Security Agents and Election Monitoring in Nigeria: Engaging International Best Practices

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Abstract
Election is termed as the heart of democracy all over the world. Peoples feeling of trust in the processes of election across the globe is principally dependent on their confidence in the security agents and enduring infrastructure that make elections free and fair. Thus, the focus of election monitoring is to change the behaviour of would-be cheaters, specifically to prevent cheating by rendering it more risky, more costly, and essentially prohibitive. Problematically, the practice of election monitoring in Nigeria is rendered vulnerable to abuse through manipulation of the entire system. The political parties, especially those in power seek to manipulate security agencies to serve partisan interests. Hence, security agents allegedly perpetrate acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm to affect an electoral process that arise in the context of electoral competition. In most cases, the outcomes of the elections are not the true reflection of choices of the electorates. The study sets out to comparatively interrogate the role of security agents in election monitoring in Nigeria and United States of America by citing examples from the U.S.A. Anchoring the discourse on structural functionalism as the beacon of analysis, explanatory research design, documentary method of data collection and content analysis as the research method. Findings of the study point to the fact that Nigerian electorates have lost hope in Nigeria's key electoral actors and monitoring agencies reflecting a broader narrative of mistrust and uncertain confidence in the state's electoral/security institutions as opposed to international best practices evident in the developed nations like U.S. The study recommends massive education and training for security agents, improvement in the welfare and promotion of security agents, and reduction in the volume of money and allowances paid to politicians.

Keywords: *Security Agents; Election; International; Comparative Analysis; Structural Functionalism; and Electoral Violence.*

Introduction

In some countries across the world,   there exist strict adherence to the electoral laws and transparent processes to universal suffrage.   However, following the trends on elections, there are clear indications that there are hurdles to jump over in many democracies, especially in Nigeria and other developing countries. Thus, the primacy of evolving and engaging security measures to prevent, contain and control factors that trigger disorder and violence during elections cannot be over emphasised. Like in developed countries, a positive security action help in managing and achieving the much desired success and some of levels neutrality through the security forces which includes preserving the integrity of elections, lives and properties and most importantly the democracy. Thus, the role of security forces and other agents is very important in elections and can never be over looked   (Oyadiran & Olorungbemi, 2015).

Historically, the first monitored election was in 1857 referendum in Moldavia and Wallachia by some European powers. How be it, election monitoring was not popular up until

after the Second World War. Contemporarily, international election monitoring has appeared on the scene of international affairs in the late 1980s. Its emergence as a widely accepted and regularly practised international activity was closely related to the expansion of the ostensible 'third wave' of democracy towards Latin America, parts of Asia, and Eastern Europe during the 1980s and early 1990s, amidst the overall transformation of the geopolitical climate after the end of the Cold War (1947–91) (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

Fundamentally, election as a phenomenon, has spread to most parts of the globe, hence there exists organized efforts by governmental agencies to discourage cheating before, during and after elections. The centrepiece of such efforts is election monitoring which seeks to change the behaviour of would-be cheaters, specifically to prevent cheating by rendering it more risky and more costly and prohibitive. When cheating can be verified, for instance, redress becomes more plausible, rendering cheating a riskier proposition. However, monitoring does not always succeed at discouraging cheating: it can also induce the monitored party to resort to means of manipulating elections that are more difficult to scrutinize.

Given the Nigerian environment, the dominant perspective is that free, fair and generally acceptable elections are possible only if security personnel, including the military are massively deployed because, the issue of electoral violence has become one of the recurring features of Nigeria's democratic process. For instance, between eight (8) years from June 2006 –May 2014, there were 915 cases of election violence in Nigeria, resulting in about 3,934 deaths (National Human Right Commission, 2015). The problem has continued to deepen with its attendant effect on the securitisation and democratisation processes in the Nigerian body-politic. This is manifested in the increasing expression of physical, psychological and structural violence committed against political opponents, the masses and the system as a whole. Invariably, this has constituted a sense of insecurity, electoral apathy and legitimacy crisis in the Nigerian polity (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

It is however open to debate, stating the fact that the Nigerian electoral ecology has been adversely marred by the security agents assigned with the role of monitoring and safeguarding elections and electoral process in general. It brings to the fore interpretation of the proverbial 'dog that eats the bone it was asked to keep.' By security personnel or agents, we have in mind personnel of the conventional Nigeria Police Force, State Security Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigerian Prison Service (now Nigerian Correctional Service), Nigerian Custom Service, and other similar organizations as well as Nigerian Armed Forces.

