



A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN UNION OBSERVATION MISSION'S REPORTS ON THE NIGERIAN 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *One of the means of knowing if a democracy is making progress is through successful successive elections and one of the ways to gauge the success of an election is to look into the reports of the various observation missions and groups that observed and monitored that election. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) is one of the credible observation missions that have monitored Nigerian elections since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. The reports of the Mission have helped to show the good, the bad, and the worst of the Nigerian brand of electoral process. Unlike the observation reports of the international organizations that Nigeria belongs to like the Commonwealth, the African Union and the ECOWAS, the EU EOM report is usually devoid of the element of a "progress report" as enunciated by Kelly (2012), the reports are more factual and more relatable. The paper submits that for a democracy to make genuine progress through its electoral process, its election needs to be observed by factual electoral observation groups in the mold of EU EOM, despite the expected claim of foreign interference by the indicted party in an election.*

KEYWORDS: Election, Observation, Monitoring.



INTRODUCTION

The European Union Observation Mission has evolved into one of the biggest Observation Missions in the world since the year 2000. The Mission has been involved in more than two hundred missions in 75 countries, since the year 2000 (European Union, 2023). Since 1999, the organization has been involved in the Nigerian electoral process through its Observation Missions and provision of electoral aid. The body deployed its Observation Mission for the Nigerian general elections that were held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 (European Union, 2022). In the last two general elections that were held in 2019 and 2023 the Mission's activities and reports stood out among other Observation Missions reports. The 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria were held on February 23, 2019 and gubernatorial elections to elect Governors in the Nigerian States were held a week later. On March 23, 2019, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) organized supplementary elections for the positions that were inconclusive at the first ballot. In the period leading to those elections, the country was experiencing a high level of insecurity and its economy was declining. According to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2022), Nigeria's unemployment rate increased from 18.8 percent in the third quarter of 2017 to 23.1 percent in the third quarter of 2018 (Olawoyin 2020). Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa were causing havoc in the Northern part of the country and Fulani herdsmen were ravaging the country, killing and maiming indigenous people across the length and breadth of Nigeria, with major casualties in the middle belt of the country; a region that is the agriculture base of the country.

According to the Global Terrorism Index for the year 2019, deaths from terrorism in Nigeria rose to 2,040 in 2018, a 33 percent increase. Even though Boko Haram killings decreased to 589 deaths in the period, the activities of Fulani herdsmen terrorists shot up. The group was responsible for 1,158, representing an increase of 261 percent compared to the previous year (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). The candidate of the Opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2019 Presidential election asked Nigerians not to vote for the incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), because of the incessant Fulani herdsmen's attacks. He believes that "unless Nigerians vote out the All Progressives Congress administration, killings by herdsmen will continue and ultimately spark a series of ethno-religious crises that will be irreversible" (Ojoye, 2019, 1). Coincidentally, both Atiku and Buhari are from the Fulani ethnic group. Despite the economic and security issues, the Presidential election was held with the incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari of APC defeating Atiku Abubakar of PDP. According to the results released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Muhammadu Buhari scored 15,191,847 votes and Atiku scored 11,262,978 votes. The results were disputed by Atiku Abubakar. He claimed that the ruling APC manipulated the election.

The background to the 2023 Presidential election was similar to that of 2019. In the period leading to the 2023 Presidential election, Nigeria was battling a high level of insecurity and a non performing economy. Kidnapping for ransom was rife and the herdsmen intensified their carnages against several communities across the country. Settlements in the middle belt zone of Nigeria were being wiped out in a series of unabated attacks. The attacks were not limited to the middle belt. In Owo, Ondo State, South West Nigeria, a Catholic Church was attacked on Sunday morning leaving scores of worshippers murdered (Odhiambo & Andrew, 2022). As the country was



grappling with insecurity, the economy was also going down. In 2022, according to The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), 133 million people, representing 63 percent of the Nigerian inhabitants were multidimensionally poor and in June 2023, statistics from The World Poverty Clock, a device that tracks poverty worldwide stated that 71 million Nigerian were extremely poor (Ubanagu, 2023). Naira, the local currency, continued its steady decline against major currencies in the world thereby increasing the prices of imported and locally manufactured goods. The double hydra of insecurity and bad economy led to unprecedented immigration of graduates and middle-class Nigerians to mostly Western countries through employment and education routes.

