

Citizens of Africa's most populous country will go to the polls in April to elect their leaders for the fourth time since Nigeria's transition to civilian government in 1998-99. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is conducting an international observation mission to analyze the electoral process before, during and after the elections. This is the first in a series of reports based on the observations of NDI's long-term observers.

## ELECTION FACTS

- Nigerian elections are conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), composed of a chairman and 12 national commissioners. INEC's offices in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are headed by 37 resident election commissioners (RECs).
- The current INEC members were named in July 2010. The chairman is Professor Attahiru Jega.
- Nigeria's National Assembly approved nearly \$568 million to carry out the 2011 elections.
- Registration of voters is taking place from Jan. 15 to 29 in Nigeria's 119,973 polling units.
- Registration will be conducted using 120,000 direct data capture (DDC) machines that use biometric data of voters to create an electronic registration list.
- Approximately 250,000 *ad hoc* registration staff have been recruited and trained.
- The preliminary Register of Voters will be displayed for claims and objections from Feb. 3 to 8.
- The official Register of Voters will be published on March 2.

## NDI INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

NDI has deployed 12 long-term international observers this month who are covering each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones to report on the country's electoral process. They come from eight countries on four continents and bring a wide variety of election-related experience. During their deployment period, which will last until May, they will meet regularly with government officials, candidates, media representatives, community leaders, political party leaders and individual voters to assess and report on the electoral process.

As part of NDI's comprehensive election observation mission, the Institute fielded a pre-election assessment team in Nigeria from Oct. 10 to 15, 2010, and will deploy approximately 30 short-term observers for the presidential election.

## START OF VOTER REGISTRATION: INEC COMMITS TO FIX EARLY PROBLEMS

In advance of Nigeria's April elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is compiling a new voter list to replace what was widely viewed as an incomplete and fraudulent voters' register from 2006. The two-week registration process for Nigeria's 70 million voters that began Jan. 15 is relying on direct data capture (DDC) machines to compile a digital voter register. Systematically capturing voters' biometric data, including a complete set of fingerprints, is intended to prevent multiple registration. All eligible citizens must register for this new voters' register or they will not be able to vote in April. While there is popular support for electronic registration, there are also concerns about its effectiveness and viability given Nigeria's limited infrastructure and very short timeframes.

Learning from the failures of a similar process in 2006, INEC ordered more DDC machines and backup power supplies for this year's round, and devised new strategies for recruiting and training staff. Many *ad hoc* staff come from the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a mandatory program for all university graduates. NYSC members are considered more computer literate than the average popu-



*Citizens wait in line at a registration center.*

lation and will work outside their home states to ensure greater impartiality.

On the first day of registration, NDI observers found that many centers were not open or opened much later than planned because of late delivery of machines and materials. INEC announced on Jan. 15 that 98,000 of about 120,000 DDC machines had been distributed and that all centers should be operational within a few days.

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## PARTY PRIMARIES

The 2010 Electoral Act requires parties to select candidates through direct or indirect primary procedures, which call for a vote by all party members or by democratically elected delegates to a national party convention. INEC has the power to monitor these proceedings and reject candidates who do not meet this requirement. In accordance with the official electoral timeline, parties held primaries before Jan. 15.

State-level primaries were marred by a number of violent incidents; however, the national conventions of all major parties were held without significant problems. The conduct of gubernatorial and National Assembly primaries left many members complaining of lack of internal democracy. In some states this led to violence; rival party members were killed in Edo and Oyo states.

One of the most closely watched primaries was the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) vote on its presidential candidate. The incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, claimed the nomination with 2,736 votes and a majority of delegates from 32 states compared to 805 votes and four states for former Vice President Atiku Abubakar.

Opposition parties also selected their presidential candidates. The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), whose base of support is primarily in the southwest, nominated former chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu. The All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), whose stronghold is in the northeast, nominated Kano State Governor Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, while the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), with support in the northwest, confirmed former military head of state General Muhammadu Buhari as its flag bearer.

## OBSERVER ACCREDITATION: DELAYED AND UNCLEAR

INEC began issuing observer accreditation for the voter registration process on Jan. 14. The commission made repeated public statements that it would accredit observers in a timely manner, but the invitation for groups to apply for accreditation was unexpectedly published on the INEC website only two days before the application deadline. No guidelines have been made available.

The forms required to register individual observers from accredited groups were made available on Jan. 12, three days before the beginning of voter registration. A number of domestic observer groups, as well as NDI's long-term observers, received their accreditation letters late on Jan. 14. This made it difficult to deliver the letters to all observers in the field before the start of voter registration on Jan. 15. Without proof of accreditation, elections officials can bar observers from stations, while without guidelines it is unclear what rights

are conferred on accredited observers. NDI observers are bound by the internationally recognized "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers."



*Observers watch as election officials contend with a malfunctioning fingerprint scanner.*

## VOTER REGISTRATION *(continued from page 1)*

Many of the centers that did open experienced technical problems, most notably with fingerprint scanners. Responding to the problem, INEC distributed software patches to improve the scanners' functioning. Other problems observed and reported by NDI's long-term observers included equipment with insufficient power supplies and lack of back-up power supplies, problems with computer login passwords, lack of materials and malfunctioning printers.

Registration staff in centers visited appeared dedicated and worked hard to overcome some of the challenges they faced. While some centers resorted to registering applicants without fingerprints or scanning some, but not all fingers, INEC informed its staff and the public that improperly registered voters would have to be re-registered in order to vote.

Observers found that citizens had difficulty locating registration centers, as locations were not widely publicized. Inside the centers, there were few signs to inform voters about the process. Many who attempted to register were frustrated by long wait times, and some left the centers without registering.

Recognizing these challenges, INEC Chairman Jega said that additional equipment and personnel were being deployed and that registration would continue as planned.

NDI observers reported notable improvements in the process as registration moved forward. However, INEC has not issued comprehensive data thus far on how the registration is progressing.

NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide. NDI has worked in Nigeria since 1998. For more information, please contact NDI Senior Resident Director Carlo Binda (cbinda@ndi.org).

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