

The Saturday COVER



Violence that marred 2023 elections in Nigeria

US deeply troubled, calls for prosecution of perpetrators

Many observers have condemned the February 25th Presidential/National Assembly Elections and the March 18th Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections following the widespread violence and electoral irregularities that accompanied the elections. In fact, some described it as the worst in the history of electoral process in Nigeria. The elections held so much promise with the introduction of technology by the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, which was generally believed would solve the problem of rigging and the assurances by the Commission's chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu that the election results would be transmitted real time to the commission's central server where everybody would have the opportunity to see it. However, INEC failed to deliver on its promise as the result of the Presidential election was not uploaded as promised giving room for manipulations and falsifications of figures. The violence that was recorded during the polls took place in virtually all the states of the federation.

CROSS RIVER

In Cross River state, an Adhoc staff of INEC, Miss Glory Effiom Essien was hit by a stray bullet after some gunmen opened fire while she was in a boat heading to Bakassi for election duty. The Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC in Cross River state, Prof. Gabriel Yomere who confirmed the incident said the victim was taken to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, UCTH, for treatment, thanking God that the bullet didn't touch her spinal chord. Also, more than 50 political thugs at about 2.15 am on Sunday March 19 invaded INEC collation centre for the Ogoja State Constituency disrupting collation of results, vandalized the place, carted away election materials, phones and inflicted injuries on many ward Collation officers.

An injured Collation officer Mbube East, Dr Paul Bassey told Vanguard at the Police Clinic, Ogoja where he was being treated for injuries inflicted on him by the invaders that the thugs also attacked one of his colleagues with heavy stones and planks and prayed he survived it.

The Electoral Officer for Ogoja Local Government Area, Mr Peter Kolo said the hoodlums broke all

security barriers to disrupt Collation with the intention to destroy election results

The Ogoja State Constituency Collation Officers, Dr Timothy Ellah of the University of Calabar said he was beaten heavily by thugs who carted away some result sheets while he sustained minor injuries.

Prof. John Undie, the Governorship Collation Officers for Ogoja Local Government said every one inside the hall was beaten mercilessly adding that they were lucky to be alive.

KOGI

In Kogi, 101 INEC officials and adhoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC while on their way from Kupa North and South Wards to the Constituency Collation Centre in Lokoja were kidnapped by armed hoodlums at about 2am on Sunday, 19th of March, 2023 at Obajana junction which is less than 20km from the state capital. 99 of the abducted staff were later rescued by the police. Three of the rescued victims who were injured during the rescue operation were evacuated to the Federal Medical center Lokoja

for treatment while two of the abducted staff were yet to be accounted for.

NASARAWA

In Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital, protesters took to streets protesting alleged rigging of the governorship election by INEC in the state. The protest turned violent during which one person was killed and several others injured. The protesters also engaged in acts of vandalism and destruction of public and private property.

KANO

In Kano, the residence of a popular singer and chieftain of the All Progressives Congress, Dauda Rarara was set ablaze by political thugs after the announcement of the gubernatorial election results by INEC.

A resident in the area, Malam Yusuf said the thugs invaded the house and started destroying valuables before setting the house on fire.

ADAMAWA

Yola, the Adamawa state capital was in turmoil late on Sunday, March 19 after political thugs and miscreants unleashed terror on the citizens following the stalemate arising from the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC to declare the governorship election results.

Trouble began at the Collation Center at the INEC headquarters moments after the Returning Officer of the poll, Professor Mohammed Mele announced the shift of the declaration of the results to Monday morning at about 1 am. When news of the postponement filtered into the capital city, thugs in their hundreds took over strategic locations to attack innocent citizens and passersby, motorists and other commuters. The hoodlums who were armed with guns and other dangerous weapons burnt disused tyres, trees and sorts on the streets. Politicians, journalists, INEC staff and others at the Collation centre were held hostage at the INEC headquarters as nobody dared to drive out of the premises.

LAGOS

In Aguda, Surulere, Lagos, a woman, Mrs Jennifer Efedu was stabbed on her face by thugs who disrupted the voting process. The political thugs who were armed with dangerous weapons went about snatching ballot boxes, attacking voters and preventing those suspected to be opponents from voting.

Sporadic gunshots also erupted in front of the palace of Alamuwo of Kuje Amuwo, Mazamaza, old Ojo Road leaving voters running for dear lives. The thugs ordered the people should leave the polling booths for their safety, warning that they would come back. Many voters could not return to the scene despite assurances from security men who rushed to the scene to restore normalcy.