Apart from insecurity and bad economy which are common in pre-2019 and 2023 general elections, other issues were also critical and peculiar to the 2023 general election. One such issue was the high level of youth participation in the electoral process. A major harbinger of youth participation in the electoral process of 2023 was the uprising against police brutality, popularly called ENDSARS that was staged across the country (majorly in the South) on October 22. ENDSARS was coined by the youth to request that the Government put an 'END' to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). SARS was a notorious arm of the Nigerian Police Force that was accused of extra-judicial killings and punishments, mostly directed at Nigerian youths. The highlight of the process was on October 20, 2020, when many Nigerian youths were killed (actual numbers are still being disputed) by the men of the Nigerian Army that was deployed to Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos to put an end to the youth that camped in the locations for several days. After the uprising died down, many of the youths who led the uprising online and offline decided to be involved in the electoral process by backing Peter Obi, the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party. Another issue that was also peculiar to the 2023 general election was the region and ethnic dimensions of the candidates of major political parties that participated in that election. The outgoing President is a Fulani-Muslim from the Northern part of the country and it was expected that the two major political parties (PDP and APC) will pick Christian Southerners as their candidates. But, this did not happen. While APC picked Bola Tinubu, a Southerner as its Presidential candidate, he is a Muslim and PDP picked Atiku Abubakar, another Fulani Muslim from the North just like the outgoing President. Then, came in a third force. Peter Obi, a Christian and an Igbo man from South-Eastern Nigeria contested under the umbrella of a little-known Labour Party. The ethnic and religious configuration of the candidates led to campaigns that were largely influenced by religion and ethnicity.

While the paper focuses on the work of the European Union Observation Mission on the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria, it should be noted that other observation and monitoring groups were accredited for those elections. They include missions of international bodies like ECOWAS, the United Nations, the African Union, the Commonwealth and the European Union. Also in attendance were the joint Nigeria International Election Observation Mission of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). International and local NGOs like Connected Development (CODE) also participated in those elections. Overall, the paper compares the EU EOM on both elections using them to assess the Nigerian electoral system in those periods.



RELEVANT LITERATURE

Several academics have made several contributions to many aspects of the subject. Starting from the distinction between an election observer and an election monitor, Binsbergen and Abbink (2002) believe that an electoral observer is exclusively an observer who has nothing to do with an election and has no right to intervene in it, while an election monitor is a local person with an organization (NGO) who functions as an impartial local observer, in the case of multi-party elections, in a country where an election is being held. They noted that the electoral monitor has a limited right to intervene in an election. Foeken and Dietz (1997) also highlighted the difference between election observer and election monitor. According to them, an observer is a 'spectator', but a monitor is almost an official participant at the polling unit he or she is assigned to during an election. They also noted that another key difference is in the length of time that the election is being watched. They believe that observation is restricted to the actual election day and vote counting after the election, monitoring covers the period that preceded the actual election day and it can even be months. They believe that all the international teams are observers, while local teams are monitors.

Several scholars have written on the importance of election observation in the democratic process. According to Kelly (2012), election observation is an important tool in the promotion of democracy. Cranenburgh (2002) posits that election observation has played a major role in nations undertaking first-time competitive elections and it has helped to build confidence in elections by preventing fraud. Kassel (2002) believes that the mere presence of international observers in an election will ensure that there is a conducive environment for political participation. Similarly, Binsbergen and Abbink (2002) believe that the activities of observers can help to promote freedom and fairness during an election. Anglin (1992) argues that observers sometimes serve as mediators in events that could lead to violent clashes in the pre-election period. He cited the example of the role that observers played in South Africa during the election that was held in 1994. Kelly (2012) also wrote on how election observation can serve as a check on the organization of elections by bad government. She cited the example of the Georgia election of 2003 where international observers denounced the fraudulent election and in the process helped to trigger a political riot that was known as the Rose Revolution, which eventually forced President Mikheil Saakashvili to respond by calling a presidential election for early 2008.

