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Civil Society Organisations and Elections Observation: Case Study of Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA-Africa) in the 2023 General Elections

Okutepa Cajetan Lawrence¹

Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutse

cajiokute@gmail.com

Abubakar Yahaya²

Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutse

Abbakaryahaya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The engagement of civil society organisations in election observation in Nigeria has become a norm since the inception of the Fourth Republic. After every general election CSOs come up with reports on elections conducted, which in some instances has become a subject of contention, especially among political parties. The reports they give about these elections shapes perceptions about the electoral process entirely. This study was embarked on to find out what exactly CSOs observe in elections and how they carry out this observation, so as to ascertain the extent to which their reports can be relied on as a true reflection of Nigeria's election, using YIAGA-Africa as the case study. The structural functional theory was relied on to embark on this research. Data were gathered by conducting key informant interviews with officials of YIAGA-Africa and other relevant stakeholders in the electoral process which includes the Independent National Electoral Commission, and other CSOs (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Transition Monitoring Group and Jigawa Civil society Forum). Data were also derived from relevant documents and analysed. The study found out that CSOs particularly YIAGA-Africa observe the entire processes of election starting from the pre-election stage, through the election day, to the post-election stage. The study also found out that CSOs particularly YIAGA-Africa employ technological tools to observe elections on election days, and also employ a systematic means of gathering data that forms the report they give on elections. Therefore, their reports are not concocted, but a product of a systematic means of gathering of data and analysis that can serve as lenses through which Nigeria's election can be viewed.

Keywords: Civil society, election observation, YIAGA-Africa, CSOs reports, election reports.

Introduction

Throughout the world, Civil Society Organisations (CSO) plays an important role in observing and monitoring elections (El Baradai, 2012). Universally, election is regarded as the heart of representative democracy. A credible election not only confers legitimacy on political leadership, it is also crucial to the sustenance of democratic order (Animashaun, 2010).

Historically in West Africa, organizations like National Council for British West Africa (NCBWA) played a vital role in the introduction of elective principle in British Colonies in West Africa. This organization was formed in 1920 during the colonial era, and it advocated for the inclusion of West Africans in the decision-making process of their states through elections, that will ensure half of the members in the Legislative Council of British West



African colonies are Africans. Their advocacy led to the introduction of elective principle in Nigeria in 1922 to determine Africans that will be members of the Legislative Council.

Not much is found in the literature on the activities of CSOs in Nigeria's election before and during the first and second republics. From 1993 to 1999, the efforts of CSOs like Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), in collaboration with Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and students associations were vital towards the restoration of democracy in Nigeria (Oke *et al.*, 2021). From the inception of the Fourth Republic, over two decades ago, there has been increased engagement of CSOs in the electoral process of Nigeria. Many CSOs perform the function of election observation among other functions. However, their engagement in the observance of elections has been called to question, as the validity of CSOs report after every general election has been a subject of contention, especially among political parties. This poses a threat to public confidence in elections reports, which serves as an important means of identifying errors that can lead to changes and improvements in the electoral process. In view of this, this paper intends to find out the ways CSOs carryout the function of elections observation, as knowing the ways CSOs observe elections will provide useful insights on how CSOs reports can be relied on. This paper relying on primary and secondary sources of qualitative data seeks to make its findings. This study examined the role of YIAGA-Africa, a leading civil society organisation in Nigeria that has been actively engaged in election observation.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

Civil Society

As with most concepts in the social sciences, scholars have come up with divergent views of what should constitute civil society and its basic elements over time and space. Taylor (1990) defines civil society as “a web of autonomous associations independent of the state, which bind citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions, could have an effect on public policy”. The definition given by Taylor seems to capture basic attributes of civil society, independence from the state and advocacy. Bratton (1994) sees civil society as nongovernmental organizations that promote democracy and good governance across the globe through some legal activities that are entrenched in the constitution (Bratton, 1994).

