

SECURITY INSTITUTIONS AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE DURING THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: The sole responsibility of the security institution in Nigeria is to provide internal and external protection for the citizens and the state. This constitutes protection during and after the election, as well as the handling of election materials in a democratic setting. Based on the importance, the government has continued to mobilize a large number of security operatives for the election to reduce the number of electoral-related violence, such as snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation, loss of lives, and properties. This study investigates the role of Nigerian security institutions in managing electoral violence during the 2023 general elections. The study employed a qualitative approach, which relied extensively on secondary sources of data collection. The data collected was analyzed using content analysis. The study is anchored on systems theory as a theoretical framework for analysis. The study revealed that there were political landscapes that posed a security threat to the 2023 election in Nigeria. Findings indicate persistent violence despite extensive security deployments, thereby underscoring the need for institutional neutrality and systemic reforms. Therefore, the study concludes and recommends that the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Police maintain impartiality during elections to uphold their integrity. The government should lower the stakes of the election to create a more friendly environment during the election.

Keywords: Security Institutions, Election, Electoral Violence, Independent National Electoral Commission, Police

INTRODUCTION

The character of violence in Nigerian elections has changed significantly since the country's return to democratic governance. In the nation's political landscape, electoral violence has evolved, modernized, and become institutionalized. Election violence permeated both the pre-election campaign and the days leading up to and following the election. Election-related issues often begin with the selection of candidates by different political parties and spread to the public's discontent with the electoral umpire's preparation and announcement of election results. The fierce rivalry amongst Nigeria's political elites for control of the state's resources and power is the foundation of electoral violence in the country. In post-colonial states, governmental authority was a valuable resource, and individuals with access to it could influence citizens' life prospects. The politicians

capitalized on this to employ forces in clichés political positions in Nigeria. Elections serve as a tool to recruit people for political posts rather than a means to an end. It serves as a vehicle for people to occupy political spaces inside the state.

Based on Nigeria's historical background, political disputes, particularly those related to electoral malpractice, typically escalate into a catastrophic national disaster. Intimidation, vandalism, kidnapping, character slander, and political assassination are only a few examples of the physical, psychological, and structural violence that is increasingly being committed against citizens and political opponents (Ojo & Ademowo, 2015). In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has conducted six general elections marked by electoral violence in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019. Political candidates and the ruling party frequently incite electoral violence in an attempt to maintain their hold on power and accumulate substantial wealth. In Nigeria, the election season turns into a battlefield for political thugs from all political persuasions, making it challenging to hold elections peacefully.

Due to this trajectory, the military and other state security forces have been deployed more frequently and are now a crucial component of the election logistics process (Ayandele, Adekaiyaoja & Angalapu, 2023). In the past elections, there were significant numbers of security guards at the INEC office and other polling places to ensure the safety of electoral materials. The necessity of holding free and honest elections is the foundation for the deployment of security forces, as it is essential to Nigeria's democratic survival (Afolabi, 2018). When all parties involved in the organisation of elections are impartial and neutral while doing their designated tasks and responsibilities, the results of elections are seen as undisputable and transparent.

Given the challenging socio-economic circumstances that the nation has been experiencing, the 2023 election differed from Nigeria's past elections due to the high level of political awareness and political sensitization. The 2020 #EndSARS demonstration demonstrated the political awareness of Nigerian youths regarding the state machinery. The victory established the groundwork and served as a focal point for petitioning for reforms in government and bad governance. Only through elections can a democratic government be changed. Nigerian youth were unwilling to tolerate electoral irregularities since they constituted a negation of effective administration. The Electoral Umpire was concerned about Nigeria's political unpredictability, particularly among the country's youth, during the 2023 general election. To ensure the protection of people's rights, particularly the right to vote and be voted for, the Nigerian Electoral Commission had to guarantee that elections were conducted freely and fairly. This can only be accomplished by the security forces working together to ensure peace and security during the general election.

