting at 8:30am. Others were able to commence between 8:30am and 9:30am. However, a few polling units where our team observed electoral process commenced lately but our observers had no record(s) of any polling unit having its electoral process run into the night. This is a major improvement on the first lap of the general elections.

ii. Election Materials

Most of the INEC officials assigned for the conduction and monitoring of the presidential election arrived lately, meaning that materials also didn't arrive in good time at all polling units where officials delayed. Upon arrival of materials, 41% of polling stations recorded shortage of materials like ballot papers, Ink, Ink pads and BVAS Machines which was simply not good enough. A shortage of ballot papers at any polling station would only serve to stir up further suspicion and doubt as it is expected that INEC provides its officials with the exact number of ballot papers as the number of people, they have registered in each polling unit

From our observation reports for the gubernatorial elections, INEC officials arrived early in many polling centers with election materials, while few Polling units experienced delay in the arrival of election materials as INEC officials didn't arrive in good time. Only a few polling stations recorded shortage of some election materials. INEC definitely worked hard in this final lap to cover the lapses of the presidential election process where 41% of polling stations recorded shortage of materials.





iii. Election Personnel

A good number of the personnel dispatched for this purpose by the INEC were generally competent in carrying out their duties and demonstrated a sense of commitment. For instance, we recorded 99% of compliance by the election presiding officers who signed and stamped the ballot papers before issuing them to the voters. Nonetheless, the COFP observation team recorded a few cases of incompetent Youth Corpers who had been recruited as ad-hoc staff for this process. Our records have it that some of them were unable to properly operate the BVAS Machine and as such, needed some assistance.

iv. Transparency of the Process

Various conducts and events displayed by the officials in charge of the Presidential and National Assembly voting exercise at different polling stations have without a doubt stirred up suspicion and doubt in the hearts of voters and observers alike, putting question marks against the credibility of the entire process. For example, our data reveals that some polling stations were short of ballot papers. Our question is why? We believe that if the ballot papers sent to each unit were equal to the number of voters registered in each polling unit, then there should have been no instance of ballot paper shortage. It is however, easy to deduce from this that some form of improper activities may have been carried out with some ballot papers after they arrived at the polling units.

Again, the Electoral Act 2022 provides for immediate transmission of results to the INEC result viewing portal via the BVAS machines after collation at all polling units. However, 100% of our data shows that INEC officials were unable to upload to the portal for presidential results immediately from the polling units because there were issues with the portal not opening. 42% of the pools observed by our delegates reported that the results of the Senate and House of Representatives could not be uploaded from the polling units to the INEC portal via BVAS, while it took some pooling units about 2 days before the transmitted results could be viewed on the INEC Irev. The inefficiency of this process

completely defeats the aim of introducing the BVAS Machine and the INEC result portal for aiding transparency by giving the impression for enough room for results to be potentially tamper with, which again calls to question the issue of transparency in the exercise.

The gubernatorial elections also recorded high levels of vote buying and intimidation at a host of the polling centers observed by our team. There was also active campaigning at some of the centers, which is clearly against the set standard both locally and internationally. In all, we could say that the process of both the presidential and gubernatorial elections lacked credibility and transparency, although, the results for the governorship elections in at least 90% of our observed polling units were transmitted immediately to the INEC IReV portal from the polling units.



v. Voting Process

Despite the delays witnessed at the commencement of the polls during the presidential elections, the process went on smoothly in majority of the polling units that we observed. However, the process was disrupted by the malfunctioning of the BVAS Machines in a number of polling units, as 41% of the polling units that our delegates observed reported that BVAS functioned inefficiently during the election process. In some cases, this situation caused agitation among the voters who had been waiting in queues for long hours, forcing some polling officials to resort to manual accreditation. Voters generally comported themselves and exhibited a high level of patience and tolerance, contributing to peaceful conduct of elections on the day. Some of our observed polling stations recorded the reassignment of voters to new polling units, which in some cases resulted in disruption and confusion, as some voters were seen moving about in search of their polling units on the day of the polls.

