



SECURING ELECTION PROCESSES: INTERROGATING THE ROLE OF SECURITY AGENTS IN NIGERIA'S ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Election is a democratic mechanism that measures and reflects the political will of the people. Ideally, the election ought to be a peaceful process of leadership recruitment and succession. However, given the nature of the Nigerian state and the character of its politics, elections in the country often result in violence. The violence takes different forms and is mostly targeted at stakeholders like members of the opposition, election officials, electoral materials, and public and private infrastructures. Worse still, the electoral violence compromises the integrity and credibility of the outcome of electoral contests. Considering this, the study examines the role of security agents in protecting Nigeria's electoral processes. The study explains security as the state of being protected from harm. To this end, it treats electoral security as keeping electoral processes safe and protected from harm. It argues that security agents play vital roles in safeguarding electoral officers and critical stakeholders as well as sensitive and non-sensitive electoral materials. It further notes that security agents maintain the sanctity of elections by ensuring adequate security throughout the electoral cycle: pre-election, Election Day, and post-election phases. Given this, the study recommends that security agents who are deployed on election duties should be trained and retrained as the needs arise. They should also receive lectures on democratic culture, civilian policing, and electoral ethics.*

KEYWORDS: Election, Electoral Integrity, Security, Security agents, and Violence.



INTRODUCTION

Election is a fundamental aspect of representative democracy. In its modern sense, democracy as government of the people, by the people, and for the people, is impracticable in the absence of a competitive election, which is the mechanism the people use to elect those that represent them in government. To this end, the people possess the power to hire and fire which is a desideratum for political accountability and responsiveness. It not only enhances political participation but also enables the people to exercise control over their leader.

However, for an election to fulfil this democratic requirement, it must be free, fair, and credible. This implies that voters should not be encumbered in their choice of candidate. They should be at liberty to independently choose among competing candidates, the person whose manifesto and campaign promises align with their interests. In the same vein, all candidates competing in an election should be given equal opportunity, and level playing ground to canvass for vote. It is for this reason that Article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights observes:

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives... The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Contrary to these noble philosophical democratic precepts, experience has shown that voters in Nigeria are harassed and intimidated into voting for candidates who do not represent their interests. Candidates contesting elective positions are molested, threatened, and compelled to withdraw from the race, while the unfortunate ones are assassinated. Campaign grounds, political meetings, party offices, and so on, were often invaded. The effect of these acts of violence is that they compromise the integrity of the electoral process. Worse still, it replaces the indeterminacy of democratic electoral contests with a pre-determined result that vitiates the popular sovereignty of the people. Besides, electoral violence undermines the people's confidence that the outcome of an electoral contest will be a true representation of their choice, and as such generates a legitimacy crisis for the government that is formed based on such an election. In emerging democracies, where election-induced violence is more of a norm than an anomaly, the idea of an impending election creates fear in the minds of citizens. This is because elections at such places can be described as the empowerment of violence. Under these conditions, an electoral contest assumes a zero-sum character. One in which every actor deploys whatever tactics, and weapons at their disposal to ensure that it comes out victorious. This primitive practice of vote accumulation rules out the politics of moderation and replaces it with the politics of desperation. The desperation is what that compels politicians, and their political parties to engage thugs, cult groups, militants, and so on to attack and decimate the political structures of opposition parties.

Indeed, a striking feature of Nigeria's political history is that the demise of all its previous attempts at democratic experimentation was attributed to election-related crises. Presently, almost all general elections conducted in Nigeria's fourth republic namely: 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 have witnessed various incidences of violence that resulted in death, injuries, instability, population displacement, assassinations, destruction of properties and electoral materials and so on. For instance, while 109 election-related deaths were recorded



before the 2023 general elections, another 28 deaths were recorded during the general election from an estimated 238 recorded incidents of election-related violence across the country.

With this, comes the need for the electoral process to be secured to preserve its democratic value. Based on this, security agents are deployed on election duties with the mandate to protect the lives and properties of all stakeholders, election officials, electoral materials, and the entire society from harm. Securing elections is not only essential to the functioning of democracy but also to its development, deepening, and consolidation (INEC, 2020a).