Based on this premise, the paper aims to determine whether security challenges triggered electoral violence during the 2023 general election. Additionally, to determine whether the presence of security operatives ensures free and fair elections during the 2023 general elections.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's democratic institutions face unprecedented challenges that threaten the political landscape and their very survival. Since the return of democracy, Nigerian elections have been

significantly reliant on heavy security deployment to ensure a transparent election devoid of electoral irregularities. It has been confirmed that a significant number of security operatives were mobilized to maintain relative peace in most states during the recent elections in Nigeria. One remarkable aspect of the 1999, 2003, 2011, and 2015 general elections in Nigeria was that the exact number of security operatives deployed was officially unspecified. A significant security presence, however, is confirmed by the available evidence, which reflects the high level of anxiety regarding election violence (Adekeye & Chima, 2022; International Republican Institute Report, 2003; Carter Center & National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1999). The public was formally informed in 2019 of the trajectory shift and the precise number of security personnel assigned to the general. In preparation for the 2019 presidential election, almost 300,000 police officers were deployed nationally during the 2019 general elections (Adekeye & Chima, 2022; Ojoye, 2019; Abdussobur & Yagboyaju, 2019).

Despite the large number of security operatives deployed in previous elections, electoral violence continued to threaten the electoral processes in Nigeria. According to Ayuk, Okongo, Obi, Ojiho, Jacob, and Everistus (2023), security agencies, particularly the Nigerian Police, play a crucial role in preventing electoral violence. They argue that, despite the constitutional authority of the Police, electoral fraud is deeply ingrained in the bloodstream of politicians, posing a threat to the nation's socio-economic well-being. Yusuf and Saminu (2023) stated that electoral violence and insecurity undermine the credibility of elections, in which politicians often resort to violence as a means to advance their political interests. Adenekan (2025) argues that the rising incidence of electoral malpractices, including vote buying and intimidation tactics, undermines the will of the people and creates confusion among the electorate.

Based on this premise, this paper examines the effectiveness of Nigerian security institutions in mitigating electoral violence during the 2023 general election, arguing that institutional presence alone is insufficient without political neutrality and systemic coherence. The study is anchored on these research questions: i) Were there security challenges that triggered electoral violence during the 2023 election in Nigeria? ii) Does the presence of security operatives ensure free and fair elections during the 2023 general election in Nigeria?

Conceptualizing Electoral Violence

Coercive, intimidating, or physically harmful acts or threats that are specifically intended to affect the electoral process are referred to as electoral violence (Rasmarie & Idrissa, 2019; Hoglund, 2009; Fischer, 2002). It can take the form of voting process delays, disturbances, vote tampering, voter suppression, or manipulation of the election outcome. According to Nwolise (2007), electoral violence refers to physical, psychological, or structural threats or acts intended to intimidate, harm, or blackmail a political stakeholder before, during, or after an election. Any act of violence during political activities is considered electoral violence, according to Igbuzor (2010).

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (2017) asserts that electoral violence is a variant of political violence; the difference lies in its objective. Electoral violence is aimed at influencing the behaviour of the voters, candidates or distorting the election results. Tactically, electoral violence is an effort to delay, prevent the vote and compilation of votes to obtain results

which do not reflect the verdict of the ballot box (UNOWAS, 2017). It is worth stating that violations of the legal framework, offensive or indecent words, murders, injury between rival supporters, intimidation of opponents, preventing voters from participating, electoral officials, ballot stuffing, and exclusion are various ways in which electoral violence is expressed.

According to Obakhedo (2011), one of Nigeria's significant challenges is electoral violence, which can occur both within and outside of parties. This has an impact on Nigeria's democratic practices, the rule of law, and the election quality (outcome) results. Foreign observers' assessments of free, fair, and transparent elections are impacted by electoral violence. In many jurisdictions, electoral violence has significantly reduced public engagement in the political process, according to Sesan (2012). It undermines the process of electing a credible candidate (Abubakar, Abdullahi, Abdul, Adam, & Obaje, 2024).

However, Nigeria has witnessed electoral violence both before and after elections, according to Ezeamama and Obani (2024). Nigeria held several election phases between 1999 and 2019 that were marred by various types of electoral violence, which resulted in fatalities and wilful property damage. Harry & Kalagbor (2021) argue that continuous electoral violence at different elections has discredited democratic governance in Nigeria. Jamaludden & Suleiman (2022) assert that electoral violence has undermined the effort to consolidate democracy in Nigeria. Electoral violence is attributed relatively to democratic erosion and public trust (Abubakar, Abdullahi, Abdul, Adama & Obaje, 2024; Harry & Kalagbor, 2021; Ibeogu & Wusulor, 2021).