To Dunn, civil society is broadly categorized as the domain of relationships which falls between the private realm of the family on one hand and the state on the other (Dunn, 1996, p.27). Fukuyama (1995) sees civil society as the realm of spontaneously created social structures separate from the state that underlie democratic political institutions. While Dunn's definition is too generic as one would ask whether private business entities should also constitute civil society since they fall between both realms, that of Fukuyama tends to narrow civil society so much to mean only political institutions that exists in democracies or promotes democracies. His perception of civil society of being spontaneously created rules out the possibility of the formation of civil society consciously or deliberately.

In his study on civil society in Africa, Ekeh (1994) perceives civil society in a broader perspective to mean those institutions and associations in the public that are independent of state control in the conduct of their affairs. He goes further to state that there are two broad categorizations of what constitute civil society in Africa. The first he explains as civil societies that acts outside of the state arena and can act in place of the state. The second he explains to



be organizations that interact with the state and having the capacity to check the state's totalitarian tendencies. Ekeh's second category of civil society appears unambiguous, as the first category seems to be unable to convincingly explain how civil societies acts "in place of the state".

To Popoola & Alao civil society organization is:

Any organization which operates between the state, the private sector and the household but interacts with the state to demand for concession and call for accountability and transparency from the state. It is an arena where the citizens act collectively to mould, constrain, and restrain the state power so as to make power holders responsible to the citizens they represent. However, the interactions of civil society organizations with the state are not with the intention of replacing the state but to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of the state (Popoola & Alao, 2017, p. 17).

While the above definition by Popoola & Alao portrays civil society organization as a check mechanism against the excesses of the state, their definition excluded associations and groups that are independent of government and exist within the public but do not check the excesses of government. Examples are non-governmental organizations that render humanitarian services.

Kastrati (2016) sees civil society as the "intermediate layer of governance between the citizens and the state that is capable of resolving problems without public coercion". The above definition is stressed on problem solving.

VanDyck (2017) perceives civil society as:

organized and organic social and cultural relations existing in the space between the state, business, and family, which builds on indigenous and external knowledge, values, traditions, and principles to foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders" (VanDyck, 2017, p. 1 in Cooper, 2018, p. 6).

The definition above given by VanDyck seems to capture all forms and types of civil society that may exist. To Longley (2022) civil society are communities and groups separate from government that carry out the function of providing support and advocacy for some people or issues in society. They check government's policies and make it accountable and recommend policies they deem as appropriate to the government.

From the various definitions of civil society given here by different scholars, all the definitions capture one basic attribute of civil society; that is: its independence from the state or being separate from the state. However, for the purpose of this study the work will have a restrictive definition of civil society to mean those formally registered organizations separate from government that work to promote the entrenchment of democratic values, particularly in the area of election observation.

Election

Election is a basic requirement for the practice of representative democracy. It has been viewed by different scholars in different ways. To Dowes & Huges (1972) election offers citizens the opportunity to change governments that have failed to deliver or live up to their expectations or have betrayed their trust. It serves as a means of reward by citizens for the government or political party that has served them creditably.



Dudley (1982) perceives election as a process permissible by the rules of a state in which members of the state choose a few persons to hold an office or offices of authority in a state. To him, one of the functions of elections is to provide the opportunity for a peaceful succession to office.

Nnoli (2003) sees election as a choice process agreed upon by a people. It is a process that enables the people to select one or few people among many that will occupy one or some positions of authority. Usually, there are rules and regulations in the process that are meant to ensure some degree of fairness and justice to all concerned. He furthered that: it is the most modern means of determining persons that will occupy public office and a fundamental aspect of the democratic process.

