



# **REPORT OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**BY**

**EDUCATION, SOCIAL AND HEALTH MISSION  
(MESH)**

**March 2023**

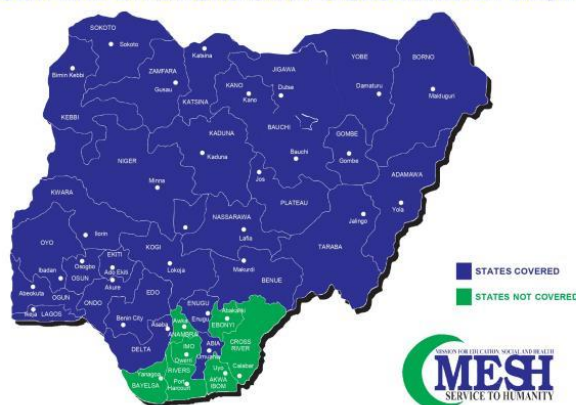
# PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS REPORT

## Introduction

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria were conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The presidential and National Assembly Elections were held on the 25th of February while the Gubernatorial and State Assembly Elections were earlier scheduled for the 11<sup>th</sup> of March but eventually rescheduled and held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2023.

Education, Social and Health Mission (MESH), the NGO of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), is one of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) accredited by INEC as a Domestic Observers Group to observe the elections nationwide. MESH actively participated in the process by deploying a total of six hundred and fifty-nine (659) trained observers to observe the polls in thirty-two (32) States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The elections were observed with the support of the Coalition of Muslim Organizations in about four hundred and ninety-one (491) polling units across the country. Their insights, supported by the analysis of our data analyst provided basis for this report on the elections. The report was analysed according to INEC stipulated guidelines for reporting as well as recommendations provided for improving future elections processes in Nigeria. MESH observed the Continuous and Accreditation Voters System (CVAS) procedure where voters were accredited and voted at the same time.

2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS STATES OBSERVED BY MESH



Data Source: MESH Election observation Google Form

## MESH Pre-Election Activities

### a. Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) Observation.

MESH started the observation of the electoral processes with its participation in the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) exercise within the period of September 2021 to February 2022. The group observed the CVR process in hundred and fifty-three (153) INEC registration centers across the six geo-political zones of the country. The states selected for the observation were Abia, Bayelsa, Borno, Enugu, Cross Rivers, Kaduna, Katsina, Lagos, Plateau, Taraba, Osun and FCT. The MESH observers observed the processes of fresh registration, applications of voters' transfer, requests for replacement of PVCs, and updates of voters' information records. At the end of the exercise, the group recommended the ardent need for more citizen engagement by INEC and all relevant stakeholders in mobilizing intending registrants who have completed the online process to ensure they completed the registration at the INEC CVR centers.

**b. VOTERS' EDUCATION ON PVC**

As the 2023 Elections drew close, MESH through a video release, enjoined all stakeholders, especially the youth who turned eighteen years old after the last general elections, new registrants, and compatriots that need PVC updates to take advantage of the INEC CVR to ensure registration and collection of their Permanent Voters Cards (PVC). This was part of MESH voters' education. The objective of this was to ensure more citizens participate in the 2023 General Elections.

**c. VOTERS' EDUCATION ON VOTING PROCEDURE**

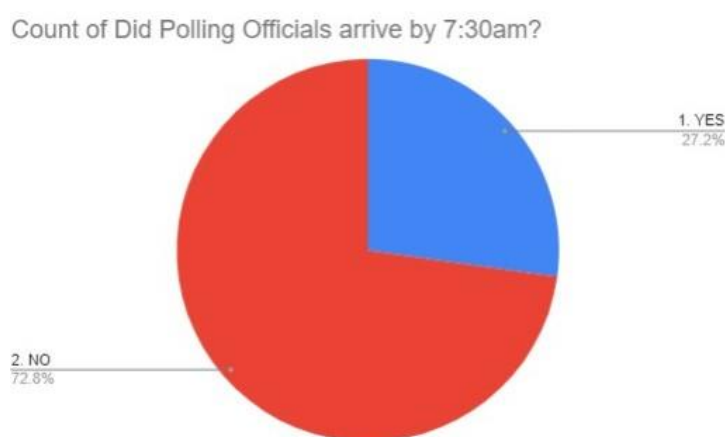
In societies where there have been major changes to electoral systems, processes, procedures and first-time voters, voter education programs is a sine qua non to address the concerns of the citizens. MESH rolled out voters' education jingles and shared the creative through various social media platforms to address voters' motivation and preparedness to participate fully in elections.

