

Anxiety as Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi await results of hotly contested polls

• Violence, apathy, vote-buying mar elections • INEC probes pre-filled result sheets

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THERE was anxiety in the polity as leading candidates and political parties awaited the results of the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi states' governorship polls, yesterday.

Early results showed tight contests in the three states as a host of the candidates expressed optimism of emerging victorious.

At press time, Alhaji Usman Ododo of the All Progressives Congress, APC, was running neck-to-neck with Muritala Ajaka of the Social Democratic Party, SDP in Kogi. The same trend was observed between Governor Hope of the APC and Senator Samuel Anyanwu of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP in Imo; as well as between Senator Douye Diri of PDP and Timipre Sylva of the APC in Bayelsa.

One person was killed and an official of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, was abducted in Bayelsa. INEC confirmed that its officer (SPO) assigned to Registration Area-06 (Ossima) in Sagbama LGA, Bayelsa was abducted while waiting to board a boat at Amassoma Jetty. However, the official has regained his freedom.

Pockets of violence, snatching of electoral materials, vote-buying, apathy, diversion of election material, and late commencement of balloting in many polling booths marred the polls.

This is in addition to the incidents of pre-filled election results in Kogi which led to the suspension of nine out of 10 wards in Ogori - Magongo LGA by INEC.

Elder statesman, Pa E.K. Clark, urged INEC to investigate cases of irregularities in the polls.

There were reports of party agents sharing money to voters to induce them to vote for their candidates in Lokoja, Kogi State capital.

The agents stationed themselves about 500 metres away from polling units, from where they shared money to voters to lure them to vote for their candidates.

The amount given to a voter ranged from N3,000 to N5,000 depending on his personality or bargaining power.

A voter was expected to present his Permanent Voter Card (PVC) as a precondition to collecting the money.

To beat the security agencies, the team distributing the money usually disappeared after sharing to a few people in a particular location only to reconvene in another location a few minutes after.

Some of the beneficiaries said they weren't selling their votes by collecting the money because they had already made up their minds to vote for the candidates of their choice.

APC, SDP bicker over killing of party supporter

APC and SDP traded bitter words over the death of Umar Hassan, an APC supporter in Anyigba, Dekina LGA of Kogi State.

While the APC accused SDP thugs of shooting Hassan to death, the SDP said Hassan was on his way to hijack a ballot box at a polling unit in Anyigba and shot dead by the military.

APC, in a statement by Kingsley Farwo, said: "People suspected to be SDP thugs gunned down Umar Hassan, 35, at his Agala Ogane Polling Unit, Anyigba. Fear gripped voters at the Polling Unit as SDP thugs were on the rampage,



Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State voting in Okene



Ex-President Goodluck Jonathan exercising his civic right at Ward 13 Unit 39, Ogbia Local Government

threatening to kill anyone who voted against the 'Igala Agenda'.

Pre-filled result sheets in Kogi

Indeed, Kogi State governorship candidate of the PDP, Senator Dino Melaye, who did not vote, complained of pre-filled election result sheets in Ogori - Magongo LGA and some polling areas, and urged people not to vote unless INEC officials showed them blank result sheets.

Despite not voting, Melaye won his polling unit in ijumu LGA.

Imo State governor, Senator Hope Uzodinma, of the APC; his Bayelsa counterpart, Senator Douye Diri of the PDP; PDP candidate in Imo, Senator Samuel Anyanwu; Senator Athan Achonu (LP Imo); Usman Ododo (APC, Kogi); and Muritala Ajaka (SDP, Kogi) were among candidates who expressed optimism of winning the elections.

INEC, which fingered sabotage for late commencement of voting in some areas of Kogi due to sudden death of vehicles to move material in spite earlier arrangements, said it had commenced investigation on the pre-filled result sheets and promised to release the outcome of the investigation timeously.

INEC said its top officials had launched an investigation into allegations that result sheets were forged in some polling units in Kogi.

INEC disclosed this on its X handle minutes after pictures of the forged sheets emerged.

"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", it stated.

