

FCT AREA COUNCIL ELECTIONS

ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (EOM)
REPORT

21 FEBRUARY 2026



SOCIETY FOR PEACE &
CAPACITY BUILDING
(SPCB)

About

The Society for Peace and Capacity Building (SPCB) is a registered non-governmental organisation committed to promoting democratic governance, peaceful coexistence, and civic empowerment across Nigeria. SPCB operates in accordance with Nigerian civil society law and upholds the principles of non-partisanship, impartiality, and accuracy in all its activities.

As part of its electoral engagement mandate, SPCB conducts Election Observation Missions (EOMs) to strengthen public confidence in democratic processes, support institutional accountability, and contribute evidence-based recommendations to electoral management bodies. SPCB's observation methodology aligns with the Electoral Act 2026, INEC Regulations and Guidelines, and internationally recognised standards for credible election observation.

For this mission, SPCB deployed 25 trained observers across all six Area Councils of the FCT, applying a standardised, checklist-based observation framework and a real-time reporting system to ensure the accuracy and integrity of its findings.

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Acknowledgement

The Society for Peace and Capacity Building (SPCB) expresses its appreciation to the twenty-five (25) accredited observers who participated in this Election Observation Mission. Their professionalism, dedication, and commitment to the principles of non-partisan and independent observation were critical to the successful conduct of this mission.

SPCB also acknowledges the cooperation of officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) across the Federal Capital Territory, whose openness and responsiveness facilitated the observation process at polling units and collation centres.

SPCB further recognizes the general cooperation of community members encountered during the exercise, which contributed to a conducive environment for observation activities.

Abbreviations

AMAC	Abuja Municipal Area Council
BVAS	Bimodal Voter Accreditation System
EOM	Election Observation Mission
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FRSC	Federal Road Safety Corps
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
NOA	National Orientation Agency
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
PO	Presiding Officer
PU	Polling Unit
PVC	Permanent Voter Card
PWD	Person with Disability
SPCB	Society for Peace and Capacity Building

Executive Summary

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For this mission, SPCB deployed 25 trained observers across all six Area Councils of the FCT, applying a standardised, checklist-based observation framework and a real-time reporting system to ensure the accuracy and integrity of its findings.



1. Introduction

On 21 February 2026, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted elections across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT): Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abaji. These elections determine Chairpersons and Councillors responsible for local public services and community development, representing a critical component of Nigeria’s grassroots democratic governance.

It is important to note that the Electoral Act 2026 — which repeals and replaces the Electoral Act 2022 — was signed into law on 18 February 2026, just three days before these elections were conducted. The FCT Area Council Elections were therefore among the first to be conducted under the new legal framework, with INEC having had almost no transition period to fully operationalise its provisions. This context is relevant to understanding some of the procedural and logistical challenges observed on election day.

SPCB deployed its Election Observation Mission to recognize the democratic significance of local government elections and to uphold its mandate to promote transparent, credible, and inclusive electoral processes across Nigeria.

Table 1: Key Electoral Statistics at a Glance

Category	Detail
Registered Voters	1,680,316
PVCs Collected	1,587,025
Total Candidates	637
Political Parties	17
Positions Contested	68 (6 Chairpersons + 62 Councillors)



2. Methodology

SPCB deployed 25 trained, accredited observers across all six Area Councils of the FCT, applying a standardised observation methodology consistent with the Electoral Act 2026, INEC Regulations and Guidelines, and international principles for credible election observation, including impartiality, independence, and accuracy.

2.1 Observer Deployment

Observers were strategically assigned to polling units selected to provide broad geographic coverage across all six Area Councils. Priority was given to high-density polling units, newly established units, and locations identified through pre-election assessment as presenting logistical or integrity challenges.

