



DEEPENING DEMOCRACY  
**LESSONS FROM KEBBI  
STATE 2022 LOCAL COUNCIL  
ELECTION**

The Electoral Hub Technical Paper Number 1/2022

# **DEEPENING DEMOCRACY: LESSONS FROM KEBBI STATE 2022 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTION**

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## **About The Electoral Hub**

The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a multidisciplinary strategic think-tank which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. The Electoral Hub complements the roles and activities of the different institutions, stakeholders and drivers of the electoral process and governance. The Electoral Hub's aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through research, documentation, electoral education, policy and legal influencing and impact advocacy. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving the electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

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## Acronyms

APC	All Progressives Congress
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IRIAD	Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development
KESIEC	Kebbi State Independent Electoral Commission
LGAs	Local Government Areas
PDP	People's Democratic Party
SIECs	State Independent Electoral Commissions

## Executive Summary

On 5 February 2022, local elections were conducted across the 21 local governments areas and 225 electoral wards in Kebbi State. The results indicate that the APC won all the chairmanship and councillorship positions. The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development, formed a partnership with the Civic and Voter Education Committee of the Kebbi Development Forum to observe the electoral process for the election. Based on reports from observers on the field, communication with key stakeholders, and media reports, we have highlighted important lessons to be learned from the election.

### **We identify the following strengths of the election:**

- Through election observation and reporting, CSOs and observer groups contributed immensely to increasing the level of transparency in the elections and keeping the public informed.
- Although information about the overall turnout during the election is unavailable, reports indicate that turnout was relatively high compared to previous local government council elections.
- Although there were pockets of violence in certain polling units, the overall level violence during the elections was generally low.

However, the election also had **weaknesses as outlined below:**

- There were logistical issues including late arrival of election workers and election materials, and incomplete delivery of election materials. This led to the elections in many polling units starting later than scheduled.
- There was a high level of electoral malpractices, including vote buying, underaged voting, and multiple thumbprinting of ballot papers. KESIEC officials and security agencies were largely complicit in these malpractices.

- COVID-19 protocols were largely ignored during the Kebbi election. In many polling units, there was overcrowding without any obvious use of masks by voters.
- There was lack of transparency on the part of KESIEC. Information such as the list of candidates, list of winners, election results, overall voter turnout figures, breakdown of voters, and so on remain unavailable.

Ultimately, while we acknowledge that the 2022 Kebbi local council elections seem to be an improvement from previous local elections in the state, going forward **we recommend the following actions from different stakeholders:**

- KESIEC should urgently address logistics management by planning early, deploying materials on time, and making backup arrangements for transportation.
- KESIEC and security agencies should ensure that electoral malpractices are effectively identified and dealt with.
- KESIEC and CSOs need to do more to educate voters on how to vote safely, and ensure that COVID-19 protocols are strictly enforced during elections.
- Subsequently, KESIEC should develop a policy on conducting elections during the pandemic, using the policy issued by INEC at the national level as a guide.
- KESIEC should create a website and social media pages to keep citizens informed.
- INEC and CSOs should support KESIEC and other SIECs to build their capacity in election administration at the local level.
- INEC, CSOs and donor agencies should support SIECs to establish results viewing portals and integrate technology into other aspects of the electoral process.

If all stakeholders take these steps recommended above, we are confident that the integrity and credibility of subsequent local elections in Nigeria will be secured.

## Introduction

Local governments, as the third tier of government in Nigeria, have been largely ineffective. This is because local elections are typically met with voter apathy, electoral malpractices, and lack of adequate media coverage. Coupled with the inadequate financial and technical capacity of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) to conduct local elections effectively, it goes without saying that local elections in Nigeria fail to meet the electoral integrity test.