The gubernatorial election voting process also went on peacefully in most of the centers. This time, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) functioned without much hitches in almost all the polling units observed by our team unlike the presidential election process where there was a lot of BVAS malfunctioning. The gubernatorial and states house of assembly election process was generally peaceful and recorded no cases of violence in polls observed by our team. However, we recorded countless cases of intimidation and vote buying at different polling units during gubernatorial election. Voters on their part displayed a great level of patience and tolerance, contributing to peaceful conduct of the day.



vi. Closing of Polls

As a result of the late commencement of the presidential election process in a majority of Polling Units visited and observed by our team, many polling units generally went on beyond the official closing time of 2:30 pm to compensate for time lost earlier in the day, and enable all voters already in the queue to cast their votes. A good number of polling stations continued the process late into the evening and the following morning. Our statistics show that about 22% of polling centers closed polls between 5.00pm and the following morning, which is way past the time for official closing of polls.

On the contrary, many polling units were able to round off accreditation and voting at the official closing time of 2:30 pm during the gubernatorial and state houses of assembly elections. A few centers extended to 3:00pm but they were generally all done in good time and immediately began sorting and counting.

vii. Counting Process

Sorting and counting of votes began in all observed polling units immediately after the close of polls. The sorting and counting process during the presidential election was inevitably delayed in most stations due to the late commencement of polls and even continued late into the evening in some polling units while some continued until the early hours of Sunday the 26th of February. On the other hand, sorting and counting during the gubernatorial election commenced early enough and finish in very good time.

At the end of sorting and counting during the presidential elections, 92% of the polls that our election team observed informed us that scores of each political party were announced publicly and recorded in the EC60E Form before the party agents present while 96% of the polls observed during the gubernatorial elections gave this same report. Overall, the counting process was a smooth one.



viii. Transmission of Election Result Electronically to INEC Irev Portal during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections

Transmitting election results from the polling units to INEC portal electronically with BVAS constituted one of the greatest challenges faced by the INEC officials during the presidential and national assembly electoral process because the portal completely refused to give access for the transmission of presidential results. Our data shows that 100% of the polling units where we observed elections could not transmit their presidential results with BVAS from their polling units to the INEC Irev. However, 58% of the polling units observed by our delegates managed to transmit their Senate and House of Representatives election result with BVAS to the INEC portal only after so many attempts. Up to the time of this report, 42% reported that the entire results of their polling units could not be transmitted electronically to the INEC portal for either the Senate or House of Representatives.

Failure to upload results immediately with BVAS from the polling units to the INEC portal gave room for suspicion of manipulation and fraudulent acts on the election results by the INEC. This is because, instead of uploading election results in the presence of voters and party agents from the polling units with BVAS to the INEC portal, INEC officials took the results to their collation center where results were inputted manually in the absence of the voters, observers and party agents. This is the reason why some of our observers complained that the results that they later saw in the INEC portal did not correspond or reflect the record that they took at their polling units. In fact, some said that results in their polling units were replaced with results from different polling units altogether.