Writing on the history of election observation, Cheeseman and Klaas (2018) noted that election monitoring debuted on the world stage in 1857, when observers were sent to witness the referendum that would unite Moldavia and Wallachia as Romania. Cranenburgh (2002) noted that election observation became very prominent, especially in African countries in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War and that it was seen as a tool for promoting and sustaining democracy. He noted the fact that, in that period many One Party States and States under military rule gave way to multiparty democracy. Anglin (1992) noted that the South African election of 1994 was the most monitored as at 1992, with 2,513 observers, apart from domestic and foreign Non-Governmental Organizations' observers. According to him, for more than one and half years before the election, observers from the United Nations, the European Community, the Organization of African Unity and the Commonwealth started arriving in the country.



Some academics have written on the weaknesses of the practice of international observation of elections. Kelly (2012) noted that international observers do not go far enough into the hinterland to see what is happening and that they can only see what the authorities want them to see. She gave the example of a Nepalese voter in the 2008 election in Nepal who said: "Look at these foreign observers. What they see is only the surface; they don't know anything about our country". Cranenburgh (2002,18) also noted that international observation focuses mainly on the procedures on polling day and observers only arrived a few days before the election, not sufficient to know the country's electoral process and other basic information about the election and the people of the country. He also talked about the lack of expertise of election observers. He attributed this to failure in the method of recruitment. He also mentioned the practice of sending observers to countries that do not meet certain minimal conditions for free and fair elections. He highlighted the fact that there is no standard policy on the formulation of statements by the observers about the elections. He noted that there are always pressures to issue a consensus statement and avoid terms such as 'free and fair'.

There is also the case of the inadequate number of observers to observe elections. This was the case in the Kenya election in 1992. Foeken and Dietz (1997) noted that only 160 international observers were deployed to over 7,000 polling stations. The breakdown showed that the Republican Institute Observer team that came with 56 members was only able to visit 2.3 percent of polling stations. Similarly, the Commonwealth Observer Group that came with 33 officials was only able to observe about 3 percent of polling stations in the 75 percent of 188 constituencies they visited. They noted that this performance was similar to other international observer groups. There is also the issue of the period spent in the country by international observers for the election. Buijtenhuijs (2002) noted that for the June 1996 election in Chad, many international observer teams arrived in N'Djamena just four days before the election and departed on the third day after the elections.

Another topical issue in international observation of elections is the language used to appraise elections by observer groups. In many cases, they okay flawed elections despite glaring irregularities. For instance, Foeken and Dietz (1997, 157) wrote on the observers' reports of the 1997 Kenyan Presidential and parliamentary elections. They noted that the European Union Observation team accepted both elections describing it as "a further step in Kenya's development towards greater democracy" despite simultaneously appraising the elections as falling short of 'normal democratic standards'. Similarly, Abbink (2002, 171) noted that during the Ethiopia election of 1995, observer teams reported many incidents in a few polling stations they visited, but this still didn't stop the United States Embassy from endorsing the election as free and fair and "an important milestone along Ethiopia's road to greater democracy". Dijk (2002) also noted that despite the multitude of incidents in the 1994 election in Malawi, Commonwealth observers declared that the elections were 'free and fair' even when votes were still being counted in several districts of the country. Similarly, Kelly (2012, 42) noted that in the period before the 1998 Cambodia election, security forces threatened, beat, and killed opposition leaders, yet, even before counting was completed, the EU and UN working under the Joint International Observation Group (JIOG), stated that "in general the polling achieved democratic standards".



Cranenburgh (2002) highlighted the areas that need improvement in election observation. He stated that election observation teams must adopt a criterion that determines free and fair assessment, expand the observation period to include the entire election cycle, adopt a better recruitment and training process, design a clear procedure for formulating statements, and ensure adherence to the code of conduct for international observers. Binsbergen and Abbink (2002) recommended what should be the ideal composition of an observer team. According to them, the team should have a gender and age balance, and it should also include at least one person who can speak the indigenous language so that the team can communicate without involving a third party.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The workings of observation missions like the European Union Observation Mission can be explained through the lenses of institutionalism. Institutionalism is an approach that seeks to explain institutions as the fulcrum of study in a political analysis. The approach seeks to show that the institution is the primary while its components like actors are secondary and they depend on the institution. According to North (1990), institutions constrain the behaviors of actors and according to Paul (1994), institutions help to coordinate the actions of different actors and also limit what actors can do and they practically determine the actions of individuals (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Friel (2017) believes that neo-institutionalism has played an important role in making academics focus attention on the role of institutions in the coordination of activities between the actors in an institution. He noted that the approach reiterates the important role of institutions in coordinating the activities of actors.