Table 2: SPCB Observer Deployment by Area Council

Area Council	Observers Deployed	Key Locations Covered
AMAC (Abuja Municipal)	6	Garki Village, CBN Quarters, Lagos Street
Bwari	5	Kubwa, Usuma Ward, Tudun Fulani
Gwagwalada	4	Selected high-density units
Kuje	4	Vote-buying arrests noted
Kwali	4	BVAS issues; collation observed
Abaji	2	Selected units
Total	25	All 6 Area Councils covered

2.2 Observation Framework

Observers used structured checklists to assess the following at each assigned polling unit:

- Opening procedures and timeliness of personnel and materials deployment
- Voter accreditation processes and BVAS functionality
- Compliance with voting procedures and ballot secrecy requirements
- Security arrangements and conduct of security personnel
- Conduct of political party agents
- Indicators of electoral integrity risks, including vote buying
- Voter participation patterns, turnout, and gender distribution
- Accessibility provisions for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)
- Results collation processes at ward and area council collation centres

A real-time reporting system supported data transmission, field verification, and incident tracking throughout election day.

2.3 Sampling Methodology and Limitations

Polling units for observation were selected using a combination of stratified and purposive sampling, ensuring representation across all six Area Councils while also covering high-risk or logistically complex locations. The sample is not statistically representative of all registered voters across the FCT. Findings are therefore indicative rather than exhaustive and should be read as a qualitative assessment supported by specific field evidence.

In simple terms: This study provides useful insights across areas but is not a statistically representative picture of all voters in the FCT.

3. Findings and Assessment

3.1 Opening of Polls and Logistics

3.1.1 Findings

INEC personnel arrived at polling units between 08:00 and 12:00 across observed locations. Several polling units opened on time, while others experienced delays linked primarily to the late deployment of personnel and materials. Delays were more pronounced in certain units in the Kwali and Bwari Area Councils.

A notable incident was recorded at Polling Unit 010, Phase 2 Site 1, Usuma Ward, Kubwa, Bwari. At approximately 08:00, a Presiding Officer pasted an incorrect voter register, causing an immediate dispute among waiting voters, several of whom interpreted the error as a deliberate attempt to disenfranchise them. The SPCB observer present reported the incident to the INEC hotline. An INEC official responded, appealed for calm, and recorded the location details. INEC officials arrived at approximately 10:20 a.m. and ensured the correct voter register was pasted. Voting subsequently proceeded at that unit.

3.1.2 Assessment

While poll opening delays were not universal across all observed locations, their occurrence reduced the effective voting window at affected units and likely contributed to voter frustration and lower participation. The incorrect voter register incident at PU 010 illustrates the potential for administrative errors to erode voter confidence. We commend the INEC hotline's responsiveness and the timely resolution of the situation. However, pre-deployment quality control checks are essential to prevent such incidents.

3.2 Accreditation and Voting

3.2.1 Findings

Accreditation and voting commenced between 08:30 and 10:00 in most observed polling units. Procedures were generally followed by polling officials, and BVAS functioned effectively in the majority of cases. Minor technical issues were recorded in fewer than 20% of observed units, with a higher concentration in Kwali; all were resolved without significant disruption.

3.2.2 Assessment

Accreditation and voting were conducted in a procedurally sound manner in the majority of observed locations. The effective use of BVAS contributed positively to transparency and public confidence. Notably, Section 47 of the Electoral Act 2026 now provides explicit statutory recognition of BVAS for electronic voter accreditation, giving legal weight to a technology that SPCB's observers found to be functioning effectively in the field.

3.3 Security Environment

3.3.1 Findings

Security personnel were present at most observed polling units. Agencies observed included the Nigeria Police Force, the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Nigerian Correctional Service, and the Nigerian Immigration Service. Inter-agency cooperation was generally orderly. In a limited number of locations, individuals believed to be unauthorised private security personnel were observed in proximity to polling units without appropriate accreditation.

3.3.2 Assessment

The overall security environment was calm and conducive to voting. No major incidents of electoral violence were recorded. The presence of unauthorised security personnel at some units indicates incomplete enforcement of deployment protocols and should be addressed to prevent voter intimidation.

3.4 Conduct of Political Parties and Agents

3.4.1 Findings

Of the 17 registered political parties, approximately eight deployed agents consistently across observed polling units. Party agents present demonstrated cooperative behaviour, participating constructively in accreditation monitoring, voting observation, and results verification. At collation centres, party agents signed result sheets after verification without incident.

3.4.2 Assessment

The conduct of party agents contributed to a generally transparent and non-confrontational environment. However, limited deployment by the majority of parties reduces the partisan scrutiny function that agents serve and may weaken procedural accountability in unobserved units.

