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## Violence, deaths, voter apathy, suppression mar process

📅 March 19, 2023 👤 Our Reporters 💬 Comment(0)

The governorship and state House of Assembly elections held across the country yesterday was marred by a general voter apathy and pockets of violence in many parts of the country. This, many observers feel may not be unconnected with the February 25 presidential elections, the reign of thugs and efforts by various state governors to suppress opposition voters. In what looked like a connivance among government officials, the Independent National Electoral Commission( INEC) and security agencies, violence, deaths, voter suppression and intimidation took the shine off the election, even as many citizens were denied access to voting. In Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Abia, Imo, Rivers, Ogun, among other states, there were reports of deliberate voter suppression, harassment and intimidation of voters, which made many to stay away from the polling units.

The Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC) in Lagos State, had to reschedule elections in 10 polling units in the Lekki axis of the state to today, owing to the inability of the voters in the affected areas to vote. In Kaduna State, there was low turnout of voters in many parts of Kaduna metropolis and its environs.

Many officials of the INEC were at their polling units at early as 8:30am but were seen idling away. However, other units were full of activities as voters turned out en masse to cast their votes for candidates of their choice. The state governor, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, who alleged intimidation of voters in some parts of the state, added that the security operatives have been mobilized to curtail the situation. He, however, said the turnout was a little bit low compared to the presidential election. El-Rufai, who spoke shortly after casting his vote at polling unit 024, Ungwan Sarki ward in Kaduna metropolis, however, said the process was seamless. "Generally speaking, the process has been free across the state, except in Southern Kaduna, where we got reports of voter intimidation. Security personnel are stepping into the situation. Robust security arrangement was put in place, in response to that intelligence. So far, so good. I just hope that more people come out, voter turnout still appears a little low."

Meanwhile, the PDP governorship candidate in the state, Hon. Isa Ashiru, pledged to accept the outcome of the election. In Aba, the commercial nerve centre of Abia State and other parts of the state, our reporter, who monitored the election in Aba South, Aba North and Osisioma Local Government Areas, reported that in so many wards and polling units, the number of agents representing the political parties outnumbered the number of accredited voters. In Aba South, Ward-12, some polling units with over 800 registered voters ended up having just 96 to 100 accredited voters.

It was the same situation in some wards and polling units in Aba North and Osisioma Local Government Areas. Some residents, who spoke to our correspondent, said they were discouraged because the outcome of the February 25 presidential and National Assembly elections did not reflect the wishes of the electorate. “Why should I vote? The one I encouraged everybody in my house to go out and vote, what did INEC do? I have so many young people living in my house. But I couldn’t do what I did on February 25 because I’m also disappointed.

“Those youths even came out this morning to encourage me to go out and vote but I refused. I know Abia needs change but I’m seriously disappointed,” Chief Maxwell Obinali said. Meanwhile, the police foiled an attempt by some thugs to cart away the ballot box at Unit 0007, Ward 7 in Osisioma Local Government Area. A Labour Party (LP) agent, Mr Ebere Louis, alleged that the plot was hatched by some members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who felt that they were losing at the unit.

“Labour Party was leading the PDP in votes at the unit and they ganged up with thugs to destroy INEC materials at the unit. So, we called for police intervention and when they came, an unknown person ran away with one of the boxes but the result sheets were intact “We know that the plot was made by PDP whose local government youth chairman came here and gave money to some boys and told them that their party is not winning there. He, therefore, engineered them to do anything they can to cancel the election”, he said. Meanwhile, some hoodlums attacked the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reporter, Mr. Ijendu Iheaka, at Umueke Ward-7, Unit 004 and took his phone, which was later retrieved by a policewoman on duty at the centre. In the neighbouring Imo State, the election was marred by large-scale militarization of the exercise, abduction of election officials and widespread snatching of election materials.

From Owerri, the state capital to the boundary communities in Ideato North Council area, cases of abduction of officials and snatching of election materials were rampant and unmitigated. To prove that the warning and directives of the Inspector General of Police were apparently plain rhetoric, the Ebubeagu Vigilante outfit of the Imo State government was in full operation, deploying the crudest form of violence and intimidation. The outfit was the culprit in the alleged abduction of about 19 adhoc staff of INEC, who were on their way to work at Ugbelle ward in Ideato South council area. When they eventually freed the officials, they took away their BVAS machines, the result sheets and other electoral materials. Similarly, the 27 LGA Sole Administrators in Imo State, literally functioned as thugs with each of them moving around their local council with a retinue of thugs and the Ebubeagu gunmen.