To Gauba (2007), election is the means which one or more persons are chosen by a community or organization for the exercise of authority on their behalf. Robert (2011) views election as a process of formal group decision making that allows people to choose an individual that will hold public office. While Agu (2015) sees election as a means through which members of a group, club, societies, communities, and organizations choose among members those to hold positions at regular intervals. Osinachukwu & Jawan (2011) opined that:

Elections serve as an important mechanism and viable means that ensure orderliness in the process of leadership succession and change. It gives legitimacy and political authority to every administration. Elections play dominant roles in a democracy and these roles are hugely circumscribed in terms of portraying the popular will, inculcating political changes and actualization of regimes legitimacy (Osinachukwu, 2011, p. 130).

Alao (2021) submits that election is an opportunity for deciding who to govern a particular society. It provides for the people opportunity to decide government's future policies, programs, and directions. It also makes government accountable to the people. He further submitted that elections pressurize those who wield power to be more responsible and be considerate of public interests in the process of making decisions. He added that at any level of government the integrity of elections should be depended on as the element of a true representative system of government and means of determining the will of the people.

From the foregoing, election is proven to be a basic ingredient of representative democracy; therefore, election here is defined as the process of leadership choice that avails citizens the opportunity to choose from among political parties and candidates vying for public offices those that should represent them in such public offices. It is intended to obtain the consent of those who are to be governed for those who will govern.

Election Monitoring/Observation

The observation of elections by citizens is an activity carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs). Citizens derive the right to participate in the observance of elections from article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and article 25 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (ACE 2020).

Election observation and election monitoring are used interchangeably in most literature, with just few scholars making attempt to differentiate election monitoring and election observation.



Fundamentally, election observation is the gathering of data in an electoral process for the purpose of making informed judgment based on the data collected, by persons that do not have the authority to intervene in the process and their activities does not jeopardize their key responsibilities in observation (Leyraud, 2007). By “elections monitoring” is meant following and observing the election process, ensuring that it is devoid of any violations, is in accordance with governing laws and regulations, then taking stock of any violations and documenting them, whilst maintaining objectivity as an observer or monitor.

Leyraud (2007) made effort to distinguish the three terms election observation, election monitoring, and election supervision. He explained that the terms are differentiated by their role and mandate in an electoral process. He clarified that the mandate of election observers is to gather information and make an informed judgment without interfering in the process, while the mandate of election monitors is to observe and intervene when laws are being violated. And that of election supervisors is to certify the validity of the electoral process. From the foregoing, most civil society organizations are involved in elections observation and not monitoring or supervision, as INEC has consistently clarified that only her has the power to respond to any anomaly in an election, and so others are observers. However, most literature doesn't distinguish between election monitoring and observation, as they are used interchangeably. Election monitoring involves the participation of independent bodies in not only observing the process of an election but also having power to prevent wrong-doing, stop wrong doing and correct any wrong observed in an election. On the other hand, election observation involves the participation of neutral bodies whose role in an election is to take note of the processes in an election, the action of bodies and people involved in the processes of an election, and how such processes and actions affects the outcome of an election, appraise or criticize such processes or actions and make recommendations.

Generally, observance of elections is categorized into three stage s the Pre-election Day observation, Election Day observation and post-election day observation. Civil society organizations in Nigeria have been engaged in the act of elections observation. For any civil society organization in Nigeria to participate in election observation it must be registered with the corporate affairs commission and accredited by INEC.

Historical Overview of Civil Society Organizations' Elections Monitoring/Observation in Nigeria

Globally, Election observation began to take shape in the mid-20th century, with international efforts to monitor elections in newly independent nations. In the 1990s election observation became more formalized and widespread. In 1990, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe which comprises of states in Europe, North America and Central Asia agreed to send election observers to member states (OSCE, 2025). Since the formalization of election observation by OSCE, the African Union and Economic Community of West African States have continued sending election observation Missions to states within the continent and the sub region. According to the study of Ayodeji (2015), on Appraising the Roles of Elections Observers in Ensuring Electoral Transparency and Preventing Electoral Corruption in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the June 12, 1993, presidential elections marked the beginning of having organized observer groups observing elections in Nigeria. As previous elections observation was left to party agents and the media (Banjo 2004, in Ayodeji, 2015).

