

# **MONITORING NIGERIA'S GENERAL ELECTIONS 2023:** **A REPORT BY LAWYERS ALERT**

## **OVERVIEW**

On February 25, 2023, the Presidential Elections were conducted in Nigeria, resulting in the victory of Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu as President-elect. Tinubu, a former senator and governor of Lagos state, won the election with 8,794,740 ballots and 36.61 percent of the vote. The runners-up included former vice president Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party and former governor of Anambra state, Mr. Peter Obi of the Labor Party, who have challenged the results.

The National Assembly elections for the Senate and House of Representatives were also conducted on the same day, with some logistical challenges leading to delays. There were sporadic outbreaks of violence in certain parts of the country.

Gubernatorial elections were conducted in 31 of the 36 states, with the exception of Imo State, Kogi State, and Bayelsa State, which will hold their elections on November 11, 2023. Off-cycle governorship elections will also be held in Anambra, Edo, Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun states.

As customary since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, all newly elected officials will inaugurate on May 29. Lawyers Alert provided observations of several polling units in Benue, Nasarawa, and the Federal Capital Territory in this report.

## **FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA**

Nigeria's capital is Abuja, and it was quite unexpected when the Labour Party emerged victorious in the Federal Capital Territory, defeating the dominant APC and PDP parties. Peter Obi secured the FCT's preference over both Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar, while Irete Kingibe won the Senate seat. The House of Representatives seat was won by Obika Chinedu, another member of the Labour Party. During the elections, the Lawyers Alert team was positioned in strategic locations in the Maitama and Gudu districts.

### **Gudu district**

Observations of the election in Gaduwa Estate Square showed that voters started queuing for numbers as early as 5:00 a.m., and voting commenced at

11:00 a.m. The area was well-secured by state security agents. People continued to observe and tally votes until 4:00 a.m. the next morning. Overall, it was a peaceful and uneventful process.

### **Maitama district**

Based on the observation of the Gana Street Polling Unit in Maitama, the INEC officials arrived at 7:30 a.m. with a robust security presence and police on standby. Later, the Joint Task Force and election observers arrived to oversee the election process.

Voting began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 2:30 p.m., followed by tabulation, which was completed by 3 p.m. Overall, the election at this polling unit was peaceful.

## **NASARAWA STATE**

Nasarawa is a state located in Nigeria's North Central region, and governed by the All Progressives Congress (APC). The state shares borders with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Benue State. Although the ruling party was able to narrowly secure the gubernatorial seat, they lost the presidential election to the Labour Party (LP).

Lawyers Alert team was deployed in Karu local government area, specifically in Masaka, to monitor the voting process.

### **Karu LGA**

Prior to the election, INEC Chairman Professor Mahmood Yakubu assured Nigerians of the commission's full readiness to conduct the elections. However, observations made by the Lawyers Alert team in Masaka, Karu LGA, suggest otherwise. INEC's preparations were incomplete as voting did not begin on time, despite citizens being fully prepared to vote. Voters had to wait for INEC officials to arrive before casting their ballots for their preferred candidates.

### **Logistics Challenges Observed**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) experienced logistical challenges during the Nigerian elections held in Masaka, Karu LGA. Despite assurances by the INEC chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, that the commission was entirely prepared to conduct the election, the distribution of election materials, including ballot papers and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machine, was delayed.

INEC officials arrived at the polling units at noon instead of the expected 8.30 a.m., resulting in a late start to voting. This delay indicates that INEC's logistics strategy for the movement of election materials and personnel was inefficient.

### **Security Lapses Observed**

During the election, several polling units were observed to have security lapses. Some polling locations lacked security personnel while in others, the personnel left after only thirty minutes. At one polling unit, voting was delayed until 11:30 a.m. despite the presence of INEC officials who did not commence the process until after noon.

Furthermore, at this particular location, a voter was detained and taken away by police officers seemingly without cause. This incident caused a commotion among voters and heightened agitation. Civil Defense officials and military personnel who arrived did not stay for the duration of the exercise. As a result, there were no security personnel permanently stationed at this polling unit, leaving it vulnerable to potential security breaches.