On 5 February 2022, local elections were conducted across the 21 local governments areas (LGAs) and 225 electoral wards in Kebbi State. The results indicate that the All Progressives Congress (APC) won all the chairmanship and councillorship positions. This reflects a trend in Nigeria, where the ruling party in the state almost always wins all contested positions during local elections.<sup>1</sup>

Given this background, The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), formed a partnership with the Civic and Voter Education Committee of the Kebbi Development Forum to observe the electoral process for the election. Based on reports from observers on the field, communication with key stakeholders, and media reports, we have highlighted important lessons to be learned from the election.

This paper can be used by stakeholders to better understand the Kebbi State local government council election, as well as inform efforts to deepen democracy, particularly at the local level in Nigeria.

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<sup>1</sup> The Electoral Hub. (2021). *Deepening Democracy: A Reflection on the 2020 Local Government Elections in Nigeria* (Electoral Hub Technical Paper 6/2021). <https://electoralhub.iriad.org/publications/technical-papers-briefs/deepening-democracy-a-reflection-on-the-2020-local-government-elections-in-nigeria/>

## Strengths of the Election

The Kebbi elections were notable for the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) and election observers in making the elections more transparent, relatively high level of voter turnout, and low level of violence.

### **a) CSOs and election observers**

CSOs and election observer groups contributed immensely to increasing the level of transparency in the elections and keeping the public informed. As discussed later in this paper, KESIEC failed to sufficiently make its processes transparent before, during and after the elections. Nevertheless, CSOs and election observers were able to fill this gap by publicising information about the elections. For example, on election day, Kebbi Development Forum posted real-time updates on its social media platforms, after which the organisation held a press conference. Media houses such as Vanguard and The Nation also published information about the elections on their platforms. Through the presence of observers on the field, electoral practitioners and the general public were able to get information about the election.

### **b) High Voter Turnout**

Although information about the overall turnout during the election is unavailable, reports indicate that turnout was relatively high compared to previous local government elections. For example, The Nation observed that as early as 7:30 am, a large number of voters, mostly women and youths, had converged at various polling units such as Mai-Aleilu, Ladan Musa, and Garki Sarki.<sup>2</sup> This level of interest in the elections,

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<sup>2</sup> Saidu, K. (2022, February 6). Massive turnout at Kebbi LG elections. *The Nation*. <https://thenationonline.ng/massive-turnout-at-kebbi-lg-elections/>



especially by marginalised groups, demonstrates the hallmark principles of participation and inclusion in a representative democracy.

### **c) Low Level of Violence**

Although there were pockets of violence in certain polling units, the overall level violence during the elections was generally low. Certain standalone events were reported in Mungadi, Suru LGA where there was a clash between members of APC and the People's Democratic Party (PDP); Garkar Mai Alelu where armed thugs allegedly made away with ballot boxes; and Nizamiyya, Dakin Gari, Suru LGA where the elections were disrupted by thugs.<sup>3</sup> These isolated events are reflective of the general nature of elections which are filled with heightened tensions. Nevertheless, we commend the security agencies and citizens for generally maintaining an atmosphere of peace across the state on election day.

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<sup>3</sup> Aliyu, H. (2022, February 5). Controversy trails Kebbi LG polls as PDP alleges vote buying, late arrival of sensitive materials. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/controversy-trails-kebbi-lg-polls-as-pdp-alleges-vote-buying-late-arrival-of-sensitive-materials/>

## Weaknesses of the Election

The weaknesses of the election include logistical issues, electoral malpractices, poor enforcement of COVID-19 protocols, and lack of transparency.

### **a) Logistical Issues**

The elections were marred greatly by logistical issues. In many polling units, both election workers and election materials arrived late. For example, in Sarkin Fawa, voters arrived the polling unit at 7:30am, but sensitive materials did not arrive until 10:00am, and even when they did, the materials were incomplete.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in Gwandangaji ward, the election materials sent by KESIEC were incomplete. This led to the elections starting late as election workers had to wait for more materials to arrive.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, at Mariya Shiyar Fada, KESIEC officials did not arrive the polling until as late as 1:00pm, even though voters had been present since 8:00am.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, these frequent logistical issues lead to frustration and agitation on the part of voters. These issues also contribute to voter apathy and lack of confidence in the process, because after facing such frustration voters might be dissuaded from coming out to vote in subsequent elections. It is therefore important for KESIEC to urgently address logistics management by planning early, deploying materials on time, and making backup arrangements for transportation.

