



AFRICAN UNION

**AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (AUEOM) TO
THE 23 FEBRUARY 2019 PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

FINAL REPORT



JUNE 2019

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ABBREVIATIONS /ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| ACDEG | African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance |
| APC | All Progressive Congress |
| AU | African Union |
| AUC | African Union Commission |
| AUEOM | African Union Election Observer Mission |
| CDD | Centre for Democracy and Development |
| CSOs | Civil Society Organisations |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| EMBs | Election Management Bodies |
| HoR | House of Representative |
| ICCES | Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security |
| ICCPR | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights |
| INEC | Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) |
| NGP | National Gender Policy |
| PAP | Pan-African Parliament |
| PDP | People’s Democratic Party |
| PRC | Permanent Representatives Committee |
| PWDs | Persons with Disabilities |
| SCRs | Smart Card Readers |
| SHoA | State House of Assembly |
| STO | Short-Term Observation |
| WSR | Women Situation Room |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to Nigeria's 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections is grateful for the support it received from various institutions, stakeholders and individuals that ensured its success.

The Mission expresses appreciation to the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for extending an invitation to the African Union (AU) to observe the elections. This invitation clearly demonstrated their openness and willingness to subject their electoral process to regional and international scrutiny.

The Mission also expresses its gratitude to the Head of Mission, His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe, former Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Her Excellency Minata Samate Cessouma, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs for their guidance and leadership of the AUEOM.

The AUEOM acknowledges the contribution of all its dedicated observers drawn from various African countries and institutions who were deployed to various States within Nigeria some of which were faced with security threats.

Finally, the AUEOM would not have succeeded in meeting its objectives without the devotion and commitment of the coordination team from the African Union Commission (AUC) that provided technical and administrative support to the Mission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigerians went to the polls on February 23, 2019 to elect their President and Members of the National Assembly. These were the sixth successive elections since the end of military rule and a return to multi-party democracy in 1999. They thus offered a unique opportunity for the country to consolidate gains made in its democratic efforts.

The AU participated in the elections following an invitation from the INEC. The Mission comprised (4) core team members and fifty (50) short-term observers drawn from AU institutions and member states. It was led by His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe, former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and was assisted by Her Excellency Minata Samate Cessouma, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs.

The Mission noted that the political space for electoral participation and competition had significantly broadened. At 84 Million, registered voters marked a 25% increase from the 2015 elections. Disappointingly, only 34.75% turned out to vote compared to 44% in the previous elections. Although there were seventy-three (73) candidates in the presidential race, the contest was largely considered to be between the two dominant parties, the PDP and APC.

The Mission observed that, despite security concerns in some parts of the country (particularly in the North East, South-South and Middle Belt regions), the elections took place within an open political environment and were generally peaceful. It was not possible to verify whether the reported isolated incidents of violence were election-related or mere banditry.

This report presents the final and overall assessment of the conduct of the February 23, 2019 elections. Based on its assessment, the Mission made the following conclusions:

While the electoral legal framework is generally conducive for conduct of credible democratic elections, it has some limitations, which could be strengthened for enhanced democratic elections. These include the lack of a provision for a definite election date, leaving the INEC with large latitude in choosing the date. The Mission further observed that the legal framework provides for postponement of elections in certain cases but bemoans the fact that there is no period indicated for the postponed elections to be conducted.

Other than the logistical challenges, which led to the postponement of the elections, barely five hours before opening of the polls, all other stages of the electoral process had been carried out in line with the electoral calendar. Although a setback to both the INEC and voters, the Mission further noted that the postponement of the elections was in line with good electoral practice. This was because the logistical challenges would very likely have resulted in shortage or non-availability of polling materials thereby

undermining INEC's competence to deliver a credible election. It would have ultimately impacted on the acceptability of the elections.

Despite Nigeria's commitment to international and regional treaties on promoting political and electoral participation of women as well as a Constitution that guarantees equality of all citizens, the Mission noted that the legal framework lacks specific provisions to address and enhance political inclusion of women. While women recorded high numbers of registered voters at 47.14%, their participation as candidates remained low. Female candidates represented only 11.36% of nominated candidates across the various elective seats. The Mission was however pleased to observe a commendable representation of women as polling staff (50%), citizen observers (45%) and party agents (12%).

