



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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REPORT OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION ELECTION WORKING GROUP (NBA-EWG) ON THE EDO STATE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS HELD ON SATURDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2024

1. PREAMBLE

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) granted accreditation to the Nigerian Bar Association Election Working Group (NBA-EWG) to observe the September 2024 Edo State Gubernatorial Election.

In furtherance of this accreditation, the President of NBA, Mazi Afam Osigwe, SAN deployed members of the NBA comprising of some National Officers and representatives of leadership of the five branches of NBA in Edo State, including Benin, Auchi, Igarra, Uromi, and Ekpoma as observers at various polling stations across the state.

This widespread deployment ensured that the NBA's presence was felt across multiple locations.

2. OBJECTIVES

The Association deployed Election Observers with the following objectives:

- i. To observe the extent of compliance of all stakeholders with the governing laws and regulations in the conduct of the elections; and,
- ii. To observe and report on the freeness, fairness and credibility of the election.

3. PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION

The NBA – EWG observed that the pre-election period within the state was peaceful, with no reports of significant violence or unrest.

NATIONAL OFFICERS:

Mazi Afam Josiah Osigwe, SAN - President

Dr. Mobolaji Ojibara - General Secretary; Sebastine Anyia - 1st Vice-President; Mrs. Bolatumi Olasunbo Animashaun - 2nd Vice President; Zainab Aminu Garba - 3rd Vice-President; Blessing Imo Udofa-Poromon - Treasurer; Nyada Auta - Welfare Secretary; Bridget Ijeoma Edokwe - Publicity Secretary; Henry Barnabas Ehi - Assistant General Secretary; Ebiere Emmanuella Ekpese - Assistant Publicity Secretary

The presence of security personnel across the state contributed significantly to maintaining law and order, ensuring that the environment was secure for both voters and election officials.

Several international and local organizations, including media outlets such as Channels TV, NTA, AIT, NEWS CENTRAL, TVC, and ARISE, also deployed their representatives to monitor the election.

This diverse presence of observers from various sectors further underscored the importance of the election and the need for transparency.

4. MODUS OPARANDI

The NBA-EWG established an NBA-EWG mini secretariat in Benin City, Edo State and published a phone number where Edo Voters, observers and other lawyers could call in with their reports.

The NBA-EWG took advantage of the various social media platforms available and set up handles which were disseminated to Edo Voters, members of the Association and her election observers. The hashtag #NBAOBSERVERS #EDODECIDES2024 was created for easy identification of reports from Edo voters, lawyers and observers alike.

The NBA-EWG critically made attempts to authenticate reports, photographic images and videos sent to it from various sources before making such reports public

5. OBSERVATIONS

5.1 DEPLOYMENT OF ELECTION OFFICIALS AND MATERIALS

Edo State has 4519 polling units spread across the eighteen (18) Local Government Areas. The NBA-EWG observed that election materials and personnel arrived late in many polling units, particularly within Benin City metropolis.

It was observed that these delays were caused by logistics challenges that hindered the smooth commencement of the voting process. In several locations, such as Wards 1, Units 1-8 in Etsako West LGA, Ward 1 and Ward 4, Units 1, 11-13 in Esan North East LGA, and Ward 12, Units 7-8 in Oredo LGA, materials and personnel arrived promptly, allowing voting to begin on schedule.

The NBA-EWG also observed yet a few polling units where there were no deployment of either INEC personnel or electoral materials. In Egor Ward I, Polling Unit 30, for instance, there were no election materials or INEC officials at all, effectively preventing any voting activity from taking place in this polling unit.

At Ward 1, Polling Unit 52, located in the open space opposite Saint Patrick Church, Ikpoba Okha, there was only one INEC ad-hoc staff member present, who appeared overwhelmed, helpless, and visibly confused. The sole police officer at the polling unit had to step in to assist the ad-hoc staff.

This lack of preparedness in certain areas is a serious issue that needs to be addressed to ensure elections run smoothly in the future.

5.2 VOTER TURNOUT

According to INEC, Edo State has a total of 2,629,025 registered voters, with 2,249,780 (85.57%) holding Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs). Despite this, voter turnout across most polling units observed by the NBA-EWG was notably low. For example;

- a. In polling Unit 9, Ward 4, Aduwawa LGA, there were 1,100 registered voters, but only 94 accredited voters.
- b. In polling Unit 10, Ward 4, out of 1,026 registered voters, only 10 were accredited.
- c. In polling Unit 71, Ward 2, Oregbeni Ikpoba, 850 registered voters were recorded, with 94 accredited voters.
- d. In polling Unit 70, there were 813 registered voters and 61 accredited voters.
- e. In polling Unit 50, 802 registered voters were recorded, with 88 accredited.
- f. In polling Unit 40, Ward 3, Eresonye Ogbeson LGA, there were 349 registered voters, but only 78 were accredited.
- g. In Ward 1 (Oselu Primary School), Egor Local Government, polling Unit 3 recorded 737 registered voters, with only 76 accredited to vote.

