

November 11th
2023

National Peace Committee Situation Room

**IMO, BAYELSA AND KOGI 2023
OFF-CYCLE ELECTION REPORT**



The Kukah Centre
SECRETARIAT OF THE NATIONAL PEACE COMMITTEE



About The Kukah Centre

The Centre was established by Bishop Kukah to enhance and encourage greater citizen engagement in Nigeria, The Kukah Centre is a non-profit organisation that promotes an active and engaged citizenry by providing support for inclusive dialogue and advocacy initiatives. The Centre treats political leadership as a collaborative exercise and aims to promote governance structures which incorporate multiple levels of engagement, including individuals, households, small businesses, the private sector, NGOs, and government. Interfaith dialogue is at the core of the Centre's work and involves actively promoting conversations among Nigeria's faith communities, as well as between leaders in faith and public policy. The centre has been transformed into a National-Regional Think Tank that formulates policies on issues of peace, social cohesion, development, political participation, diversity, leadership training and knowledge promotion.





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Executive Summary

The 2023 off-cycle elections in Kogi, Imo, and Bayelsa constituted a pivotal moment as the first polls conducted under the leadership of the newly inaugurated government. Despite the overarching atmosphere of relative peace, the electoral landscape was not devoid of challenges. Instances of violence, vote-buying, and occasional ballot box snatching were reported. One of the notable concerns emerged in the realm of result transmission, revealing a shortfall in compliance with established electoral guidelines. In numerous polling units, there was a deviation from the prescribed use of the Biomodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for voter accreditation. This discrepancy calls attention to the necessity of reinforcing adherence to electoral protocols to ensure the integrity of the electoral outcomes. Similarly, over-voting was recorded in many polling units in Imo, Kogi and Bayelsa and was subsequently on INEC's results Viewing Portal raises concerns not just about transmission of results but also about the accuracy of the voter register.

A significant and alarming aspect of the off-cycle elections was the palpable manifestation of low voter turnout. This phenomenon was attributed to a pervasive sense of voter apathy and a prevailing lack of trust in the electoral system. The underwhelming participation of the electorate points to a broader societal issue that warrants deeper examination and targeted interventions to revitalize civic engagement and voter education.

The 2023 off-cycle elections in Kogi, Imo, and Bayelsa have provided a nuanced myriad of the challenges and opportunities inherent in Nigeria's democratic process. Addressing issues such as violence, irregularities in result transmission, and voter apathy demands a concerted effort from all stakeholders to strengthen the democratic foundation and restore public trust in the electoral system. These findings should catalyse strategic reforms aimed at fostering a more robust and participatory democratic experience in future elections.

Introduction

There are three legal frameworks guiding elections in Nigeria; The Electoral Act (2022), INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). These frameworks recognise the functions of various stakeholders in providing the constitutional medium of electing candidates into various positions at the national, state, and local levels. Elections are therefore critical aspects of the democratic framework governing the Nigerian society. However, since Nigeria's return to democracy, one of the most talked about issues in elections has been violence. Most times when citizens go to the polls, they ask fundamental questions about their security during votes and whether their votes will be translated into the results announced by the electoral management body, INEC.

With the plethora of election violence recorded since 1999, it appears that Nigeria's elections have not fully come to terms with the rules of political competition which prioritise tolerance, security, consensus, and peaceful bargains over personal interest. This plausibly explains why Nigeria's elections over the years have witnessed ballot box snatching, vote-buying and other forms of voter inducement and disenfranchisement. Notably, the 2023 general elections witnessed fewer issue-based campaigns from presidential candidates with an over-concentration in identity politics. The voting process was largely perceived to be flawed with many integrity questions lingering even in the aftermath of the elections.

It is within this complex web of interrelated issues of politics, governance, elections, and security that the off-cycle elections in Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo were conducted. It is concerning that rather than settling some of the issues fundamental to election security and the role of election technology, the off-cycle elections held concurrently in these three states seemed to have raised further questions on the quality of Nigeria's elections. Leaning on the previous off-cycle elections in Ekiti and Osun in 2022, it is safe to say that there is a general decline in the quality of elections in Nigeria.

Despite the particular setbacks in the turnout and quality of elections, Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi states enjoyed relative calm – a near-sharp contrast to what many anticipated would have been elections defined by violence, chaos, and total disregard for the fundamental principles of establishing a democratic society.

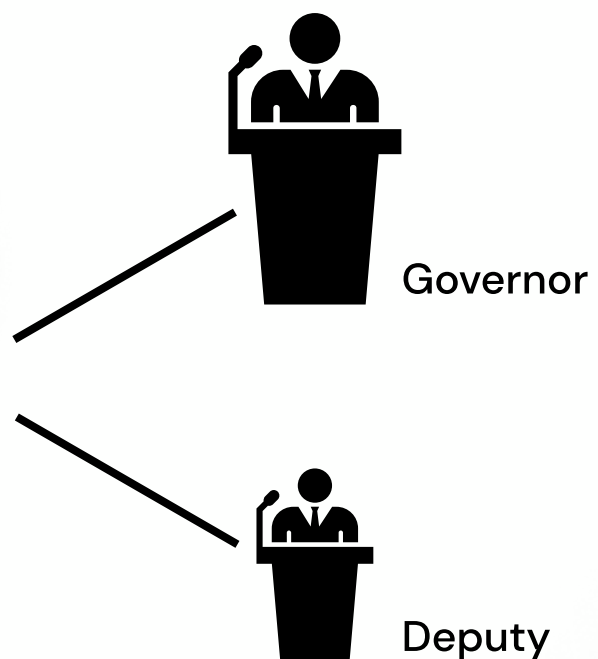
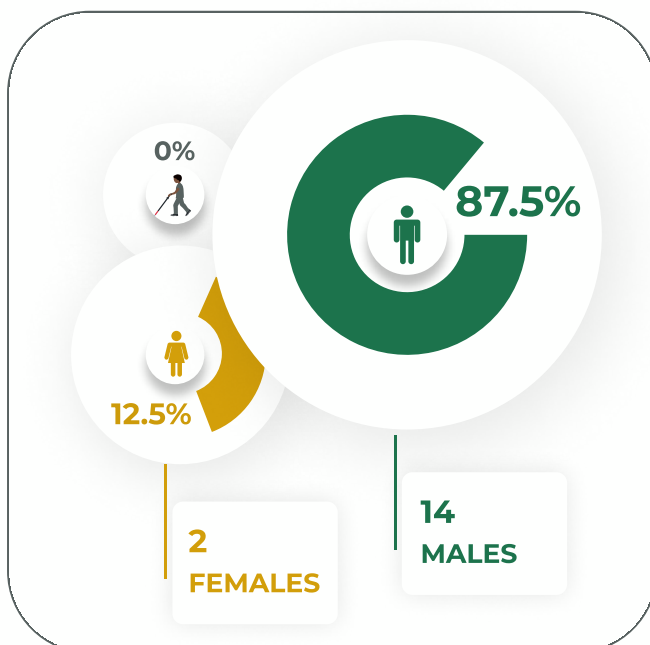
Background

Elections are said to be 'off-cycle' when they are conducted outside the general election period. Nigeria currently has eight off-cycle elections. The first of these off-cycle elections started in 2006, when the court overturned the election of Chris Ngige as governor of the then People's Democratic Party (PDP) in favour of Peter Obi, then governorship candidate of the All-Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).