Most of them were also active in the snatching of election materials. The election was dominated by the deployment of the force of arm by the ruling APC government in the state to the extent that the Deputy Speaker of the state Assembly, Amara Chyna Iwuanyanwu, a candidate in the same election, was moving from polling unit to polling units, intimidating voters and opponents, fully backed by a ‘platoon’ of armed policemen and a Police Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) in his convoy. In the course of his roaming the polling units, his thugs, emboldened by his ‘superior firepower’ shot at point blank range, the Umuanya Amaigbo Youth Leader, Tochukwu Amaechi, who was at his polling unit in Umuanya, Amaigbo Community, Nwangele LGA. Amaechi is currently battling for his life.

In the state capital, thugs allegedly loyal to the APC state chairman, with the full support of security agents, chased other parties out of the St. Paul polling unit at Douglas Road, Owerri. A PDP agent was stabbed in the head and bled profusely.

He had to be rushed out for medical attention. By midday Saturday, the allegations were rife that electoral materials for Ohafor-Okporo/Umutanze, Ebenese/Umueze/Ihioma, Okwuabala Ihioma, IhitteOwerre, Ogbaeruru and Amaifeke wards where no election held, were in the custody of state actors in Orlu, who were all gathered at the Orlu LGA guarded by heavy security while alleged manipulations were taking place.

The Police authorities in the state were unashamedly partisan. Findings indicated that part of the platoon of the Deputy Speaker, was the Officer Commanding and men of the State Intelligence Bureau (SIB) of the Imo State police Command. The soldiers were not wonderful. They were a bit discrete but in Ideato South, they threw caution to the wind to lend themselves to do the work of political thugs, chasing away people from the LGA Collation Centre. As at the time of filing this report, no official result has been declared for any LGA in Imo State.

In Ogun State, Governor Dapo Abiodun, condemned pockets of violence in some parts of the state during the conduct of the governorship and House of Assembly elections. The governor, in a statement signed by his Chief Press Secretary, Kunle Somorin, blamed opposition elements, saying rather than subjecting the exercise to the people’s choice, these undemocratic characters turned a

seamless electoral process to a do or die affair. Abiodun said the reports of the violence came as a surprise, as the election started on a peaceful note across the state.

Somorin added that the state governor, Dapo Abiodun, seriously frowned at the situation, which, according to him, will not be condoned. He said though normalcy had returned to the affected areas as security agencies swiftly responded, the state government would not hesitate to deal with anyone or groups behind the poll disruption, attacks on voters and snatching of ballot boxes. Apparently taking advantage of the poor security arrangement made for the elections, the thugs shot their ways to polling centres to cause mayhem, even in the full glare of security operatives deployed to maintain law and order during the exercise.

#### Lagos State

At least, one person was killed as hoodlums attacked various polling units and chased away eligible voters from the voting areas at Ago and Ijegan suburbs of Lagos State. The hoodlums, who rode on motorbikes, also attacked other polling units in the community as gunshot rent the air for hours before arrival of soldiers and policemen who dispersed them.

It was also gathered that one of the thugs attempted to snatch a ballot box and escape when he was shot dead by a policeman attached to one of the polling units. Prior to the shooting, the same thug had reportedly seized the phones of some journalists in a bid to prevent them from doing a video of him at the scene. It was gathered that the election was going on well when the hoodlums arrived the various polling units and started attacking people freely for not voting their party. One the victims of the attack, Kelechi Nwaiwu, said he was about to cast his vote when the hoodlums appeared from nowhere and started shooting sporadically into the air to scare away the people. According to Nwaiwu, his ballot paper was collected from him by one of the hoodlums, before they descended on the voting materials. Another victim, Yusuf Olanrewaju, told our correspondent that one of the hoodlums used a bottle to stab him on his head.

"I was at my polling unit at Ijegan Primary School when some thugs came and disrupted the election process even when the counting has not begun. I went forward trying to stop them when three hefty men came out from three vehicles and some bike riders attacked those of us who are not voting APC." Another victim, who gave her name as Cynthia said there was no election in Lagos state but war. According to her, the thugs came out of their vehicles and started shooting at her polling unit when the counting had just begun and Labour Party was in the lead.

