

OFF-CYCLE ELECTIONS

Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi residents anxious as INEC announces winners today

•1 killed in Kogi •Gov. Bello commends INEC

•INEC suspends elections in 9 wards as Melaye calls for cancellation of results in 5 LGAs

By Yekini Jimoh Lokoja, Imoleayo Oyedeyi with Agency report

AS residents of Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa State await the result of the off-cycle election today with bated breath, early results of the poll obtained across the three states on Saturday indicated that the ruling political parties in the states might be coasting to victory.

The early election figures, uploaded on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Election Results-Viewing (IREV) Portal showed that the candidates of the All Progressives Congress (APC), which control both Kogi and Imo State, were in the lead, while the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is also taking the lead in Bayelsa State which it controls.

However, the election was held across the 21 local government areas of Kogi State on Saturday amid voter apathy, killing, violence, allegations of vote-buying and malpractices.

According to data obtained from INEC website, no fewer than 1,833,160 prospective voters who had collected their Permanent Voters Card (PVCs) out of the 1,932,654 registered voters had been expected to turn out for the election yesterday.

But *Sunday Tribune* gathered that there was low turn-out of voters in some parts of the state, just as one person identified as Umoru Idhu was shot dead at the Agala-Ogane polling unit in Anyigba, Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi East for destroying the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machine.

According to reports, Idhu was gunned down around 10 am, while the voting was about to commence at the said polling unit in the area.

An eye witness identified as Abdullahi Danjuma, said the deceased approached the polling unit and forcefully took the BVAS device before smashing it on the ground in his bid to destroy them and stop voting at the polling unit.

"But a person, suspected to be a vigilante rushed in from the crowd and fired at him, killing him instantly," the eye-witness added.

Despite the incident, voting reportedly went on at the polling unit yesterday, even as the voters called on security agencies to thoroughly investigate the killing.

However in Ogori-Magongo Local Government area of the state, the people were reportedly not allowed to vote as no INEC officials and election materials were noticed in any of the polling unit in the council area.

A resident anonymously told *Sunday Tribune* that election did not hold in the local government due to viral claims that voting had taken place on Friday night in the council area.

"They said have voted in our behalf," the resident said, adding that a man was seen dropping filled INEC election result sheets from one polling unit to another in the area.

According to the source, the man was swiftly arrested with the filled election result sheets and a cash sum of one million naira in his bag and was consequently handed over to security agents.

Bello commends INEC, security agencies

Meanwhile, the state governor, Yahaya Bello, has commended the security agencies and INEC for the conduct of the poll in the state.

Speaking with journalists shortly after casting his vote at Ahache Ward 11 in Agassa, in Okene Local Government Area of the state, the governor described the election as peaceful, despite some reported cases of violence in some parts of the state.

The governor, who described the reported incidents of violence as fake news, said: "The number of security men in the state for the elections is highly commended and so far so good all INEC electronic devices are working well without any problem."

"I appeal to you journalists not to listen to online news that will be circulating fake news. You people are hear and you have seen by yourself, everywhere is peace.

"My achievements, as the governor of the state, will definitely give my party victory in today election, we have done well and the people of Kogi State know that we have done a lot. The incoming governor, which will come from my party, will continue from where I stop by the grace of God. We have all come out in numbers to cast our votes. I have just cast my vote along with my family members and others are casting their votes. It is timely. All materials were deployed within the time stipulated, and so far I haven't seen a complaint from any quota.

"The conduct of INEC so far has been so fantastic. All the security agencies have conducted themselves so far very professionally. Citizens that are exercising their franchise are doing that freely. There is no hitches, no rancor. We are united and we are happy over this exercise. And by the special grace of God we are going to come off very triumphant in this particular exercise," the governor said.

Melaye calls for cancellation of results in 5 LGAs, fails to vote

Meanwhile, the governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the Kogi election, Dino Melaye, has called for the cancellation of the elections held in five Local Government Areas of the state.

Melaye, who made the demand on his official X handle on Saturday, hours after failing to vote at his Polling Unit 04, Iluafon Quarters, Ayetoro Gbade in Ijumu Local Government Area of Kogi State.

The PDP standard-bearer had listed the affected LGAs as Okene, Okehi, Ajaokuta, Adavi, and Ogori/Mangogo, alleging that the results obtained from the units in the councils was compromised.

He said: "INEC must cancel the election in the 5 local governments of Kogi-Central. The election in Okene, Okehi, Ajaokuta, Adavi, and Ogori/Mangogo is a scam coordinated from the highest level of INEC."

Despite this, the PDP guber candidate did not cast his vote as he did not show up at his Polling Unit until the

voting ended at 2 pm on Saturday, even though his aides, party members and supporters had patiently waited for him at the voting centre.

As of press time, the reason for his failure to turn up at the PU could not be ascertained, but unconfirmed reports say it may not be unconnected with the appearance of operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) at the voting centre.

