SECURITY AND THE 2015 ELECTIONS: Issues and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Politics is the quest for power, influence and authority. And for the simple reason that political office aids the allocation of resources in transition states it is often viewed as warfare with attendant security implications. Security which is the freedom from danger or damage whether physical or emotional is imperative in the electoral process. Elections in Nigeria are full of acrimony and therefore fraught with danger. Election security has been a major challenge to both the election umpire and the citizenry as political parties and their supporters view the electoral process as a "do or die" affair resulting in brigandage and electoral malfeasance. The just concluded 2015 general elections were not an exception as some of the elections were characterized by pockets of violence and security breaches despite the rigorous preparations put in place by the Independent National Electoral Commission to stem the tide of insecurity during the process. Somestates experienced some form of security breaches such as replacement of trained adhoc staff, connivance of security personnel with politicians and holding INEC staff hostage to corrupt the electoral process. The paper deploys the qualitative method to interview 20 respondents. Anchoring the analysis on the Political Economy and Systems theories the paper concludes that a mobile 21st Century Police force can ensure the security of the electoral process in Nigeria.

Key words: Security, Elections, Power, Authority, Mobile force.

Introduction

Elections are contests for legitimate power fought within a political arena. Elections by their nature are confrontational and therefore require the assurance of equitable security to retain participants' confidence and commitment. Consequently security is integral to the electoral process. Evidence from the United Nations has shown that on a global scale that one in every five elections experiences some measure of violence (USAID, 2013) and this makes security in the electoral process an imperative especially in emerging democracies. For (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010), the issue of election security comes up at all stages of the electoral process that is the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral phases. When security of the post electoral process was mismanaged asevidenced in the post-electoral violence of the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria many people were dismayed by the level of carnage and blamed INEC and government for not been proactive. Of significance is the fact that conflicts or violence resulting from insecurity do not stem from the electoral process but from the poor management of the process.It is so important that all the stakeholders in the electoral process namely political parties, candidates, voters, the election umpire and their staff and even the security personnel are involved. Since the process is characterized by fierce competition and opposition between the contending parties it behooves the umpire to create conditions likely to reduce tension and violence. For instance, tensions can result from perceived unfair treatment in the allocation of public resources, unequal access to public media to canvass for votes. Inequality in the use of public spaces for campaigns or even the use of security personnel to harass and intimidate opponents and their supporters by the party in power. In the analysis of insecurity in the electoral process peoples' perception of the role of the security personnel is very crucial. Where they are perceived to perform with professional expertise the process is usually credible and devoid of conflict and violence. But in situations where stakeholders perceive them as partial arbiters the process is deemed to be compromised ab initio and results in conflict and violence.

The sheer logistics of elections in Nigeria, requires that adequate security be put in place, from the movement of electoral materials to the deployment of staff, the manning of the polling booths to the movement of cast ballots to the collation centres. Including the protection of voters at the polling booths, the safety of the candidates, the party agents and even the media that cover the election, each of the processes requires adequate security. According to   (Jega, 2012), adequate security enhances the free movement of staff, voters, candidates, observers and other stakeholders thus ensuring the credibility of the process.

Election security involves policing and could be said to be in the purview of the Nigeria Police Force. However, it is a known fact that the Police has consistently performed below expectation as far as security is concerned. Therefore in order to ensure a credible and secure electoral process devoid of violence and brigandage the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) set up the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security. As the name implies the committee comprises the Police, the Military, Department of State Security (DSS), and other stakeholders to ensure the security of the electoral process. However, despite this laudable initiative the 2015 general elections experienced pockets of insecurity especially in states such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Imo and Abia where the outgoing governors were bent on handing over to their preferred candidates.

Statement of the Problem

Voters confidence in elections emanate from a combination of the mechanisms and procedures deployed to count and record votes and the election officials competence and integrity. These processes are anchored on proactive security to engender confidence. Understanding the outbreaks of election violence is a complex issue and one way of addressing electoral violence is to empower the electoral umpire to secure the process through adequate funding by the state. However, often the state fails to adequately fund the umpire thereby unwittingly compromising the process. For instance, paucity of funds can affect voter turnout due to poor mobilization of voters, this in turn can affect the outcome of the election results leading to conflicts and invariably fragility of the state. To guarantee electoral security the electoral umpire should understand the different phases of the electoral process and thus craft the needed strategy to secure each phase. For elections in Nigeria, the electoral cycle can be categorized into three phases namely the Pre-Election phase, the Election Day and the Post-Election phase. In the context of Nigeria, most security breaches happen during the Post-Election phase. The paper therefore focuses on election violence and concomitant security breaches emanating from such violence especially those of the 2015 elections using states such as Imo, Abia, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom as case studies in order to proffer solutions and avoid reoccurrence. To address the issues in context the paper seeks answers to the following questions: - a. What is the role of the military in the electoral process? b. Why security breaches in the 2015 elections? c. Should political parties be involved in election security? d. What is the role of INEC in election security? e. Should the police be involved in the electoral process?