The objective of this study, therefore, is to highlight the roles of security agents in securing electoral processes in Nigeria. It seeks to provide answers to two interrelated questions: does the involvement of security agents ensure secured elections? And how does a secure electoral process enhance electoral integrity?

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The basic terms used in this study require brief conceptual clarifications. To this end, we will begin by understanding what is meant by election and elections security. Reynolds *et al* (2005) defined an election as an act of choosing or selecting candidates who will represent the people of a country in a parliament and other positions in the government. For this process to serve its purposes, it should be conducted under an atmosphere in which the people are not coerced in their choice of candidates, parties, and programmes. This means that for an election to serve as an instrument that measures the democratic credentials of a country, the electoral process must be described as free and fair to all stakeholders involved. Free election, according to Teckle (1997), consists of voter's ability to express their choice of party or candidate without interference in the form of threat, intimidation, or other influence. Election is fair when the contesting parties and candidates are given equal treatment, and opportunities to compete and seek for votes, without discrimination and undue hindrances. An election is said to be free and fair when the following conditions are met:

- a. The election is administered impartially, and there are opportunities for complaints about the process to be lodged and dealt with in an even-handed and transparent way.
- b. People qualified to vote, and only people so qualified can do so.
- c. People can vote in an open and neutral political environment in which contending views can be safely expressed in an election campaign.
- d. Votes are not bought and sold.
- e. Voters can cast a secret ballot without fear of any adverse consequences.
- f. Everyone votes only once.
- g. Voters understand the nature and significance of the act of voting.
- h. Votes are counted and tabulated accurately, without any fraudulent interference.

Accordingly, democratic elections provide avenues for:



- i. consolidating a transition from conflict to peace;
- ii. empowering citizens by enabling them to exercise a peaceful democratic choice (rather than change achieved through revolution or violence in a non-democratic context);
- iii. conferring power and legitimacy on elected institutions, regimes, political parties, leaders and representatives;
- iv. enforcing the accountability of those who have occupied positions of power;
- v. identifying members of a representative body or legislature;
- vi. indicating the extent of public support for various political players, often as a prelude to elite-level negotiations on government formation;
- vii. providing a focal point for the periodic contestation of political ideas, and for activism in support of social change; and
- viii. building a sense of civic ritual, especially by exemplifying mechanisms for peaceful political action and change.

One of the necessary conditions for a stable functional society is security. Without it, it is difficult for society to plan, execute, and sustain goals achieved over time. The absence of security deters individuals and corporate bodies from investing their time, money, and other resources in a venture they cannot ascertain its outcome. People take risks and pursue goals because they have confidence that the benefit outweighs the risk. Based on this, security is mostly seen as freedom from fear, want, danger, and threat. However, security is not just the absence of physical threats or armed conflict; it is an environment where individuals can freely exercise their rights. It requires access to education and health care, democracy and human rights, and economic development. It is a state where citizens' rights are enforced, and citizens are treated fairly by state institutions (Bastick & Tobie, 2013). It is for this fact, that the meaning of the concept of security has now shifted from its state-centric notion to a broader notion of human security that has man at its centre. The dimensions of human security include health security, food security, economic security, political security, personal security, community security, and environmental security. On this note, the conduct of secure and violent free polls facilitates the democratic process of electing those who will lead and represent the people. Election security, therefore, can be defined as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders, information, facilities, and events (Fischer, 2002). According to IDEA (2015), electoral security possesses two basic aspects:

1. Personal security: ensuring the physical safety, and the safety of the property, of all stakeholders in the process, including voters, candidates, political party activists and officials, members of civil society involved in campaigning and electoral officials; and
2. Ensuring the security and integrity of the electoral process, for example by taking steps to prevent interference with ballot materials, or with the polling, counting, and results compilation.