What has fuelled this perspective of the indispensability of security personnel in the organization of our elections is the generalized violence, which has become common; such as thuggery and flurries of electoral malpractices that have featured consistently and prominently in our elections as the hallmark. In some pessimistic quarters, violence, intimidation and electoral malpractices generally are inseparable from elections in Nigeria. Evidently, in the February 2019 general elections, as in previous elections, many armed gangs and cults offered their services to politicians to intimidate opponents and rig polls, for instance, in the 2011 polls, more than 800 people died, as post-election protests in twelve northern states while more than 100 people died during and after the 2015 polls (International Crisis Group Report 21 December 2019). In the above content, it is logical to state that only an adequate policing can

secure the election environment. This pessimistic perspective is backed by history and experiences, and it is the view of most political actors and the public generally (Afolabi 2014).

To this end, Nigeria's election has been faced with a plethora of security challenges and in most cases, the primary goal of elections, which is that voters' choice prevails, has been unmet. Accordingly, the unending violence associated with Nigeria's elections is a pointer to the systemic problems afflicting African cum Nigerian politics. This manifests mostly by the increasing voters' apathy and disillusionment with conduct of elections in Nigeria, thereby questioning the preparedness and effectiveness of the Electoral Management Body (EMB) - Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) -to organise and conduct credible elections (Afolabi 2014). Scholars and policy makers aver that electoral violence in Nigeria involves printing, stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes; rigging of votes, multiple and underage voting; unauthorised and false declaration of results, political thuggery and brigandage, manipulation of security agencies against political opponents, intimidation and harassment of voters among other abuses (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

It is against this backdrop that this study attempts to comparatively analyze the involvements of security agents in election monitoring processes and procedures between Nigeria and developed states like the U.S.A. bearing in mind international best practices.

Conceptual Delineation
Security Agents

Fundamentally, by security personnel or agents, we refer to personnel of the conventional Nigeria Police Force, State Security Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigerian Prison Service (now Nigerian Correctional Service), Nigerian Custom Service, and other similar organizations as well as Nigerian Armed Forces that are assigned to oversee candidates' activity, day volunteers, electoral materials and poll watching in an apolitical character. In other words, this constitutes state agents employed to ensure elections are conducted in a peaceful, fair and in transparent manner.

Election Monitoring

Election monitoring is the observation of an election by one or more independent parties, typically from another country or a non-governmental organization (NGO), primarily to assess the conduct of an election process on the basis of national legislation and international election standards. There are national and international election observers. Monitors do not directly prevent electoral fraud, but rather record and report such instances. Election observation increasingly looks at the entire electoral process over a longer period of time, rather than at election-day proceedings only. The legitimacy of an election can be affected by the criticism of monitors, provided that they are themselves seen as unbiased. A notable individual is often appointed honorary leader of a monitoring organization in an effort to enhance its own legitimacy.

Historically, the first monitored election was that of an 1857 plebiscite in Moldavia and Wallachia (current Romania) that was monitored by most of the major European powers. Election monitoring was uncommon until after World War II. Election observation activities have expanded significantly following the end of the Cold War, along with the development of

international standards on the conduct of democratic elections and the process of monitoring elections by both international [1] and domestic [2] observing organizations.

In the 1990s, international election observation focused on elections in countries with weak democracies or democracies in transition. In recent years, however, there have been an increasing number of observer mission monitoring elections in long-standing democracies, including the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. Accordingly, election monitoring has (over a century) become a global phenomenon, where states' actors (i.e. security agents etc.) and non-states' actors (non-governmental organisations and the like) make concerted efforts to protect and make sure the electoral processes and procedures are not tempered by individuals, cheaters, and parties involved in the process.

For instance, election-monitoring agencies have mobilized millions of citizens around the world to participate in their countries' democratic processes as election observers. When citizens come together to observe elections, they may have a number of goals. Depending on the context, civil society might mobilize to observe an election in order to: engage citizens in the election process; deter fraud; expose problems and irregularities; provide an accurate measure of the quality of the election; promote confidence in the process and outcomes; and provide recommendations for improving the process for the next election. In the longer term, citizen election observation helps ensure electoral integrity, and strengthens civil society's capacity to promote citizen participation, engage in policy advocacy and foster governmental accountability within and well beyond the election cycle.

