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3 killed, ballot boxes hijacked in Rivers

... Women protest against arrest of monarch as Wike expresses hope of victory

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Two persons were reportedly killed during the governorship and House of Assembly elections, and several ballot boxes and voting materials snatched by political thugs in Rivers State.

The deaths were recorded at two different locations in Akinima, Ahoadia West Local Government Area and Omerelu, in Ikwerre Local Government Area of the state.

Our correspondent gathered that gunmen stormed the office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Akinima, where they shot at the door to force themselves inside the office and killed the victim whose identity is yet to be ascertained.

Community sources disclosed that the perpetrators of the crime also carted away some materials for the elections, alleging that a chieftain and federal lawmaker of the opposition party in the state knew those behind the shooting.

Similarly, in Omerelu, Ikwerre LGA, it was gathered that, supremacy war ensued when a cult group attempted to snatch a ballot box, leading to the killing of a cult member.

Also, a police officer on election duty was shot on Friday night in Andoni LGA. His shooting has been confirmed to journalists by the police command spokesman, Nnamdi Omoni, in Port Harcourt.

Ballot boxes were reportedly hijacked in Buguma, in Asari Toru wards 15, 16 and 17 in Akuku Toru, Abua/Odual, Okrika, Gokana, Khana, Port Harcourt City, and Akpajo in Eleme local government areas of the state.

In Buguma, Asari LGA, it was gathered that some women staged a peaceful protest in the community to condemn the arrest of their traditional ruler, by security men at the polling centre.

A community source, Ipalibo, who could not disclose the name of the traditional ruler, said the paramount ruler was arrested unjustly, when he was about to cast his vote.

Ipalibo told our correspondent that it was military men who arrested the king, adding that they (army) had desecrated their land, which was the reason for the demonstration by the women of the area.

He said that voting processes started peacefully in Buguma until about 9:35am, when soldiers stormed the polling centre and arrested the monarch, thereby disrupting the exercise.

In a similar development, men in military fatigue, allegedly arrested a Kula kingdom royal father and took him to their base in Abonnema.

Aside voter apathy witnessed across the 23 local government areas of the state, polls were peaceful compared to what happened during the February 23 presidential and National Assembly elections in the state.

There was heavy shooting in Kpor community in Gokana LGA, by political thugs. As at 2:15pm, the headquarters of the police in the area was tensed up, with heavy presence of armed security men. Investigation showed that security operatives helped in rescuing INEC ad hoc personnel at the police station.

Our correspondent gathered that the hoodlums that snatched ballot boxes at Okujagu, in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area (PHALGA) escaped through the waterfront.

Election in Khana LGA was stalled following security challenges reported in the communities, which forced security agencies to order a recall of all INEC personnel, ad hoc staff and members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to police area headquarters in Bori.

Some of the INEC ad hoc personnel that spoke to our correspondent said earlier in the day, angry youths held them hostage for two hours at INEC office before they were freed by soldiers.

One of the staff who spoke on condition of anonymity, alleged that some drivers were attacked on their way to Wiaka community and their personal effects and non-sensitive materials snatched by armed youths.

Speaking shortly after he had voted, Governor Nyesom Wike, expressed satisfaction that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) would win, notwithstanding the funny reports he had received about the military.

"For now, we are quite satisfied. We are going to win the election very well. Even though we have got reports of what military is doing in some local government areas.

"By and large, we have always said the duty of the army is to provide security. But, it is unfortunate that they are directly participating.

"Police appear to have no role. The military has taken over the function of the police, which is abnormal. But, we believe that we will win.

"We don't know how many local governments they manipulate. But, the reports we are getting, even though they are trying to be funny, we will surely win," Wike said.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Transportation and leader of the All Progressives Congress in the state, Chibuike Amaechi, has said that the presence of military averted bloodbath and electoral violence in Rivers.

Speaking to newsmen in his country home, Ubima, Ward 8, Unit 14, in Ikwerre Local Government Area of the state, where he voted for his choice candidates for both the governorship and state House of Assembly elections, Amaechi commended the police, the military and other security agencies for keeping the peace.

“So far, we have not heard of any shootings and killings. We are completely happy that the army and the police are everywhere maintaining the peace. We have held elections in Rivers State where over 15 to 20 persons were killed. But, this is the only election that has recorded peace and it is because of the presence of the military.

“The militants have fled because of the presence of the military and we are voting peacefully. And you know, one thing about the soldiers is that they are apolitical, they are neither supporting APC nor AAC nor PDP. What they are doing is to maintain peace and ensure that nobody disrupts the process. I think we will prefer to have this kind of election where everybody is having peace,” Amaechi explained.



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