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The Problem with Nigeria's Collation Process

July 2020
Review



Introduction

During the 2019 general elections, significant problems with the ward-level collation were recorded in 5 states in Nigeria; Lagos, Osun, Kaduna, Rivers and Sokoto states. These problems ranged from election collation officers absconding with result sheets to interruption of collation processes by political thugs and security agents. According to a CDD report, 46% of the collation incidences in the 2019 elections occurred in these 5 states and there were no reported cases of collation incidences in 8 states in Nigeria; Katsina, Benue, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Bauchi, Ondo, Plateau and Nasarawa states.

The Current Situation

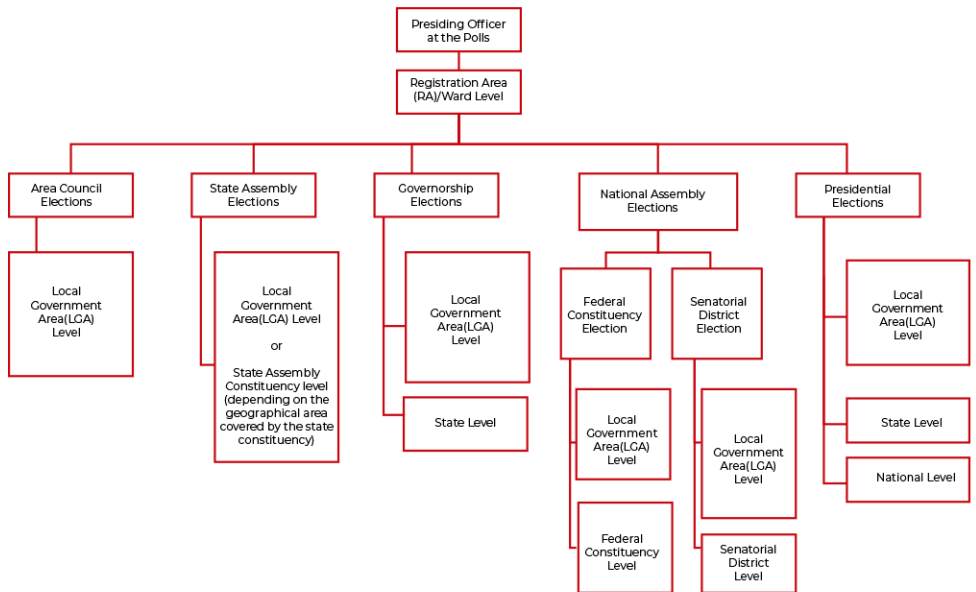
In Nigeria, there are 7 levels of collation for election results and the type of elections determine the levels that will be involved in the collation. The levels are:

- 1 Registration Area (RA)/Ward Level
- 2 Local Government Area (LGA) Level
- 3 State Assembly Constituency Level
- 4 Federal (House of Representatives) Constituency Level
- 5 Senatorial District Level
- 6 State Level
- 7 Collation and Declaration of Presidential Election Result at the National Level.

Irrespective of the election category; Area Council Elections, State Assembly Elections, Governorship Elections, National Assembly Elections or Presidential Elections, the collation of election results begins when the Presiding Officer at the polling unit counts all casted votes, cancels invalid ones, announces the results and sends the result to the Registration Area (R/A). The Presiding Officers manually count the votes, record results on approved sheets of paper, announce the results, then transport the sheets by themselves to the Ward Collation Center (WCC) and hand it over to the RA Collation Officers.

Section 63 (4) of the Electoral Act 2010, in providing guidelines for the transmission of results from polling units, requires the Presiding Officer of a polling unit to count the votes, announce them at the polling unit and Section 65 (1) states that the same officer, after announcing the results, must submit the recorded results and all the election materials to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC is also enabled by Section 73 of the Act to mete out guidelines and regulations for the collation of results at any level of collation where the results of the election will be declared.

This illustration shows the collation levels involved in the collation process for all the election types/categories in Nigeria



Simply put, Presidential election results are to be passed manually from 119,973 polling units to 8,809 wards, to 774 LGAs in 36 states before it gets to the Chief Electoral Commissioner (INEC Chairman) who collates results from the State Collation Officers, declares the results and announces the winner as the President-Elect of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

In 2015 and for the first time, Nigeria deployed the use of the Electronic Collation and Transmission platforms as a support to the manual collation process during the Kogi State elections and this has been deployed in some other elections since then. In the 2019 general elections, the e-TRAC was used only at the national level of the collation process and till date, the e-TRAC and e-collation systems have not been fully incorporated into the election process in Nigeria.