There were efforts aimed at enhancing inclusive political participation for the youth and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Specifically, the AUEOM commended the passage into law of the "Not Too Young to Run" bill which lowered the minimum age requirement for vying for elective offices thus allowing more youths to participate in the electoral process. INEC ensured inclusion of the PWDs through adoption of a Framework on Access and Participation of PWDs, provision of magnifying glasses for visually impaired and posters for those with hearing impairments.

The media in Nigeria is diverse and largely accessible. However, the misuse of social media in propagating misinformation about the electoral process and the contestants has implications for the country's democracy, peace and stability.

All observed voting points opened late, with an average delay of over an hour. This was coupled with reported incidents of lack of essential election materials including ballot boxes and papers, Smart Card Readers (SCRs) and copies of the voters register. Despite these challenges, the AUEOM observers reported a peaceful environment outside the polling units.

Domestic observers, party agents and international observers had easy access to the polling units and were allowed to undertake their duties without interference. It was however reported that voting points were not easily accessible to PWDs in over 80% of visited points.

Polling, closing and counting operations were generally well administered. Polling staff adhered to the prescribed procedures in over 80% of visited polling units.

In view of its findings, the AUEOM made the following key recommendations:

The Government:

- Consider electoral reforms by amending the Elections Law to include the following:(a) Compulsory use of smart card reader electronic transmission of

results;(b) Limitations on election campaign finance; and (c) Reduction in the cost of nomination for political candidates particularly women.

The Independent National Electoral Commission:

- Conduct a comprehensive and participatory post-election audit to identify challenges in the administration of the 2019 elections and develop measures to address them;
- Formulate a regulation that would guide the development of logistics plan far in advance for the timely delivery of election materials to the States in order to avoid the constant postponement of elections closer to set election date which contributes to voter apathy; and
- Develop a communication strategy that would engage citizens proactively in determining what news posted on social media are credible or fake.

Political Parties:

- Institute democratic reforms in the programs and activities of political parties that would allow for increased participation of women and youth as candidates;
- Consider strengthening the engagement with the youth leveraging the “Not too young to run” Act for a more active involvement in electoral processes given that more than half of the registered voters are youth; and
- Remain active and engaged with the democratic process by contributing to public discourse on major governance issues taking place in the country.

Civil Society Organizations:

- In collaboration with political parties, develop a civic education program to engage young people to become better prepared to participate in the electoral process as candidates taking advantage of the “Not too young to run” Act; and
- Remain engaged with the governance process by monitoring the political and democratic processes and advancing and advocating for electoral reforms.

I. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the African Union (AU) deployed a Short-Term Observation (STO) Mission to observe the Nigerian Presidential and National Assembly elections, which took place on February 23, 2019. The Mission ran from February 9-28, 2019 and was led by His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe, former Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, who was assisted by Her Excellency Minata Samate Cessouma, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs.

The Mission also included four (4) core team members and fifty (50) short-term observers drawn from AU member states and the following institutions: Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) of African Ambassadors accredited to the African Union in Addis Ababa, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from across the continent. Staff from the African Union Commission (AUC) and PAP provided support to the Mission.

The overarching mandate of the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) was to make an impartial, independent, and objective assessment of the electoral process and offer concrete recommendations to improve the conduct of future elections in Nigeria.

Pursuant to this mandate, the Mission undertook several activities, including organizing a two-day briefing program for its observers on February 13-14, 2019 and meeting with the heads of other international missions notably ECOWAS. Other activities included consultations with stakeholders such as the Chairperson of INEC, the leadership of the ruling APC, and the main opposition PDP, representatives of domestic observer groups, security agencies, and attending INEC's regular press briefings.

The Mission conducted its observation activities in accordance with Nigeria's Constitution and electoral law and regulations, as well as key international normative frameworks such as the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa; the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; the 2002 African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Missions; and the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

The Mission's findings, conclusions and recommendations are based on consultations held with key stakeholders during the immediate period before the elections, a review of the legal and regulatory framework, and direct observation of the opening, voting and counting processes.

II. PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

(a) Background and Context

The February 23, 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections were significant for deepening Nigeria's democratic processes and laying a solid foundation for future elections. They marked the sixth successive elections since the end of military rule and a return to multi-party democracy in 1999. The elections offered a unique opportunity for the country to consolidate gains made in its democratic efforts particularly the peaceful transfer of political power between parties, which was achieved for the first time in 2015 when incumbent President Goodluck Johathan conceded to the opposition's Muhammadu Buhari.

The political space for electoral participation and competition has since significantly broadened. 84 Million Nigerians registered to vote, a 25% increase from the 2015 elections with the highest number of voters from Lagos and Kano States. Seventy-three (73) candidates contested the presidential race but essentially the contest was between the two dominant parties, the PDP and APC.

The candidates of these two parties, Atiku Abubakar of PDP and Muhammadu Buhari of APC were both aged over 70 and were veterans of the Nigerian political scene having served as Vice President and President respectively, before.

14,543 candidates ran for seats in the 36 States Houses of Assembly.

Despite the high number of registered voters and contestants, only 34.75% turned out to vote as compared to 44% during the 2015 elections. This could be a signal of growing frustration among the voters, most of whom are young people. The postponement may also explain the voter apathy.

At the same time, Nigeria has a long history of "identity politics" that is linked to religion, region, and ethnicity. However, the regional identity factor was not heightened during the electoral period because the two leading candidates shared similar regional identity profiles. Nonetheless, other identity factors such as ethnicity and religion underpinned the political space.

Stakeholders engaged by the Mission reiterated that the failure on the part of the government to enact the amended Electoral Act for the use of Smart Card Readers (SCRs) and the electronic transmission of results was a missed opportunity for codifying recent improvements in the electoral process. At the same time, the government passed the "Not too young to run" Act that created the prospect for increased youth participation the country's democracy.

The elections were also held within a weakened economic environment. Economically, the country depends on oil for more than half of its revenues, which makes it vulnerable to recession. Unemployment remains high and more than half the population is living in extreme poverty.

By the same token, electoral security remained one of the major challenges faced by Nigeria with continuing instability in the oil-rich Niger Delta and persistent attacks from Boko Haram in the north of the country. The Boko Haram used the election period to stage a series of attacks including an attempt to fire rockets into the city of Maiduguri on the day of the elections.

The lack of political dividend particularly among young voters, frustration with the old order of the two main presidential candidates who have dominated the political scene for years and a declining economic condition underpinned the elections. Other factors included insecurity in some states, and weak internal democracy within political parties.

(b) Legal Framework

The conduct of democratic elections must be underpinned by an efficient legal framework, which safeguards a country's international obligations, the rule of law, and democratic rights. Nigeria's legal and regulatory framework for the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections comprised mainly the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended 2015), and the Independent National Electoral Commission Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections 2019. Nigeria is also a signatory to international and regional instruments on elections¹. The AUEOM finds that Nigeria's legal framework provides a good basis for the conduct of democratic elections and adequately covers all aspects and procedures of the electoral process. It is further noted that Nigeria's electoral legal framework is contained mainly in one consolidated piece of legislation, the Electoral Act, making it easily accessible and simple to use.

The AUEOM notes that the Constitution, the Electoral Act, and the INEC Regulations and Guidelines align with Nigeria's international obligations. The legal framework provides for a constitutional democracy and the principle of the supremacy of the Constitution², democracy and social justice, declaring "sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government... derives all its powers and authority"³. It establishes the separation of powers under sections 4, 5, and 6. It also guarantees freedom, equality, and justice⁴. The Constitution has enshrined fundamental freedoms, which are central to democratic elections such as freedom of thought, conscience and

¹For example, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

²See sections 1 and 13 of the 1999 Constitution of the Republic of Nigeria.

³See section 14 of the Constitution.

⁴See the preamble to the Constitution.

religion⁵, right to peaceful assembly and association⁶ and the right to freedom of expression and the press⁷. It has established the INEC under section 153 and guarantees its independence under section 158. The Electoral Act provides for functions of the INEC and establishes the Independent National Electoral Commission Fund⁸, which acts as a vehicle for the INEC's financing. It also provides for continuous voter registration⁹.