Thugs invade polling units in Southern Sagbama, Ijaw, hijack materials

Armed thugs reportedly invaded polling units in Sagbama LGA and hijacked election materials amid heavy gun shots. They struck at about 9 am at Agorogbene, units 6, 7 and 8 in Ward 11 of the LGA.

Election materials for five units namely 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 at Olugbobiri in Southern Ijaw LGA were also reportedly hijacked by thugs from the ward headquarters.

The incident left the majority of the electorate in Olugbobiri disenfranchised with voters calling on INEC to cancel the votes in the area.

Confirming the incidents, angry voters told newsmen that "There's also no voting in Olugbobiri. All materials have been hijacked."

Gunmen in military uniform deny party supporters voting in Nembe-Bassambiri

PDP supporters in Nembe-Bassambiri in Nembe LGA expressed concern over the inability of security agencies and INEC to ensure they exercised their franchise. Electorate in Ward 13, Unit 6 of Oluasiri community and Ward 7 unit 5, cried out over the use of armed thugs dressed in military uniforms threatening to gun down any member of the PDP found within the vicinity of voting.

Diri expresses concern, lauds INEC

Diri had also expressed concern about the stopping of PDP members and agents from Nembe-Bassambiri by supporters of APC.

The Bayelsa PDP candidate, who spoke after casting his vote at his ward at Sampou in Kolokuma-Opokuma LGA of the state, said: "We have concerns about Nembe-Bassambiri, our party members, most of them have been excluded, our agents have been stopped from going into Nembe, that is a very serious concern, our party has written to INEC and they have to take drastic action to ensure our people are allowed to vote."

Diri had earlier lauded INEC over its improvement on the handling of the governorship election in the state.

"I think this is an improvement of all the other elections that I have participated in. It's very seamless, very fast and if it continues like this then I want to believe that INEC has improved not only their facilities but also the training of their men that are handling the process..."

"We are still putting our ears to the ground as to what is



Kogi State governorship candidate of Social Democratic Party, SDP, Muritala Ajaka, voting

happening in other polling units

"But here (Sampou) I'm very satisfied with the process and the personnel that are handling the process. In any case what we ask for is a free process where the BVAS should be used just as I have done here today. Accreditation should be by BVAS across the state," he said.

Eradiri decries high inducement voters'

The Bayelsa Labour Party, LP, governorship candidate, Udens Eradiri, decried what he called the high level of vote-buying, stating that the exercise had been compromised.

Eradiri, who spoke after casting his vote alongside his wife at his polling unit in Agudama Ekpeta Ward 10, Unit 5, Yenagoa Local Government Area, accused the ruling party of vote-buying.

His words: "The optics shows that the process is going on smoothly aside from those things that are happening behind the scene where money is being exchanged for votes and people are writing down names to be collecting N12,000 and so on and it is happening everywhere, and you know, some of us have decided that we will not express ourselves violently."

"There is always peace in my community during elections because of our peaceful disposition and that disposition is what I have displayed today, but the only thing I will not do is to buy votes."

APC commends INEC

However, the Bayelsa APC commended INEC for the success recorded in the poll.

The party's Publicity Secretary, Mr Doifio Boukonbo, gave the commendation after casting his vote in Polling Unit 4, Ward 4 Okpo Polling Ground II, Okpoama, Brass LGA but expressed displeasure over reports that some APC members were prevented from voting at Sampou and other communities in Kolokuma Opokuma LGA.

Sylva election despite delays commends process

Also, the APC candidate, Chief Timipre Sylva, commended what he called the general peaceful conduct of the election.

Sylva cast his vote at about 1p.m at Polling Unit 4 at Okpoama, Brass LGA, saying the process had been smooth in spite of delays in the commencement of voting in the area.

Allegations of vote-buying, diversion of materials reign in Imo

In Imo, allegations of vote-

buying, hijacking and diversion of election materials were rife in some areas amid voters' apathy.

Alleged vote-buying was reported at Adult Education GRA, 007 and 008 in Owerri Municipal LGA in spite of the presence of security agents.

One of the leading parties was also accused of buying votes at Ihite Mbien Umuodu Booth 15 and 16 in Mbaitoli LGA.

In Ideato North LGA, some voters raised the alarm that electoral materials for 39 polling units were allegedly hijacked by political thugs.