Observers who work for international groups have their conduct and action in election duty regulated by the group they represent. Even when they voice opinions on the conduct of elections, some organizations can still override it when they make their reports public. For instance, some scholars have proffered answers to the question of why some observation groups publish statements that are materially different from what happened in the election. Kelly (2017, 59) believes that it is due to what she tagged as biases. According to her, there are four such biases: The first one is subtlety bias which represents the assumption that observation groups are likely to accept elections that have minor irregularities. The second bias is special relationship bias, which she reckons, comes as a result of particularly "strong political pressure to be lenient toward countries with which they or their sponsors have a special relationship". She also mentioned progress bias, which comes when observers approve an election that falls short of the standard to encourage consolidation of the democratic process, and the fourth bias is stability bias, which is when the observation group endorses elections which they reckon, if they do otherwise, will lead to instability in a country.

In the case of the European Union Observation Mission, even though it had a history of using progress bias, as seen in its report on the Kenyan Presidential election of 1997 (Foeken & Dietz, 1997), the EU is not known to influence the report of its Missions to suit its narrative, but it can easily disclaim the report of its Observation Missions. It usually puts a disclaimer on every report of its Mission. For instance, in the Mission's report on the 2023 Nigerian general election, the European Union stated that "The Election Observation Missions are independent from the institutions of the European Union. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of



the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy and position of the European Union" (European Union, 2023: 2). This is despite the fact the Mission is practically an arm of the EU in its set-up and operation. The EU funds the Mission, recruits its personnel, and lays down its rules and regulations. At the express invitation of the host countries, EU election observation architecture is deployed through its full-fledged Election Observation Missions (EOMs), Election Experts Missions (EEMs), and Election Follow-up Missions (EFMs). The EU Election Observation Missions “ provides a comprehensive, independent and impartial assessment of an electoral process according to international and regional standards for democratic elections”, EU Election Experts Missions (EEMs) is a technical unit that works covertly without involving in comprehensive observation. They check election conduct to see if they meet international, regional, and national obligations on election conduct and EU Election Follow-up Missions (EFMs) follow up on the recommendation made by EOMs in every observation mission. The EU Election Observation Mission is usually led by The Chief Observer and the team comprises its core team which consists of a Deputy Chief Observer and other electoral experts, along with short-term and long-term observers (European Union, 2023, 3).

ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION OBSERVATION MISSIONS FOR THE NIGERIAN 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

One of the Observation Missions that appeared to give a relatively comprehensive and objective report about what transpired in the Nigerian general elections of 2019 and 2023 is the European Union Observation Mission. For the 2019 general election, the European Union Election Observation Mission arrived in Nigeria on January 5, 2019, with fifty-one observers and left on April 7, 2019. The mission had a mandate to “observe all aspects of the electoral process and assess the extent to which the elections complied with regional and international commitments for elections, as well as with national legislation” (European Union, 2019, 8). The mission deployed observers on March 9 and March 23, 2019, for Federal elections and States elections respectively. The Mission also observed supplementary elections on 23 March. The mission deployed 11 experts and 40 long-term observers to all six geopolitical zones and Abuja.

For the 2023 general election, based on an invitation from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Mission’s delegates arrived on January 11, 2023 Nigeria and left on April 11, 2023. The Mission had the same mandate as that of 2019. The mission observed the Presidential, Senate and House of Representative elections that were held on February 25 and also observed the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections that were held on March 18, 2023. For the Presidential and National Assembly elections, the European Union EOM had 11 analysts and 40 long-term observers on the ground for the general election. In addition, it had 54 indigenous observers and 25 observers from EU member states, totaling 110 observers. For the Governorship and House of Assemblies election, an additional 16 indigenous short-term observers were recruited, totaling 63 observers.

The Mission’s 2019 report noted some notable pre-election political events in the country that it believed undermined the electoral process. Most importantly, the reports questioned the



suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria in the campaign period, just three weeks before the elections. According to the Mission, “the suspension did not follow due process, was divisive, and to some extent undermined confidence in the electoral process and opportunity for remedy” (EU, 2019, 45). In its 2023 report, the Mission noted that the campaign was hampered by several issues. One of the issues was how the political office holder used the incumbency factor to frustrate opposition from the campaign thereby not allowing a level playing field. The report noted how several Governors denied their political opponents from using public-owned venues like stadiums and schools to campaign. It noted that some Governors that permitted the use of public venues imposed high levies on the usage of those venues, while there are cases of sealing of campaign offices of political opponents.