Nature and Character of Nigeria's Electoral Process

The Nigeria electoral process is characterized by violence, primitive accumulation of votes, and zero-sum affair. Election periods in the country are often marked with tension, to the point of being nasty, solitary, brutish, and human lives becoming short as was evident during the 2003 and post-2011 general elections, and so on that witnessed the loss of hundreds of human lives and destruction of properties worth hundreds of millions of naira. The violence is a function of the nature of the Nigerian post-colonial state that lacks autonomy and is at the same time an instrument of primitive wealth accumulation. While politicians in advanced societies, possess an economic base but require state power to protect and promote this economic interest and enterprise. On the other hand, politicians in most post-colonial African states do not have an economic base, hence, they need to capture the state and use it as an economic base. Based on this, the state that ordinarily should moderate, regulate, and control the political games among contending social classes and forces in the society, becomes itself an object of contestation. The struggle for state power is not meant to effectuate the public goods, rather it is sought after to enable the holder to control and preside over the sharing of state resources to the benefit of the occupant's immediate family, community, cronies, ethnic group, class, region, and religion to the detriment of the rest of the country. With this, politicians and their supporters are willing to do anything to capture the state power. Under this condition, election supposed to be the peaceful means of political recruitment, leadership change, and mediation of class interest and conflict becomes a do-or-die affair.

Accordingly, the history of elections in Nigeria is the history of electoral violence (Okoye, 2008, 2012, 2018). The Nigerian electoral landscape as evidenced in the 1959, 1964/5, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 as well as other off-cycle elections and bye-elections have persistently marred by violence. These elections have witnessed political assassination, voter intimidation, inter and intra-party clashes, ethnic schisms, brigandage, brinkmanship, political thuggery, and wanton destruction of lives and property. This compelled (Aduba, 2014; Okoye, 2012, 2018; Nweke, 2004; Ake, 2001; Yaqub, 1999; Adekanye, 1989; Nnoli, 1984, 1987) to equate elections in Nigeria to warfare. Although, politics has been described as war without bloodshed, however, Nigeria's electoral contests have always witnessed bloodshed. As earlier stated, the lack of economic base by Nigerian politicians replaces politics of moderation, with politics of desperation. In their desperation to capture state power at all costs, politicians arm political thugs to victimise and molest their rivals, intimidate opposition to withdraw from the contest, and use violence to suppress votes in the stronghold of their main opposition. This contravenes the provision of Section 93(1) of the 2022 Electoral Act that prevents any political party, candidate, aspirant, individual, or group from coercing anyone with the use of force to abstain from or vote against his or her wish.

Meanwhile, the point needs to be made that electoral violence does not exist in isolation. Rather, it is dialectically linked to the general socio-political and economic contexts in the environment where it occurs. It often feeds into the pre-existing socio-political fault lines of class, region, religion, demographic differences, identity politics, ethnicity-based politics, and so on. Relating this to Nigeria, it is observed that primitive production breeds primitive politics. And since production in Nigeria is still at the primitive level, our politicians adopt crude tactics in the pursuit of state power. This explains the basis for all electoral malfeasance that is witnessed in the nation's electoral process. It is a known fact that Primitive production produces primitive politics.



Security Agents and Security of Nigeria's Electoral Processes

The place and role of security agents in the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in Nigeria's quest for democratization cannot be underestimated. The nature of elections in Nigeria exposes the process to various security threats. As a result of the primitive character of the electoral contest in the country, therefore, becomes difficult to conduct elections in the country without security agents. Security agents in this context denote statutory bodies that can use force to prevent and mitigate all forms of electoral malpractices capable of compromising the integrity and credibility of the electoral process. The security agency that is primarily concerned with elections activities in Nigeria is the Nigeria Police Force. However, different aspects of elections necessitate the involvement of other security agencies like the Department of State Services, National Intelligence Agency, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Federal Road Safety Corps, Nigerian Prisons Service, Nigeria Army, Nigeria Navy and Nigeria Air force. Currently, there has been an expanding involvement of military personnel in election security duties in Nigeria. This notwithstanding, the Nigerian Police remains the official lead agency in election security matters in the country. These security agencies should ensure the safety of all stakeholders (voters, candidates, election officials, election observers, the media, civil society organisations, and non-governmental organisations). They also ensure that the integrity of the elections is not compromised (Electoral Hub Technical Brief, 2020), as well as the protection of sensitive election materials. In practical terms, functions performed by security agents during an election are classified into three namely: static (protection of warehouses, polling stations and offices, among others), mobile (protection of voter registration teams or campaign rally sites, among others) and reserve (contingency forces to support either static or mobile forces as required, among others) (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network).