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<sup>4</sup> Aliyu, H. (2022, February 5)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

## **b) Electoral Malpractices**

The elections were also marred significantly by electoral malpractices. Numerous instances of vote buying were alleged.<sup>7</sup> We also received reports of underage students being mobilised by authorities to vote at Government Girls College (Unity), Birnin Kebbi. There was also underage voting in PU 001, Mai Hausawa Ward in Kamba, Dandi LGA.

Furthermore, we received reports of KESIEC officials caught with election materials diverted to the house of the APC Chairman in Raha, Bunza LGA. There were also videos of KESIEC officials thumbprinting ballot papers for APC candidates at Gidan Agoda in Augie LGA.

All these happened in the presence of security agents who watched idly. Clearly, both KESIEC and security agents were complicit in the malpractices. Indeed, due to the high level of electoral malpractices, PDP rejected the results announced by KESIEC.<sup>8</sup> This calls for significant reform within KESIEC and security agencies to ensure that electoral malpractices are effectively identified and dealt with.

## **c) Poor Enforcement of COVID-19 Protocols**

Although KESIEC has no official policy on conducting elections during the pandemic, it was expected that COVID-19 protocols, which apply across the country would be followed. These include social distancing and compulsory wearing of face masks at polling units. However, these protocols were largely ignored during the Kebbi election. As shown in the picture below, there was overcrowding without any obvious use of masks by voters.

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<sup>7</sup> Aliyu, H. (2022, February 5)

<sup>8</sup> Aliyu, H. (2022, February 8). PDP rejects Kebbi LGs polls announced by KESIEC. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/pdp-rejects-kebbi-lgs-polls-announced-by-ksiec/>

KESIEC and CSOs need to do more to educate voters on how to vote safely, and ensure that these protocols are strictly enforced during elections. Subsequently, KESIEC should also develop a policy on conducting elections during the pandemic, using the policy issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at the national level as a guide.



*Overcrowding during the elections*

#### **d) Lack of Transparency**

Finally, the election was marked by lack of transparency. KESIEC has no website or social media handle, which greatly reduced accessibility of information about the elections. Prior to the elections, no list of candidates was released by the Commission, and even after the election, there was no publicised list of winners.

Furthermore, information such as overall voter turnout figures, breakdown of voters, and so on remain unavailable. This has made the electoral process in the state largely opaque, with citizens and other stakeholders unaware of key information surrounding the elections. In this way, KESIEC failed to meet the integrity test for conducting elections.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2022 Kebbi local council elections seem to be an improvement from previous local elections in the state. We commend CSOs and election observers for their role in increasing transparency, the electorate for maintaining a relatively high level of turnout, and the general public for maintaining peace during the elections.

However, we are concerned about the logistical issues, electoral malpractices, poor enforcement of COVID-19 protocols, and lack of transparency which marred the elections.

Going forward, we recommend the following actions from different stakeholders:

- KESIEC should urgently address logistics management by planning early, deploying materials on time, and making backup arrangements for transportation.
- KESIEC and security agencies should ensure that electoral malpractices are effectively identified and dealt with.
- KESIEC and CSOs need to do more to educate voters on how to vote safely, and ensure that COVID-19 protocols are strictly enforced during elections.
- Subsequently, KESIEC should develop a policy on conducting elections during the pandemic, using the policy issued by INEC at the national level as a guide.
- KESIEC should create a website and social media pages to keep citizens informed.
- INEC and CSOs should support KESIEC and other SIECs to build their capacity in election administration at the local level.
- INEC, CSOs and donor agencies should support SIECs to establish results viewing portals and integrate technology into other aspects of the electoral process.

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