Omotola (2010) attests that incessant electoral violence is connected to the neo-patrimonial character of the African state. This character is reflected in the manner of contesting for power, the monetization of elections, and the weakness of democratic institutions. Ukana (2015) posits that political elites employ violent strategies to win elections since political office is seen as a means to accumulate personal wealth. This informed the activities of the incumbent, who used state resources and institutions to manipulate the election results in their favour. Onapajo (2014) asserts that incumbents exploit state resources and security personnel to intimidate, harass, and manipulate the electoral outcome. Agidi (2022) attributed the prevalence of electoral violence in Nigeria to poverty, youth unemployment, financial inducement, and weak security architecture. Adeosun, Ismail, and Zengeni (2017) affirmed that electoral violence is pervasive in Nigeria because the elite class promotes and encourages it for their interests. Harry & Kalagbor (2021) stated that institutional weakness, socio-economic ethnic tension, resources, and political patronage are instigators of electoral violence. Nwambuko, David, and Osuafor (2024) assert that the activities of political parties and aspirants contesting for elective offices undermined human security during the elections in Nigeria. It prevents electorates from participating in elections, leading to political apathy and hindering good governance (Agidi, 2022).

Security Institutions and Electoral Governance

There is no doubt that security is essential to both the life of any nation-state and the lives of individuals. Nwolise (2009) asserts that security is the most critical aspect of a person's identity, country, or self. This is because everything else will be pointless until one can be sure of their physical security or safety. Security is the state of being content and safe from harm and danger,

as well as an environment of assured safety. Security institutions encompass security agencies and networks charged with the mandate of maintaining public safety. According to Adekeye and Chima (2022), these personnel are responsible for maintaining social order and enforcing the state's authority. Statutory entities known as security institutions were established by legislation to maintain internal security. Among Nigeria's security institutions are the following: a) The Army, Navy, and Air Forces b) National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Nigeria Police Force, State Security Services, Defense Intelligence Agency, Nigerian Intelligence Agency, Nigerian Prison Services, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps c) Para-police regulatory organizations: the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration, Nigeria Custom Services, Nigeria Immigration Service, and Federal Road Safety Corps (Ojo & Ademowo, 2015; Albert, 2007).

Security agencies play a crucial role in ensuring security before, during, and after elections, thereby preventing violence and promoting peaceful elections. In Nigeria, security agencies are responsible for providing security during the polls. Danjuma, Yahaya, and Aminu (2016) assert that agencies are expected to gather intelligence information to identify potential hotspots and troubling areas during elections. To arrest insecurity during the election, security agencies work closely with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure the safety of electoral materials. Section 91(1) of the 2022 Electoral Act, which was amended, stated that "the Commissioner of Police in each State of the federation and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja shall provide adequate security for proper and peaceful conduct of political rallies and procession in their respective jurisdiction, and for this purpose, the Civil Defence Corps may support the police". This language is understandable. Before, during, and after elections, the security agency's job is to safeguard people and election-related materials. According to this constitutional stipulation, the primary agency in charge of election security in the Nigerian State is the Police (Ese, 2019). The police are the primary law enforcement organization responsible for combating internal security concerns and preventing crime. When the threat exceeds the police's capability, other security services may be called upon (Ayuk et al., 2023).

In support of this, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria declared the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to be the country's sole law enforcement agency; nevertheless, several other groups also possess both formal and informal enforcement powers. Protecting people and property, identifying and preventing crimes, catching and prosecuting criminals, upholding law and order, enforcing rules and regulations, and performing any other duties delegated to the Nigerian Police in the areas of peacekeeping both domestically and abroad are among the statutory duties of the police, according to Section 4 of the Police Act. The Police have a crucial responsibility to ensure security during elections so that citizens can elect their leaders in a peaceful environment free from corruption, fraud, fear, coercion, intimidation, and violence.

Abdussobur and Yagboyaju (2019) assert that security agencies are a veritable institution for elections in Nigeria based on their civil disposition and integrity. Jamaludden and Suleiman (2022) and Ugwuanyi (2011) attest that security agencies have a remarkable responsibility during elections. The roles of security during elections encompass election monitoring, enforcement of law and order, protection of vital electoral material, and intervention in hotspots during elections. Ayuk et al. (2023) assert that security operative activities should align with established election

rules and regulations. Nigerian elections are governed by a number of laws and regulations, including those that forbid multiple voting, the distribution of erroneous election results, the possession of another person's voter cards, the prevention of disorderly conduct at polling places, the prohibition of stealing or damaging ballot boxes or card readers, the prohibition of public gatherings during election hours, the restriction of carrying arms or dangerous weapons at polling places, the prohibition of inflicting or threatening harm on any individual at a polling place, and others (Njoku & Nwangenah, 2024; Electoral Acts, 2022).