In Onuimo LGA, electoral materials for Okwelle 1 and 2 were allegedly diverted to Okwelle Police station.

There was also allegation of diversion of electoral materials from the 7 wards of Orlu LGA to the palace of a monarch by the APC.

However, Imo State Traditional Rulers Council Chairman, Eze Emmanuel Okeke, and the ruling APC denied involvement in the diversion. While Eze Okeke said "there is nothing like that," Mr Cajetan Duke, the APC Publicity Secretary, said "my party cannot be involved in this kind of electoral malpractices."

EFCC operatives arrest vote-buyers in Owerri North

There was a mild drama at Eke Ama, Awaka Polling Units 001 and 002, Owerri North LGA, where there serious vote-buying was alleged. This allegedly continued unabated until an EFCC operative, who was on ground but pretended to be a voter, alerted his people. They quickly stormed the area and arrested some people sharing money.

Voting continued when the EFCC operatives left the scene. There was, however, very low turnout of voters, as people largely shunned the exercise.

Also, an INEC official was caught at Polling Unit 005, Township Primary School, Ikenebogu I, in Owerri Municipal LGA by ICPC operatives for having sums of money allegedly given to him by one of the parties.

Uzodinma expresses satisfaction with INEC, turns

Governor Uzodinma has expressed satisfaction with the INEC on the conduct of the election. He lauded Imo residents of the state, especially his community, for trooping out en masse to cast their ballots; and security operatives for ensuring calm and general safety during the election.

Nobody can stop my victory - Anyanwu

Also speaking, the PDP

standard bearer, Senator Anyanwu, said nobody could stop him from winning the governorship election.

Fielding questions from journalists shortly after he voted at his Polling Unit 012 at Amaimo Central School in Ikeduru LGA, Anyanwu said any issue of ballot snatching or violence would not count based on INEC's instruction.

Bello, Ododo, Ajaka optimistic in Kogi

In Kogi, Governor Yahaya Bello and APC candidate, Ododo, commended INEC and security operatives for their conduct during the poll.

Bello spoke after voting at his polling unit in Okene where he noted that the level of preparedness by INEC and its officials resulted in a smooth conduct of the exercise.

On his part, Ododo expressed satisfaction at the conduct of security operatives at the election and praised them for ensuring that things were smooth and peaceful.

In like manner, Alhaji Muritala Ajaka, the SDP candidate, expressed confidence of victory in the election.

Ajaka spoke with newsmen shortly after he cast his vote at the polling unit 005 in his Ida county home.

Ogori/Magongo result sheets tampered with - Melaye

Decrying moves to rig the poll, Kogi State PDP standard bearer, Melaye, alleged that result sheets had been pre-filled and tampered with in all polling units located in Ogori/Magongo LGA.

The candidate said that there were massive protests in the units, as voters refused to be accredited, insisting that plain result sheets should be made available for the electorate in the area.

His words: "The result sheets have been filled and tampered with already, and people have refused to accredit, people have refused to vote and they are insisting that the plain result sheets must be returned to agents in accordance with the electoral law."

"If they refuse to show you result sheets in all polling units across the state, don't accredit, don't vote, protest and resist it. This is democracy. We must protect our votes, and protect the process. We must make sure that all the regulations are observed and respected," he charged his supporters.

Council boss arrested

The Chairman of Igalamela LGA, Mr James Onoja, was arrested by security operatives allegedly cash and ammunition.

In a video spotted by Sunday Vanguard on social media (X Platform), Onoja, who wore a white Caftan, was arrested with other boys and was forced to sit on the ground.

The alleged money and ammunition were packed in several 'Ghana-must-go' bags.

Polls relatively peaceful - TMG

Meanwhile, in its preliminary report, the Transition Monitoring Group, TMG, described the governorship elections in Imo, Kogi and Bayelsa states as relatively peaceful.

In a statement issued by its Chairman, Auwal Ralsanjani, TMG said observers reported impressive voter turnout in Imo and Kogi states and a low turnout in Bayelsa.

The group attributed the low turnout in Bayelsa to poor weather conditions, difficult terrain, logistics issues and voter apathy in a number of polling units.