Whereas, security agents in election monitoring are meant to deter, protect and safeguard lives and properties before, during and after elections, it is necessary to note that monitoring and observation are somewhat different. As Banire (2018), noted observation refers to information gathering or on-site fact- finding and making an informed judgement about the credibility, legitimacy and transparency of the electoral process. Observation is usually carried out by external agencies that cannot interfere in any material way in the voting and counting operations.

On balance, monitoring focuses on information gathering, examination and evaluation of the electoral process. It is usually carried out by domestic agencies that are able to draw attention of the presiding officers to observed deficiencies in the voting and counting operations. Nigeria electoral authorities distinguish between election monitoring and election observation and election monitoring carries a deeper meaning. In Nigeria, only the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and its duly authorised personnel are empowered to monitor elections. An observer literally does not have any role in the administration of the election or any control. To classify these points:

1. An electoral monitor in the person of security agent exercises some level of lawful authority over the conduct of elections as well as over officials involved; an observer has no such powers.
2. In Nigeria, a monitor must be duly authorised personnel of the INEC; an observer is independent and reports only to his or her organization.
3. A monitor in the person of security agent can issue instructions and take decisions on behalf INEC.

4. To fulfil their functions effectively, INEC is responsible for training election monitors on election administration. The training of election observers is the responsibility of the organization that deploys them.
5. The roles, powers and functions of monitors in the category of security agents are created and regulated and the authority to exercise such powers is clearly spelt out by law.

International Best Practice

Essentially speaking, international best practice is a method or technique that has been generally accepted globally and/or generally as superior to any alternatives because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means and/or because it has become a standard way of doing things, e.g., a standard way of complying with legal or ethical requirements. Best practices are used to maintain quality as an alternative to obligatory established standards and can be based on self-assessment or benchmarking (Bogan, & English, 1994).

A best practice can be defined as a process, programme, or method that produces results superior to others as measured by a set of objectives. Within the context of electoral security, a best practice can be defined as a policy, practice, or programme intervention that has demonstrated measurable results in achieving electoral conflict prevention, management, or mediation (United States Agency for International Development, 2013).

However, good or best operating practice is a strategic management term that is geared towards achieving set objectives of the organisation or state. More specific uses of the term include good agricultural practices, good manufacturing practice, good laboratory practice, good clinical practice, good distribution practice, good management/administrative practice and good electoral practice.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted structural-functional framework of analysis. The theory has its origin from sociology, in the writings of anthropologists like August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, and adopted in political science, especially in comparative politics by Gabriel Almond. Other prominent proponents of the theory are Parsons (1937, 1961); Merton (1957); Davis (1959); Evans-Pritchard (1940); Meyer Fortes (1945); etc. Structural functional analysis is basically concerned with the phenomenon of system maintenance and regulation. The basic theoretical proposition of this approach is that all systems exist to perform functions through their structures.

The Structural-Functional analysis was first experimented in the biological and mechanical sciences as part of system analysis. According to Almond, & Powell (1966) structural-functionalism revolves around two main concepts namely; functions and structures on the basis of which Varma (1980), cited in Almond, & Powell (1966), raised three basic questions – (1) what basic functions are fulfilled in any given political system? (2) By what structures? (3) Under what conditions? He stresses that while functions deals with the consequences (i.e. involving objectives as well as processes) of patterns of actions, structures refer to arrangements within the systems, which performs the functions.

The fundamental Assumptions of the Theory

According to Almond, & Powell (1966), the basic assumptions of the structural-functional derivative of the systems approach are:

1) That the society is a single inter-connected system in which each of its elements performs a specific function and whose basic goal is the maintenance of the systemic equilibrium;
2) That the society, being a system as a whole, consists of its numerous parts which are inter-related;
3) That the dominant tendency of the social system is towards stability which is maintained by its own in-built mechanism;
4) That the system's ability to resolve internal conflicts is usually an admitted fact;
5) That changes in the system are natural, but they are neither sudden nor revolutionary, but are always gradual and adaptive as well as adjustive;
6) That the system has its own structure, with its own aims principles and functions.

The structural-functional derivative speaks of the political system as composed of several structures as patterns of action and resultant institutions with their assigned functions. According to Almond & Powell (1966), the functioning of any political system may also be viewed in terms of its capabilities, which is the way it performs as a unit in its environment. The concepts of regulative, extractive, distributive, symbolic and responsive capabilities are employed as criteria to assess how a system is performing within its environment, how it is shaping its environment, and how the environment is shaping it as well.