According to Adele (2011), election security encompasses more than only voting and other Election Day activities. Election security is a concerted effort to ensure the credibility of elections by preventing electoral governance from being distorted, violated, or manipulated. According to Jamaludden and Suleiman (2022), in order to avoid, identify, and avert anomalies in elections, security personnel tasked with election monitoring must possess a sufficient understanding of the voting process. In light of this, Eja (2021) claimed that transparent election administration and governance depend on the professionalism of security forces. According to Elechi, Nwodom, and Ohazuruike (2023), the primary duty of security agencies to uphold law and order during elections is compromised by their unprofessional conduct. In their analysis of the 2019 election, Eja (2021) argued that a competent and professional security network is essential for overseeing electoral governance.

According to Emegha (2020), security personnel should be loyal to the state and the people whose lives and property they vowed to defend, not to individuals, organizations, or authorities. The impartiality and neutrality of security agencies throughout the election process ensured democratic consolidation, with results that accurately reflect the votes cast. According to Rosenje, Adeniyi, and Peju-Rosenje (2021), ongoing political meddling prevents security personnel in Nigeria from establishing an electoral government. They continued by saying that one essential component of enthroning electoral governance is the performance of the police. The neutrality of the Police in protecting electoral materials before and after the election upholds democratic principles where people's votes count.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The paper is a qualitative research study that relies on secondary sources for data collection. This source of data encompasses journals, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and other written materials that contain information relevant to the topic under investigation. Since the data collected is not subject to statistical evaluation or measurement, content analysis becomes a veritable method for data analysis. Content analysis is a systematic examination of data collected from archives, newspapers, documents, and other sources.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Systems theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. David Easton introduced the notion in his book "The Political System" in 1953. In his subsequent book, "A Framework for Political Analysis (1965), he expanded on this strategy by developing a general theory of politics that is grounded in actual research. Through a methodical framework, he attempted to define the

types of functions and characteristics of any political system in that work. The systems approach focuses on the entire and the intricate relationships that arise from it, viewing social processes as irreducibly interconnected systems. The Nigerian social structure comprises various institutions, including political, economic, security, religious, and educational institutions.

The theory shows the interconnectedness of these institutions in ensuring equilibrium. There are components within these institutions that influence the system and are, in turn, influenced by systemic events. The security apparatus includes the Police, military, DSS, SSS, Civil defence, and other paramilitary officers; the political institution, for example, consists of the ruling party and its members; the opposition parties and their candidates for office; the electoral umpire and its staff; and, of course, the electorate. For the system to be in balance, all its components must function together; however, if political parties or other actors attempt to sabotage the election process, violence may break out, leading to electoral violence.

On the other hand, the entire election process could be derailed if the security apparatus works with the ruling party to undermine the process. This would lead to a mishandled security process that results in violence. As a result, the opposition offers alternative security measures in the run-up to elections when the ruling party disables and weakens the security structure's ability to guarantee public safety and security. Violence is so often ingrained in the minds of the elites, who rarely accept loss and are resistant to giving control of the political system to the opposing party, even after the electoral votes have determined otherwise.

In the 2023 general elections, the security institution functioned as a subsystem within the larger electoral system. The electoral system comprises the Independent National Electoral Commission, Political Parties, the Judiciary, the Media, Civil Society, and voters. Electoral violence is understood as a systemic failure in coordination, communication, and accountability across the subsystems. The systemic failure during the 2023 election is explained by a breakdown in communication between the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Police in securing electoral materials in volatile areas, which led to delays in security responses and resulted in electoral violence. It is pertinent to understand that poor security arrangements and political interference concerning biased deployment of Police to volatile areas led to electoral violence due to voters' tension. Furthermore, the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission's viewing portal (IReV) exacerbated public distrust and suspicion, leading to increased electoral violence during the 2023 election, despite the presence of security guards at polling places.