The jingles which were released in English and three major Nigerian languages (Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba) provided information on electoral processes, voting procedures and practical steps needed to ensure credible elections according to INEC, the stipulated guidelines. The jingles were also aired on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) network of channels around the country for weeks.

Below is the summary of preliminary findings across the county;

### **i. Opening of Polls**

MESH field observers reported late polls opening across the country. Most polling units visited showed INEC election officials' staff setting up at about 11 am in the morning, as against the 8:30 am stipulated time for polling units opening. 58.3 percent of the polling units visited started voting from 9 am to 12 noon. The least arrival time observed for electoral officials was 2 pm, the report showed the inability of the officials to locate their polling units in good time. In some instances, they arrived with the wrong materials or insufficient ballots sheets, thereby, impacting negatively on the starting time of voting and by extension, collation time. In a sizeable number of locations, voting hours were extended into the night, while polling units were ill-equipped with proper lighting to facilitate voting and counting in the dark.



Data Source: MESH Election observation Google Form

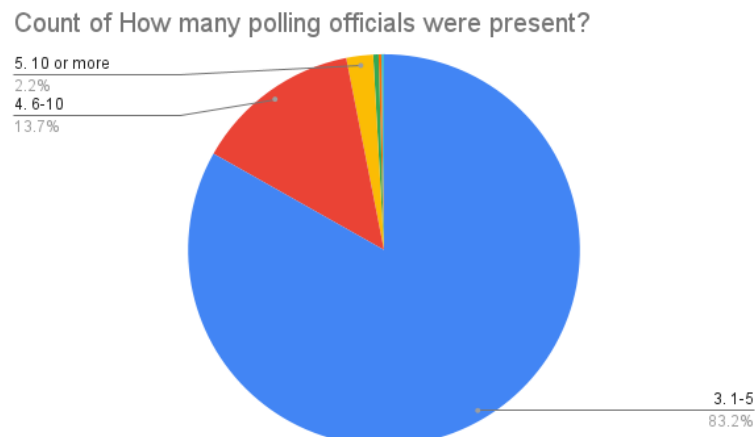
### **ii. Logistics Challenge**

MESH generally observed logistical problems across the country. This was against the claim by INEC that it was logistically ready for the elections. The late arrival of election officers and materials at the majority of the polling units visited resulted in voting and collations into the late hours of Election Day.

### **iii. Presence of Electoral Officials**

Despite the logistical challenges, INEC electoral officials were visibly present in their polling units well-kitted with 100 percent readiness to perform their assigned roles. We observed an average of 68.7 percent of 1 to 5 electoral officers deployed to polling units. MESH observers noted that in 92.4 percent of the

polling units visited, voters had adequate access to polling units and voted without intimidation.