Armed thugs also invaded the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, polling unit 003 in Bestford/Ganiyu Yusuf Street, Oke-Afa, Ejigbo in Lagos State. The thugs, who brandished the identity tags of a major party, stormed the polling unit and attempted to cart away election materials and ballot boxes and in the process damaged several thumb-printed papers. The rampaging thugs also destroyed chairs and tables used by officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission and attempted to seize the BVAS machine.

BENUE

No fewer than six persons were killed while many were injured in Benue state during the

Governorship and State House of Assembly election. Security personnel were said to have shot dead six persons in Gboko area of the State for allegedly snatching ballot boxes. The six persons, who were killed at different locations by the security personnel, stormed polling units to snatch the ballot boxes.

In some parts of Agatu and Ukum Local Government Areas of the State,

there were reports about disruption of electoral process.

Benue State Police Command announced the arrest of 26 suspects for various electoral offences and recovered various arms and ammunition during the elections.

The police public relations officer (PPRO) Catherine Anene explained that the suspects were arrested across the state for various offences including political thuggery and illegal possession of firearms, snatching of ballot boxes and intimidation of voters.

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RIVERS

The February 25th Presidential Elections ended up in violence in most parts of Rivers State, as angry youths allegedly protesting against attempts to manipulate the results of the presidential election took to the streets in the late hours of the day. There were sporadic shootings and vandalism of properties and vehicles along the busy Igwuruta-Elele-Airport Road at the Igwuruta axis of the Ikwerre local government area. The angry youths who were shooting sporadically alleged that a prominent politician in Ikwerre local government area carted away ballot boxes at the collation center to frustrate further declaration of results. Three youths suspected to be political thugs were said to have been killed during a clash at Ogbakiri Community in the Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers state. The thugs were allegedly hired by two leading political parties in the community.

EDO

The election violence in Edo State claimed the lives of Festus Idahosa, 33 years old, and late Mrs. Elizabeth Owie, a 43-year-old mother of three. They were killed

when political thugs stormed their polling units where they had gone to exercise their civic rights during the Presidential and National Assembly elections in the state.

DELTA

Amid a seeming low turnout and apathy of voters in Delta State during the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, three persons were reportedly shot dead, and a building was set ablaze in Mosogar, Ethiope West Local Government Area of the state. The two young men were shot dead by military personnel as they allegedly tried to flee a polling unit with snatched ballot boxes. It was gathered that at Amukpe, Sapele, one of the youths lost his hand during a clash in one of the polling units in the area. Another thug who disrupted the polling exercise at Utagaba-Uno in Ndokwa West Local Government Area was also reportedly killed. Some hoodlums also ambushed and snatched voting materials from INEC officials in Tuomo area in Bomadi Local Government Area.

Further electoral violence continued as rampaging thugs invaded and destroyed electoral materials, including the BVAS machine, at the Ewerni community in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of the state. The thugs disrupted the exercise in

all the polling units in Ewerni.

A team of journalists monitoring the elections were prevented from entering the community by the rampaging thugs. Some of the corps members and other electoral officials, who scampered to safety while security agents looked on, were attacked by the thugs, with some sustaining injuries, why about three BVAS machines were smashed.

US tasks FG to bring perpetrators of violence to justice

Meanwhile, the United States has tasked the Federal Government to bring to justice everyone that was involved in violence including intimidation of voters and suppression of voting during the elections.

The US also said it was "considering taking all available actions, including additional visa restrictions, on individuals believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic process in Nigeria".

A statement on Tuesday by the United States Embassy in Nigeria read: "We call on Nigerian authorities to hold accountable and bring to justice any individuals found to have ordered or carried out efforts to intimidate voters and suppress voting during the election process. The United

States likewise will consider all available actions, including additional visa restrictions, on individuals believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic process in Nigeria."

According to the statement, the United States was deeply troubled by the disturbing acts of violent voter intimidation and suppression that took place during the polls in Lagos, Kano, and other states.

It added that: "Members of the U.S. diplomatic mission observed the elections in Lagos and elsewhere and witnessed some of these incidents firsthand. The use of ethnically charged rhetoric before, during, and after the gubernatorial election in Lagos was particularly concerning."

We commend all Nigerian political actors, religious and community leaders, youth, and citizens who have chosen to reject and speak out against such violence and inflammatory language, affirming Nigerians' commitment to and respect for the democratic process.

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