The theory stresses that all systems have structures, which can be identified, and those structures perform specific set of tasks if they are to remain in existence and maintain their relevance to the system. Political systems are compared in terms of the manner in which structures perform the expected functions in society. Structural-functionalism is anchored on two basic concepts: structures and functions. While structures are arrangements within the system which perform the functions, which either could be diffused or diffracted, functions are the objective consequences emanating from the workings of the system or what the system does (Omodia, 2007).

All political systems are therefore perceived to perform two basic functions –input and output functions. Input functions are political socialization, recruitment, interest articulation; interest aggregation; and political communication. While the output functions are rule making, rule application and rule adjudication. Structural-functional analysis will enable us to establish the relevance of the structures created by government to help maintain order in the whole system. Structural-Functionalism as a theoretical framework is intended to explain the basis for the maintenance of order and stability in society and the relevant arrangements within the society, which maintain the social order and stability.

Application of the Theory to the Study

The theory is apt to this study because it explicitly defines the functionalities inherent in states and democratic institutions. And these institutions can be referred to as a system with structures with various functions. More so, the safety, and viability of these institutions are largely dependent on the processes and procedures tied to its assigned functions. However, the

failure and/or decay of the institutions are also dependent on the assigned functions. These factors can make or mar the socio-political milieu of the state as can be seen in African countries like Nigeria where security agents are used by the power that be to scuttle electoral process for their selfish gains thereby raises issue about institutional weakness of governance. While in the developed states like United States, the security agents are strictly mobilised to perform their traditional roles of protecting lives and properties before, during and after elections without fear or favour with clear-cut institutional strengths.

Analytical Discourse
The Fundamental Role of Security Agents in Electoral Process

The essentiality of the security agencies as tools of ensuring swift election monitoring and election outcomes in states around the world cannot be over stressed. A major goal of any civilized state is to ensure that law and order are maintained thereby guaranteeing the general security of the populace and ensuring public peace and safety. In Nigeria for instance, Chapter II, Section 14 (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 states inter alia (a) "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government, and (b) the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with provisions of this Constitution."

In accordance with this Constitutional provision, the governments of Nigeria have the responsibility to cater for the security and welfare of Nigerians, and to ensure that Nigerians freely participate in their governments. The basic form of such participation is the exercise of the right to vote. Therefore, any situation that obstructs any citizen from exercising his civic and constitutional rights to vote and be voted for must be taken as a violation of his civic and Constitutional right to freedom of expression. The government is supported in the pursuance of these by the Nigeria Police and other security agencies.

According to Ugwuanyi (2011), below are the major roles of security agents during election monitoring.

1. Safeguarding the security of lives and properties of the citizens during campaigns/ voting so that citizens would not feel unsafe on account of holding, associating with or expressing a political opinion.
2. Ensuring the safety of electoral officers before, during and after elections.
2. Providing security for candidates during campaigns and elections.
3. Ensuring and preserving a free, fair, safe and lawful atmosphere for campaigning by all parties and candidates without discrimination.
4. Maintaining peaceful conditions, law and order around the polling and counting centres; and
5. Providing security for electoral officials, voting and counting centres, and ensuring the security of election materials at voting and counting centres and during their transportation thereto. It is the duty of the police and/or security agents to ensure that election materials are not stolen, hijacked, destroyed or fraudulently altered by any group or person.

Security Agents and the Timeline of Election Monitoring in Nigeria (2007-2019)

In sharp contrast to the prevalent practices in many advanced democracies of the world, where security forces play no other role in the electoral process beyond their constitutionally assigned task of maintaining law and order due to their successful annihilation of factors that engender election-related crises; elections in Nigeria and some other countries in Africa have persistently remained a major cause of worry, violence and insecurity (Abubakar, 2007). Specifically, in Nigeria, all elections conducted from independence era till the period of general elections in 2007 brazenly contravene several provisions of the Nigerian Electoral Acts. This, therefore, is an indication to the fact that elections are potential sources of violence and conflict in Nigeria.