### **BENUE STATE**

In the long-standing battle between Nigeria's major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) emerged victorious in Benue state, defeating the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) by a landslide. Benue state has been a battleground for the APC and PDP, with both parties practically taking turns ruling the state.

The Lawyers Alert team closely monitored the election in Katsina Ala LGA, keeping a watchful eye on the voting process.

### **Katsina Ala LGA**

Katsina-Ala Local Government Area in Benue State comprises 12 districts and 185 polling units. The voters in the area turned out to cast their votes in the federal and state elections held there. However, the governorship and other state elections recorded a low turnout due to the postponement of the election. The voting process commenced at around 9:30 a.m. and ended at 3:30 p.m.

The conduct of the election in Katsina-Ala was peaceful, with no reported cases of violence in most polling units. The Township Club II polling unit with code 020 stood out as a particularly well-organized unit where the BVAS machine worked seamlessly.

## **Disenfranchisement of Marginalized Groups**

The clear absence of Persons with Disabilities and other marginalized groups at the polling units is a cause for concern, as their voices and votes must be heard and counted in a democratic society. They were left disenfranchised. However, the turnout of women and youth was remarkable and is a sign of progress toward inclusivity in the political process.

Generally, the election proceeded smoothly and results were promptly announced.

## **2023: A POSITIVE SHIFT TOWARD TRANSPARENCY**

Despite the electoral irregularities noted, Nigeria's 2023 general election could be considered one of the most credible and transparent since the historic 1993 election which saw Chief MKO Abiola emerge victorious. Lawyers Alert, based on countrywide monitoring reports, is confident in this assessment for various reasons.

One notable development is the loss of some influential governors in their bid for the federal legislature. In the past, it was a common practice for term-constrained governors to seek refuge in the federal legislature. However, seven governors were unable to secure this position in the recent election compared to five in the 2019 elections.

This significant shift could mark the beginning of a new era in Nigerian politics, where governors can no longer view the national assembly as a retirement plan.

Another significant indicator of the election's fairness and transparency is the defeat of President-elect Ahmed Bola Tinubu's party in his home state, Lagos, which he once governed for eight years. This outcome is remarkable given Tinubu's status as a political powerhouse in Nigeria's southwest region.

Furthermore, the Labour Party's impressive performance in the Federal Capital Territory and other regions is an indication of its increasing popularity despite being a relatively small party, at least in terms of nationwide spread. This feat is particularly notable as the party is perceived as a "Christian" party in certain quarters. It is now the third most popular party in Nigeria, with a significant number of seats won at both the federal and state legislative levels.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the foregoing observations, Lawyers Alert hereby suggests the improvements ahead of future elections:

1. Improve confidence in the electoral process and the electoral management body by putting adequate logistics and support mechanisms in place to facilitate a hitch-free voting experience.
2. Transmission of results and all other electoral processes should be carried out in strict compliance with provisions of the electoral act. This will enhance confidence not just in the electoral body but also in the voting process. The ripple effect will be improved voter turnout.
3. Security personnel should be deployed appropriately to different polling units to ensure free and fair elections.
4. More effort should be put into creating awareness for the general public regarding changes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the 2023 General Elections had a mixture of successful, challenging, and violent events, with the two main political parties, APC and PDP, facing intense competition for the first time. The Labor Party emerged as a surprise contender, breaking their apparent dominance of Nigeria's political space by the big two parties in a multi-party electoral system.

Though the elections took place in most parts of the country, the exercise recorded a number of hiccups. The last-minute decision by the current administration to redesign the naira and limit cash flow, along with fuel scarcity, may have contributed to some of the challenges experienced by citizens and state agencies during the election process. Still, Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu was elected as the President-elect, thereby keeping APC firmly in power probably for another eight years.

The emergence of smaller parties, a growing number of engaged voters, and the defeat of influential politicians seeking personal gains are positive signs for the future of Nigerian democracy.

Lawyers Alert played a crucial role in observing the process and detailing its observations in various polling units. While some locations had relatively peaceful election processes, others were marred by logistical issues and sporadic violence.

The incoming administration has a duty to address the identified issues in the electoral process to ensure future elections are free, fair, and credible, creating an enabling environment for sustainable development and thriving democracy in Nigeria.

  
LAWYERS ALERT