INEC suspends election in Ogori/Magongo LGA

Meanwhile, the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) has suspended election in the nine Wards in Ogori/Magongo LGA of the state.

The commission in a statement on Sunday night signed by its National Commissioner & Member, Information and Voter Education Committee, Mohammed Kudu Haruna, said it took the decision following "incidences of electoral malpractices, particularly the incident of result sheets completed before voting."

The statement, entitled "Suspension of election in some locations in Kogi State" reads in part: "The commission has received reports from our officials in Kogi State on incidences of electoral malpractices, particularly the incident of result sheets completed before voting."

"Reports indicate that the incidents occurred in Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ogori/Magongo, Okehi and Okene Local Government Areas. The most serious incidents occurred in Ogori/Magongo, affecting nine of 10 Registration Areas.

"This is entirely unacceptable. Any result not emanating from the commission's process in the Polling Units will not be accepted.

"The commission is determined not to reward bad behaviour. Consequently, the election in the nine Wards in Ogori/Magongo LGA (Eni, Okibo, Okehi, Iletaju, Aiyeromi, Ugugu, Obinoyin, Obatgben and Oturu) is at this moment suspended. The incidences in the other Local Government Areas are being thoroughly investigated, and the outcome, including the way forward, will be announced in the next 24 hours.

"Meanwhile, as the processes continue, we follow the audit trail of personnel and materials to ascertain those who may have been complicit in undermining the process. We have a record of all officials deployed at various levels as supervisors, monitors, technical staff or polling unit officials and all election materials issued to them. Appropriate sanctions will be applied where necessary.

"The commission assures voters in Kogi State that their votes are protected, and their wishes will be respected."

SDP candidate alleges malpractices

Meanwhile, the candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in the Kogi governorship election, Murtala Ajaka, has alleged that fake election result sheets were deployed to Okene, Okehi and Adavi local government areas of the State by the electoral officers posted to the areas.

While addressing journalists after casting his ballot on Saturday, Ajaka claimed that certain original election result sheets were taken to unknown locations where false results were inputted.

He said that apart from the observations in the identified three local government areas, INEC had set up a good process for a credible election in the state.

However, while reacting, the electoral commission said the allegations of forged election result sheet will be investigated, while appropriate action will be taken.

"Our attention has been drawn to a report that filled result sheets were discovered in some polling units in Kogi State. The Commission views this situation seriously. Our senior officials deployed to the State are currently investigating the incident(s). The Commission will communicate its decision earnestly," the commission stated on his official X account.

Kogi LGA chair allegedly arrested with ammunition, cash

However, the chairman of Igalamela Local Government Area of the state, James

Ojoja, was arrested by security operatives during the election in the state on Saturday over alleged possession of ammunition and lots of cash.

It was gathered that the money and ammunition were packed in several 'Ghana-must-go' bags, supposedly for use during the election.

A video which circulated on social media on Saturday evening showed the suspects sitting on the floor near an army checkpoint.

In a viral video, both the council chairman and his gang were seen expressing regrets and pleading for forgiveness.

As of press time, the state Police Public Relations Officer, William Oyve, was yet to issue an official statement on the development.

Kogi guber: No report of security breach, poll peaceful, says DIG

But despite this, the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) in charge of security in the Kogi election, Mr Habu Sani, described the poll as peaceful and devoid of security breach.

The DIG made the disclosure to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Lokoja, the state capital on Saturday.

He said that from all indications, the electorate and political actors in the poll behaved well.

"There was no report of breach of security from any part of Kogi State. We thank God that what we have been praying for is indeed manifesting to show a sharp deviation from past experiences in Kogi.

"We urge residents to maintain this peace even after the election so that Kogi can continue to experience the desired growth and development as a state," he said.

According to him, his officers and men alongside other security agencies did their best to ensure that the election was peaceful till the end.

The DIG commended security operatives for displaying high level of professionalism in maintaining peace during the election.

Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi polls: Voters sell votes for meager N1000 —CODE

THE off-cycle election held in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi States on Saturday witnessed massive vote-buying as party agents reportedly carried the favour of the voters with as

low as N1000.

This was contained in the mid-day report of the elections in the three states jointly presented by Hamzat Lawal, the CEO of the Connected Development

(CODE), Emmanuel Njoku, the Director, Democracy and Governance and Head of Uzabe elections situation room, CODE and Hajiya Zaili Lawal, Deputy Director Programs, CODE, in Lokoja,

Kogi State on Saturday.

Njoku, who read the report under the Uzabe Situation Room, said that vote buying was recorded across the three states in different shades and categories.

"Disturbingly, in Bayelsa, Market Square Ogia Town Ward of Ogbia LGA, verified reports of vote buying have surfaced, with amounts going as high as N20,000. This was also

observed at Ama-Ukwu Umuawaka Square Ward of Njaba LGA, Imo State where votes were traded for as low as N1,000. This practice is disturbing and must be halted," he said.