The political landscape that posed a security threat to the conduct of the 2023 Election in Nigeria

The prevailing political environment exacerbated Nigeria's political instability in the run-up to the 2023 general election. Systems theory acknowledges the influence of environmental conditions on system performance at any given time. People in Nigeria were tense about the prospect of holding a free and fair election because of the country's high degree of insecurity, economic hardship, poverty, ethnic centrism, and other issues. The following headings are used to evaluate these challenges:

Insecurity and the armed groups' crisis

There was a lot of insecurity in Nigeria prior to the 2023 elections. In the Northeast and Northwest, there was a rise in banditry and terrorist activity. In North Central and South East, there was herder-farmer conflict, ethnic tensions, and separatist agitation resulting from marginalization. In the northeast, there was a danger from Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) conducted a violent separatist insurrection in the South East, and illegal oil bunkering and piracy plagued the Niger Delta. The 2023 general election was conducted in a very high-intensity environment. This produced an atmosphere of uncertainty that caused voters and employees of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to worry about how the election would be conducted. For the 2023 election to run well, security became crucial, and the majority of ad hoc personnel had doubts about some polling stations in Nigeria.

Introduction of Modern Technologies by INEC

The 2022 Electoral Act, as revised, introduced contemporary technologies to guarantee a transparent election process in Nigeria. By using ballot paper and open secret voting, these modern technologies made it possible to vote by hand. INEC introduces various technologies at each level of the election process. The INEC Voters Enrolment mobile (IVED), an Android mobile, is utilized for ongoing voter registration during the pre-election phase (Mahmood, 2021). ii) The Automatic Biometric Identification System (ABIS), which checks voter registrations for fraudulent and duplicate enrolments (Gana, 2022).

Additionally, during the election phase, the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) was introduced. It would be used to verify voters before voting and transmit votes after the voting unit collation (Mahmood, 2022). Last but not least, the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) facility is a public online platform for viewing results submitted from voting places in real-time throughout the post-election phase (Mahmood, 2022). To guarantee seamless operations and, consequently, transparency in the Nigerian electoral process, the deployment of these technologies was a welcome step. However, the majority of the equipment in several polling places, particularly the BVAS, was broken, which caused delays in the accreditation procedure and the voting process.

Mobilization of Non-state Armed Groups

The use of armed non-state organizations by political actors to sway election results has grown. Political gladiators took advantage of the tense political climate in Nigeria during the general election of 2023 to further their political agendas. To frighten opponents and stifle opposition votes, officials in states like Borno organized organizations like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). While the Eastern Security Network (ESN) and other militia factions in the South East targeted Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices and participated in violent activities to sabotage the electoral processes, the Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun) operates in the South West (CSIS, 2023; Buba, 2023).

According to Carboni and Serwat (2023), these armed groups are state-sponsored security organizations that assist law enforcement agencies in combating criminal activities in the Southeast, Northeast, and Southwest, including armed banditry, cattle rustling, kidnappings, and violations of anti-grazing laws.

The Naira redesign policy.

On October 26, 2022, former Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele introduced the naira redesign policy, which had a significant impact on the election cycle. With a deadline of January 31, 2023, for exchanging old notes for new ones at banks, the high denominations of the Naira—the N200, N500, and N1000 notes—were slated for redesign (Olorok, 2023). To combat corruption, vote-trading, the growing threat of kidnapping for ransom, lower inflation, and excessive cash circulation, this programme was proposed. According to Awi (2023), the purpose of this policy was to prohibit cash trading during elections, a practice in which political parties attempt to sway voters by offering cash, food, branded souvenirs, and apparel either before or during an election to garner support.

However, in places where kidnappings often occur, the naira redesign strategy increased security, allowing the election to proceed with few interruptions. However, it significantly restricted voter turnout, as fewer than three out of ten registered voters collected their ballots (Clowes, 2023). Cash shortages could make it challenging to pay logistics workers and deliver election-related supplies, INEC said (Olorok, 2023).

Attacks on Electoral Infrastructure

Before and on Election Day, there were multiple attacks on INEC offices and election materials aimed at impeding the election's seamless operation. The security and integrity of the 2023 general election were seriously questioned in light of these developments. For example, an attack on the INEC office in Abeokuta, Ogun State, destroyed 29 polling booths, 904 vote boxes, 65,000 uncollected PVCs, and other election supplies (Kabir, 2022). According to Abati (2022), thousands of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), ballot boxes, and other election supplies were destroyed when INEC offices in Ogun and Osun states were set on fire. In addition to interfering with the polls, these attacks instilled fear in both voters and election officials.