This table shows INEC's use of technology collation of election results since 1999:

S/N	Election Year	Technology Used
1	1999	NIL
2	2003	NIL
3	2007	Excel Sheet / Email
4	2011	Excel Sheet / Email
5	2015	Election Transparency Administration And Collation (e-TRAC) ¹
6	2016	Electronic-Collation Support (E-Collation) and e-TRAC ²
7	2019	E-Trac and E-Collation systems and processes ³

Source: This Research Report

- 1** The e-TRAC system was developed for the 2015 general elections but it wasn't used due to technical problems. It was used in Kogi State elections in 2015.
- 2** In 2016, as a support for the manual collation, the Rivers State parliamentary rerun, Kogi State gubernatorial rerun, Edo State, Bayelsa State and Ondo State gubernatorial elections, as well as Osun State senatorial bye-elections conducted in 2017, witnessed the use of E-collation
- 3** In the 2019 general elections, the e-TRAC was only used at the national level of the collation process



The Short Falls of the Collation Process

With a collation process that is heavily dependent on manual procedures, there is bound to be human errors. In the 2019 general elections, there were reports of errors made by Ad hoc staff when they were compiling figures and entering them into the result sheets. It was also reported that INEC collation officers filled out some forms incorrectly and used ineligible handwriting to record the results.

In INEC's 2019 supplementary funds, N4.77 billion (\$13.25 million) was allocated to e-TRAC and E-Collation systems and processes, but the Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu said ahead of the elections that electronic collation of results will only be done at the National Level.

Also, despite the N2.125 billion (\$5.9 million) that INEC received for the procurement of election duty vehicles N105 million (\$292,000) for fueling during the 2019 general elections still recorded cases of inadequate Transport Vehicles for collation officers and election materials, collation officers absconding with result sheets, collation officers refusing to use designated locations for Ward Collation Centers because they had to transport themselves between collation locations, and late arrival of materials and RA officers at Ward Collation Centres.

A long and manual process makes it easy for electoral crime as agents of electoral violence often have the opportunity to swing in and disrupt the collation process or threaten collation officials. The significance of this is that INEC is more likely to declare results from a Ward as inconclusive or cancel elections in an area if the ward level collation process had such security problems. The large-scale impact of this is a financial burden on INEC to run a supplementary election, taking them further away from realizing the goal of eliminating off-cycle elections.

Why The Collation Process Is Important

Chidi Nwafor, INEC's Director of Information and Communication Technology, said, "Observations have shown that most election malpractices that take place do not take place at polling units. The challenge has been after the poll – between the polling units and the collation centers and at the collation center". He explained that it is difficult to rig elections at the polling units because the electorates participate in the counting of the ballot papers and recording of the scores.

The Electronic Collation and Transmission System

This system provides secure transmission of election results from polling units to a central database and aims to totally eliminate the manual collation. In this system;

- 1** The votes will be counted manually and recorded in words and figures on the approved result sheet.
- 2** The results will also be entered into the e-collation application on the smart card reader.
- 3** The results are then transmitted to a central server.
- 4** The results will be auto-collated; they can be viewed at the Registration Area/Ward Level and the EC8A result sheet is to be scanned at this level.
- 5** At the LGA Collation Level and National Level, audit and confirmation of the results will take place.
- 6** Viewing access only is allowed at the Ward Level and LGA Level.
- 7** There is a real-time user interface with a flexible dashboard that shows a graphical illustration of the collation results





Lessons From Senegal

The Electoral code guides the election process for the 6.6 million registered voters in Senegal. During the voting process of the presidential elections, all candidates from the 47 political parties are expected to be represented at the polling stations. They have the right to observe the preparations for the elections (from the registration of candidates to the result announcements). To be at the polling station or observe the electoral preparation, these observers must have submitted their full names, profession, date and place of birth to the minister of elections, the President of the Constitutional Council and the President of the National Census Commission, 15 days before the commencement of the voting process according to Article LO.138 of the Electoral Code.

Article 83 of the Electoral Code states that the votes are to be counted at the polling stations by the poll workers. The representatives of the National Autonomous Electoral Commission, authorized local citizens and political parties and their coalitions usually make up the poll workers that count the votes. Polling station election results are announced immediately after the counting process and each representative gets a certified copy of the result. From here, results gathered from all the polling stations are sent to the Departmental Committee for the Counting of Votes where they are collated and the results are announced by the departmental committee. Next, these results are transported in sealed envelopes to the National Committee who the President of the Court of Appeal of Dakar presides over. It is this national committee that announces the provisional results as they are broadcast in real-time. In 2012, Senegal revamped this process and election results are immediately published online once it gets to the Departmental Committee. This process takes place in the presence of national and international observers at the polling stations.