In 1999, at the instance of the then military head of state General Abdulsalami Abubakar, and the then INEC chairman, 12,000 elections observers were accredited to observe the 1998/1999



general elections, with 2000 of them being foreign elections observers' mission from organizations like the European Union and Commonwealth. The remaining 10,000 were drawn from domestic observer groups. Despite the presence of these observer groups, there were reported cases of electoral fraud manifesting in the form of falsification of voters register and stuffing of ballot papers into boxes (National Democratic Institute, 1999; Banjo, 2004; Ayodeji, 2015).

The 2003 general elections had more observers than the 1999 general elections, as Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of 170 civil society organizations deployed 10,000 observers. Foreign monitoring groups like the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM), International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) were all involved in the monitoring exercise. But despite the increase in the involvement of these civil society groups in the exercise the elections were not without allegations of irregularities as the TMG expressed doubt over the credibility of the elections (HRW, 2004 in Ayodeji, 2015).

Similarly, the 2007 general elections were observed by civil society organizations with the Transition Monitoring Group adjudging the election to have been programmed to fail from the beginning. The UK-aid Department for International Development (DFID), in its report submitted that the 2007 general elections are regarded as the worst in history (DFID, 2007).

The elections in 2011 were observed by both domestic and foreign observer groups. The report of so many civil society organizations both local and international noted a significant improvement compared to previous elections conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2007. The Professor Attahiru Jega led INEC was commended for conducting a relatively free and fair elections (Aluigba, 2016)

The reports of CSOs on the 2015 general elections were remarkable despite some shortcomings in the elections they noted. For instance, the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room which was a coalition of 60 domestic civil societies group as of 2015, reported that the 2015 general elections was the most successful general election in recent Nigeria's history (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room Report, 2015). The elections of 2019 and 2023 were also observed by both domestic and international CSOs. And YIAGA-Africa among many other CSOs participating in elections observation have been front runners in observing elections, as they deploy modern technological gadgets and adopt a systematic method to observe elections. YIAGA-Africa observes general elections, off circle elections and the Federal Capital Territory Councils polls.

The engagement of civil society organizations in the observance of elections in Nigeria is now a norm; however, based on the reported cases of electoral malpractice in the elections that were observed by CSOs it seems their presence has not been able to stop electoral malpractices in Nigeria's elections.

Theoretical Framework

Structural Functional Theory

Structural-functional theory emanated from anthropology. Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, and Emily Durkheim are associated with the origin of structural functionalism. Durkheim gave an analysis of society's basic structures and their parts like that of an organism. To Durkheim, society has several parts, and they are all connected and dependent of each other, with each

performing its own duty. Gabriel Almond adopted this model in political science to study political systems.

Gabriel Almond and Powell in their study, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* submitted that all political systems have structures that perform certain functions for its sustenance. The structures are institutions such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, political parties, interest groups etc. The actions of these institutions affect each other and the system generally. They provided seven functions performed by a political system. On the input side, the functions are political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and communication. On the output side, they are rule making, rule implementation, and rule adjudication (Almond & Powell, 1966).

The political system performs the function of political socialization by inculcating in its members values, beliefs, and orientations of the political system. It performs the function of interest articulation by accepting demands from structures like pressure groups, interest groups and associations. The political system performs interest aggregation function by acting on demands to initiate policies and make decisions, while through communication individuals, groups, and institutions transmit information and receive feedback concerning the political system. The input variables translate to the output variables as rules or laws are made by the legislature, the rules or laws are implemented by the executive and the Judiciary adjudicates the rules or laws made (Almond & Powell 1966).

To determine the importance of these structures in a particular political system one has to analyse the functions performed by these structures, as changes in the political system affect actors. Feedback mechanism allows constant change of inputs as actors react to outputs. This theory, among other theories is chosen because election is a process that demands input by structures within the political system such as political parties, security agencies, the electoral umpire, the electorates and civil society organisations that serve as watchdogs in the process. The results of elections serves as output of the process and lapses noted as feedback.

