

2 feared dead as violence, ballot snatching mar Rivers election

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Two persons reportedly lost their lives in Tia and Bodo City in Gokana and Tia local government areas of Rivers State during the rerun election for national and state assemblies yesterday.

The election was reportedly marred by harassment of voters by a combined team of the army and the police, as well as the alleged snatching and diversion of electoral materials by chieftains of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

One person was said to have lost his life in Tia during a gun battle at Luawii community of Tia Local Government Area.

Suspected members of the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS), who were escorting a top APC chieftain, reportedly invaded Bodo polling unit where they shot sporadically in the air before carting away election materials. Unconfirmed report had it that one person was killed in the process.

But the police public relations officer, Rivers State command, DSP Nnamdi Omoni, said he was not aware of the incident.

Also, there were reported cases of ballot snatching and diversion of electoral materials such as result sheets in other polling units. In Ogoni, the Director of Finance and Administration, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Mene Derick, was accused of hijacking electoral materials meant for some wards in Gokana and diverted them to his hotel.

The special adviser on projects to Governor Nyesom Wike, Cyril Dum Wike, was reportedly manhandled by APC thugs. In Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, seven boys allegedly working for the former commissioner for power in the state under the administration of Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi, Austin Nwokocha, were arrested with charms and dangerous weapons at Omoku.

In Etche, Omuma, Ikwerre and Ahoada, electoral materials were reportedly diverted to unknown places by political thugs. At Ward 16 in Ubima, Ikwerre Local Government Area, where the Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, hails from, the result sheet meant for the ward were carted away by thugs allegedly working for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The minister, in collaboration with security agents, was, however, said to be on the trail of those behind the diversion of the electoral materials.

The media aide to the minister, David Iyofor, told newsmen that the presiding officer at Amaechi's Ward 8, Unit 14, was detained by security agents following the disappearance of the result sheets.

Also, the return officer of the PDP, Kingsley Chindah, said ballot papers and result sheets meant for Ahoada were diverted by unidentified thugs. In Ahoada, voters protested the use of fake electoral materials.

In Akuku-toru Local Government Area, election was postponed till Sunday because of the late arrival of materials. Election was also cancelled in Ward 9 Unit 7 of Ogu/bolo because electoral materials meant for the area were diverted by political thugs.

Governor Wike has accused the Nigerian Army and the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigerian Police of killing PDP agents, hijacking electoral materials and working to deliver a particular candidate in Rivers South-East senatorial district.

Reacting to mass shooting by the Nigerian Army and the Police in Khana, Gokana, Akuku-Toru and Etche local government areas, Governor Wike accused security agencies of working to manipulate the results of the election. He said that APC governors and other leaders had made good their threat of using federal might to rig the rerun election in Rivers State. The governor alleged that in Khana Local Government Area, election materials were hijacked by the Nigerian Army and the Police. He further alleged that in Gokana Local Government Area, soldiers hijacked election materials for wards 2 and 3 in Bodo City, killing two persons in the process. He also said that out of the 19 wards in Etche Local Government Area, soldiers and members of SARS hijacked election materials meant for four wards.

He informed that one Mr. Charles Anyanwu, an APC chieftain in Etche, was arrested with two AK47 rifles, but said that security agencies were likely to release him.

The governor alleged that the onslaught by the military and SARS personnel started on Friday night when the minister of transportation, backed by a battalion of soldiers and over 20 SARS personnel, attempted to hijack materials from the Isiokpo headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), but was resisted by youths.

He, however, said there was no loss of life on Friday night at Isiokpo in Ikwerre Local Government Area.

Governor Wike further noted that in Opobo-Nkoro Local Government Area, soldiers hijacked election materials and took same to the home of Dr Sam Sam Jaja of the APC.

He said: "I anticipated it. I tried to let the world know that those were the plans of the security agencies.

"In all my political career I have never experienced this kind of invasion by security agencies. What causes violence is when you give certain persons undue advantage.

"Be assured that we are resisting it. It may take our lives, but we will resist it to the last. That is what is expected when you are fighting for freedom. You must make sacrifices.

"It is unfortunate that we are congratulating the opposition for winning in Ghana, but here, the military are directly involved in rigging and hijacking materials."

The governor said he had informed a national commissioner of INEC and the Resident Electoral Commissioner of the development in Khana and Gokana local government area and he was assured that action would be taken.

But Senator Magnus Abe, the APC senatorial candidate for Rivers South-East, commended the conduct of the election. Abe, who spoke after casting his vote at his Ward 16 Unit 10 of Bera in Gokana, said although he got reports about few cases of late arrival of materials and ballot snatching, security operatives responded appropriately. He commended security agents and the INEC for their impressive roles during the election.

Also, the governorship candidate of the APC in 2015, Dakuku Peterside, said the conduct of the election was very impressive.

However, the state chairman of the PDP, Felix Obuah, said the election was characterised by the arrests and intimidation of his members. He alleged that about 200 PDP members were arrested by security agents while electoral materials were diverted to unknown places by APC chieftains.

Speaking to newsmen, the spokesman of the APC in Rivers State, Chris Finebone, absolved members of his party of any wrongdoing, saying the conduct of the election was very impressive.

Also speaking, the Resident Electoral Commissioner in Rivers State, Aniedi Ikowat, said INEC achieved 75 per cent success in the conduct of the election.

Meanwhile, results of the election in all the 21 constituencies were being awaited at the time of filing this report.