In both reports, the EU EOM reported several similar issues in both elections. The reports stated the incidence of violence before, during and after the elections. In 2019, the Mission reported that around 150 deaths were recorded before and during the election. For the 2023 elections, the Mission noted 101 violent incidents during the campaign alone, with at least 74 fatalities. On the days of voting in both general elections, the Mission reported in its 2019 report that many Nigerians were prevented from voting by civilians who were carrying weapons. However, this particular incidence was more pronounced in the 2023 election. The 2023 report highlights voters’ intimidation and interruption of voting by political thugs.

Both reports noted the use of technology in the elections. The 2019 reports noted that Card reader was used in the 2019 election and the 2023 report highlighted the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV). However, in its 2019 report, the Mission stated that there were incidences of non-transparency in the use of smart card readers for accreditation in several polling units in the 2019 general election, and in its 2023 report, it noted that despite the deployment of IREV and BVAS, there were “severely delayed display of presidential result forms” that dampened the confidence of the electorates in the electoral process (EU, 2023, 6). The 2019 and 2023 EU EOM’s reports show that there were a staggering number of pre-election and post-election cases instituted by candidates in those elections. In the 2019 election, the Mission reported that there were at least 644 pre-election cases and 766 post-election petitions and in its 2023 report, the pre-election court cases alone were at least 1200 cases. Both reports also detailed the ordeal of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the two general elections. The 2019 reports highlight how INEC failed to provide information on the actual number of registered voters in IDPS camps and how IDPs in Borno State camps, who were more than 650,000, were manipulated to vote for a particular party. In the 2023 report, the Mission detailed how several IDPs were disenfranchised as many of them could not collect their Permanent Voters Card (PVC), especially in Benue State and many that collected their PVCs could not locate their polling units where they were supposed to cast their votes.

The reports also detailed how electoral offenders continue to evade justice in Nigeria. The 2019 report stated that electoral offenses were widespread but the number of electoral offenders arrested was low in comparison to the number of electoral offenses committed. The 2023 reports highlighted a higher number of arrests of electoral offenders, but the report suggested that the offenses were not being diligently prosecuted at the time the report was being collated.



Both reports also detailed collation issues which is arguably one of the greatest issues militating against free and fair electoral process in Nigeria. In the 2019 report, the Mission detailed how its observers witnessed incidents of intimidation of INEC officials during the collation process in 20 States. In some cases, the report stated that INEC officials were abducted and sexually assaulted. In the 2023 report, the Missions claimed that the process of collation was disorganized, tense and chaotic. The report stated that there was a lack of transparency in the collation process and noted that INEC failed to state the calculation process he adopted to arrive at the winners of the Presidential and National Assembly members. The report also noted that INEC did not ensure that the original results sheets were the same as the results sheet uploaded on the IREV. This was one of the serious infractions of the Presidential elections. The River State Presidential election result, for instance, showed that Peter Obi of the Labour Party won the election in the State based on the results displayed on the IREV but INEC declared Bola Tinubu of All Progressive Congress as the winner in the State (Addeh, 2023).

The two reports also focused on the procedure of cancellation of votes in the two general elections. The 2019 report showed a lack of accountability in the process of cancellation of votes as it appeared that INEC was just taking this important decision at whims. Similarly, in its 2023 report, the Mission noted that INEC canceled the result of many polling units, where it claimed that voting disruption happened and it also said that its observers witnessed eight cases where the collation officer did not note the canceled polling unit and five cases where the required forms for cancellation were not completed.

Both reports also noted the role played by the traditional media and social media in the two general elections. The 2019 report shows how social media was used positively and negatively. The reports noted that it was through social media that a video of INEC officials who were being threatened during the collation process was broadcast. The Mission also noted that social media influencers were used by major political parties in their campaign or to attack opponents. The reports stated that social media was also used to promote ethnic attacks. The 2023 report also showed that social media was used both positively and negatively in the 2023 general elections by all the major candidates. However, the report claimed that Peter Obi, the candidate of the Labour Party has the largest supporters on social media and the candidate himself was very active on social media, mostly on X (formerly Twitter). The reports claimed that the social media campaign witnessed a lot of derogatory terms and harmful content that were directed at political opponents and that ethnic or religious sentiments were deployed in online attacks and some of the actors indicted for harmful content included a former and a serving Federal Minister and top officials of the campaign team of the ruling party.