However, the 2007 elections witnessed more of these court judgments in Ekiti, Osun, Kogi, Bayelsa, Ondo and Edo states. The most recent was in the 2019 elections when the Supreme Court – almost six months after elections were concluded – overturned the elections and declared Sen Hope Uzodinma as governor of Imo state. Candidates that have emerged from these tribunal judgements assumed office and are expected to complete their terms in line with the provision of the constitution. This resulted in having elections outside the general election cycle in Nigeria.

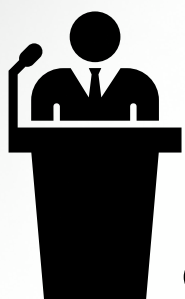
Gender Disaggregation of Governorship Candidacy

BAYELSA STATE

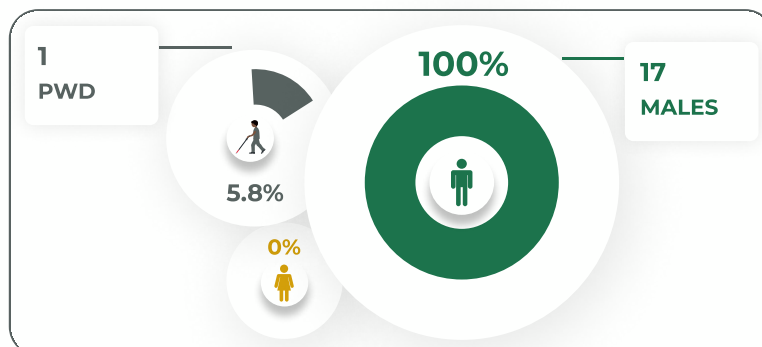


Gender Disaggregation of Governorship Candidacy contd

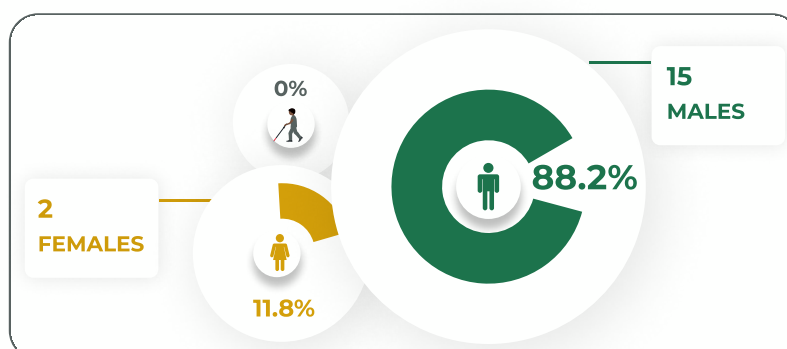
IMO STATE



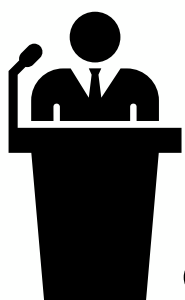
Governor



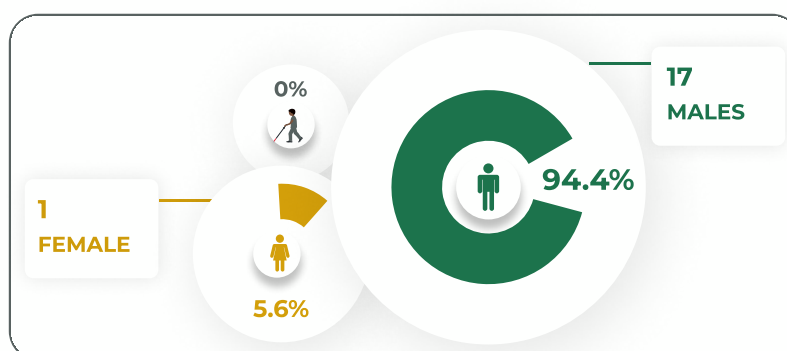
Deputy



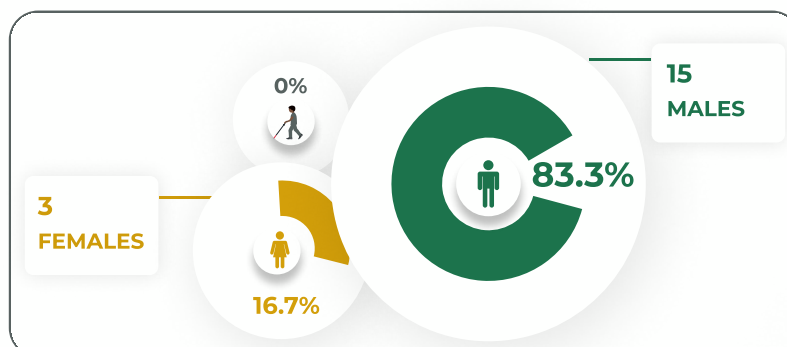
KOGI STATE



Governor



Deputy



Kogi State

Kogi State, situated in the North Central region of Nigeria, shares borders with Ekiti, Kwara, the Federal Capital Territory, Nasarawa, Niger, Edo, Ondo, Anambra, Enugu, and Benue. Established on August 27, 1991, it was formed from portions of Benue, Niger, and Kwara States. Dubbed the "Confluence State," it derives its name from the Hausa word for river, owing to the confluence of the River Niger and River Benue near its capital, Lokoja. Covering an area that ranks thirteenth in Nigeria, Kogi is the twentieth most populous state, boasting an estimated 4.5 million inhabitants as of 2016.

Kogi State grapples with multifaceted challenges, including political violence rooted in inter-ethnic, social, and resource-based disputes. Additionally, the state contends with terrorism, with reports indicating the presence of terrorists for over a decade. In addition to terrorism are sectarian violence, and electoral-related clashes, there are also communal clashes, incidents of banditry, and a farmer-herder crisis occurring in the state. For instance, there was a communal clash on the 30th of May 2023 in Bassa Local Government, in East Senatorial District of the state, where properties worth millions of naira were reportedly razed as a result of renewed fighting between the people of Bassa and Igburra. Such conflicts have inter-laced with politically motivated attacks that have built up over time leading to the coming off-cycle elections in the state. All these factors have contributed to making Kogi highly susceptible to political violence and insecurity.

The November 11 elections in Kogi state evolved within a socio-political context which dates back to the 2019 elections where APC unseated almost all PDP senators in the state as a result of the Buhari effect who equally won about 54% votes in the state during the 2019 presidential elections. Governor Yahaya Bello was able to secure a second term in office in November 2019 in an election faced with challenges of irregularities and instances of electoral violence. While Yahaya Bello articulated a strategic vision with emphasis on agricultural development, increased employment opportunities, and policies that will support Internal Generated Revenue (IGR), his second term received criticism for incitement of electoral violence, and autocracy, coupled with corruption allegations.

This, and the subject of power rotation, formed the background for the November 11, 2023, off-cycle election in the state. Governor Yahya Bello who could not contest due to term limitation garnered support for his serving Auditor-General for Local Governments, Ahmed Usman Ododo, who secured 187,185 votes during the APC primary elections. APC's Ododo Ahmed Usman contested the seat of the governor with SDP's Muritala Ajaka, PDP's Senator Dino Melaye, Leke Abejide of the African Democratic Congress (ADC); Olayinka Braimoh of the Action Alliance; and Okeme Adejoh of the LP, and other contestants.