With this, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)(2020b) in its Manual for Election Official 2020 (COVID-19 Edition) outlined the following as the electoral role of Security Agents on Election Duty:

- i. Provide security at the Polling Units/Polling Stations and Collation Centres to ensure that the Polling Units, counting of ballots, collation and declaration of results are conducted without any disturbance.
- ii. Take necessary measures to prevent violence or any activity that can threaten to disrupt the elections.
- iii. Comply with any lawful directive(s) issued by, or under the authority of INEC.
- iv. Ensure the safety and security of all Election materials, by escorting and guarding such materials as appropriate.
- v. Protect Election Officials at the Polling Stations/Units and Collation Centres, especially in the course of movement from one point to the other until the process is completed.
- vi. Arrest, on the instruction of the Presiding Officer, or any other INEC official, any person(s) causing any disturbance, or preventing the smooth conduct of proceedings at Polling Stations/Units as well as at the Collation Centres.



- vii. On the instruction of the Presiding Officer, stand at the end of the queue of voters at the Polling Unit, if any, at 2:30 p.m., to prevent any person from joining the queue.
- viii. Accompany the Presiding Officer to deliver the election results, ballot boxes and other election materials safely to the RA/Ward Collation Centre.
- ix. Accompany Collation Officers to deliver election results to the Returning Officer and, subsequently, to the Resident Electoral Commissioner, or Electoral Officer, as the case may be, for the handover of election materials and reports.

Meanwhile, INEC (2020a, p.6) under its Code of conduct and rules of engagement for security personnel on election duty highlighted the roles of security agents in elections to include:

- a. Ensuring the safety and security of all persons and properties that will be involved, before, during and after the voting exercise without bias;
- b. Strict enforcement of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Criminal/Penal Code as well as Electoral laws; and
- c. Traffic and crowd management at venues of Political Parties' conventions/congresses, campaigns/rallies and other activities relating to the elections.

It went further to state that all deployment of security personnel for electoral activities must be guided by the provision of section 29(3) of the Electoral Act 2010 (As amended). Specifically, it argued that all officers deployed on election duty shall be guided by the Standard Operational Guidelines/Rules that seek to:

- i. Ensure efficiency and uniformity in methods with which their roles are discharged;
- ii. Prevent abuse of fundamental human rights and misuse of powers;
- iii. Mitigate criminal and administrative liabilities;
- iv. Ensure safe conduct of electoral activities; and
- v. Ensure the security and safety of all involved in electoral activities.

To build trust and enhance professionalism and efficiency, it was observed that Security personnel on election duty shall:

- a. Swear to an oath of neutrality in accordance with the Electoral Act;
- b. Be alert at all times;
- c. Be approachable to all members of the public;
- d. Exhibit a high degree of professionalism;
- e. Maintain impartiality and fairness in dealings with all parties;
- f. Ensure that they sustain ICCES primacy in securing the electoral process;



- g. Adopt a professional orientation that emphasizes democratic values and respect for human rights and dignity.
- h. Be mindful of the duty imposed upon them by law, to protect all against illegal acts and dispense their duties without discrimination based on gender, race, religion, colour, sex, creed, associations or affiliations;
- i. Be ready to receive instructions from designated INEC officials and share information with authorized members of ICCES; and
- j. Be duty-bound to render assistance to those in need of such, especially vulnerable persons (INEC, 2020a pp.12-13).

Election security challenges exist in three phases: pre-election phase, election day, and post-election phase. In the pre-election phase, threats to the electoral process manifest at the levels of intra and inter-party relations. Internally, the conduct of party congresses, conventions, political meetings and primaries had on several occasions ended in violence. On the other hand, the voter registration exercise, campaigns, rallies, manifesto speeches, and party symposiums had witnessed rival politicians and political parties engaging each other in fierce battle with dangerous weapons. Security agents are needed to prevent and curtail this election-induced violence. Considering this, Section 91(1) of the 2022 Electoral Act stipulates that:

The Commissioner of Police in each State of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, shall provide adequate security for the proper and peaceful conduct of political rallies and processions in their respective jurisdictions and, for this purpose, the Police may be supported by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and any other security agency of the Federal Government.