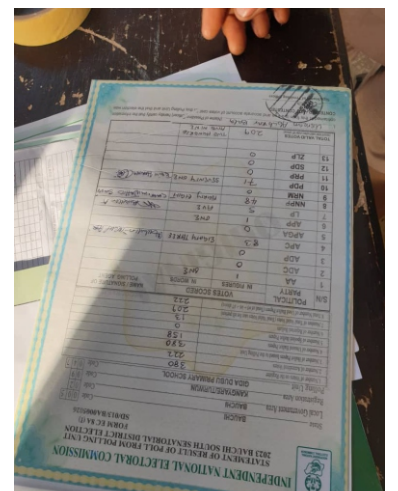
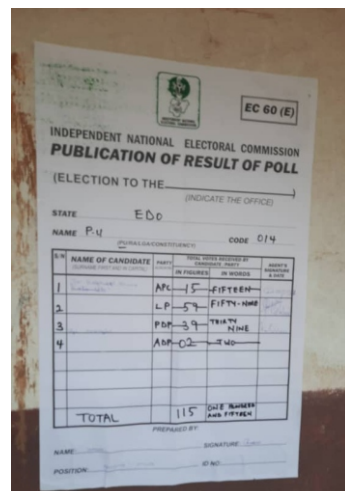
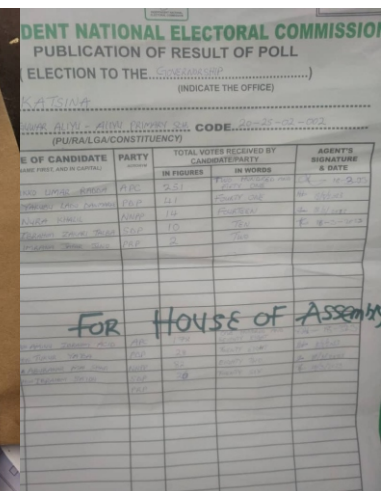
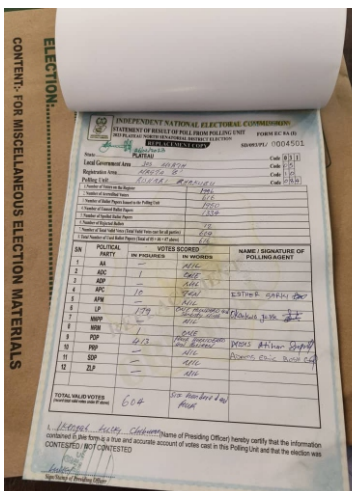
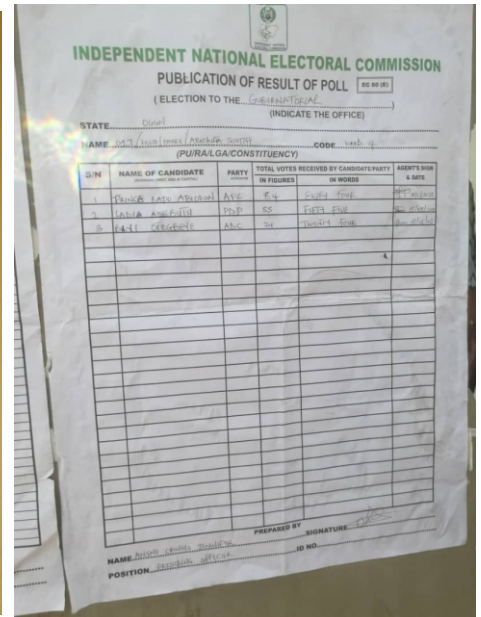
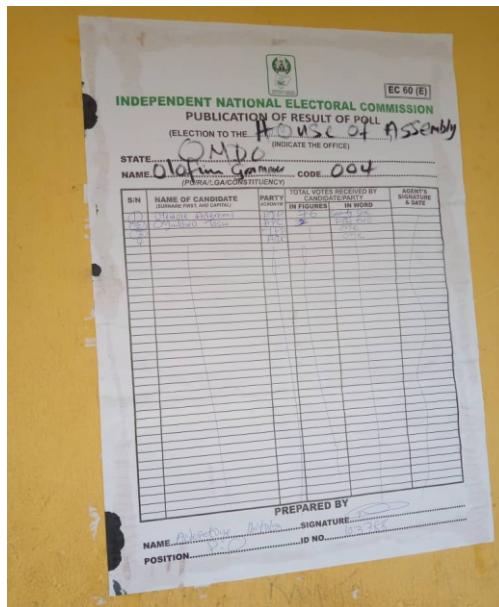
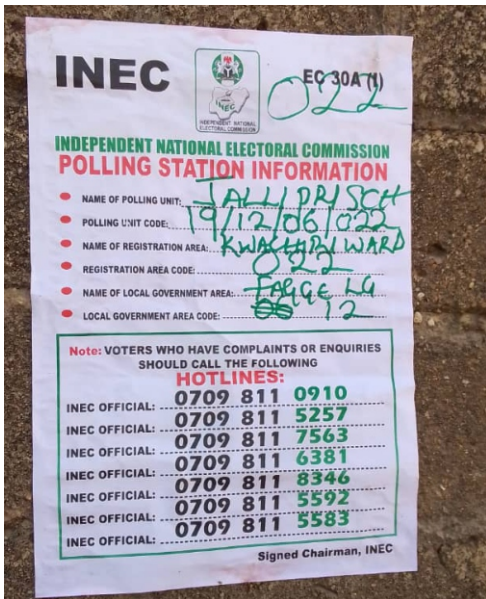


ix. Transmission of Election Result Electronically to INEC Irev Portal during the Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly Elections

75% of polling Units observed by our team reported that results were immediately transmitted electronically through the BVAS to the INEC IReV portal without any hitch or delay like we experienced in the Presidential and National Assembly electoral process. This leaves us with the idea that the just concluded gubernatorial election process was a more transparent process as opposed to the presidential election process which left every one of us with more doubts and questions than answers.

x. Electoral Security

Our collated data from COFP election observers reflected adequate presence of security personnel as every single polling unit had at least one security agent during elections held on the 25th of February and the 18th of February. However, there are questions as to why electorates at some polling stations were threatened by thugs and hoodlums in order to stop them from voting for the party/candidate of their choice without the intervention of the security agents present. Meanwhile, there are questions as to why voters at some polling stations were intimidated openly, denied the right to vote, swayed with money and materials in order to induce or coerce them to vote a certain party or candidate during gubernatorial election. How were all these perpetuated without the intervention of the security personnel present at the stations? These concerns for us raise more questions on the credibility of the process.



GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- i. The diverse challenges faced during the presidential and gubernatorial elections at the various polling units, such as late arrival of coordinating officials, malfunctioning of the BVAS machines, intimidation of voters, vote buying and disenfranchisement and the likes did not stop the election process but significantly mar the process in the polling units observed by the COFP team. Generally, party agents, voters and observers were satisfied with the conduct of the voting exercise but for some stations already pointed out in the report. Based on the just concluded exercise and the findings made above, we hereby make the following recommendations for consideration by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as remedies for the reduction of voter disenfranchisement, to safeguard Nigeria's democracy and amplify the voices of Nigerian citizens:
- ii. There is a need for INEC to improve on election logistics, as issues like delayed arrival of officials as well as insufficient election materials have become a recurring decimal in our elections. Some polling unit observers reported that INEC officials lacked means of transportation to collation centers with results after the election. However, there was an improvement on general logistics and transportation during the gubernatorial elections which took place on Saturday 25th February 2023. Overall, we hope that this can still be worked upon to ensure all round excellence in subsequent years.
- iii. A number of the officials appeared to be unfamiliar with the BVAS machines, hence, they experienced some difficulty using it. Some of these BVAS machines sent to polling stations observed by our team were not properly functioning. As such, we recommend that the INEC organize a more thorough, hands-on training program on the use of BVAS before sending them out subsequently. The machines should also be checked, charged and serviced adequately before it is dispatched to the field for use.
- iv. Transmission of the election result electronically to INEC Irev especially for the Presidential election from the polling units became impossible during the process, which questioned the authenticity of the figures subsequently posted by INEC on their portal. Meanwhile, posting of results to a different polling unit on the INEC portal made the entire process more questionable and unacceptable to many people. To increase transparency and build a higher level of confidence, INEC should stick and abide by their rules by uploading their result to the portal immediately they are received or cancel election in places or situations where there is glaring irregularity or malfunctioning of technology. Furthermore, INEC should tackle network connectivity problems in order to guarantee that results received can be transmitted electronically from BVAS at the polling units as promised.
- v. Transmission of the gubernatorial election results electronically to INEC Irev was very efficient this time, unlike the previous experience. Unfortunately, the electoral process was still marred through other factors such as voter's intimidation, coercion of voters to vote a party/candidate other than their preferred choice, vote buying and disenfranchisement of voters in some polls where our team observed. Hence, we recommend that the security agents should ensure that the right of the citizens to vote freely during elections is protected while INEC should enforce this process by not declaring any party involved in irregularity winner in such polling units.
- vi. The government, in tandem with the INEC, should do everything possible to encourage a larger inclusion of people living with disabilities (PLWD) in subsequent elections. There was inclusive participation in most of the polling stations observed by our team, however, the turnout of PLWD was not very encouraging. INEC should endeavor to make more provisions for supply and distribution of assistive voting tools such as braille ballot guides and magnifying

glasses for those with albinism and low vision as these tools were inadequate on election day to serve all voters with disabilities. Transportation arrangements could also be made to convey PLWD to and from their polling units, in order to make participation easier and more convenient for these special group.

- vii. The voter education department in INEC, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other Civil Society Organizations should increase voter education to reduce voter apathy which was visible in virtually all polling units our team observed during the gubernatorial elections. And to think of the fact that the turnout of voters for gubernatorial elections was very low? Ensuring a very transparent process for the Presidential elections would always spur voters to turn up instead of the low turnout experienced in the case of the 2023 March 18 gubernatorial elections.

- viii. Although the election process was not without its unique challenges, we must commend the efforts and commitment of all agents, officers, and voters alike for coming out to exercise their right to vote for their preferred candidate. The general conduct of voters was impressive to say the least and how most groups were able to show composure in the face of challenges is simply exceptional.





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