Kogi State

446,237



Ahmed Usman Ododo

259,052



Murtala Ajaka

46,362



Dino Melaye

Imo State

Imo is a state in Nigeria located in the Southeast geopolitical zone. It is bordered to the north by Anambra, Rivers State to the west and south, and Abia State to the east. The state capital is Owerri. Imo has 27 Local Government Areas with an estimated population of over 5.4 million as of 2016. Elections were conducted in the state amid political violence, social unrest, and widespread insecurity caused by the activities of IPOB and gunmen. The political and social crises in the state made the electoral terrain uneven for citizens to actively exercise their franchise. Pre-election observation showed that the southeastern state had experienced politically motivated and election-related attacks by unknown gunmen in various locations such as Orlu East, Mbaitolu, Okigwe, and Mbano. Many citizens were disenfranchised in these LGAs on election day.

Imo State

NPC Situation Room observed that political campaigns in the state were influenced by the power of incumbency, leading to an uneven playing field for opposition parties to campaign for votes. For instance, before the elections, opposition parties were required to pay 54 million for advertorials on billboards or cars. There were reports that the incumbent government had exerted undue influence on some critical election stakeholders in the state, raising concerns about the credibility and fairness of the upcoming elections on November 11, 2023

540,308



Hope Uzodinma

71,503



Samuel Anyawu

64,081



Athan Achonu

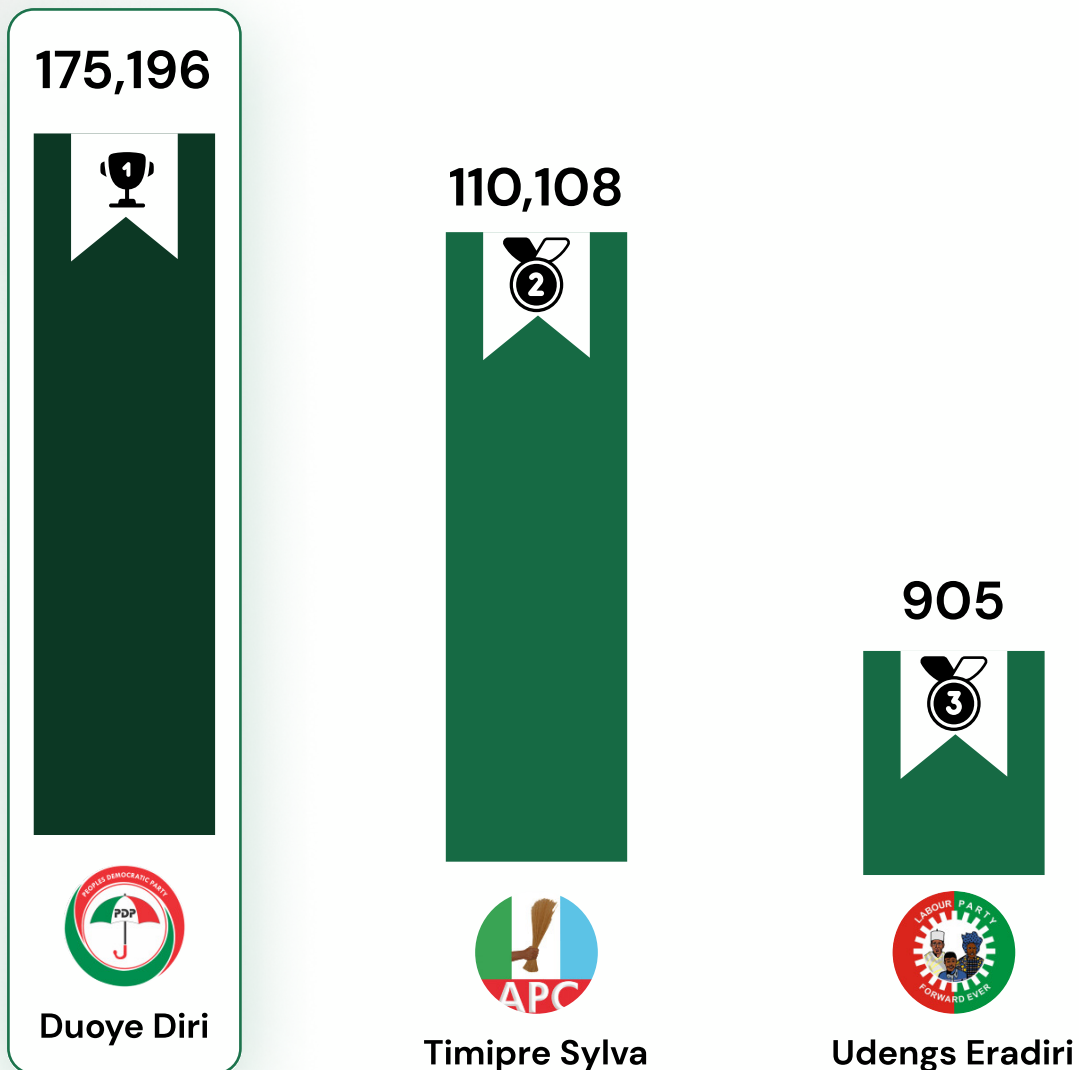
Bayelsa State

Bayelsa has a complex political history that has been marred by occurrences of political and electoral violence. This violence has been attributed to several factors, including the pursuit of political power, control of oil resources, and some underlying ethnically charged tensions. Bayelsa is a stronghold of the Peoples Democratic Party. Since 1999, the state has elected governors from the PDP until 2015, when David Lyon was elected but the Supreme Court invalidated his election in a pronouncement that was premised on the submission of a fake certificate to INEC by his running mate, Degi Eremienyo.

The state has suffered from a long history of environmental degradation exacerbated by illegal oil bunkering. The National Peace Committee Situation had identified transportation of sensitive and non-sensitive materials as a prevalent challenge in the state due to the presence of water bodies. This is equally accompanied by security challenges as a result of the illegal activities of pirates, and thugs. There was a recurrence of this challenge on the night of the elections when an INEC official, Wilfred Ifogah was kidnapped while waiting to board a boat at a jetty in Sagbama Local Government Area of the State. In addition, a boat carrying election material and INEC personnel to Southern Ijaw capsized, leading to the loss of result sheets.

The removal of the APC's candidate, Timipre Silva, from the ballot a few days before the elections had spurred mixed reactions. There were reports of political instability in Nembe and Brass local government areas (LGAs) as a result of the decision. Specifically, there have been reports of serious agitations by certain militant groups in Nembe seeking to truncate the elections. Similarly, in Brass LGA, certain groups had threatened that the elections would not be held in the state unless the court reversed its decision to exclude the APC's candidacy from the ballot. While the decision of the courts to reinstate Sylva's name on the ballot may have addressed the issue, it highlighted how potentially violent elections can be at the instance of such matters that pertain to civil law.