Moreover, Section 91(3) provides:

Notwithstanding any provision in the Police Act, the Public Order Act and any regulation made thereunder or any other law to the contrary, the role of the Nigerian Police Force and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and any other security agency of the Federal Government in political rallies, processions and meetings shall be limited to the provision of adequate security as provided in subsection (1).

Similarly, the former Inspector General of Police - Alhaji Tafa Balogun, while extolling the immutable role of security agents in the country's electoral process, argued that:

There is no disputing the fact that most of the congresses held before election time by political parties would have been disrupted by aggressive and violent party members and their supporters if not for heavy security presence on the ground (cited in Aduba, 2014).

Balogun's submission demonstrates the essential roles the security agents perform in ensuring that political party meetings, gatherings, and electoral proceedings are conducted in a violent free atmosphere. Security agents are expected to search and sweep venues of political campaigns and rallies, voting, and so on, for small arms and explosive devices before the event commences. They set up mechanisms for traffic management by identifying entry and exit, as well as car parks, etc. This phase especially the voter registration is very sacrosanct to the conduct of credible elections. Hence, security agents are to adequately guard the venue, election officials and materials that are engaged for the purpose. Indeed:



Section 1 (2)(3) of the Public Order Act, of 1979, requires politicians to seek Police permission before holding rallies and campaigns. When such permission is granted, the campaign is to be restricted to pre-defined routes. Section 2 of the Act further empowers a police officer of the rank of Inspector or above to stop any rally, meeting or procession for which no permit had been issued or which violates any condition of the permission issued under section 1 of the Act.

The Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS) is expected to ensure that foreigners do not infiltrate the voter registration process. The Customs Services is to ensure that both the land, air, and water borders of the country are not used to smuggle and proliferate weapons for purposes of electoral violence. Security agencies, also carry out confidential security checks and report on each of the (potential) candidates vying for elective positions to ensure that people with criminal records are not elected to positions of trust.

On election day, security agents play the most vital roles in the electoral process. In this regard, they secure the transportation of election officials, the movement of people, and the distribution of electoral materials to polling units. They monitor and ensure that polling units are safe and secure for electoral officers to discharge functions as well as for voters to cast their vote without fear, intimidation, molestation, and victimization. Following the legislation governing elections in the country, they prevent voter inducement, vote buying, and all forms of electoral misconduct at the polling units. Security agents, escort election observers to various polling units on election day. After voting, they safeguard the counting of votes at the polling units. And escort the Presiding Officer and the result to the Collation Centre. After, they escort officials who take the results to the headquarters. To this end, the benefits of having adequate security agents during elections far outweigh its inadequacy, as their absence possesses the capacity to compromise the entire electioneering process. Accordingly, the Electoral Hub Technical Brief, (2020, p.2) argued that:

Some of the ways in which inadequate security might undermine elections include the following: voters might be beaten or intimidated into voting for a particular candidate; election officials might be beaten or intimidated into skewing the election results in favour of a particular candidate; ballot boxes might be snatched from election officials and stuffed with fake votes; and election observers might be beaten or intimidated into giving inaccurate reports of the election. Indeed, if voters are uncertain about the security situation at polling centres, they might be unwilling to come out and vote, and a low voter turnout will affect the legitimacy of an election. Clearly, it is impossible to have free and fair elections without adequate security. Security agencies are therefore highly crucial in ensuring the integrity and credibility of elections in Nigeria.

The sacrosanct nature of the electoral process, starting from the registration of voters to the announcement of results and declaration of winners, to the democratic project, accounts for the reasons Section 27(2) para.3 of the 2022 Electoral Act grants INEC the power to request and deploy security personnel throughout during the process when it held:

Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law and for the purpose of securing the vote, the Commission shall be responsible for requesting for the deployment of relevant security personnel necessary for elections or registration of voters and shall assign them in the manner determined by the Commission in consultation with the relevant security agencies: Provided that the Commission shall only request for the deployment of the Nigerian Armed Forces for



the purpose of securing the distribution and delivery of election materials and protection of election officials.