Application of the Theory

The structural functional theory is relevant to the subject of this research. Civil society organizations being a structure of the political system as deduced from this theory perform certain functions for the sustenance of the political system. The observance of election starting from the pre-election period which consists of the activities of the electoral umpire leading to Election Day, political parties conduct of primary elections, conduct of political parties and politicians which could constitute threats of electoral violence, coming to Election Day activities observation and post-election day observations are all input processes that brings output as results of elections that are announced, post-election violence, citizens perception of the electoral system, post-election litigations, and demand for electoral laws reform.

The proper observation of elections by civil society organizations in the nation will give better feedback to the political system that will lead to decision making, such as better legislation to improve the electoral system.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through the conduct of interviews for key informants, while the secondary data were generated from documents retrieved from YIAGA-Africa's reports, and other journals. The key informants consist of two officials of the communication unit of YIAGA-Africa, 6 members

of civil society organizations which include Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Transition Monitoring Group and Jigawa Civil society Forum, one political party member of the All-Progressive Congress, a political party member of the People's Democratic Party, and two officers of Independent National Electoral Commission. Respondents were selected considering their knowledge of the above subject matter and involvement in the electoral process. The data derived from interview of Key Informants were transcribed, coded and analysed using thematic analytical interpretations. These data was supported by electoral report documents derived from YIAGA-Africa, and discussed thematically.

Discussions and Findings

In this section, data collected are presented and discussed in themes. The section presents findings on the role of civil society organisations in Nigeria's elections both at the pre-election day, election day, and post-election-day stages.

Civil Society Organisations and the Observation of Elections in Nigeria: YIAGA-Africa in Focus

This theme attempts to respond to the question of how CSOs observe elections with the responses derived from key stakeholders in the electoral process. The result showed that CSOs observe elections from the pre-election day stages to election-day, and post-election day.

According to the INEC Desk Officer for CSOs:

CSOs deploy stationary observers and roving observers to polling units and collation centres where they observe elections and document their observation and give report of these observations to the public. Only CSOs that are registered with INEC and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) are allowed to observe elections”.

The chairman of a coalition of CSOs further stated that:

CSOs observe the entire election process which involves voter's education, Permanent Voters Card (PVC) registration and collection, to ensure people are being registered by INEC and the people are issued their PVCs without difficulties. On election day CSOs observe the turnout of voters, the conduct of electoral officers and security personnel at both polling and collation centres.

CSOs also make efforts in ensuring that certain categories of people are not being denied the opportunity to exercise their civic duty of voting. Hence, women and people with disabilities are given the opportunity and necessary support to participate in election. According to a representative of INEC:

CSOs reach out to the people, especially people living with disability, women, and youth because they know where these people are found and how to engage them to be part of the electoral process.

This confirms that CSOs monitor the participatory aspect of elections not only on election-days, but also on the days preceding election-days to avoid certain category of persons with disadvantages in the society that might lead to denial of the opportunity for them to vote. YIAGA-Africa attempt to comprehensively observe elections in three stages (the pre-election day, election-day, and post-election day stages). The representative of YIAGA-Africa explained that:



In the pre-election day stage we track early warning indicators of election violence; we also report the activities of stakeholders like INEC, political parties, other civil society organizations and security agencies around the elections. Activities of INEC, for instance, if INEC has identified new polling units, recruited ad-hoc staff, or whether INEC carry out continuous voters' registration etc. all of these constitute INEC activities in the build up to the election, we also track the activities of National Orientation Agency whether they are doing enough voters education campaign. And then on political parties we track party activities like candidates' selection processes, party campaigns etc. The second leg of the pre-election observation is tracking early warning signals for election violence. When we identify these signals, we share them with election stakeholders so that their intervention could help to douse tension and prevent the escalation of election related violence. We came up with indicators like hate speech that could lead to election violence, tracking government restrictions on the use of public spaces, tracking whether there is even enough voter education, because sometimes the lack of information could also trigger violence, tracking candidate related violence, that is if there are attacks on candidates, on their parties or their properties in the cause of doing their campaigns. We also track violence against elections officials that is if there is any attack on INEC or their personnel or their equipment. For instance, in the build up to the 2023 elections we were able to track that there were about 54 attacks on INEC facilities. On election days we deploy election observers to polling units. We observe and document the entire processes of election from accreditation, voting, counting and aspect of returns. And as this is happening, we also deploy other observers to collation centres at the local government levels and state levels to provide oversight and report things as they happen at different locations. The goal is to provide timely and accurate reporting of elections, to build citizens confidence in the process, and by extension to verify whatever will be the outcome of the election (YIAGA-Africa Representative during interview, December, 2023).