Bayelsa State

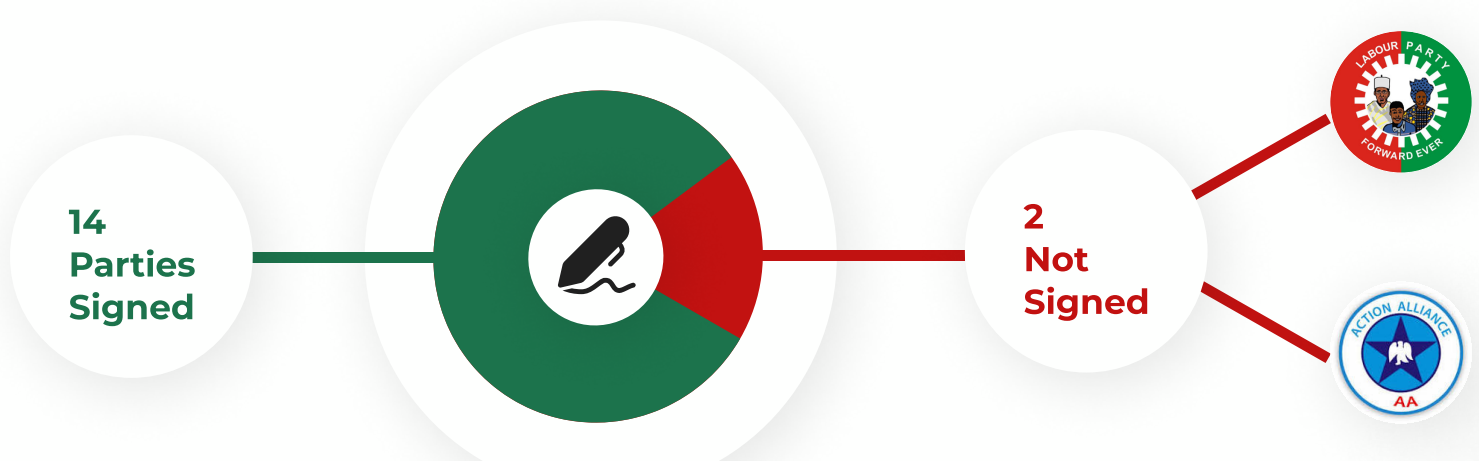


Election in the state was a closely contested race between the incumbent Governor Douye Diri, and one-time governor and past State Minister of Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva. The State Governor was reported to have based his campaigns on some infrastructural projects he implemented, including the completion of the Bayelsa International Airport. The Labour Party Candidate who came a distant third in the governorship race rejected the results on the grounds of massive vote buying and other election irregularities.

The signing of Peace Accords

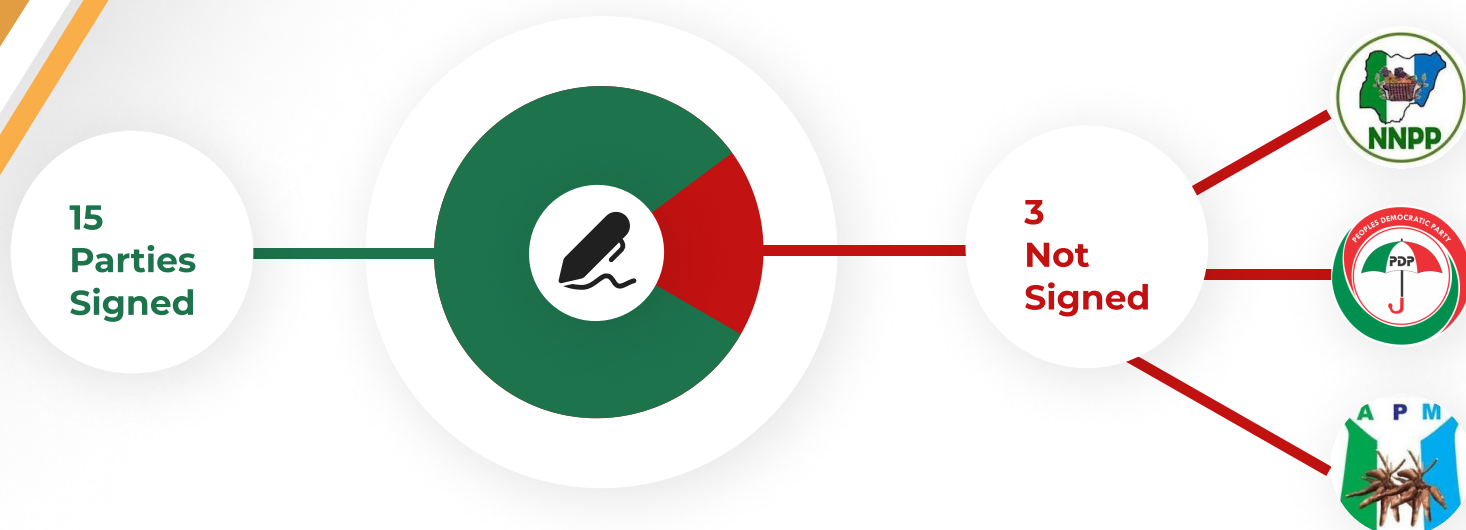
The National Peace Committee Situation Room observed that there was considerable turnout by political parties in Imo, Kogi and Bayelsa for the signing of the Peace Accord. The event has been a sustained initiative of the NPC to deploy its moral interventions to facilitate peace before and during elections. This has become a recognised activity in the election process that is supported by other election stakeholders like INE and the Security Agencies. On the 9th of November 2023, political parties and their governorship candidates in Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi committed to peaceful conduct of themselves, their parties and their supporters before, during and after the elections.

Bayelsa Peace accord Signing



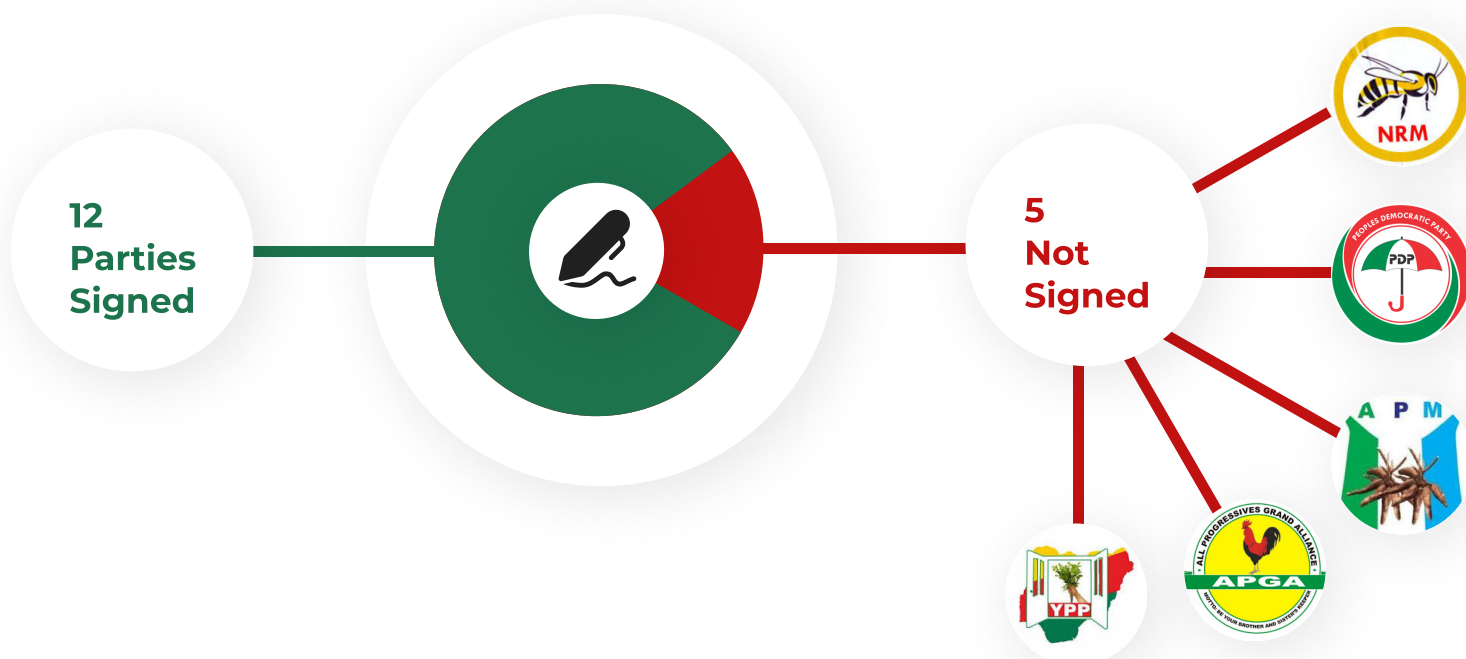
In Bayelsa, out of 16 candidates that contested for governorship positions, two (2) parties; Action Alliance (AA) and Labour Party (LP) did not sign the Accord.