In the post-election phase, where there are high chances of post-election-related violence from parties, candidates, and their supporters that do not accept the outcome of an election, as witnessed in the post-2011 Presidential election in some northern states. Security agents are expected to maintain law and order during this period. Through this, they guarantee peace and security by preventing violence or subversive activities (Arowolo, 2019). Also, when aggrieved parties and candidates petition the judiciary (Election Tribunal) regarding their displeasure over the conduct or outcome of an election; security agents as stakeholders in the process assist the tribunal in quick determination of the case. Besides, they are to protect members of the tribunal, and court premises, ensure crowd control, and prevent unruly behaviour from supporters of various candidates and parties that gather to observe the judicial proceedings. As part of the nation's criminal justice system, the Police also arrest, detain, and prosecute individuals and groups indicted for electoral malpractices, violence, and misconduct. With this, they assist in enhancing the credibility of the country's electoral process.

Moreover, the outbreak COVID-19 pandemic presented a special security threat to the conduct of elections in the country. On this note, it was expected that:

- i. If a security personnel on duty observes a voter or any other person at an election location be in breach of the INEC Policy on the Conduct of Election in the Context of the COVID-19 pandemic, he/she shall politely caution the person. If the breach persists or threatens the good conduct of activities, he/she shall call the attention of the presiding officer or any other designated INEC official, who may authorise the removal or arrest of the person.
- ii. In enforcing the provisions of the INEC Policy on the Conduct of Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 pandemic, security personnel shall at all times be professional, humane, polite, even-handed, and non-partisan (INEC, 2020a, pp.13-4).

Adequate security during an election deepens the voter's and contestant's trust in the electoral process. It entrenches the belief that the outcome of the process will be a true representation of the voter's choice. As it assures all that no one is coerced in his/her choice of candidate. This suggests that security is a *sin qua non* for credible elections, especially in emerging democracies.

Challenges in Securing the Nigerian Electoral Process

The capacity of Nigerian security agents to successfully police the nation's electoral process is being hampered by several pathologies. The Nigerian security agencies especially the Police, which is the lead agency in internal security and election security matters have a low public image within the society. The public sees police personnel as corrupt, abusive, extortionate, brutal, and anti-people. All these result in a lack of public trust in the institution. This makes it difficult for the police to work with a population that views it as suspect. The presence of security agents in communities and polling units during elections rather than creating a sense of security; triggers anxiety, and fear among voters who feel intimidated by the presence of these security operatives. This results in massive voter apathy as voters are scared of coming out to vote. Security agents especially the military are not trained for civil duties rather they are trained as combative forces that counter attacks from enemies of the state. Security agents



deployed on election duties have been repeatedly accused of being highhanded, and unprofessional.

The remuneration and funding of our security agencies are naturally poor. This creates room for them to engage in criminal acts of accepting bribes from corrupt politicians to subvert the very process they are deployed to secure. There have been a series of allegations by various election observer missions that accused security agents of conniving and colluding with politicians to hijack, steal, or stuff the ballot boxes with pre-thumb printed ballot paper. Having been compromised, security agents look the other way while voter inducement, intimidation, suppression, vote buying, electoral violence, and malpractices take place in broad daylight at polling units. Community members and voters have also alleged that security agents aid and abet some of these electoral crimes.