The election days saw massive deployment of military and security personnel in several cities, especially in states like Rivers. Akwa Ibom, Kaduna, Kano etc, which the IGP had identified as potential hotspots. These deployments undoubtedly provided a degree of security, preventing clashes that claimed over 70 lives from degenerating even further. However, coming after President Obasanjo's threats against the opposition, and similar threats by PDP chairman, Ahmadu Ali, and the IGP himself, they also intimidated many opposition supporters and other voters (Nash, & Ehrenfeld, 2010; Ugwuanyi, 2011).

Instead of providing security, the police were often deliberately used to scuttle the electoral process. There were several cases where they looked the other way while under-age voting, stuffing of ballot boxes and false thumb printing occurred. Sometimes they were used by PDP chieftains to hijack ballot boxes from electoral officials at gunpoint; in Ondo State, reportedly soldiers and police took part in moving ballot boxes and papers from one polling station to another, thereby facilitating massive rigging at some centres (Chigbo, 2007).

In the state capital, Ondo city, they provided cover for PDP candidates to stuff ballot boxes in the homes of party chieftains; as a combined force of anti-riot police officers and PDP thugs moved round the polling stations picking up over 300 Labour Party members (mostly party agents), the PDP thumb printed ballots and wrote in results as pleased. Where INEC officials had been induced to falsify the figures at counting centres, police granted PDP agents easy access to assist staff, while barring agents of other parties (Ajaero, 2007). At the conclusion of presidential and national assembly elections, agents of opposition parties were denied access to INEC state headquarters, where results were written and announced.

Experiencing significant police violence, the opposition had argued even before the voting that police inspector general Ehindero had shown himself to be one of the most politically involved police bosses in Nigeria's history. Before the elections, he showed visible bias in favour of the ruling party. Thus, in Oyo and Plateau States, he quickly removed the impeached governors, Rashidi Ladoja and Joshua Dariye, based on court pronouncements in tune with PDP thinking, but dragged his feet in reinstating Ladoja, even after new court decisions. Ehindero's apparent bias may have been due to the fact that he was due for retirement when he reached the mandatory age of 60 in March 2006, but Obasanjo extended his tenure to the beginning of the new president's term on 29 May 2007 (Chigbo, 2007).

The involvement of police personnel in rigging, however, is more fundamentally a symptom of the force's crisis of professionalism. A senior officer, now retired, told Crisis Group that Nigerian police, as presently indoctrinated, trained and orientated, will always see their allegiance to the governing party; this is first because they cannot distinguish 'ruling party' and 'government', and secondly because as long as political control of the force rests

solely with the president, no officer would want to risk his job by refusing to support that president and his party (Ajareo, 2007; Afolabi, 2014).

In the same vein, there were high level partisanship of security operatives in the country, just two days before June 21, 2015 Gubernatorial election in Ekiti state. In the emerging scenario surrounding the preparations for the election according to report credited to Vanguard Newspaper of 19th June, 2015; stalwarts of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) from Abuja, the capital territory and others from outside the state were given easy access to Ekiti state; whereas former Governor Rotimi Amechi of Rivers State, some other Governors and other stalwarts in the opposing party, All Peoples Congress (APC) were barred by security operatives from entering Ekiti to attend a rally organized by their party (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

As noted previously, untold blames and accusations often trail the performance of security agencies in all elections in post-colonial period in Nigeria. In fact, the myriad insecurity issues peculiar to elections' conduct and administration in the country go beyond security agencies. This is not to explain away the malfeasances of security operatives during elections in the country; but to point out politicians' complicity in the whole issue. Indeed, the reckless means by which some members of political class appropriate public security and law enforcement agents for their personal purposes do constitute a major security issue in Nigerian political space. Often times, politicians' misuse of their security orderlies to attack opponents and other members of the public have aggravated tensions around the polls in the past elections. In essence, involvement of security operatives in electoral malfeasance would have been a rarity if regular motivation and backing from public office holders was non-existent.