The AUEOM also observed, however, that the legal framework does not prescribe the elections date, leaving the INEC with a large latitude in choosing the same.¹⁰ The AUEOM finds this to be problematic as there is no certainty in the law as to when elections will be held. It is proposed therefore that the legal framework provides for a specific elections date. The AUEOM observes that the legal framework provides for postponement of elections in certain cases but bemoans the fact that there is no period indicated for the postponed elections to be conducted. This leaves INEC with too much leeway in choosing the elections date. The legal framework also lacks specific provisions for the enhancement of women's participation in politics and elections.

All in all, however, the AUEOM finds that Nigeria's electoral legal framework is conducive for credible democratic elections.

(c) Electoral Administration

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria establishes the INEC under section 153 and guarantees its independence under section 158(1). INEC is mandated to direct and supervise the conduct of elections and referenda, constituency delimitation, registration and regulation of political parties, registration of voters, civic and voter education, establishment of polling units, and prosecution of electoral offences. INEC also appoints the elections date. INEC comprises the Chairman, twelve National Commissioners and thirty-seven Resident Electoral Commissioners one for each of the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory.

The AUEOM finds that the INEC was well funded from the Consolidated Fund, via the INEC Fund established under section 3 of the Electoral Act, to finance all its budgetary requirements for the Elections.

The AUEOM finds that the main challenge for the INEC in the conduct of the 2019 General Elections was logistical in nature and, arson on several INEC warehouses damaging sensitive materials. The postponement of the Elections that followed these challenges notwithstanding, the AUEOM finds that the postponement by a week,

⁵See section 38.

⁶See section 40 of the Constitution.

⁷See section 39 of the Constitution.

⁸See section 3 of the Electoral Act.

⁹See section 10 of the Electoral Act.

¹⁰See section 25(2) of the Electoral Act.

although it was announced only 5 hours before the polls were to open, was in line with good electoral practice as the logistical challenges would very likely have resulted in non-availability of polling materials thereby undermining INEC's competence to deliver a credible election. The AUEOM finds the reasons for the postponement that were given by INEC to be cogent and verifiable as stipulated under section 26(1) of the Electoral Act.

Barring the logistical challenges, which led to the postponement of the Elections, the Mission observes that all other stages of the electoral process had been carried out in line with the electoral calendar. Further, in the week following the postponement, INEC managed to swiftly achieve the deployment of materials, the movement of personnel and reconfiguration of smart card readers, ballot papers, result sheets and non-sensitive materials in readiness for the rescheduled Elections.

(d) Participation of Women, Youth and Marginalized Groups

Nigeria is party to several international and regional instruments that seek to promote and enhance equal political participation of women, youth and marginalized groups.¹¹ These instruments oblige nations to take appropriate measures to protect, promote and fulfill human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. Consistent with these obligations, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, reinforced by the legal framework, confers equal rights of participation to its citizens in all spheres of public life, including in the electoral process.¹²

Despite Nigeria's commitment to promotion of gender equality in the political sphere, through ratification of the various instruments, the Mission noted that the legal framework lacks specific provisions to address and enhance political inclusion of women. While there is a National Gender Policy (NGP) 2006 in place, a Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, aimed at bringing domestic laws in line with international commitments, has been pending since 2010. Continued political exclusion of women is not only a blow to the quest for gender equality but also risks slowing down the nation's democratic gains.

While women recorded high numbers of registered voters at 47.14%, their participation as candidates remained low. Although there was a slight increase in the number of women presidential candidates compared to the 2015 elections, overall, female candidates represented only 11.36% of all nominated candidates.. Women represented 30.13% of the candidates for the vice presidential seat; 12.34% (Senate); 11.39 (House of Representative – HOR); 3.07% (governorship); and 11.4% (deputy governorship). The expectation of enhancing the political participation of women was dimmed by such

¹¹ These include: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Convention on Political Rights of Women; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and African Youth Charter.

¹² Sections 17, 39, 40 of the Constitution.

a low starting point. Even if all candidates were to be elected, at 11.36%, the numbers still fell short of the recommended threshold of 30% in the NGP.