"Some of the hoodlums, who were armed, told everyone us at our polling units to leave and go back home if we are not voting their candidate," she said. Sunday Telegraph learnt that the arrival of the hoodlums at every polling unit created fear and panic as voters ran helter skelter for their lives. The voters, it was learnt, were told to go home if their votes were not for Babajide Sanwo – Olu the governorship candidate of the All Progressive Congress( APC) on Lagos State. Our correspondent also gathered that those casting their ballot for the APC were allowed to vote more than once as an elderly woman was seen voting three times.

An APC party agent was also seen telling voters that members of his party must vote before any other person. As if these were not enough, some political thugs brazenly attacked and chased away non-Yoruba-speaking voters in Oshodi-Isolo area of Lagos because they would not cast their ballots for Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who is seeking re-election. The attackers, wielding iron rods and sticks, invaded polling units across wards on Ajao Estate in Oshodi-Isolo Local Council Development Area (LCDA) where voters were waiting for the arrival of electoral officials as at 8:53am.

#### Delta State

Three persons were shot dead as violence erupted at a polling centre in Mosogar, Ethiope West Local Government Area, Delta State. The three persons were reportedly shot dead during a gun duel between some thugs and security operatives. In the confusion that ensued thereafter, the home of a former Chairman of Ethiope West Local Government council, Dr. Wilson Omene, was set ablaze by some irate youths. There was also violence in Ewreni, Ughelli North Local Government Area, as another gang of thugs attacked INEC officials, destroying about three Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machines and other election materials at a polling centre. Some of the INEC officials were said to have sustained injuries, while voting was disrupted at the polling units in the area. At Amukpe, Sapele Local Government Area, one of the youths lost his hand during a clash with thugs at one of the polling units. Meanwhile, voting commenced early at some polling units in parts of the state, as polling materials arrived at the various RAC Centres the previous day and officials of INEC commenced the distribution of the items to the various units as early as 7:00am. The governorship candidate of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Chief Great Ogboru, who spoke to journalists commended the peaceful atmosphere at the polling unit, where he voted and expressed hope that the exercise will be peaceful across the state. "The verification in the voting process was okay because the BVAS worked. My thumbprint was captured. "Until this time, it has been peaceful. So, let us see the situation later in the day. Let us hear the results if the uploading of the units results will take place before we can start to judge," he said. Also, the gubernatorial candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Delta State, Rt Hon. Sheriff Oborevwori, who voted at Oha Ward 1, Unit 33, Osubi, Okpe Local Government Area of the State at exactly 9:30am, expressed optimism that he would win because his party had worked so hard for

it. Oborevwori said it was also expected that the exercise would be properly conducted and peaceful across the state, stressing that every critical stakeholder must strive to further strengthen the democratic process in Nigeria. Governorship candidate of the APC in Delta State, Senator Ovie Omo-Agege, who cast his vote at his Orogun Ward 2 Unit 19, Ughelli North LGA at 11:11am, also expressed optimism that his party would win the election. Omo-Agege said: "We believe that we are going to win at the end of the day, no doubt about that; this has been the feelers for more than a month and the momentum was there all along coming into the polls today, so I expect that at the end of the day, we would be declared winner. "PDP entered into this contest with a determination to ensure that attacks are launched on polling units across the state, most especially in Delta Central to destroy the votes. "We have received reports of those attacks in polling units in Ewreni, Ughelli South, Oteri and of course, there are some mischief going on since last night in Gbaramatu and Oporoza in Warri South West Local Government Area." On their parts, the governorship candidates of the SDP and LP, Olorogun Kenneth Gbagi, Mr. Ken Pela respectively, also expressed optimism that they would win the election. Pela however, said his enthusiasm had been dampened by reports of vote buying by some political parties and violence in some parts of the state.

#### Benue State

Military forces drafted to ensure the peaceful conduct of the elections, reportedly shot dead two political thugs who stormed polling units to snatch ballot boxes in Gboko South Local Government area of Benue State. The military men also beat up a serving member of the House of Representatives, Hon. Kpam Sokpo, who represents the Buruku Federal Constituency of Benue State. Sunday Telegraph gathered that the fierce encounter between the federal lawmaker and the soldiers, took place on the eve of the elections at the Old Barn Hotel in Gboko Local Government Area of the state.