Some of the major aspects of election observed on election-day by YIAGA-Africa include:

- Arrival of election officials
- Deployment of security agents at polling units
- Presence of party agents
- Voters turn out
- Availability of voting materials
- The checking of registered voters against the register of voters
- The functionality of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS)
- Neutrality and professionalism of election officials
- Commencement of polls
- Upholding of the secrecy of ballots
- Counting of ballots
- Transmission of election results
- General misconducts at polling units
- Collation process of results at local governments areas and state collation offices

On how they observe elections, YIAGA-Africa through their Watching The Vote (WTV) observes elections by deploying long term observers in some months leading to elections in the 774 local governments of the federation. They monitor developments in regards to preparation for election, like the deployment of non-sensitive election materials, the training of election officials, and the deployment of sensitive election materials from Central Bank of Nigeria states

offices across local government areas in the states. YIAGA-Africa deploys thousands of observers across polling units in the country. Some of these observers are Parallel Votes Tabulation (PVT) observers deployed to randomly selected representative sample of polling units. They also deploy roving observers (observers that move from one area to another) across the 774 local governments in Nigeria. YIAGA-Africa's representative further stated that: We deploy working group members that run real-time election analysis. Observers are also deployed to local governments and states collation centres. These observers send periodic report to the National Data Centre of YIAGA-Africa where they are processed and analysed. The deployment of different types of observers in different places and at different stages of the election is to enable the observation of the entire election process (YIAGA-Africa Representative during interview, December, 2023).

The findings presented above dispute the submission of some studies like that of Onyia and Ugbor-Kalu on Civil Society and Elections Observation in Nigeria: Participant and Non-Participant Observers, in which they submitted that domestic civil society organizations do not participate in the observance of the entire electoral process, as aspects of the electoral process that precedes election-day are rarely given attention to by domestic civil society organizations. They listed these pre-election processes to include voters' registration, party primaries and electioneering campaigns. They argued that even on Election Day, civil society organizations due to logistics problems and threat of insecurity do not access some remote parts of the country, yet what happens in those areas affects the outcome of elections. They further argued that domestic civil society organizations are not given unfettered access to collation centres where the votes gained by political parties contesting elections are summed up, yet they give report on elections based on the fragment of the electoral process they participated in.

YIAGA-Africa and Observation of the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria

YIAGA-Africa is a leading non-profit organization in Nigeria founded at the University of Jos in 2007. YIAGA-Africa aims to promote democratic governance, human rights and civic engagement. The organization is on a mission to support democracy and development on the principles of inclusion, accountability, and justice through research advocacy and capacity development. With an operational base in Abuja, YIAGA-Africa has leadership structures across the 36 states of Nigeria.