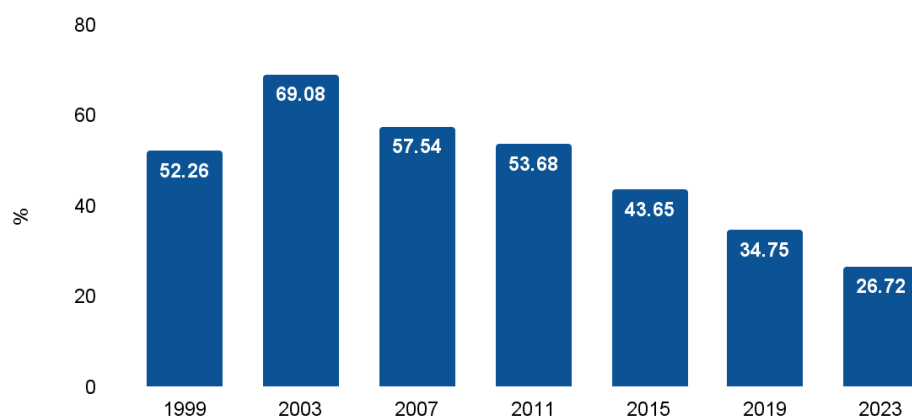
Data Source: MESH Election observation Google Form

#### iv. Voters Turn Out

The result of the elections as announced by INEC shows that only 24.9 million persons out of 93.47 million registered voters voted in the elections. This represents 26.72 percent of voters' turnout. This is the lowest turnout of voters in the country since the 1999 general elections. Comparing the voters' turnout of 34.74 percent in the 2019 elections, the turnout in the just concluded elections declined by 8.03 percent. This indicates that the challenge of voters' apathy needs to be urgently looked into ahead of the next general elections.

#### Percentage of Voter Turnout in Nigeria's General Elections

Voter turnout has been on a steady decline since 2007

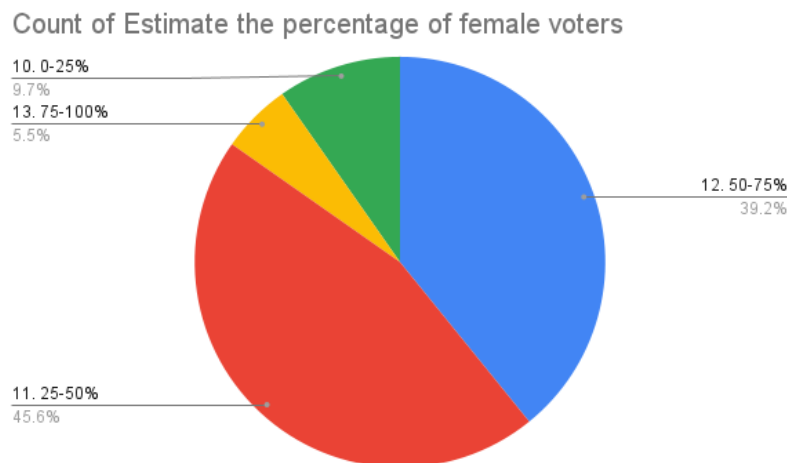


Source: INEC; IDEA | Chart: Dataphyte

#### v. Inclusion of Women in the Voting Process

MESH observed an even distribution in the percentage of female to male electoral officers deployed for the elections. This was highly remarkable given the call for more female involvement in the electoral process in Nigeria. There was overwhelming evidence that there was an increased percentage of female

voters. The report indicated that 25 to 50 percent of voters in the polling units visited are women. The inclusion of women in political processes is a key element in achieving a truly inclusive democracy. Although, the participation of women in politics in Nigeria is below global standards.



Data Source: MESH Election observation Google Form

#### **vi. Voting Process and Functionality of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)**

We noted the high-level functionality of the BVAS machine in accrediting voters for the elections. The performance of these machines was commended as 90 percent of the polling units visited successfully accredited voters without significant challenges. However, rowdiness was observed in polling units with large numbers of voters and insufficient BVAS machines deployed.

Despite these successes recorded in accrediting voters, BVAS was not able to transmit the election results in real-time. This failure created challenges on the transparency of the election results and gave room for apprehension in the entire country.

