



Obstruction and organised violence limited the free expression of the will of the voters, despite efforts by civil society to promote democratic standards

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For Immediate Release

Chief Observer Barry Andrews, Member of the European Parliament, presented the second preliminary statement of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Nigeria on the 18 March Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections. *“Throughout the mission we saw that Nigerians have a great appetite for democracy and are keen to engage in various civic activities. However, in many parts of the country, their expectations were not met. Many were disappointed and we witnessed voter apathy that is in part a clear consequence of failures by political elites and, unfortunately, also by INEC,”* said the Chief Observer Barry Andrews.

Positively, INEC introduced some corrective measures ahead of Saturday’s polls, allowing a timely delivery of sensitive materials and improved use of election technologies, yet the institution continued to lack transparency. EU EOM observers noted that voting on 18 March mostly started on time, with INEC ad-hoc officials present and ready to serve the voter. However, polling on election day was disrupted by multiple incidents of thuggery and intimidation of voters, polling officials, observers, and journalists. Lagos, Kano, and other states in the southern and central part were most affected. Unfortunately, there were many casualties and fatalities. Vote-buying, also directly observed by EU EOM observers, further detracted from an appropriate conduct of the elections.

Campaigns in state elections were competitive. Fundamental freedoms of assembly and movement were largely respected. However, insecurity impeded the canvass for votes in certain parts of the country and organised violent attacks shortly before the elections in several states led to a fearful atmosphere. Some states governors took executive actions, negatively affecting the campaign environment. EU EOM observers also saw misuse of administrative resources, including through various financial and in-kind inducements to voters, giving an undue advantage to the party in power.

Furthermore, the protracted deadlines for candidacy disputes created uncertainty for voters and electoral contestants alike, while clear underrepresentation of women as candidates demonstrated a stark lack of internal party policies to support constitutionally prescribed inclusion, also contrary to Nigeria’s international commitments to eradicate discrimination against women.

“The EU EOM commends the civil society, media, and fact-checkers’ commitment to promote democratic standards, as shown between the elections by raising awareness and providing electoral information of public interest to voters, by organising debates and by striving to preserve the integrity of the online space. Also, the deployment of more than 10,000 citizen observers on the election day positively contributed to the transparency of elections,” said the Chief Observer Barry Andrews.

The second preliminary report of the EU EOM Nigeria 2023 supplements the first report issued on 27 February. The mission has been present in Nigeria since 11 January and will continue to observe post-election developments. The EU EOM will present and publish its final report, including recommendations for improving the electoral framework in the next few months.

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