Kogi Peace accord Signing



In Kogi, out of 18 governorship candidates, 3 did not sign the Peace Accord; Allied Peoples Movement (APM), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

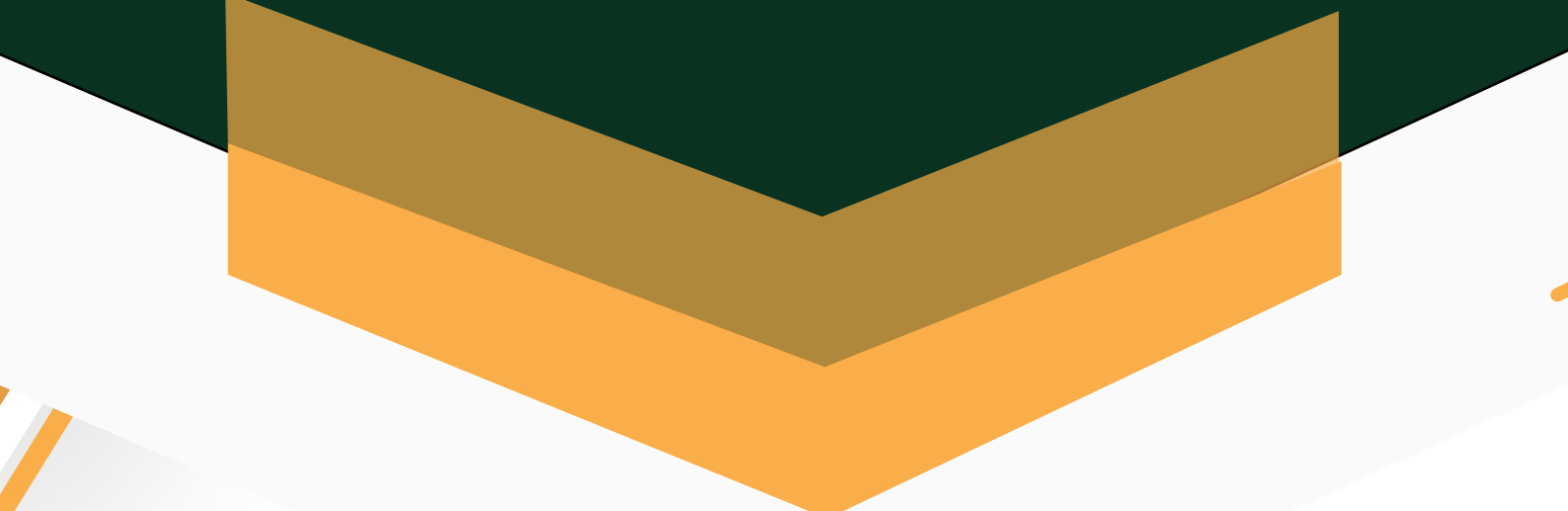
Imo Peace accord Signing



In Imo, out of seventeen political parties, five (5) did not sign the Accord; Young Peoples Party (YPP), National Rescue Movement (NRM), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Allied Peoples' Movement (APM), and All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).



The general expectation from this symbolic event is that political parties, their candidates, and supporters will abide by the letter and spirit of the accord which among other things include, resorting to legal means to seek redress if elections do not meet the expectations of their parties. Importantly, political parties committed to peaceful conduct during and after the elections. Situation Room observed that there was reasonable compliance with the accord in terms of maintaining peace after the announcement of results. However, vote buying and incidents of violence in states like Kogi reveal non-compliance with the Accord.



Methodology

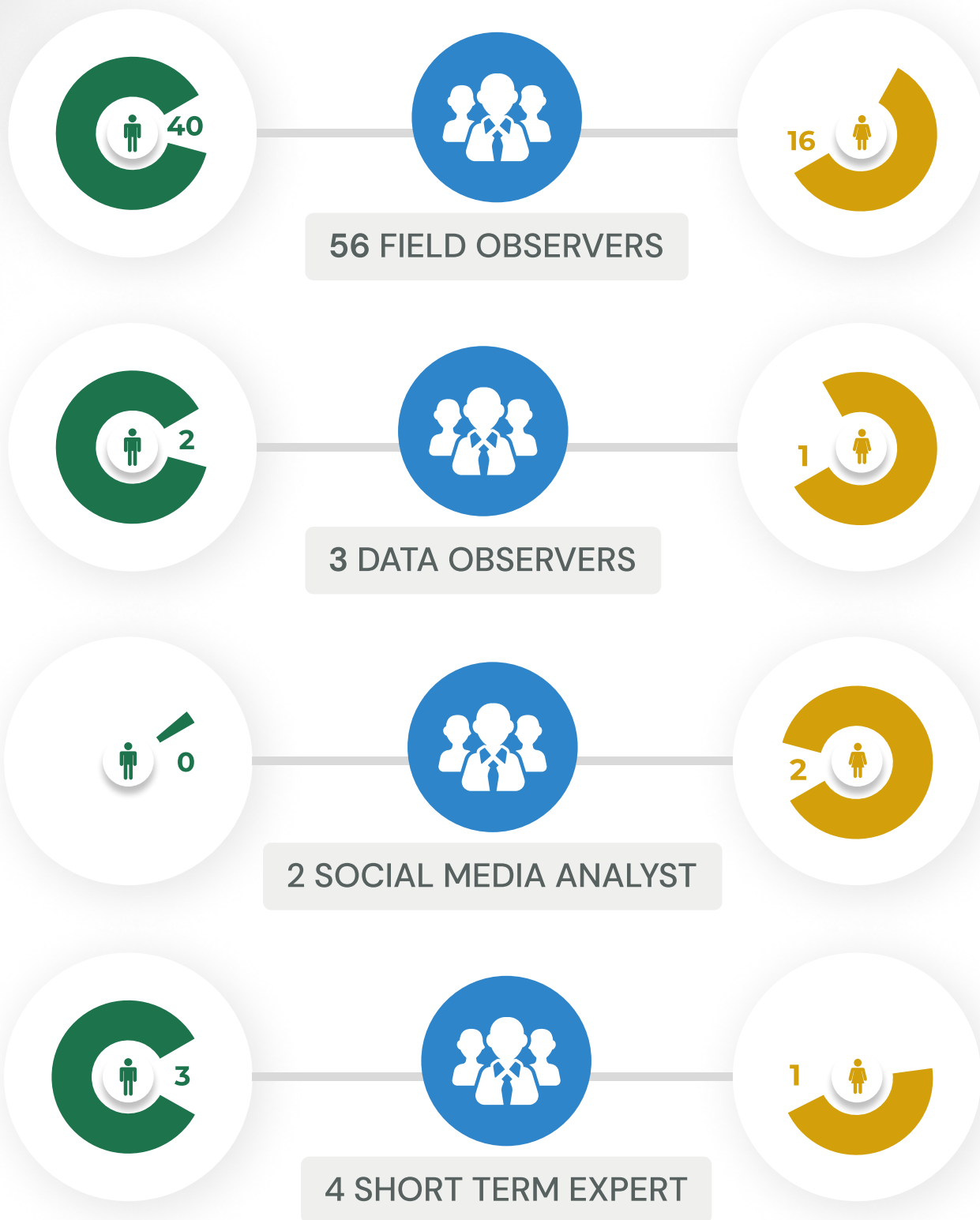
The National Peace Committee Situation Room deployed a total of 56 Field Observers to observe the elections in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa states. 8 were deployed to Bayelsa, 21 to Kogi and 27 to Imo state. The monitoring centred largely on election security – whether or not elections took place peacefully and in compliance with election guidelines.