The AUEOM noted the enactment of the “Not Too Young to Run” Act in 2018 which has lowered the minimum age requirement for elective offices and propels the country towards inclusive political participation for the youth. This has an ultimate impact of deepening and sustaining democracy. The mission noted that the youth recorded high numbers of registered voters at 51.1%. Their numbers as candidates also significantly increased from the previous election signifying a positive impact of the new law. For the 2019 elections, the youth represented 34.2% of the total candidates compared with 21% in 2015. Specifically, of the total candidates for the various elective seats, the youth represented 13.4% (Senate); 27.4% (HOR); 9.8% (governorship); 22.9 % (deputy governorship); and 41.8% (State House of Assembly - SHoA). In comparison, youthful candidates for the 2015 elections represented 10% of the candidates for the Senate seat; 18% (HOR); 5.3% (governorship); 16% (deputy governorship); and 29% (SHoA). The mission further observed that several young people were recruited as candidates’ agents and polling staff. This demonstrated a commendable level of youth mobilization for political participation.

The Mission commends INEC’s inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the electoral process. These included the adoption of a Framework on Access and Participation of PWDs, provision of magnifying glasses for visually impaired voters and posters for those with hearing impairments, to increase their participation in the electoral process.

(e) Participation of Civil Society Organisations

The AUEOM found that CSOs actively participated in the electoral process through observation and dissemination of voter information. The most prominent CSOs involved in the elections included YIAGA AFRICA, which fielded several thousands of domestic observers across the country before and during the elections; the Women Situation Room (WSR) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).

The active involvement of these organisations helped to raise awareness among voters and reinforced the transparency and credibility of the electoral process.

(f) Campaign

The AUEOM observed limited political campaign activities during the extended one-week period and these were largely peaceful. It also gathered from stakeholder consultations that earlier campaigns were generally violence-free. Political parties and candidates exercised their fundamental rights of association, free speech and assembly without significant restrictions. However, there were reports of the use of inflammatory language and intimidation of political opponents during the campaign period.

(g) Security

The 2019 elections took place in a generally peaceful environment. Nevertheless, certain parts of the country, particularly in the North East, South-South and Middle Belt regions, faced security challenges. On Election Day, there were reports of bomb blasts and violence in some regions. The Mission observed that the destruction of election materials including over four thousand Smart Card Readers, ballot boxes, and voter registers and fire incidents at INEC warehouses in Plateau and Anambra States impacted on the timely conduct of the elections in those States. It further notes that the collaborative relationship between INEC and the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) contributed to the generally peaceful elections.

(h) Media Environment

The media played a critical role during the election as a platform for candidates to communicate their political agendas and educate the electorate. The AUEOM notes that the media in Nigeria is diverse and largely accessible. However, the misuse of social media in propagating misinformation about the electoral process and the contestants has implications for the country's democracy, peace and stability.

III. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS

On Election Day, the AUEOM deployed 50 observers to 123 voting points in 13 states representing the 6 geopolitical regions. Below is a summary of the Mission's observations on the opening, voting, closing and counting processes:

(a) Opening

The AUEOM observed opening procedures at 16 voting points. 87% were in urban areas while 13% were in rural areas. All of the voting points observed opened late. The average delay was over an hour. The reasons for the delayed opening were late arrival of polling officials and election materials as well as poor preparation of voting points.

More than half of the AU observer teams reported lack of essential election materials in the voting points observed as follows: Ballot Boxes (25%), Polling booths (25%), Ballot Papers (25%), Copy of voter register (25%), Envelopes (25%), Indelible ink- marker pen (25%), Polling station journal (25%), Forms (25%), Seals (25%), Stamps (75%), and Smart Card Readers (25%).

Despite these challenges, all observers reported that the environment outside the polling units was generally peaceful, except for a few polling units which had crowd control issues due to overcrowding and congestion.

Generally, polling staff did not demonstrate sufficient knowledge and competence in application of the opening procedures.

Thirteen (13) of the sixteen (16) voting points observed were not accessible to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) due to their placement on uneven ground.

Party agents were present and performed their duties without restriction. Similarly, the presence of security personnel outside the polling units was observed and their performance was non-intrusive.

(b) Voting

The AUEOM observed polling in 123 voting points. 65% of these were in urban areas while 35% were in rural areas. They reported that, although opening was delayed, voting took place in a relatively peaceful environment.