3.5 Electoral Integrity and Vote-Buying Risks

3.5.1 Findings

SPCB observers did not directly witness vote-buying transactions at any observed location. However, behavioural patterns consistent with voter inducement were noted at multiple polling units, including:



- Voter clustering around specific unidentified individuals in proximity to polling units
- Observable interactions between third parties and individual voters at Garki Village (AMAC) and Tudun Fulani (Bwari)

These observations do not constitute direct evidence of vote buying but are consistent with patterns associated with voter inducement dynamics. Additionally, reports of arrests for vote-buying activities were confirmed in the Kuje and Kwali Area Councils.

SPCB emphasizes that these observations are indicative and do not constitute direct evidence of electoral offences.

3.5.2 Assessment

The combination of observed behavioural indicators and reported arrests in multiple Area Councils suggests that voter inducement was an active concern on election day across parts of the FCT. SPCB notes that strengthening ballot secrecy is the most effective structural safeguard against vote buying: when voters cannot prove how they voted, the commercial incentive for inducement collapses, as the purchase cannot be verified.

3.6 Polling Unit Relocations and Voter Confusion

3.6.1 Findings

Observers documented a pattern of voter confusion arising from last-minute polling unit relocations communicated to voters on the morning of election day. At Polling Unit 010, Usuma Ward, Bwari, voters showed SPCB observers mobile phone notifications received that morning directing them to new, unfamiliar polling unit locations with insufficient time to act.

A particularly striking contrast was observed at approximately 11:00 a.m. in Usuma Ward: Polling Unit 058, Phase 4 — a newly created unit — had recorded only one (1) accredited voter from a total registration of 58, while Polling Unit 012, located approximately 25 metres away, had a queue of hundreds of voters. INEC officials at PU 058 confirmed it was a new location and that registrants appeared unaware of its existence.

3.6.2 Assessment

This pattern indicates gaps in voter information systems that require urgent strengthening. Voters redirected to new polling units via SMS on election day, with no prior notice, are significantly constrained in their ability to participate. This is an indirect but material barrier to voter participation and warrants urgent reform of communication and relocation protocols before the next electoral cycle.

3.7 Voter Participation and Turnout

3.7.1 Findings

Voter turnout was low across observed areas, with the most acute figures recorded in AMAC and Bwari. In AMAC, a total of 837,338 voters were registered, of whom approximately 65,676 were accredited on election day — representing a turnout of approximately 7.8%.

Observed data from sampled polling units in Garki (AMAC) illustrate variation in turnout across units:

Table 3: Observed Polling Unit Turnout — Garki, AMAC

PU Code	Location	Registered Voters	Observed Turnout
003	Garki Village (Fmr. Primary School)	3,376	High
007	CBN Quarters (near Primary School)	2,329	Good
002	Garki Village (near Social Club)	1,796	Average
040	Lagos Street / Drum Sticks	234	Gradually building
025	Garki Village	109	Good
043	Garki Market	124	Low
046	Obiaja Street, Garki	133	Low
005	CBN by O&O Polling Office	73	Low

Contributing factors to low turnout may include:

- Voter perceptions that electoral outcomes were predetermined, reducing the motivation to participate
- Last-minute polling unit relocations with inadequate voter notification (see Section 4.6)
- Limited voter awareness and civic education campaigns before election day
- Delays in the opening of some polling units
- Socio-economic constraints and transportation challenges
- Religious observances coinciding with the election period (Ramadan and Lent)

3.7.2 Assessment

A turnout of approximately 7.8% in AMAC is critically low and raises concerns regarding the level of democratic inclusiveness at the local government level. Even accounting for structural factors, such figures indicate deep-seated disengagement that demands a targeted civic and institutional response.

3.8 Gender and Inclusion

3.8.1 Findings

SPCB observers noted the gender composition of polling officials and voters qualitatively across observed units. The gender of polling officials was broadly mixed across the six Area Councils, with both male and female officers observed at the majority of polling units visited. Female participation among voters varied by location: in some units, female voters were observed in comparable numbers to male voters, while in others, female turnout appeared lower, particularly in more rural wards.