#### **vii. Violence and Attacks on Election Materials**

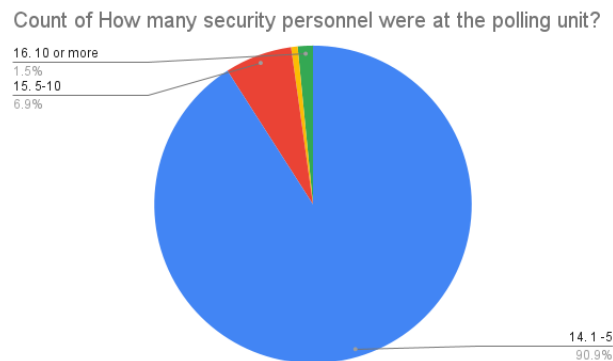
MESH observed that the 2023 presidential and National Assembly elections recorded fewer elections-related violence as well as an attack on electoral officials and election materials compared to the 2019 general elections.

There were pockets of violent attacks in 14 States, and the destruction of ballot boxes and papers, especially in parts of Lagos and Edo States. There were a few incidences of political party agent campaigns by mentioning party logos, over voting, disruption of voting, disorderly conduct, and intimidation of voters. Vote buying was recorded in Sokoto State specifically while the offender was apprehended by the EFCC. Generally, the elections were conducted in an

orderly manner with a pocket of issues that can be reduced with adequate and intensive voters' education while offenders prosecuted accordingly.

#### **viii. Presence and Conduct of Law Enforcement Agencies**

Our report indicated that for every polling unit visited, there is one to five (1-5) security personnel attached, this was a combination of the Nigerian Police Force, Civil Defense Corps, and other Security personnel. They displayed a high level of civility and conducted their election duties with a high level of commitment and professionalism assisting the overwhelmed officials with crowd control. This was highly commendable.



**Data Source: MESH Election observation Google Form**

### **GOVERNORSHIP AND STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS REPORT**

On March 18, 2023, Nigerians came out to vote for their preferred governorship candidates across different political parties in 28 states of the federation and 36 States for the State Assemblies.

In the area of opening and arrival of Election materials, the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) improved considerably compared to the February elections. Electoral Officers arrived on time at most polling units, and voting started early in many parts of the country. BVAS machine worked better compared to the February 25 presidential election, and the INEC Election Results Viewing (IREV) portal functioned optimally, enabling citizens to download polling unit-level results. The results upload enhanced the transparency of the process.

MESH deployed more than 500 observers for the elections, violence was rampant in the southern region of the country as observed by MESH observers. The Elections were disrupted by multiple incidences of thuggery, vote buying,

ballot snatching, and intimidation of voters, polling officials, observers, and journalists.

Security agencies, party supporters, and political thugs denied accredited observers access to the results collation centers. Thugs also attacked collation centers, and unruly party agents interfered with the collation process in states like Abia, Delta, Gombe, and Enugu. Polling unit-level results were altered during collation without any explanation from collation officers and returning officers.

This violence and intimidation may have led to a low turnout in this election, compared to the presidential and National Assembly elections across the country with records of 26.7 percent, the lowest in the history of Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

MESH, as a domestic observers group recommends as follows:

1. MESH urges INEC to conduct a thorough post-election review of the electoral process to draw lessons, and this is imperative for ensuring public confidence and guaranteeing accountability for operational lapses and also improve on their logistics operations, making provision for electricity for recharging BVAS and lighting up the polling units, and to implement the recommendations of observers.
2. MESH urges INEC to intensify the training of Electoral and Returning Officers who largely demonstrated a poor understanding of the guidelines and misapplied the rules. Our Observers reported inconsistencies in enforcing the 2022 Electoral Act and INEC guidelines on over-voting and cancellation of votes. INEC should, in line with Section 64 of the 2022 Electoral Act, review cases where legitimate concerns have been raised on the conduct and declarations made by collation and returning officers, especially cases where declarations were made in violation of the electoral legal framework. And officers who flagrantly violate the laws should be investigated and prosecuted.
3. The new polling units (PUs) created had little effect on the overcrowded ones. We recommend that PUs with more than one thousand (1000)



accredited voters should be spread. This will address the disorderly voting process.