Sokpo, who was accused of planning to rig the election, was beaten to pulp by the soldiers. But narrating his ordeal to newsmen, Sokpo refuted the allegations, saying the soldiers stormed the hotel where he was lodging around 2:30 am and started beating him even after he identified himself as a serving lawmaker.

"I don't know what came over them. I came to the hotel where I was staying in Gboko, Old Barn around 2:30am. I sat there with some of my friends. Later, about five trucks filled with over 60 soldiers drove into the hotel.

"When they alighted from their vehicles they just took positions. I got up from where I was sitting to do something and one of them approached me and asked why I was walking in the manner I was walking.

"And as I was talking, he slapped me in the face. I asked why he did that and introduced myself as a House of Representatives member. I told him he does not know me and just slapped me in the face and before I knew what was happening, more than 30 of them just pounced on me using the butt of their guns to injured me. Some of the guns they used on me even broke into pieces. As I speak with you, I have stitches on my face, on my head and I have all kinds of injuries on my body," he said.

When contacted, the Public Relations Officer of 401 Special Forces Makurdi, Captain Okezie and the Commissioner of Police, Wale Abass, both said they were not aware of the incidents.

#### Ebonyi State

A voter, Peter Nweke, was allegedly beaten to a state of coma by armed thugs who invaded Polling Unit 10, Ogboji ward in Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

His brother, Oko Sampson Nweke, who confirmed this to our correspondent, said the thugs invaded the polling unit, armed with AK-47 rifles. The thugs who arrived the scene riding on two motorcycles, drove away the voters and election officials before setting ablaze all the electoral materials.

#### Enugu State

On the eve of the election, the military arrested 140 armed men, who were allegedly hired by one of the political parties in the state to cause mayhem during the polls.

The armed men were said to have been arrested when soldiers, acting on a tip off, stormed a hotel where they were lodged at Nsukka, preparatory to their planned operation on election day. The thugs, were reportedly caught with sophisticated weapons, including AK-47 and pump action rifles on them.

#### Ondo State

A policeman and one resident of Idanre in Idanre Local Government Area of Ondo State were yesterday hit by stray bullets during the House of Assembly election in the State.

Sources in the town said the victims were shot by suspected political thugs, who were showing supremacy between the leading Peoples Democratic Party(PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC).

The source said the two victims are currently receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital.

The Police Public Relations Officer(PPRO), Funmilayo Odunlami, who confirmed the shooting, said a suspect has been arrested in connection with the incident while a pump action gun and two live cartridges were recovered from him.

### Imo State

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) confirmed the kidnap of 19 members of its ad hoc staff while on their way to conduct the House of Assembly election in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo.

INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioner for Imo, Prof. Sylvia Agu disclosed this in a statement issued in Owerri.

It was gathered that they were, however, released following intervention by security agents but election materials including BVAS machines are still missing.

Agu said: "The attention of the commission has been drawn to a report from Ugbelle Registration Area (06) in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, where thugs carted away all electoral materials and took our staff hostage for some hours during the March 18 House of Assembly election.

"The security forces were informed and a rescue operation was mounted.

"Presently, all ad hoc staff on hostage have been rescued but no trace of the election materials.

"While the commission remains grateful to the security operatives, it condemns such acts of thuggery, intimidation and disenfranchisement of voters and urge the public to continue to have confidence in the electoral process," Agu stated.

### Ogun State

Hoodlums suspected to be political thugs disrupted the electoral process in a polling unit in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital.

The thugs descended on journalists and officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at Ward 13, Polling Unit 22 in Itori Odo, Abeokuta, South Local Government Area of the state.

The hoodlums, armed with axes, caused panic in the area, as they overpowered a Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) personnel, who attempted to rescue two ballot boxes snatched from the polling unit.

Trouble started when an agent of the All Progressives Congress (APC) challenged journalists for taking pictures at the unit. According to the agent, they had instructions not to allow anybody take pictures or record videos at the polling unit.

### Kano State

The elections were grossly disrupted in Rimin Gado Local Government Area of Kano State as hoodlums destroyed several ballot boxes and chased away party agents and voters from polling units.