With respect to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and other vulnerable groups, observers recorded both positive provisions and notable gaps:

On the positive side, several polling units across AMAC displayed official INEC fliers — EC 30E (PWD): “How to Vote – For the Deaf” — providing step-by-step voting instructions adapted for deaf voters. This represents a meaningful information accessibility measure. Additionally, priority queuing was observed at multiple polling units, with elderly persons, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and other special citizens given the opportunity to cast their votes ahead of the general queue.

However, physical accessibility infrastructure remained largely absent at observed polling units. No ramps, tactile pathways, or adapted voting booths were observed. Voters with physical mobility limitations were seen navigating difficult terrain without institutional support.

3.8.2 Assessment

The deployment of EC 30E fliers for deaf voters and the practice of priority queuing for vulnerable groups are commendable steps that reflect awareness of inclusive election obligations. These practices should be formally standardised and applied consistently across all Area Councils in future elections.

At the same time, the absence of physical accessibility infrastructure — particularly ramps and adapted booths — means that voters with physical disabilities remain significantly disadvantaged. INEC should treat the positive steps observed in AMAC as a baseline to build upon, not a ceiling. Gender-disaggregated data on voter participation and official deployment should also be formally collected and published in future elections to enable evidence-based accountability.

3.9 Results Collation and Announcement

3.9.1 Findings

SPCB observers monitored results collation at centres in Bwari (Kubwa) and Kwali. Results were physically verified and processed by Supervisory Presiding Officers. Party agents were present and signed the result sheets after verification. Collation extended into the late evening hours at both locations. Challenges noted included inadequate lighting and limited physical infrastructure affecting efficiency and visibility.

With respect to the results announcement, INEC declared the outcomes for five of the six Area Councils late on Saturday, 21 February 2026. The result for Kuje Area Council was the exception, announced at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, 22 February 2026 — the day following the election. No reason was publicly stated for the delay in Kuje.

Under Section 60(3) of the Electoral Act 2026, electronic transmission of Form EC8A from polling units to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) is provided for as a statutory requirement, subject to full operational implementation. SPCB observers at collation centres in Bwari and Kwali were not in a position to independently verify whether electronic transmission to IReV was carried out in compliance with this provision. SPCB notes this as an observation gap and recommends that IReV compliance monitoring be incorporated into future EOM checklists.

3.9.2 Assessment

Collation procedures were generally followed, and the presence of party agents provided an important transparency safeguard. However, poor lighting and suboptimal physical conditions at collation centres reduced operational efficiency and created a risk of errors in reading and verifying result sheets. The delayed announcement of the Kuje results until the following day warrants an explanation from INEC. Given that the Electoral Act 2026 mandates electronic transmission of results to IReV — a provision designed to enable real-time public verification — INEC should take steps to ensure observers and the public can independently confirm compliance with Section 60(3) in future elections.

4. Overall Assessment

Positive Aspects

- Professional and largely procedurally compliant conduct of INEC polling officials
- Effective and confidence-building deployment of BVAS technology
- Calm overall security environment conducive to voting across all observed locations
- Constructive and cooperative conduct of deployed party agents
- Responsive INEC hotline and timely incident resolution at PU 010, Usuma Ward, Bwari
- Absence of major electoral violence or evidence of systemic malpractice
- Mixed-gender composition of polling officials across Area Councils
- Display of EC 30E (PWD) deaf voter instruction fliers at several AMAC polling units
- Priority queuing observed for elderly persons, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and other special citizens

Areas of Concern

- Delays in deployment of personnel and materials, leading to late opening of polls at some units
- Administrative error resulting in the incorrect voter register posted at PU 010, Usuma Ward, Bwari
- Critically low voter turnout – approximately 7.8% in AMAC – raising democratic inclusiveness concerns
- Last-minute polling unit relocations communicated on election day with no adequate prior notice
- Weak voter information and civic education coverage ahead of election day
- Behavioural indicators consistent with voter inducement; arrests reported in Kuje and Kwali
- Insufficient ballot secrecy safeguards at some observed polling units
- Inadequate physical infrastructure – lighting, power – at collation centres
- Presence of unauthorised security personnel at some polling units
- Physical accessibility infrastructure (ramps, adapted booths) is absent at observed polling units despite positive information provisions for deaf voters
- Female voter participation lower than male participation in some locations
- Kuje Area Council results announced at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, 22 February – the day after the election – with no public explanation for the delay
- IReV electronic transmission compliance under Section 60(3) of the Electoral Act 2026 could not be independently verified by SPCB observers at collation centres

5. Recommendations

SPCB presents the following recommendations in order of priority, directed to the relevant responsible authorities.

