Beat: News

HIGH STAKES PRESIDENTIAL VOTING UNDERWAY IN NIGERIA

Amid Attacks, Security Threats

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Timothy Obiezu | VOA News

ABUJA, NIGERIA —

Attacks and violence are reported across Nigeria as citizens go to the polls to elect a president and other leaders. Nigerian authorities deployed heavy security ahead of the voting. Africa's most populous nation has been struggling to stem violence and boost its economy.

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The process is being monitored by heavy security teams, including the army, police and civil defense forces.

Nigeria is electing a new president and vice-president, senators and house of representative members in an election with a record 93 million eligible voters.

Insecurity and economic problems were the main topics during the campaign. Nigeria is struggling to control widespread violence, including Islamic militancy, kidnapping and separatist agitations.

On Saturday, INEC chief Mahmood Yakubu briefed journalists after reports of election disruptions, vote-buying and attacks in some states, including Lagos, Borno and Rivers.

"We're following the challenges we have in two locations in Borno state, some bandits or some insurgents that were firing from the mountain top in Gwoza, despite firing at random," Yakubu said. "That was what we were tracking before we had to come to brief you." Nigeria is also facing economic struggles. Government spending and debt have been surging, raising concerns about Nigeria's ability to pay back its loans.

The Central Bank is implementing a currency reform policy that has led to a shortage of Nigerian's naira, causing deadly protests and harming the economy.

Abuja residents are here to cast their ballots.

"The security is poor, and the economy is very down," said Chibueze Onyema, one of the residents. "I think that's the one thing that makes people come out massively to vote this time round."

"The election is free, the challenge we have is that the materials came late," said Musa Sarki, Apo District Local Chief. "Secondly, the officials are not organized, the crowd here is too much, it's more than 2,000 people here and they came around 9:30."

Eighteen candidates are in the race to become president, but only three stand a chance. The election is considered the most open since 1999, when Nigeria transitioned from military rule to democracy.

On Friday, authorities seized $500,000 in cash from a member of the House of Representatives in Rivers state, hours after the anti-graft agency intercepted about $70,000 suspected to be for vote-buying in Lagos.

Source: VOA News

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:
United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com