The objective is to document and report cases of violence to The National Peace Committee which will inform its intervention and provide more insight into the causes of election security in Nigeria. Observation was done based on three broad phases: Pre-election, election, and post-election phases. On election day, a pre-voting assessment was conducted across polling units in Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi to determine the arrival of INEC officials and sensitive election materials, the presence of security and the overall readiness of election stakeholders before voting. The voting assessment focused on the functionality of the BVAs and the conduct of voters, party agents and as well as the participation of women. While post-voting assessment focused on the collation and announcements of results as well as the reaction of political parties and their supporters.

Structure

The NPC Situation is constituted of four (4) Short-term Experts – Research and Monitoring, Data Analysis, Media and Communication and Infographics Design, three (3) Data Clerks and two (2) Social Media Clerks, and fifty-six (56) Field Officers who observed elections across the fifty-six (56) LGAs in Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi states.

Composition of NPC Situation Room



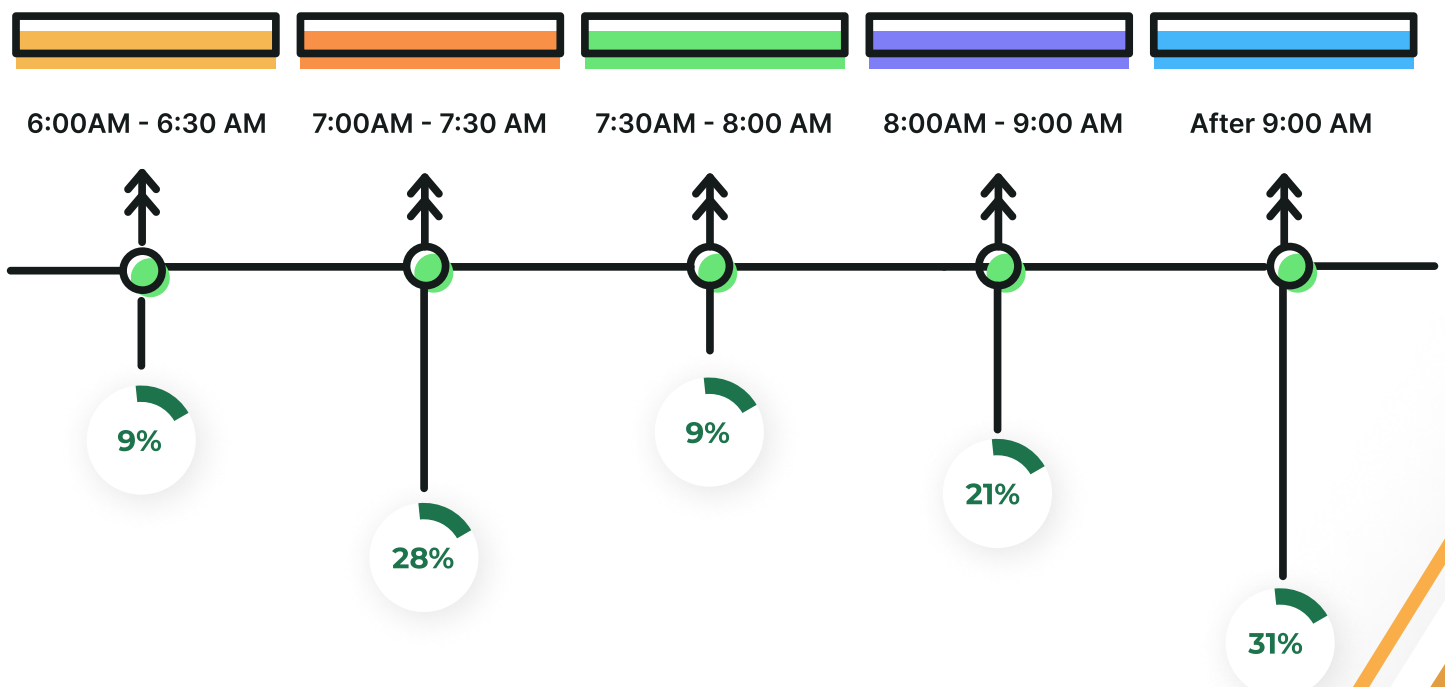
Key Findings and Assessment

Findings from observation are categorised into three phases: Pre-voting Exercise, Voting Exercise and Post-voting exercise. Furthermore, some critical incidents were documented across the three election phases.