Many Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) were destroyed when the INEC office in the Izzi local government area of Ebonyi State was set on fire (Kabir, 2022). Seven hundred forty-eight ballot boxes and 240 polling booths, among other items, were destroyed when an INEC office in Enugu state, namely in Igboeze North LGA, was set on fire (Daily Trust, 2022). It is essential to note that these attacks in Imo State were not isolated incidents; instead, they appeared to be part of a larger, concerted effort to shorten the 2023 election process (Punch). These attacks sparked public discussions on INEC's capacity to hold the 2023 election in the face of security instability in some regions.

The Activities of Security Institutions and Electoral Violence during the 2023 Election in Nigeria

Nigeria's insecurity was the main barrier to a smooth general election in 2023. Systems theory acknowledges that the external environment can affect a system's performance at any given time. People's perceptions of the feasibility of holding a free and fair election were strained by issues with insecurity, economic hardship, and disinformation. As a theoretical framework, systems theory acknowledges how environmental variables exert pressure on the voting system, overwhelming the security institution. The Federal Government of Nigeria halted its higher education institutions from February 22 to March 14, 2023, in accordance with the preliminary findings of the CLEEN Foundation's inquiry for a peaceful election.

The Federal government decided to deploy a significant number of security officers to the 2023 general election to ensure both the safety of the electorate and the smooth operation of the poll, which was influenced by the level of insecurity in Nigeria. The security institution's responsibilities include ensuring the safety of INEC premises, polling stations, and collation centres. They also provide persons with escorts and electoral materials (Usigbe, 2023). According to Inspector General of Police Alkali Baba, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is prepared for the 2023 general elections (Deji, 2023). He claimed that during the general election in 2023, 404,106 security personnel were deployed.

Table 1: The breakdown of Security Personnel during the 2023 General Election

S/N	Security Operative	Number of personnel
1	Nigeria Police Force	310,973
2	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence	51,000
3	Federal Road Safety Corps	21,000
4	Nigerian Correctional Service	11,336
5	Nigerian Immigration Services	21,000
6	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency	9,447
7	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission	350
	Total	425,106

Source: Compiled by the Authors from Nigeria Diaries (2024)

Interestingly, the number of deployed military officers is not included in this tally because their details were withheld due to concerns about national security. Alkali Baba stated that two security personnel from the under-listed agencies will be jointly deployed to man each of the polling units across the country. On the other hand, the armed personnel provide security for local and international monitoring teams, secure INEC facilities and personnel as well as volatile places (Deji, 2023; Olaniyi, 2023). Having at least two security personnel in each of the more than 176,600 voting places was the aim of this deployment (CLEEN, 2023). The data above indicates that a sufficient number of security personnel were deployed for the general election in 2023. It is noteworthy that during elections, all security forces are activated, with the Police serving as the primary agency. The standard rule is three security personnel to each polling station, but there may be a need for more.

There was a significant amount of electoral violence in Nigeria in 2023, despite the security institutions being widely coordinated for the general election, particularly in opposition-held states. The theoretical framework facilitates our understanding of the systemic flaws that occurred throughout the states during the 2023 general election. In the 2023 elections, a high number of violent incidents had a major impact on the deployment of state security forces to polling places. In states held by the opposition party, including Benue, Cross River, Delta, Imo, Kano, Kogi, Lagos, and Rivers, multiple flashpoints almost led to a collapse of law and order (Imoh, 2023). Armed groups, for example, ejected voters who backed opposition parties from Kano, and journalists covering the polls were attacked. Such incidents discouraged voters from casting ballots and damaged the election's credibility (Ibrahim, 2023). Security personnel stationed at voting places in Bauchi, Enugu, and Lagos witnessed voter trading and other types of election violence, demonstrating that the presence of security forces did not deter political thugs (CDD & EAC, 2023).

Additionally, according to Adelana et al. (2024), the Centre for Collaborative Investigative Journalism (CCIJ) investigated the many forms of intimidation that significantly decreased voter turnout and raised concerns about the upcoming elections in Nigeria. According to Oduola (2023), voter intimidation can take many different forms. These include preventing voters from registering, providing them with inadequate access to polling stations, unequally distributing them, and sometimes having ad hoc workers or voting materials arrive late. In all six geopolitical zones, political thugs and agents of political parties engaged in voter suppression, intimidation, and damage to electoral materials (CDD, 2023).