Both reports detailed incidences of vote buying that were witnessed by EU EOM observers. The 2019 report noted several incidences of vote buying in places like Sokoto, Borno and Kano. In particular, it mentioned institutional vote buying, like the TraderMoni scheme that was introduced in 2018 in the mode of interest-free loans to traders, but in reality, it was a form of vote buying. The report stated that EFCC investigated some cases of vote buying on election days, but there was no information on the results of the investigation. In its 2023 report, the Mission claimed its observers witnessed several incidences of vote buying in several states including Sokoto, Kano, and Akwa Ibom and that incidences of vote buying increased compared to that of the 2019 general



election. The report also noted that vote buying was also procured through the purchase of permanent voter's cards. This is despite the measures taken to curb vote buying, including systematic folding of ballot paper and the ban on mobile phones in the polling units.

In all, the 2019 EU EOM reports had thirty recommendations on various issues that the EU EOM observers witnessed during the 2019 general election and for the 2023 general election the Mission suggested twenty-three recommendations. The recommendations were directed at institutions such as INEC, the National Assembly, the Judiciary and the Presidency.

COMMENT ON SELECTED OBSERVATION MISSIONS IN THE NIGERIAN 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

In both general elections under review, the EU EOM reports did not follow the progress bias of Kelly (2017) compared to that of some Observation Missions of international organizations that Nigeria belongs to like the Commonwealth and the African Union. For the 2019 general election, the Commonwealth Observer group's report on the Nigerian 1999 general election can be classified under Kelly's "progress bias". According to Kelly (2017), progress bias is when an observer approves an election that falls short of the standard to encourage consolidation of the democratic process. It appears that the Commonwealth believed that by being mild in its assessment, it was helping Nigeria to consolidate its democracy, even though its observers witnessed glaring flaws in the elections. Major issues that happened in the elections were barely mentioned. In the final report released by the observer group that was led by Jakaya Kikwete, the Mission concluded that "the voting, closing, and counting processes at polling units were transparent, and offered Nigerians, for the most part, the opportunity to express their will and exercise their franchise" (Commonwealth, 2019: 1). The African Union Election Observation Mission also followed the "progress bias" of Kelly (2017), despite claiming that its observers witnessed "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", the Mission went ahead to endorse the elections, claiming that "the elections took place within an open political environment and were generally peaceful" and that the elections "largely satisfy AU and international standards for democratic elections" (African Union, 2019: 1). Also, the ECOWAS Observation Mission report for 2019 claimed that the election was largely peaceful despite acknowledging some incidents that "led to violence and deaths, wide range disenfranchisement, result in inflation and malfunctioning of election accreditation devices" (This Day, 2019: 1).

Similarly, the 2023 observation missions of the African Union, Commonwealth and ECOWAS followed similar patterns in their 2019 reports. The African Union Observation Mission report for the 2023 general election stated that the electoral environment was generally peaceful despite isolated incidents of violence, but still commends the country for its continuous commitment to consolidating its democratic governance (African Union, 2023). Also, the Commonwealth Observation Mission to Nigeria's 2023 general elections claimed that the 2023 general elections "were largely peaceful despite administrative and logistical hurdles at many polling units" (Commonwealth, 2023: 1). While the preliminary report of ECOWAS centered on urging the



losers to accept the outcome of the elections. Little attention was placed on the litany of issues like disenfranchisement, killings and vote buying that were recorded in the elections (Okafor, 2023).

CONCLUSION

EU EOM reports of 2019 and 2023 showed that despite the introduction of technology in the Nigerian electoral process, little progress has been made. Several issues that have bedeviled the Nigerian electoral process since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999 are still present. The political class is still as desperate and vicious as ever. Nigerians are still being killed because of an election. The political class continues to take advantage of vulnerable, poverty-stricken Nigerians by paying them peanuts to buy their votes. Disenfranchisement of eligible voters in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps continued unabated in the two election cycles. In all, the reports that Nigerian democracy has been in motion without movement.

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