5.1 Immediate Priority: Before the Next Election Cycle

Table 4: Immediate Priority Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsible Party
Implement pre-deployment quality control checks for all voter registers and materials to prevent errors such as the wrong voter list incident at PU 010, Usuma Ward.	INEC
Develop a robust, multi-channel voter notification system for polling unit changes, ensuring voters are informed at least 7 days in advance via SMS, radio, posters, and community liaisons — never on election day.	INEC / NOA
Introduce mandatory infrastructure checklists for collation centres, covering lighting, power supply, and seating, verified before election day.	INEC
Enforce strict compliance with authorised security deployment protocols and establish a clear mechanism to remove unauthorised personnel.	INEC / Security Agencies
Strengthen ballot secrecy measures at all polling units, including adequate booth placement and privacy screens, to eliminate the ability of third parties to verify individual votes.	INEC
Ensure full compliance with Section 60(3) of the Electoral Act 2026 by implementing real-time electronic transmission of Form EC8A to the IReV portal, and make the IReV upload status publicly verifiable by observers and party agents at collation centres.	INEC
Provide a public explanation for the delayed announcement of Kuje Area Council results on 22 February 2026, and establish clear, binding timelines for results declaration at the Area Council level.	INEC
Standardise and extend proven inclusion practices — such as EC 30E deaf voter fliers and priority queuing — across all six Area Councils, and complement them with physical accessibility infrastructure, including ramps and adapted voting booths at all polling units.	INEC

5.2 Short-Term: Within Six Months

Table 5: Short-Term Recommendations (Within Six Months)

Recommendation	Responsible Party
Launch targeted voter education campaigns for local government elections, including the importance of Area Council governance, candidate information, and how to locate one's polling unit.	INEC / NOA / Civil Society
Develop community outreach programmes to address voter apathy in high-population urban areas such as AMAC, including partnerships with religious leaders and community associations.	NOA / Civil Society
Collect and publish gender-disaggregated data on voter participation and polling official deployment in all future elections to enable evidence-based accountability.	INEC
Conduct a post-election review of BVAS performance in Kwali to document and address recurring technical issues before subsequent elections.	INEC

5.3 Long-Term: Structural Reform

Table 6: Long-Term Structural Reform Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsible Party
Commission a study into the structural causes of voter apathy in FCT local government elections, including the role of voter perceptions about electoral outcomes, and develop evidence-based strategies to rebuild voter confidence and participation.	INEC / NOA / Academic Institutions
Expand civil society participation in pre-election voter education to ensure broad civic awareness ahead of future elections.	INEC / Civil Society
Introduce enhanced legislative and enforcement mechanisms to address pre-election voter inducement and ensure accountability for vote-buying activities.	National Assembly / INEC / Law Enforcement

Conclusion

The FCT Area Council Elections of 21 February 2026 were conducted in a largely peaceful and procedurally credible manner in the locations observed by SPCB. The effective use of BVAS, the professionalism of INEC officials, and the cooperative conduct of party agents contributed positively to the integrity of the process.

Nevertheless, the elections revealed operational and structural vulnerabilities, particularly around voter notification, ballot secrecy, PWD accessibility, and voter participation, that, if left unaddressed, risk further eroding public confidence in local democracy. These are solvable challenges, and SPCB believes that the reforms outlined in this report, if implemented with political will and institutional commitment, can produce meaningfully stronger elections in future cycles.

SPCB remains committed to supporting credible, inclusive, and transparent electoral processes in Nigeria and looks forward to continued engagement with INEC and all relevant stakeholders on the implementation of these recommendations.







Society for Peace and Capacity

Building (SPCB)

info@spcb.org.ng

www.spcb.org.ng

+234 701 770 7610