Misconducts were also traced to a segment of security agents before, during, and after the elections. For instance, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) report of 29th March, 2015 indicated that there were record of cases of intimidation and harassment of voters by overzealous security agents in Sokoto state during presidential and National Assembly elections. Worse still, the group (CDD) also reported that the same security agents from taking photos and recording the voting processes in the same state equally stopped voters. In the same vein, another dimension of excessive and varied impulsively unprofessional acts of security agents during 2015 general elections was captured by a Non-governmental Organisation, the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), the NGO accused the security agents of failing to act while the electoral processes were being disrupted during governorship and House of Assembly polls in Rivers state. The group further reiterated Police's non-response stance to distress tweets by Nigerians regarding snatching of ballot boxes, voters' intimidation, violence and INEC staff harassment (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

Similar to what happened in Rivers state, security agents were also accused of deceit based on the fact that nobody was brought to justice by the agency despite compelling evidence of underage voting as reported in some national dailies in Kogi and Bauchi states during 2015 general elections. Particularly, during the countdown to 2015 general elections, many people as issues that could aggravate tensions during the polls and consequently undermine the credibility of the elections saw some of the activities of police and other security agencies. Palpable fears were raised in many quarters particularly in Rivers state where the conduct of some senior police officers portrayed the agency as one that could be manipulated to serve the interest of the ruling party, PDP. In addition to this, the actions and pronouncement of the

Department of State Security Services (DSS) suggested some degrees of institutional bias in favour PDP even before the conduct of 2015 general elections (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

It is instructive to note, however, that various security biases and partiality recorded in the 2015 general elections and many others before it occurred in states and communities where the central government had vested interest in who emerges as the eventual winners. For instance, the desperate act of the central government regarding how to ensure that People's Democratic Party (the political party of the central government) by all means win Imo and Rivers states gubernatorial elections due to the fact that the incumbent Governors had earlier decamped into the opposition party, APC (All Peoples Congress) necessitated the massive deployment of security forces to the affected states by the central government. This was done in order to railroad the much needed electoral victory in the general elections of 2015. This eventually resulted into large scale violence and brigandage in the affected states (Ademowo, & Ojo, 2015).

In 2019, The Situation Room observers noted military involvement in the elections outside of the limits allowed by law. Section 29 (3) of the Electoral Act specifically states that military involvement in the elections shall only be at the request of INEC and only for the purpose of securing the distribution and delivery of election materials and protection of election officials.

Conversely to the role of security agents as specified in the electoral Act during election, in 2019 general elections, troops (security agents) were deployed nationwide during the elections, without any clear coordination with INEC and with President Buhari warning that people who would attempt to snatch ballot boxes risked paying with their lives, a statement the army chief said he would heed. In places like Rivers State, the military posed significant challenges and obstructions to the performance of election duties by INEC officials. Situation Room received reports of incidents of partisan involvement in the elections by the military, particularly in Rivers State. Whereas, the loyalty of all the armed forces should be to the state or the sovereign as represented by the people, it is often the individuals in office that the security forces tend to show loyalty to rather than the state institution a person occupies (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

In general, overreaching conduct by security personnel was reported in several States of the country including Rivers, Delta, Kano and Bayelsa that undermined their claim to neutrality. The inability of security personnel in some parts of Lagos, Bayelsa, Edo, Rivers and Akwa Ibom States to curb incidents of violence, intimidation of voters, ballot box snatching and their eventual destruction was inexcusable in many cases. Reports from Situation Room partners indicated security personnel were implicated in the delayed delivery of ballot materials in States such as Imo and Abia (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

There were also questions about the behaviour of some security agencies towards officials of INEC that bordered on intimidation. For instance, an INEC National Commissioner, Prof. Okechukwu Ibeanu, reported his car broken into and his laptop, tablet and official documents stolen, in an area where security agents attached to the Electoral Commission were present (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

Then with the announcement of election postponement, the Department of State Services and the Nigeria Police invited Ibeanu along with four other INEC officials for questioning. The invitation was eventually dropped in the face of public condemnation. Across

the country the trend of harassment of INEC officials by security agents continued. In Imo, Sokoto and Benue States, State Resident Electoral Commissioners, reported security actions, seen as attempts to secure advantages for the ruling party in States where they were perceived to be weak (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

Security Agents and Election Monitoring in United States

In the United States, free, fair and credible elections are a hallmark of American democracy. Essentially, the U.S. is characterized by a highly decentralized election administration system (Legislatures, National Conference of State, 2018). Elections are constitutional responsibility of state and local election entities such as secretaries of state, election directors, county clerks or other local level officials encompassing more than 6,000+ local subdivisions nationwide (Home Land Security, n.d).