Pre-Voting Exercise

Arrival Of Materials

NPC Situation Room noticed that sensitive materials arrived in most of the Polling Units visited. It is encouraging to note that 69% of the responses received indicate that the election materials arrived before 9 am. This suggests that the logistical process in the majority of the Local Government Areas observed was relatively smooth. A further breakdown is provided in the table below:



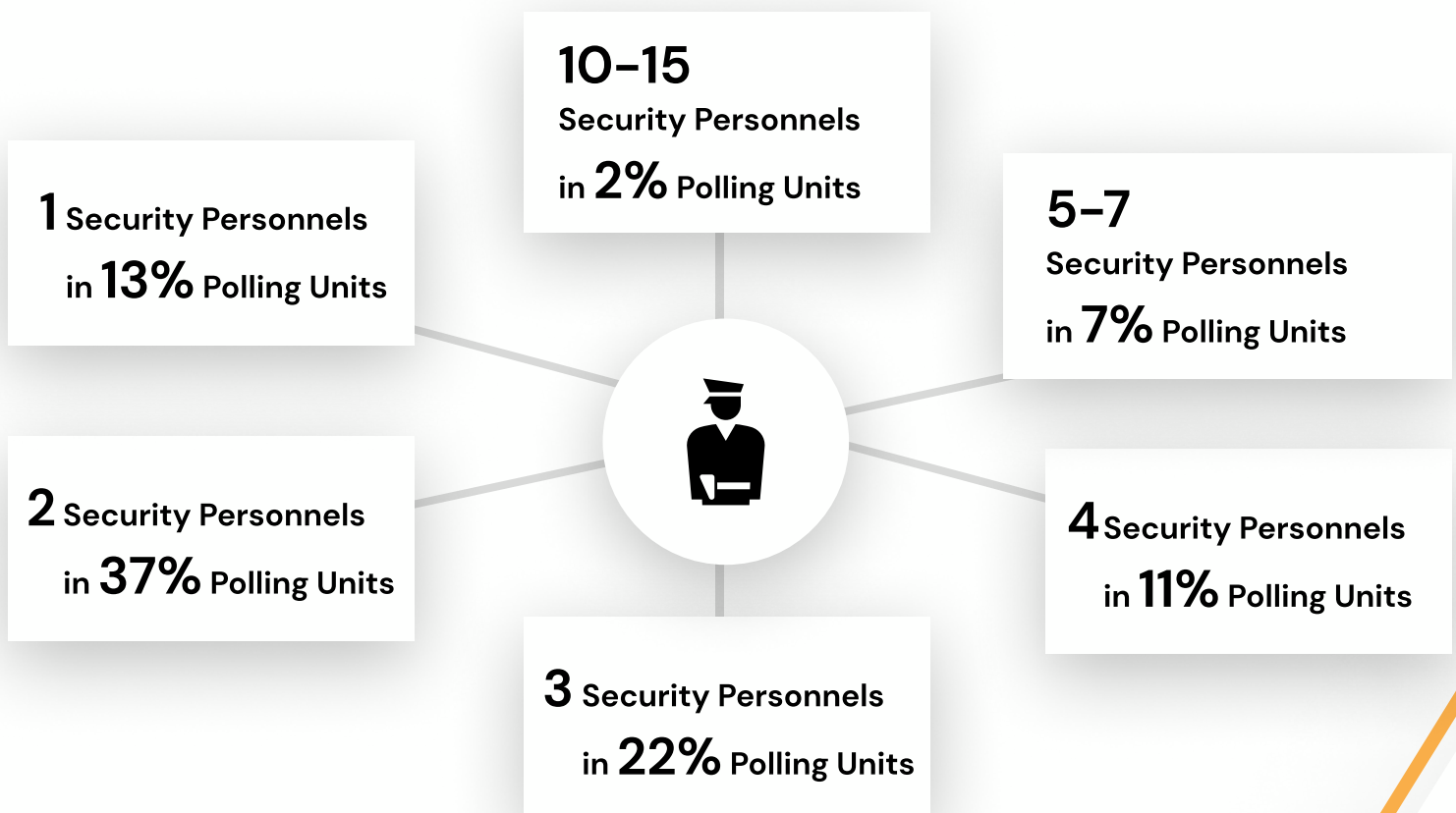
Security Presence

Despite security concerns arising from pre-election violence as well as historical evidence of election violence in Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo, the National Peace Committee Situation Room observed a significant 90% presence of security personnel at polling units visited before the commencement of votes.

Are there any Security Personnels on Ground?



This is a good sign that indicates a commitment to peaceful elections on the part of Security Personnel. This also underscores an effort to maintain a secure environment for the electoral process. However, the 10% indicating an absence of security personnel raises concerns and necessitates further investigation to address potential vulnerabilities.



Pre-Voting Exercise (contd)

Functionality Of BVAS

The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) functioned in 94% of the Polling Units visited. This is a positive indicator of technological reliability in the electoral process.

Is the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System functioning well?



Absence of Tensions at Polling Unit

The NPC Situation Room received 94% of responses indicating an absence of tensions at the polling units, reflecting a generally calm and stable atmosphere during the pre-voting period.

Voting Exercise

1. NPC Situation Room Field Observers reported that voting took place in 92% of polling units visited. However, voting didn't take place in 8% of polling units.

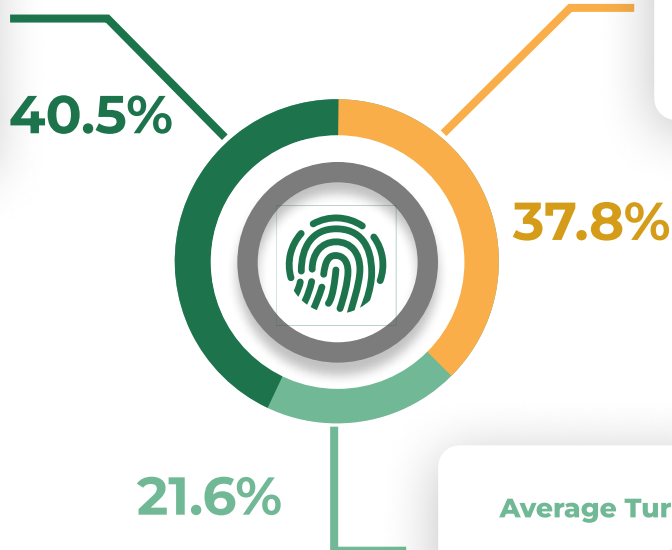


Voting Exercise (.contd)

2. There was low voter turnout in 40.5% of the polling units visited by the NPC Situation Room Field Observers while 37.8% of polling visited recorded high voter turnout. 21.6% of polling units visited had an average turnout of voters.

Low Turnout

There was low voter turnout in 40.5% of the polling units visited by the NPC Situation Room Field Observers



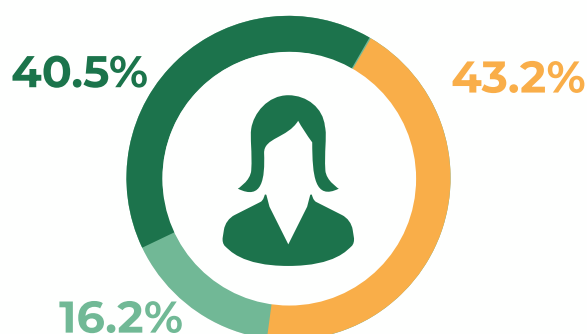
High Turnout

37.8% of polling visited recorded high voter turnout

Average Turnout

21.6% of polling units visited had an average turnout of voters.

3. NPC Situation Room observed the participation of women in the elections. Reports from Field Observers across LGAs in Imo, Bayelsa and Imo indicated that women were seen to have voted in **40.5% of polling units visited**. There was a nearly commensurate percentage of low voter turnout in **43.2% of the polling units observed in the three states**. While 16.2% of polling units had an average turnout of women.



4. The National Peace Committee Situation room observed that there was vote buying in 52% of the polling units visited. According to reports from NPC Field Observers, the parties responsible were APC and PDP. For instance in Bayelsa, Brass LGA, in Ward 6, Liama Town, Polling Unit 13, party agents were reported to have paid voters as high as N10,000 to N15,000. There were similar reports from Imo, in some polling units in Nkwerre, in Eziabo Ward 4. Polling Units 003,004 and 005 in Obibi Ward 2, in Owerri North recorded similar incidents of vote buying. It is pertinent to mention that 34% of polling units visited across Imo, Kogi and Bayelsa recorded that women were involved in vote buying.