Despite the low numbers, it was encouraging to see middle-aged men and women, as well as physically challenged persons, who were determined to cast their votes.

Despite a heavy downpour of rain during the election, these individuals remained resilient and waited patiently to exercise their civic duty. The turnout of physically challenged voters was particularly commendable, as they were given priority treatment at the polling stations, ensuring they could vote with ease.

5.3 POLITICAL PARTY AGENTS

Although 17 political parties were registered for this election, only three parties were observed to be represented at most of the polling units, noticeably, the representatives of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP).

The presence of party agents played a crucial role in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. Their presence added an extra layer of accountability and transparency to the process, ensuring that the election was conducted fairly.

However, as at 11:16 a.m. in Ward 10, Unit 14, Esan North East LGA, Uromi, only one party agent (APC) was present.

5.4 VOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

Both male and female voters participated actively in the election. However, it was observed that the number of male voters exceeded that of female voters.

This demographic trend suggests the need for increased efforts to encourage female voter participation in future elections, ensuring that gender representation at polling units is more balanced.

5.5 BIOMETRIC VOTER ACCREDITATION SYSTEM (BVAS)

The Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) devices functioned effectively in most polling units, ensuring that the accreditation process and subsequent uploading of election results were smooth.

However, there were some technical challenges in some areas. For instance, in Ward 7, Polling Unit 18, Ugbekw LGA, an INEC adhoc staff member reported that the BVAS device displayed the message “No Election Ongoing” despite the voting process being in progress already.

5.6 SECURITY

The deployment of security personnel was widespread, with officers from the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigerian Army,

Nigerian Correctional Service, and Nigerian Immigration Service were present at most polling units.

Their presence played a key role in maintaining order and ensured that potential security threats were mitigated, allowing the electoral process to proceed without significant incidents of violence or disruption.

However at Aunty Maria Nursery & Primary School, Oliha, Ward 2, which hosts five polling units within the school compound under Egor Local Government Council, Gunshots were fired. The incident occurred when an APC politician instructed security personnel to assault a voter who had questioned his suspicious actions at the polling unit.

5.7 CONDUCT OF VOTERS

Voters in most polling units conducted themselves in an orderly and respectful manner.

There were no reported instances of voters interfering with the election process or engaging in disorderly behaviour. This level of decorum contributed, to the smooth execution of the election.

5.8 INFLUENCE OF MONEY

Despite efforts to promote free and fair elections, the influence of money remained a concern. Several attempts were observed where political party agents discreetly tried to influence voters with monetary incentives.

At the main entrance of Ward 7, Enikaro Ugbeku local Govt, for instance, both men and women were observed engaging voters in private discussions under the guise of directing them to their polling units.

Additionally, a middle aged man was seen moving around Ward 7 compiling a list of voters.

These actions appeared to be efforts at vote buying, a malpractice that could undermine the integrity of the electoral process.

5.9 INTERFERENCE BY ELECTION OFFICIALS

No incidents of interference by INEC officials were observed. The election officials conducted themselves professionally and adhered to established procedures, ensuring that the voting process was fair and transparent.

6. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Bar Association Election Working Group (NBA-EWG) observed that the 2024 Edo State Governorship Election was generally orderly, however, there were logistical and technical challenges in some areas.

The low voter turnout, influence of money, and delays in the distribution of election materials were notable concerns. However, the conduct of voters, election officials, and security personnel was commendable, contributing to a largely peaceful election process.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian Bar Association Election Working Group (NBA-EWG) recommends as follows:

Enhance Timely Distribution of Election Materials: INEC should prioritize the timely deployment of election materials and personnel to avoid delays and ensure that all polling units are equipped to begin the voting process on time.

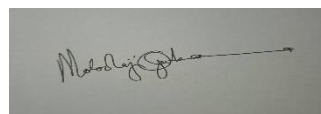
Increase Voter Education and Sensitization: There is a need for intensified voter education campaigns aimed at restoring public trust in the electoral process and encouraging greater voter participation, especially among women and youth.

Curb the Influence of Money in Elections: Stronger measures must be implemented to prevent political parties from using money to influence voters. This includes stricter monitoring at polling units and more transparent processes to safeguard the integrity of the electoral system.

Signed,



Mrs. Bolatumi Animashaun
Team Lead.
NBA-EWG
EDO STATE 2024



Mr. Mobolaji Ojibara
General Secretary