According to CDD (2023), cases of voter intimidation and suppression tied to identity politics are primarily carried out by political party thugs or loosely affiliated individuals in contested or battleground states. Vandalism and the destruction of electoral materials contributed to 25% of electoral violence events in approximately 2,000 polling places (Ayandele, Adekaiyaoja, & Angalapu, 2023). Additionally, at least 38 election-related deaths were reported in the states of Abia, Rivers, Kano, Kaduna, Ondo, Kogi, Ebonyi, and Delta; more than 60% of all electoral violence incidents occurred in the southern part of the nation (CLEEN, 2023). Vandalism of whole polling stations and the destruction of spent ballots were reported in Sokoto and Zamfara (CDD & EAC, 2023).

Additionally, INEC's failure to utilize the new technology during the 2023 general elections led to voting errors and violence throughout the federation. The INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) malfunctioned, causing public suspicion and allowing INEC officials and agents from political parties to tamper with election result sheets (Oyediran, 2024). Additionally, INEC failed to transfer election results online from the many polling places to the central servers as required by the Electoral Reform Act, which resulted in electoral violence. In the 2023 general election, the presence of security forces did not deter these perpetrators of electoral violence. The Security agencies failed to act neutrally during the 2023 general election due to the political interference of the gladiators. The security agencies aided ballot snatching and disregarded thugs chasing voters away in polling units.

Additionally, the election violence in 2023 is a result of the politicization and uneven allocation of security personnel during the general election (Ayandele & Angalapu, 2023; Ibrahim, 2023). According to CDD & EAC (2023), the credibility of this poll has been further compromised by the uneven deployment of security forces in states such as Bayelsa, Enugu, and Bauchi. This affected their capacity or desire to step in and stop serious violent incidents. Many polling places in the Southeast reported a partial or total lack of security guards, according to CDD. According to Imoh (2023), in many cases, the security agents deployed to provide security for the 2023 general election provided operational cover to political thugs to perpetuate electoral violence (aiding ballot snatching, disregarding thugs). In other cases, they stood by unwilling and unable to do anything to stop the violence. This display of reluctance to intervene and prevent violent incidents by the security agencies resulted in repeated skirmishes and altercations between voters, party agents, and party officials.

However, some scholars argue that having a tactical and mobile squad to ensure a smooth election process has been more effective than placing two or three security officers at a polling site, given the country's large geographic makeup. According to Ayandele, Adekaiyaoja, and Angalapu (2023), the tactical and roving team can stop election violence because the perpetrators of the violence can overpower the security guards positioned at a specific polling place. It is understandable why Ayandele and Angalapu (2023) and Ibrahim (2023) claimed that even security members are there but frequently hesitate to step in during violent occurrences, enabling political thugs to scare voters and sabotage the election process.

Conclusion

A pivotal moment in Nigeria's history, the 2023 general election had a significant impact on the country's political stability and security. The political climate in Nigeria prior to the 2023 general election threatened the country's political stability. There was increased political tension leading up to the peaceful election due to problems with the redesigned Naira, the growth of security networks, Nigerian insecurity, armed group activity, and other difficulties. The study revealed that these challenges institutionalized an apprehensive mindset among Nigerian electorates, as well as among INEC, International Observers, and civil society, regarding the possibilities of conducting the 2023 general election in Nigeria.

This necessitates an increased number of security operatives being deployed to ensure the smooth conduct of the election, to secure electoral materials and INEC staff in crisis-prone areas. This large number was intended to gain the public's confidence and that of INEC officials in the institution of the state. The paper revealed that, despite the increased number of security operatives during the 2023 general election, electoral violence was perpetuated at a high intensity. The study revealed that political interference, bribery, poverty, the power of incumbency, and other factors hindered Nigeria's police and INEC officials from establishing electoral governance during the 2023 general election. The study concludes that the presence of security operatives alone is not sufficient to ensure a transparent election in the absence of political neutrality. There is a need for systemic synergy to achieve electoral governance in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study made the following recommendations:

- 1) The Nigerian government should provide good governance to address the insecurity challenges confronting the nation.
- 2) The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should leverage modern technology to ensure a transparent election to enthrone electoral governance in Nigeria.
- 3) The Security institution should remain unbiased, neutral, and transparent during the election process to preserve the integrity of the profession.
- 4) The Security institution should embark on a training and re-training programme to acquaint them with the current security techniques and to uphold professionalism by the electoral act reform.
- 5) The government should make an effort to lower the stakes in elections to create a friendly environment during the election.

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