The AUEOM observed that voters exercised their right to vote without systematic restriction. The secrecy of the vote was guaranteed in 85.4% of the voting points observed. Where it was not guaranteed it was mainly due to overcrowding.

Over 90% of voting points observed were laid out in a manner that allowed for easy flow of voters. Ballot boxes were placed in public view.

Observers reported that the polling procedures such as verification, authentication and accreditation of voters were adhered to in 98.4% of the voting points observed.

In 7.3% of the voting points observed, the process was temporarily stopped due to malfunctioning of the smart card readers and insufficient materials.

In 91.1% of the voting points observed, priority was given to PWDs, the aged, expectant and nursing mothers. The AUEOM noted that assistance was given to persons unable to vote. Contrary to the requirement that such assistance be provided by a person chosen by the voter other than polling staff, party agents or security personnel, in the majority of the cases the voters were aided by polling staff.

87.7% of the voting points observed were not accessible to PWDs. Challenges to such voters included polling units that were mounted in upstairs rooms with a flight of stairs but no ramps provided, polling units on uneven grounds at and obstruction of the entrance to polling units by crowds.

The AUEOM observed a commendable representation of women as polling staff (50%), citizen observers (45%) and party agents (12%).

(c) Closing and Counting

The AUEOM observed closing procedures in 16 voting points. Of these, thirty eight percent (38%) did not close at 2PM due to late opening as voters already on the queue at closing time were allowed to vote as provided by the law.

The closing and counting procedures were adhered to in over 80% of the voting points observed. Where they were not observed, it was mainly due to inconsistencies in determining valid and invalid votes and failure to publicly post the result forms at the polling units.

In all (100%) voting points observed, the polling personnel completed the necessary documentation for the counting and closing processes at the end of the elections. However, copies of the result forms were not posted publicly in 13% of the voting points observed.

Despite the challenges noted above, Election Day operations were administered in a manner that allowed the free expression of the will of the voters.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) Conclusion

In view of its findings, the AUEOM concludes that the 23 February 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections were conducted within an improved legal framework and political environment that allow for broad participation by citizens, and largely satisfy AU and international standards for democratic elections. Notwithstanding the complex security environment and operational and logistical challenges experienced in the run up to Election Day, the INEC managed the process in a transparent and professional manner, and in accordance with the relevant laws governing elections in Nigeria. INEC also enjoyed broad confidence and trust from stakeholders and there was little doubt in its ability to conduct credible elections, except for the late communication to the public of challenges related to its electoral preparedness. However, the consistent pattern of postponing elections in Nigeria at the eleventh hour has the potential of undermining confidence in the electoral process and democratic institutions.

(b) Recommendations

In the spirit cooperation, the AUEOM offers the following recommendations for consideration by relevant stakeholders for the advancement of future elections and consolidating the country's democracy.

To the Government

- Consider electoral reforms by amending the Elections Law to include the following: Consider electoral reforms by amending the Elections Law to include the following:(a) Compulsory use of smart card reader electronic transmission of results;(b) Limitations on election campaign finance; and (c) Reduction in the cost of nomination for political candidates particularly women.

To Independent National Electoral Commission

- Conduct a comprehensive and participatory post-election audit to identify challenges in the administration of the 2019 elections and develop measures to address them;
- Formulate a regulation that would guide the development of logistics plan far in advance for the timely delivery of election materials to the States in order to avoid the constant postponement of elections closer to set election date which contributes to voter apathy; and

- Develop a communication strategy that would engage citizens proactively in determining what news posted on social media are credible or fake.

To Political Parties

- Institute democratic reforms in the programs and activities of political parties that would allow for increased participation of women and youth as candidates;
- Consider strengthening the engagement with the youth leveraging the “Not too young to run” Act for a more active involvement in electoral processes given that more than half of the registered voters are youth; and
- Remain active and engaged with the democratic process by contributing to public discourse on major governance issues taking place in the country.

To Civil Society Organizations

- In collaboration with political parties, develop a civic education program to engage young people to become better prepared to participate in the electoral process as candidate the government and other stakeholders, take effective measures, including voter and civic education, to encourage active youth participation in the electoral process taking advantage of the “Not too young to run” Act; and
- Remain engaged with the governance process, monitoring the political and democratic processes, advancing and advocating for electoral reforms.