Objectives of the Paper

The fundamental objective of the paper is to provide an overview of the various security breaches that occurred during the 2015 elections especially in the afore mentioned states. Other objectives include:-

a. To ascertain the role of the military in the electoral process.

b. Determine the causes of insecurity in the 2015 elections.

c. Ascertain the role of political parties in election security.

d. To determine the role of the Police in the electoral process.

e. Recommend the necessary measures to be adopted by INEC to enhance the security of elections.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives the paper raised the following research questions:-

    a. What is the role of the military in the electoral process?
    b. What were the causes of security breaches during the 2015 elections?
    c. What is the role of political parties in election security?
    d. Should the police participate in election security?
    e. How can INEC secure the electoral process?

Literature Review

Ideally, elections ought not to be characterized by conflicts and violence if the actors were genuinely seeking power for the common good. And security forces have no role to play in an ideal democracy. However, for democracies in West Africa elections remain a major trigger of violence and insecurity (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010). They averred that elections possess certain characteristics which make them a potential source of insecurity, conflict and instability for the democratic system if not properly managed. Significantly, it is evident that security during the electoral process is a major problem in the management of elections

especially in emerging democracies. But this in no way suggests that elections engender violence rather it is the poor management of the electoral process that results in violence especially if the process is perceived to be compromised. This notion was properly captured by (Jinadu, 2011) when he argued that "that the increase in election violence in many African states is due, among other causes to the poor management of diversity, reflecting the mobilization of ethic cleavages and repression of dissenting views". He concludes that a fall out of this mismanagement is the insertion of the state into the electoral governance as a partisan through the use of the power of incumbency by the party in power for unfair political advantage. Other scholars such as (Maitambari, 2011) have focused on the inadequate preparation of the electoral umpire. They argued that inefficient of pre-election processes such as voters' registration and education are sources of conflict and violence as politicians take advantage of such lapses to commit electoral fraud. Other narratives include the complicity of the party in power by its failure to adequately fund the electoral empire or late release of funds. The sabotage of logistics arrangement by those contracted by the umpire to convey election materials and even in certain situations the corruption of the security personnel detailed to provide security for the materials and personnel of the umpire. The availability of voting materials and behaviour of polling agents are delicate aspects which present potential risk of violence and insecurity (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010). For instance, during the distribution of the permanent voters' card for the 2015 elections, the South-East states, Lagos and Ogun states were completely unsatisfied with the distribution of the cards. Whereas some states in the North had a 98% collection rates the states in the South-East, Lagos and Ogun recorded below 60%. This was misconstrued as a ploy by the umpire to rig the election in favour of a particular candidate. Unfortunately, with the exception of Lagos state, the other states were states with very high voters' apathy as recorded in a survey on **Voters Apathy** prior to the 2011 elections as most of the citizenry were already disillusioned with the conduct and performance of their state governments.

The security challenges faced by the umpire during elections were well articulated by one of the resident electoral commissioners. He argued that "lack of internal democracy by participating political parties in the nomination of candidates contributes to the various conflicts that characterize elections in Nigeria. For him, the absence of a redress mechanism for aggrieved candidates has resulted in self-help for those who feel cheated (Igini, 2013).The tendency to resort to self-help is often due to the perception of compromise of the process by the voters and the feeling of corruption to benefit some candidates. For instance, during the

2015 presidential election, the failure of the card reader to accredit one of the candidates was misconstrued as a deliberate ploy by the umpire to disadvantage the candidate. Thus it behooves the umpire to ensure the fidelity of its electronic devices in order to allay the fears of corruption of the system given the heterogeneous nature of the society. The perception of corruption of the electoral process was what triggered the violence, destruction and murder of National Youth Corp members during the post-election phase in 2011.