In Dugurawa, Jili, Yalwan Danziyal, in Akalawa Futufutu Wards, the ballot boxes were completely destroyed while voters were seen running helter skelter as the political thugs chased them.

A lawyer, Haliru Danga Maigari, accused the APC of being behind the disruption of the elections because they were losing the elections. He alleged that members of the APC in connivance with some security personnel perpetrated the commotion at Futufutu despite the fact that the election was going on peacefully. .

### Edo State

There was pandemonium in Eresoyen Primary School Uhogua- Iguoshodin community, Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State as gunmen stormed the primary school, taking away the three BVAS machine and other voting materials.

At the Polling Unit, INEC Officials and materials arrived at about 7:30 am and accreditation and voting commenced simultaneously at exactly 8:30 am.

The gunmen, numbering three, alighted from their vehicle and started shooting sporadically in the air and snatching the BVAS machine and other voting materials from the INEC officers in both Units and left in their car.

A voter in the community, Joseph Simon, lamented that there was hardly any security agents around, noting that though there were enough INEC Officers on ground, the BVAS Machine allocated to Unit 17 would not be enough to take the crowd in the Unit.

"What happened here can only be seen in Hollywood films. Some men came in from nowhere, shooting. They also ordered us to sleep on the ground as they took the three BVAS machine away. The INEC Officials and some voters ran into the bush, while voting was disrupted in the units.

"Initially, the INEC Official told us that the BVAS Machine in Unit 11 was not configured because the accredited voters for the last (Presidential) election was still appearing. So, someone took him on a bike to their centre for the problem to be rectified. They came back within an hour and the INEC Official declared that the machine has started working well. It was only about 10 persons that had voted before the gunmen arrived and started shooting.

"Come to look at the whole scenerio before the shooting started, what happened in this Unit 17 during the presidential and NASS election would have played out. In the Presidential and NASS election, the BVAS machine in Unit 17 was logged out. About 300 persons were unable to vote. While that of Unit 11 in the same polling Unit was still working. In spite of the complaint, INEC still allocated one BVAS machine to the Unit 17 while Unit 11 with fewer voters got two BVAS machine. To me, this one looks like systematic disenfranchisement".

Another voter in the community, Mr. Mathew Ikhale, said: "I will describe what transpired at Eresoyen primary school as Commando film.

Thugs just took away electoral materials. We all ran into the bush as they were shooting. The security was not adequate. How can one security person be drafted to a Polling Unit as big as this. There was no election here as thugs invaded the Units," he said.

Osun State

Shooting and ballot boxes snatching by armed thugs was the order of the day in some parts of Osogbo, the Osun State capital. The political thugs stormed some polling units and scared away people, who were on ground to cast their votes. Sunday Telegraph gathered that at exactly 10:35 am, hoodlums numbering about eight stormed polling unit 10 and 11, ward 5, Iso Pako Alekuwode area, Osogbo with guns and chased the voters away before carting away the ballot boxes. One of the voters, Mrs Adeleke Toyin, told Sunday Telegraph that voting had already started when the hoodlums invaded the area, shot sporadically into the air before they took away the ballot boxes. "We were on the queue when they suddenly came and started shooting on the air. They chased away and took the ballot away.

They came in Sienna vehicle. They were eight in number. Three of them were in the vehicle while five of them came down of the vehicle. "When they sensed they might have be filmed, they dropped the boxes and drove off the scene. They don't want us to exercise our civic rights but we would resist every attempt to disenfranchise us." Other units where ballot boxes were carted away by the hoodlums are ward 4, polling unit 17 and 32. A PDP party agent, Adeyemi Adedayo, unit 10 was said to have joined hands with others at the polling unit to prevent the armed thugs from taking the ballot box away.

It was gathered that the invaders were however prevented from going away with the ballot box. Also, suspected political thugs allegedly destroyed ballot boxes and chased away voters in unit 3 ward 17 Oja Tuntun area in Ife Central area of Osun State. At the unit, over 30 women protested during the ugly attack by the thugs. Narrating the ugly incident, the women who were almost weeping, while speaking with Newsmen, said hoodlums have denied them their rights to vote. They were seen protesting within the confines of their voting unit just as they accused opposition party of being the brain behind the action of the thugs preventing them from voting.



### Our Reporters

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📅 October 22, 2022 👤 Abolaji Adebayo Caleb Onwe

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