Worse still, even with the best of intentions and capacity, our security agencies especially the police institution are grossly understaffed. There is a serious problem of shortage of personnel in our security sector. The situation makes it difficult to adequately police the over 176,974 polling units in the country. There is the problem of low interagency collaboration. Experience has shown that various security agencies that deploy personnel for electoral duties plan, formulate, and implement their logistics and code of conduct independently of others. The practice often results in duplication of effort and functions. It also led to the waste of time and resources, and underutilization of personnel as well as function overlap. With this, it becomes difficult for different security agencies concerned with securing stakeholders and materials involved in election duty to share information. On several occasions, this has deprived agencies of vital information, intelligence, and security tips needed to successfully tackle threats or even preempt and prevent the eruption of violence at different phases of the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made several findings. Based on this, it therefore makes the following recommendations:

- a. Security agents who are deployed on election duties should be given timely training and retraining on electoral issues. They are to be given quality civic and political education. This is to reorient their mindset from conventional security duty (especially where military personnel are involved) to the civic duty of securing electoral officials, stakeholders, voters, and electoral material from harm and hoodlums.
- b. Election budgeting should be explicit in terms of security funding. For security agents to deliver on their electoral security mandate, they should be well-funded and equipped. Experience has demonstrated that funding is one of the fundamental problems when it comes to electoral policing. Hence, a mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure that these officers are well-remunerated and compensated. This will prevent them from accepting bribes, and material inducements that compromise electoral security operations. For instance, in the November 16, 2021, Anambra State gubernatorial election, the basic reason given by security agencies for not deploying their men to the various polling units on time was the lack of operational vehicles needed to transport them to their duty posts.



- c. Given the low public image of security personnel within the society, it is advisable for the security agents that will be deployed on duties to be given critical lectures to be delivered by seasoned political scientists on democratic culture and election ethics. With emphasis on the things that are expected of them in each phase of the electioneering process. This is to strengthen their professionalism and strictness but fair in discharging their functions. Moreover, security agents who participate in the election duty must be approachable, impartial, neutral, and nonpartisan. They should not be seen as an agent of any of the competing parties and candidates. They must in all matters act independent of the competing forces.
- d. It is not just enough to deploy security agents to secure various aspects of the electoral process. In doing this, measures should be taken to ensure that adequate numbers of security agents are deployed to various polling units and strategic locations. To adequately police the electoral process, security agents should be deployed based on objective factors like voting population, number of polling units in an area, level of risk factors, and so on, rather than on subjective grounds like pecuniary consideration, symbolic purposes, etc.
- e. INEC should leverage the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS) to enhance and perfect inter-agency collaboration among the various security agencies it engages for election security. This will limit the problem of wastage of human and material resources, in addition to duplication and overlapping of functions that at times generate unhealthy competition among security agents and their agencies. It will also facilitate the sharing of vital security intelligence that will benefit all.
- f. Given, the constant public outcry regarding corrupt practices among security personnel who are deployed on election duties, there is a need for the adoption of a disciplinary matrix within our security agencies. It is one of the best practices that enhance accountability in the security sector. As a formal schedule for disciplinary action, it outlines presumptive actions against any case of misconduct and any adjustment based on the officer's previous disciplinary measures.
- g. There should be a timely multi-stakeholder review of election security after every election. This will enable the state, civil society, and INEC to understand the nuances and nuisance in election security management. Lessons learned and gaps identified through this process will assist the INEC in future election security planning.

CONCLUSION

The conduct of free, fair, and credible elections is the hallmark of liberal democratic culture. Because secured polls enhance the integrity and credibility of an electoral contest. It is exigent for elections to be protected from threats that can compromise the integrity of the outcome of electoral contest. To this end, the study examined the role of security agents in securing Nigeria's electoral process. It noted that the nature and character of the post-colonial Nigerian state and its politics that manifest most trappings of the Hobbesian state of nature. This made it incumbent for security agencies to be involved in election management to ensure the safety of critical stakeholders, and electoral materials. It observed that several challenges such as low public image, use of the military in electoral duties, low funding, inadequate personnel,



corruption, and so on undermine the capacity of security agencies to adequately secure elections in the country.

The study argued that the roles of security agents in the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in the country are immutable and can never be understated. Although, many a security agent and agencies have been accused of conniving with desperate politicians and political parties to sabotage and subvert the very process they were mandated to protect; security agents still play vital roles in maintaining the credibility and integrity of the country's electoral processes.

Finally, security is a necessary condition for any society that desires free, fair, and credible elections. On this note, security agents perform fundamental roles as they prevent, intimidation of voters and election officials throughout the pre-election, election-day, and post-electoral period.

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