Critical Incidents Documented



KOGI STATE



Ballot Box Snatching

Fatality in Anyingba, Dekina LGA: Umaru Iduh lost his life attempting to snatch a ballot box in Anyingba, Dekina LGA, succumbing to gunshot wounds



Pre-filled Results Sheet

Pre-filled Result Sheets in Ogori/Magogo, Olamaboro LGA: Pre-filled results sheets were discovered in PU 004, Eno-ward of Ogori/Magogo, Olamaboro LGA before voting commenced. INEC has issued a Press Statement, committing to a thorough investigation of the matter.



Firearms Recovery

The arrest of Senior Special Assistant in Ogugu Town: A Senior Special Assistant to the Governor was apprehended in Ogugu town, Olamaboro LGA, at Sabon Gari Roundabout with N28 million cash and firearms.

Critical Incidents Documented (.contd)



IMO STATE



Vote Buying

Vote Buying in Ihitta Oha Ward 2: Report received at 12:25 pm indicating witnessed vote buying in Ihitta Oha Ward 2.



Low Vote Turnout

Low Voter Turnout in Awo-idemili, Polling Unit 005: Despite the presence of INEC officials, voters in Awo-idemili, Polling Unit 005, did not turn up due to the sit-at-home order by IPOB



IMO STATE



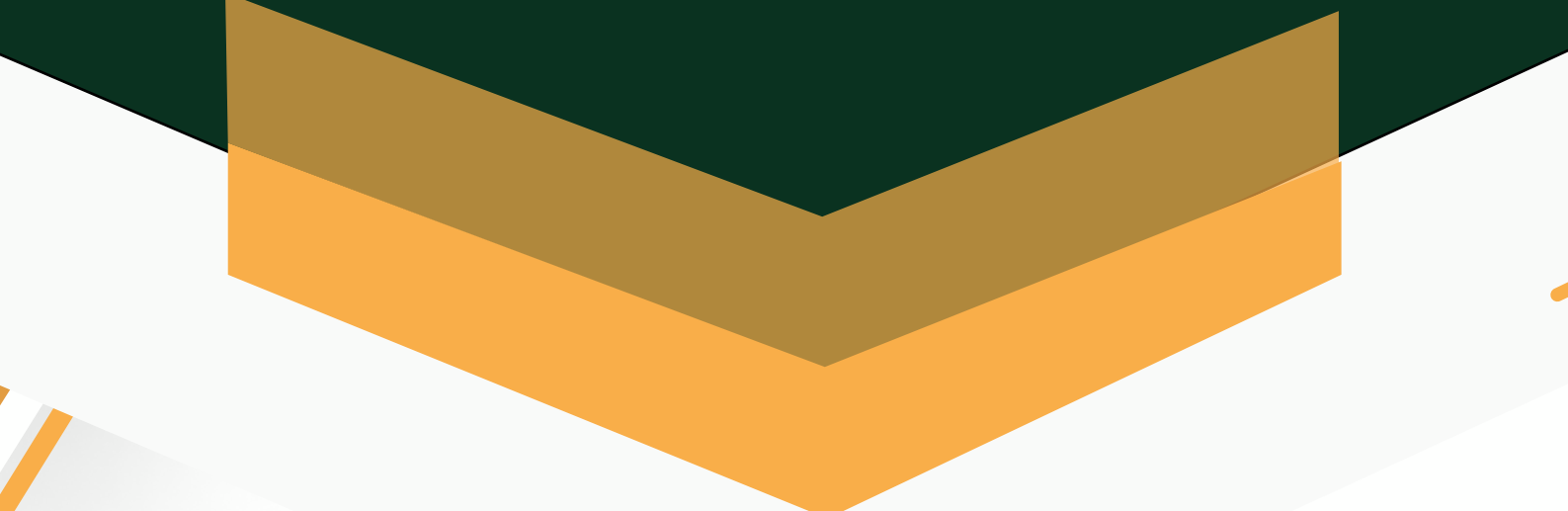
Kidnapped INEC Official

Kidnapping of an INEC official in Sagbama LGA



Accident

A boat carrying election personnel and materials capsized on its way to Southern Ijaw.



Conclusion

The 2023 off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi states unfolded with an overall semblance of peace yet were marred by concerning irregularities that warrant serious reflection. The bypass of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) raises questions about the integrity of the electoral process, as it represents a breach in the technological safeguards put in place to ensure fair and transparent elections. The prevalence of vote buying further compounds these challenges, undermining the principle of free and fair elections by compromising the autonomy of voters.

Moreover, the low voter turnout witnessed during these elections is indicative of a potential erosion of public trust and engagement in the electoral process. This decline may be attributed to various factors, including voter apathy stemming from previous electoral issues or a lack of confidence in the efficacy of the electoral system. The alarming incidents of prefilled election result sheets and ballot box snatching underscore the vulnerability of the electoral infrastructure, posing a direct threat to the credibility of the entire democratic process.

Addressing these irregularities is imperative to reinforce the foundations of democracy and improve the quality of elections in Nigeria. A thorough investigation into these discrepancies, coupled with comprehensive reforms to enhance electoral transparency and security, is essential to restore public confidence in the electoral system and ensure the integrity of future elections.

Recommendations

The National Peace Committee Situation Room makes the following recommendations:

1. **Vote-buying:** Measures must be implemented to curb the menace of vote-buying. This could include the deployment of law enforcement personnel at strategic locations, enhanced public awareness campaigns, and stringent legal consequences for both buyers and sellers involved in such practices.
2. **Voter Turnout:** Understanding the factors contributing to low voter turnout is essential. Stakeholders, including government bodies and civil society organizations, should collaborate on initiatives to rekindle public trust and interest in the electoral process. This may involve educational campaigns, outreach programs, and addressing specific concerns that deter citizens from participating in elections. INEC must ensure that the vote of every citizen counts.
3. **Reform and Continuous Improvement:** Electoral authorities should engage in a comprehensive review of the electoral framework, incorporating lessons learned from the 2023 off-cycle elections. Reforms should be implemented to address identified weaknesses and adapt to emerging challenges.
4. **Public Trust:** The federal and state governments should ensure the independence of INEC and other critical institutions saddled with conducting free and credible elections in the state. This can restore the public confidence in the Commission and will improve citizens' trust in the election process.

5. Improved Election Logistics: Delays due to the unavailability of security escorts and the late arrival of materials experienced in some polling units in Bayelsa and Imo call for better logistical planning.
6. Establishment of Electoral Offense Commission: This is crucial for safeguarding the democratic process. The commission will address electoral crimes experienced in Nigeria's elections and will relieve INEC of such duties to focus more on improving the quality of the election process.

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About the Report

This report is produced by The Kukah Centre, a Nigeria-based non-profit, non-governmental and public policy organisation that offers alternative approaches to the challenges of leadership and the impact of conflict on national development.

The Centre's core programme areas include Good Governance, Leadership Development, Interfaith Dialogue, Knowledge Promotion, Advocacy and Memory Preservation.

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