

Akwa Ibom LG polls claims 8 lives

From PATRICK TITUS, Uyo

NO fewer than eight persons were reported killed in skirmishes while electoral materials and private property were destroyed in skirmishes during the local government polls in Akwa Ibom State conducted by the State Electoral Commission, (AKISIEC) on Saturday.

Breakdown of the casualties showed six in Ini, one in Uruan

and another in Udung Uko local government areas.

Although their identities were not known as at noon yesterday, the cause of trouble may not be unconnected with the ruling Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) bid to win at all cost in the midst of resistance from other political parties.

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Another possible cause might be the result of the consensus candidacy option adopted by the PDP during its primary that left some stakeholders dissatisfied, even as they rejected those favoured by the party as imposition on them by some power blocs against the popular will.

The development, *New Nigerian* learnt, led to many supposed PDP members in the affected areas playing the role of the "Biblical Peter" in favour of the party opponents at the very last moment of decision taking through the polls.

However, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr Gabriel Ngban contacted over the reports of casualties denied knowledge of such reports and described same as "pocket of assumption and rumour made here and there."

"I have not been briefed that anybody has been killed during the conduct of the elections in the state, but information I have received on the conduct of the exercise was that it went peaceful throughout the state", Ngban stated.

Meanwhile, PDP has won all the chairmanship and councillorship seats in 16 local government areas declared by AKISIEC chairman, Mrs. Gloria Ukpung as at 11 am yesterday.

According to Mrs. Ukpung, PDP candidates were returned unopposed in Eastern Obolo, Ibeno, Nsit Ubium, Nsit Atai, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Etinan, Obot Akara, Mbo, Ibesikpo Asutan and Etim Ekpo, as well as Governor Akpabio's hometown Essien Udim.

In Urue Offong Oruko, Onna and Okobo PDP beat its opponents from All Nigeria People Party (ANPP), Labour

Party (LP) respectively with wider margin of votes cast.

However, the conduct of the exercise in these areas was peaceful. A cross section of people who commented on the peaceful atmosphere enjoyed in the areas compared to other turbulent areas, attributed its to the political awareness and disposition that peace should remain a recurrent decimal in the state to bring about its growth.

The state governor, Chief Godswill Akpabio who spoke with newsmen in his Ward in Essien Udim where the PDP also captured all the seats unopposed, described the development as evident of the people's belief in the party and his administration to take the state to another height of development characterized by improved well-being for all as well as hope for future.

The governor who lauded the people especially the youth for not allowing themselves to be used by desperate politicians who have nothing to offer the state, appealed for continued peace and support to government, pointing out that with credible people so elected to man government at the third tier level, much would be achieved for the people.

As at 4 pm yesterday, results of elections in the remaining 15 local government areas of Uyo, Eket, Esit Eket, Nsit Ibom, Itu, Ini, Ikono, Ibiono, Abak, Udung Uko, Oron, Mkpato Ennin, Ikot Abasi, Oruk Anam and Uruan were yet to be announced.

Although AKISIEC reserved comments on the delay in getting results from these areas, investigation revealed that it was due to violence and other skirmishes that did not allow the exercise take place smoothly in these areas.