

## **POST-ELECTION OBSERVATIONS, POSITION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

AYGF observed with keen interest the Presidential and NASS elections held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2023. Committed to promoting democratic values, our findings raise several concerns about the management of the Presidential and NASS elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

We observed significant delays in the deployment of INEC staff and election materials, resulting in a late start of voting in many polling units across the 36 states. This caused many polling units to close before the end of the 6-hour voting period, while others had citizens voting late into the night without proper security or lighting, therefore, leading to the disenfranchisement of a large number of Nigerians, particularly vulnerable groups such as Persons with Disability, pregnant women, and the elderly. Despite INEC's introduction of RACs (Registration Area Centers) to decentralize logistics coordination, some polling units did not open until 3 pm or later, which is unacceptable.

AYGF equally noted that INEC did not follow its own guidelines which state that in cases where the election fails to hold due to the late opening of polls or BVAS malfunction, INEC should conduct the election the next day. Although the INEC Chairman reinforced this guideline on Election Day, we found out that in many polling units, INEC did not deploy staff and materials to hold the election the next day in areas where there was BVAs malfunction, leading to the disenfranchisement of citizens. This was noted in several affected polling units.

On security, it was observed in many polling units, an average of 2 security personnel were present early in the day, with armed security personnel present in some units. While the early deployment of security personnel was commended, there were instances of voter intimidation and disruption of polls aimed at suppressing votes for certain political parties, and security personnel were seen to be present but did not intervene. This falls short of the anticipated standard for a democratic process, in which it is crucial to safeguard the safety of voters and enable them to cast their votes freely, and without any pressure or fear.

We noticed that Nigerians approached and participated in the election with optimism, believing in the transparency of the result collation and management due to the promised innovations by INEC. These innovations, namely the BVAS and INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV), were highlighted as game changers for the 2023 general election. However, citizens faced difficulties in accessing the IREV on the day of the election and no results were uploaded for the Presidential election until late in the day. Even when results began to be uploaded, it was at a slow pace. Four days after the Presidential election, only 75% of the results were been uploaded, which is a significant contrast to INEC's assurances. In the same vein, some uploaded results do not correspond with the result on the result sheet at the polling unit, and in some locations where elections did not take place, results were still recorded.

As an organization committed to promoting good democratic governance, our position on the last Presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria is one of great concern. The reported

incidents of violence, vote buying, and the failure of the electoral commission's staff to arrive at some polling units on time are all deeply troubling. The malfunctioning of the BIVAs machines further undermined the integrity of the electoral process.

Africa Youth Growth Foundation (AYGF) is urging INEC to address the numerous issues that impacted the credibility of the Presidential election ahead of the upcoming Governorship and State House of Assembly elections on March 11th, 2023. We call for the swift deployment and timely opening of polling stations, professional behavior from security personnel, and strict adherence to the use of BVAS for biometric accreditation and electronic transmission of results from polling units, as required by the Electoral Act 2022 and INEC 2023 Election guidelines. AYGF views the upcoming election as an opportunity for INEC to restore its tarnished reputation and regain the trust of Nigerian voters in the electoral process

### **We recommend:**

- A thorough examination and inquiry to uncover the reasons behind the tardiness in posting the election outcomes on the internet platform.
- Individuals who were identified as having played a role in disrupting vital aspects of the election should face penalties.
- Extending the voting hours until 5 pm is recommended as a way to boost voter turnout in future elections.
- INEC should prioritize transparency in the result collation and management process, and ensure that polling unit results are promptly uploaded on the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV). This is essential for INEC to regain public confidence and restore the goodwill they have previously enjoyed from Nigerians.
- We recommend that Nigeria's electoral legal framework should include legal timelines for the testing of new electoral technologies.

### **Conclusion.**

AYGF focused mainly on the election day procedures and expected that the election would be conducted in a manner that would result in a high-quality outcome that would be accepted by all. Our observations, however, concluded that the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Election did not meet the basic requirements for a trustworthy election, falling short of the expectations of citizens, INEC's promises, and international election best practices.

Sign:



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