4. MESH commends the media for being part of the electoral process in the community reporting even in troubled areas. We urge them to be gatekeepers of the public sphere and make sure that the information released to the public is based on the principle of verification, accuracy, fairness, balance, and humanity.
5. MESH calls on the politicians to play by the rules guiding the Electoral process and to refrain from the use of provocative language, and dissemination of misinformation, which could create political tension, divisiveness, and violence and undermine the democratic progress in Nigeria. They should ensure the training of their party agents to equip and educate them on adequate information to perform their responsibilities.
6. MESH admonishes all stakeholders especially Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and other Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to increase Voters' Education to reawaken and re-orientate Nigerians on the need to participate fully in the electoral process and shun violence at all costs.
7. Moving forward, the CSOs should ensure accountability and transparency in government, and involve in massive voters' education to encourage voter large turnout in the coming elections in the country.
8. Faith-Based Organizations are also advised to engage the newly elected leaders to deliver their mandates by resolving fundamental problems we are facing as people.
9. Security agencies should immediately investigate the incidences of reported killings and abductions and thuggery during the elections and ensure perpetrators and their sponsors are brought to justice.

## **In Conclusion**

Nigeria's 2023 general elections were "largely peaceful", free, and fair despite administrative and logistical hurdles at many polling units. The MESH

observation team agreed that the voting outcome reflects the will of the people and enjoins the electorate to accept the result with utmost good faith.

MESH commends International Observers, Civil Society Organizations, Party Agents, Security Officers, Voters, and all relevant stakeholders who participated freely without fear and intimidation in ensuring that the democratic process is all-inclusive to engender democracy of development and transformation.

Finally, MESH congratulates Nigerians for their determination, patience, and resilience displayed during and after the elections. Despite the long queues at some polling units, Nigerian voters demonstrated commitment to participate in the process and a strong desire to ensure their votes count. The elections have come and gone but have left lessons to be learned in strengthening our democratic processes as a country.

## **Appendix**

A) The Coalition of organizations that observed the elections in collaboration with MESH are;

1. Abia State Council for Islamic Affairs
2. Abuja Muslim Forum
3. Abuja National Mosque Dawah and Welfare Foundation
4. Akwa- Ibom State Council for Islamic Affairs
5. Anambra State Council for Islamic Affairs
6. Bayelsa State Council for Islamic Affairs
7. Cross-Rivers State Council for Islamic Affairs
8. Delta State Council for Islamic Affairs
9. Muslim Student Society of Nigeria (MSSN)
10. Muslim Lawyers Association of Nigeria (MULAN)

11. Muslim Media Practitioners of Nigeria
12. Nsukka Muslim Community, Enugu
13. National Council of Muslim Youth Organization
14. Network for Democracy and Development (NDD)
15. Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA)
16. The Muslim Congress (TMC)

**B) Pictures from the field;**



***MESH Observer***



***Osun State Team***



***Images from the Elections sites***



***Media Team***



***Bayelsa State Team***



***Images from the Elections sites***



***FCT Observers Team***



***Image from the Elections sites***

### **C. Report Team**

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- Mr. Tajudeen Alabede
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*Education, Social and Health Mission*

*March 2023*

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### **About MESH**

Education, Social and Health Mission (MESH) was established by the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) as an implementing entity to provide relief services on education, social and health issues to indigent Muslims and Non-Muslims in Nigeria. It started operations in April 2017 with funding from the NSCIA and donors and has implemented several projects across the country. We mobilize resources to advocate and promote qualitative education, social and democratic processes, support healthcare delivery services, promote socio-economic growth and advocate for human rights

through the provision of crucial assistance for the needy in collaboration with other relevant Local and International organizations.

### **About MESH and Coalition of Islamic Organizations**

MESH provided a coordinated platform for various Islamic organizations under the auspices of the NSCIA to actively participate in the electoral process in Nigeria through elections observation. The coalition started in 2019 to observe the General Elections in 22 States and strengthened further in 2023 when the group observed in the 32 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).