However, election security has been characterized as a national security concern increasingly drawing the involvement of federal government entities such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. In early 2016, Jeh Johnson, Secretary of Homeland Security designated elections as 'critical infrastructure' making the subsector eligible to receive prioritized cyber-security assistance and other federal protections from the Department of Homeland Security. The designation applies to storage facilities, polling places, and centralized vote tabulations locations used to support the election process, and information and communications technology to include voter registration databases, voting machines, and other systems to manage the election process and report and display results on behalf of state and local governments. In particular, hackers falsifying official instructions before an election could affect voter turnout or hackers falsifying online results after an election could sow discord (Johnson, 2017).

The American people's confidence in the value of their vote is principally reliant on their confidence in the security and resilience of the infrastructure that makes the Nation's elections possible. Accordingly, an electoral process that is both secure and resilient is a vital national interest and one of cyber-security and infrastructure security agency's highest priorities of the US Home Land security (US Election Assistance Commission, 2018). Cyber security and infrastructure security agency (CISA) is committed to working collaboratively with those on the front lines of elections at state and local governments, election officials, federal partners, and vendors, to manage risks to the Nation's election infrastructure. CISA remains transparent and agile in its vigorous efforts to secure America's election infrastructure from new and evolving threats (Johnson, 2017).

Every election year, citizens across the United States head to their local polling stations in order to cast their ballots for the candidates of their choice. The cyber-security and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) works to ensure the physical security and cyber-security of the systems and assets that supports the Nation's elections. Known as election infrastructure, this assembly of systems and networks includes but is not limited to:

Voter registration databases and associated IT systems in the U.S

Information technology infrastructure and systems used to manage elections (such as the counting, auditing, and displaying of election results, and post-election reporting to certify and validate results) Voting systems and associated infrastructure Storage facilities for election and voting system infrastructure Polling places to include early voting locations (Home Land

Security, n.d). In January 2017, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated the infrastructure used to administer the Nation's elections as critical infrastructure. This designation recognizes that the United States' election infrastructure is of such vital importance to the American way of life that its incapacitation or destruction would have a devastating effect on the country (Fidler, 2017). While ultimate responsibility for administering the Nation's elections rests with state and local governments, CISA offers a variety of free services to help states ensure both the physical security and cyber security of their elections infrastructure. Additionally, election infrastructure as a critical designation enables CISA to provide services on a prioritized basis at the request of state and local elections officials (San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury 2019).

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is a known fact that the onerous task of achieving free, fair and credible elections does not solely lie with election regulatory body alone. Other stakeholders such as the press, politicians, government, security agents and even the electorate in the country, have considerable constitutionally defined roles to play in facilitating and achieving credible elections. In Nigeria, as opposed to developed states like US and Britain, the security forces, especially the Department of State Services; the state security police, but also the military and the police on many occasions put themselves in overbearing roles on behalf of partisan interests.

However, in developed countries, where election best practices are obtainable, security agents during and after election do not owe allegiance to persons, parties and/or the power that be, but owe allegiance to state and the masses of whose lives and properties they have sworn to protect. Adduced from the lenses of the theory of structural functionalism, it is evidently established that the functioning of the structures and systems of states are veritable to their wellbeing and survival; on the other hand, when there is structural or system failure, it leads to system collapse and worst still, system decay. The former speaks volume of the structural best practices as could be seen in developed states like US and Britain; whereas, the latter speaks volume of the condition inherent in the Nigerian state. Hence, the security architecture or structure in Nigeria has been tilted away from the traditional roles during elections to outright partisanship in obedience to the powers that be at different regimes.

Recommendations

It is against this established discourse that following recommendations are made:

1. Massive education and training for security agents, improvement in the welfare and promotion of security agents, and reduce the volume of money and allowances paid to politicians.
2. In achieving best practice in election monitoring, there should be electoral security curriculum that will include instruction on international standards and practices regarding public order management and rules of engagement as well as focus on methodologies for assessing and profiling electoral threats of all sorts.
3. Through the training, there should be a common theme of political neutrality, respect for human rights, and the political will to pursue justice before, during and after elections.

4. There has to be adoption and deployment of frameworks similar to Cyber-security and infrastructure security agency (CISA) used by Home Land Security in the US to forestall election threats and violence.

5. Security agencies in Nigeria should revert to their traditional roles of protecting lives and property rather than being partisan in state politics and elections.

6. The insecurity engendered by security agents during elections can only be altered by extensive reforms aimed at building professionalism in the agencies, including limitations on the president's ability to manipulate the security outfits or agencies for partisan and political purposes.

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