



EU EOM Statement on 23 March Supplementary Governorship Elections

Summary

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) deployed teams to each of the five states that held supplementary governorship elections on 23 March. A total of 20 observers followed polling, counting and collation of results. Extensive electoral security problems were observed in some areas, with groups of men with weapons intimidating and obstructing the process, and security agencies ineffective at protecting citizens' right to vote. In particular, parts of Kano were largely inaccessible to EU observers, and citizen observers and journalists were also obstructed. EU observers also witnessed increased interference by party agents and cases of vote-buying. Party leaderships did not appear to take any steps to rein in their supporters. Given the high stakes and the reduced electorate involved, supplementary elections are systemically vulnerable to parties strategically pressurising voters and disrupting the process. In the polling units that could be fully observed, there were improved logistical arrangements and procedures were mostly followed, although there were problems with secrecy of the ballot.

Background

The EU EOM deployed teams to each of the five states that held supplementary governorship elections: Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Plateau and Sokoto. This statement follows the mission's earlier preliminary statements on the presidential and National Assembly elections, issued on 25 February, and on the governorship and State House of Assembly elections, issued on 11 March.

On 21 March, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) notified that supplementary elections would take place on 23 March for five governorships, as well as 45 State House of Assembly seats. This followed elections being declared inconclusive due to the cancellation of a number of polling units on 9 March, and the total number of voters affected being more than the margin of lead. INEC listed electoral misconduct, violence, failure to use smart card readers and over-voting as the reasons for the cancellations. Re-polling took place in 623 polling units with 397,120 registered voters, 2.7 per cent of all registered voters in the five states.

Before election day, various ongoing court cases in Adamawa, Bauchi and Rivers caused uncertainty for voters, and there was a lack of clear and timely information from INEC. The supplementary election in Adamawa is now pending a court decision. In Rivers, collation of the 9 March elections could not be finalised due to widespread disruption, with INEC noting that collation centres had been invaded by some soldiers and armed gangs. Collation in Rivers is now scheduled for 2-5 April and is also pending a court decision.

Positively, national and state-level media in Benue, Plateau and Sokoto regularly updated the public about the supplementary elections. Media and social network users also scrutinised and debated the use of state resources in the days before the supplementary elections, in particular the large-scale infrastructure and social benefit projects initiated by the incumbent governor of Kano.

Electoral security

On 23 March, extensive electoral security problems were observed, particularly in parts of Kano where polling became inaccessible to EU observers in some areas. The environment was intimidating and not conducive to voters' free participation in the election. Party leaderships locally and centrally did not appear to take any steps to rein in supporters and prevent evident violence,

intimidation or other misconduct. Throughout the day, INEC did not comment on electoral disturbances, despite its overall responsibility for the election and security arrangements.

In Nasarawa local government area (LGA) in Kano, which accounted for approximately one-third of all registered voters for the supplementary governorship election, EU observers witnessed organised intimidation of voters. For example, groups of youths with clubs and machetes patrolled the streets, and people with party agent tags harassed voters. During collation in Kano, EU observers saw that several INEC polling staff had been attacked. Large groups of men with weapons were not contained by the police.

Due to intimidating crowds and disturbances, EU observers in Kano could not access or continue observation in polling units in Dala and Nasarawa LGAs. The electoral process in Kano was further compromised by the harassment and obstruction of citizen observers, and journalists from BBC Hausa, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), and TVC. This compromised scrutiny of both polling and collation of results in the affected areas.

Isolated violent incidents also disrupted voting and counting in other states. In Bauchi, EU observers witnessed around 50 people with clubs disrupting counting in one polling unit. In Benue, election materials were burnt, resulting in the cancellation of polling affecting 13,000 registered voters, and a collation officer carrying result sheets was shot in the leg.

Polling and collation procedures

Party agents were seen to interfere more in the process than on the previous two election days. Some polling units in Kano were dominated by controlling party agents and supporters. Of the 40 polling units that EU teams could fully observe, agents were present in all and in five cases were seen interfering in the work of polling officials, in Benue, Plateau and Sokoto. EU observers in all five states also saw party agents trying to influence voters, assisting voters or voting on their behalf. Supporters and agents were sometimes present in polling units in excessive numbers, resulting in overcrowding. EU observers also saw vote-buying in Sokoto by both the leading parties, and indications of vote-buying in Kano. Citizen observers also reported party agents involved in vote-buying, and bribery of polling staff and police.

INEC improved logistical arrangements with most polling units observed open within half an hour of the official opening time. In the 40 polling units that EU teams could fully observe, procedures were mostly followed. Smart card readers were used to accredit voters in all polling units observed. However, manual accreditation procedures were not always correctly followed if card readers failed to authenticate fingerprints. The secrecy of the vote was not always sufficiently protected in nearly one-third of polling units observed.

The collation process was finalised in Bauchi, Benue, Plateau and Sokoto within 24 hours, but in Kano it was suspended for several hours due to concerns over the safety of lower-level collation staff. For security reasons, collation of results in two of 29 LGAs in Kano had to be undertaken at the state collation centre. Similarly, ward collation had to be undertaken at one LGA in Bauchi. Adding to transparency of the process, the media provided live coverage of state-level collation. EU observers visited 12 collation centres and observed party agents present in all. EU observers noted that overall collation procedures were followed and the process was generally transparent.

The EU EOM will continue to observe the results and petitions' processes, and will remain in Nigeria until early April. The Chief Observer, Maria Arena, will return in June to present the mission's final report, which will include recommendations for future electoral processes.

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