As a civil society organization accredited by INEC to observe the 2023 general elections, YIAGA-Africa deployed 3,836 election observers across the country for the 2023 general elections. Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology was employed by YIAGA-Africa where observers were deployed to a representative sample of 1,507 polling units in pairs to observe election throughout the day. 822 of these observers are roving observers deployed to all the local government areas in Nigeria, and move from one area to another. The deployment of these observers and the reports they deliver enabled YIAGA-Africa to access reliable information on every process on Election Day, enabling it to analyse and provide accurate report on the processes on Election Day and also make projections on votes to be secured by candidates in the election based on votes cast at the polling units. Through the reports of observers and analysis of their reports press statements were issued at intervals within election day informing INEC and the public of situation around the country concerning the election, highlighting shortcomings and improvements in the elections, and also making recommendation to INEC for prompt response to some challenges that can be mitigated promptly for a better outcome of the election (YIAGA-Africa Watching The Vote 2023 Presidential Election Report).



YIAGA-Africa, through data obtained from 1,454 of 1,507 polling units sampled during the 2023 presidential election were able to come up with key findings concerning the 2023 general election. Some of the key findings include:

Late arrival of INEC officials and delayed commencement of polls, as reports from sampled polling units indicate that INEC officials arrived polling units by 7:30 am in only 27% of polling units during the presidential election.

Difficulty in locating polling units due to transfer of voters to new polling units

Deployment of security personnel to 88 % of polling units during the presidential election, in which 84 % properly conducted themselves.

The function rate of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in which the BVAS was used in 99 % of polling units and functioned properly in 89 % of polling units during the presidential election.

Misconduct at the polling units.

The transfer of polling unit results to INEC data base, in which at 69 % of polling units attempt was made to transfer the polling unit election result to the INEC IReV portal during the presidential election.

Expected result of the election: At the end of counting of votes on the evening of election day, YIAGA-Africa made projection of the expected outcome of the presidential election based on data derived from 1,453 of the 1,507 sampled polling units, it indicated that the All Progressive Congress (APC) would receive between 34.4 % and 37.4 % of votes, Labour Party (LP) to receive between 24.2 % and 28.4 %, while the People's Democratic Party (PDP) would receive between 28.3 % and 31.1 % of votes. The New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) was projected to receive between 4.6 % and 6.4 % of votes, while no other political party was expected to gain more than 0.3 % of votes. The analysis was based on the number of registered voters.

Inconsistencies in elections results: YIAGA-Africa was able to report inconsistencies in election result as announced by INEC and its projected result for two states during the presidential election. These states are Rivers and Imo. In Rivers state YIAGA-Africa projected APC to secure 21.7 % votes, LP 50.8 %, PDP 22.2 %, but results as announced by INEC indicated APC secured 44.2 %, LP 33.4 % and PDP 16.9 %. In Imo, YIAGA-Africa projected APC to gain 5.1 %, LP to gain 88.1 %, PDP to gain 5.7 %, in contrast with what INEC announced which indicated that APC gained 14.2 %, LP 77.1 % and PDP 6.5 % (YIAGA-Africa Watching The Vote Post Election Report for 2023 Presidential Election).



Conclusion

There is no doubt that civil society organisations have invested much effort in elections observation, particularly YIAGA-Africa as shown above. Its deployment of both stationed and roving observers, the usage of modern technology and the systematic method it adopts in observing elections makes its report difficult to discard, as the methods used in observing these elections proves conclusions reached in their reports are not mere statements of guess work or politically motivated interests, but a product of serious work on the field. Therefore, their observations should be seen as scorecard for the various institutions involved in the electoral process, especially political parties that are quick in expressing doubts or dismissing their reports.

Recommendations

The reports of CSOs, particularly YIAGA-Africa serves as a vital feedback to the political system which can be relied on for electoral laws reform and administrative changes that can lead to the conduct of credible elections in the country. Therefore, the National Assembly, electoral reform committees, INEC and other stake holders should consider their reports in implementing changes that will enhance the credibility of the electoral processes.

The Independent National Electoral Commission should partner more with civil society organisations, as the prompt reports they give on activities concerning election before election and on election-day serves as a check measure to challenges what may mar the conduct of credible elections. Hence their observations and recommendations either at the pre-election stage, election-day or post-election stages should be taken serious and promptly acted upon by both INEC, security agencies, and other relevant stakeholders involved in the electoral process.



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