Questions have been raised as to the role expected of the police during elections. For (Adekanye and Iyanda, 2011), the functions of the police should include superintending electioneering campaigns to ensure that politicians remain civil and thus avoid conflicts. And providing a secured environment for voters to exercise their franchise without the fear of intimidation and harassment. Including ensuring the sanctity of the whole process.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical anchorage for the paper is derived from two perspectives namely the politicaleconomy and systems approaches. The analysis is situated within the context of thecontinuing changes in the society brought about by two fundamental factors: first, the dynamics in the physical environment; and second, the adoption of the capitalist mode ofproduction. In addition to the changes brought about by macro- economic policies packaged by IMF/WORLD BANK for developing countries experiencing balance of payment problems which blue print has consistently reproduced a series of inequalities due to the policies of cutting down on government expenditure and the provision of social amenities by the state. Ake (1981) had canvassed similar arguments as the economic inequality reproduces itself in a series of other inequalities thus resulting in social divisions. The economically privileged want the existing social order preserved and this can only be possible when the status quois preserved thus elections become war theatres. Ake reiterates that the morality and values of a society tend to support the preservation of the existing division of labour and distribution of wealth in that society. According to him , "The integration of African economies into the world capitalist system by western colonialism and imperialism is the event which has had the most influence in shaping the economic and development of contemporary Africa" (Ake, 1981:14). He asserted that the capitalist mode of production is characterized by two major elements. First, the means of production are unevenly distributed. Second, he likened the capitalist society to a market. He argued that the capitalist mode of production polarizes society into a small group who own the means of production and the

majority with no means of production. Those denied of the means of production are subordinated in a relation of inequality and domination. In the political contexts those who own the means of production strive to reproduce the existing inequality by sponsoring candidates to contest elections and by ensuring that such candidates win at all costs hence the emergence of the concept of "god fatherism" in the political lexicon of Nigeria. In addition, the owners of capital raise huge sums of money to ensure that political parties favorable to the system in existence is returned to power. Such situations reproduce a series of insecurity in the electoral process as the owners of capital strive to ensure that the status quo remains while the citizenry and those who see themselves as progressives work towards changing the status quo to achieve inclusiveness in the political equation.

The systems approach is a complex of concepts, suppositions and propositions having a logical integration. It is a set of two or more interrelated elements with the following properties:-

a. Each element has an effect on the functioning of the whole
b. Each element is affected by at least one other element in the system.
c. All possible subgroups of elements have the first two properties.

The systems approach views social phenomena in terms of irreducibly integrated systems where attention is focused on the whole as well as on the complex interrelationships resulting thereof. Significantly, the environment of any system affects and is in turn affected by it. According to (Ackoff, 1981), the environment of any social system contains three levels of purpose: the purpose of the system, of its parts and of the system of which it is a part, the suprasystem. The Nigerian social structure as a system comprises of numerous institutions such as the political, economic, security, religious, education etc. And within these institutions are parts which impact on the system and are in turn affected by the occurrences in the system. For instance, the political institution comprises of the party in power with its attendant political actors, the opposition political parties with their candidates vying for political positions, the electoral umpire and its staff and of course the voters. While the security apparatus comprises the police and the military. For the system to be at equilibrium all the parts should work harmoniously but a situation where the political parties or the political actors work to subvert the electoral process conflict will ensue thus resulting in insecurity. Conversely, if the security apparatus connives with the party in power to compromise the process the result will be a

mismanagement of the security process resulting in conflict or even violence which may derail the whole electoral process. On the other hand if the staff of the electoral umpire connives with political parties to compromise the process other stakeholders will lose trust in the process and this may derail the whole process. Incidentally, the above scenarios played out in some states during the 2015 governorship elections as there were accusations and counter accusations by the political parties and their candidates of electoral malfeasance. In states such as Rivers and Akwa Ibom, the allegation was that those trained to man   the election by the umpire were substituted with people perceived to be sympathetic to the party in power. The result was a process perceived to have been compromised thus leading to tensions, conflicts and various acts of violence.While in Imo and Abia, states, opposition political parties accused the party at the center of using security personnel to subvert the electoral process and intimidate political opponents to secure an advantage for its candidates.

Method

The paper focused on issues of conflicts and security breaches during the 2015 elections with particular reference to states such as Abia, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Imo. It deployed the qualitative method to gather data while the research design comprised of key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. A total of 20 respondents consisting of 10 males and 10 females were interviewed. Of the ten males, three were top members of the electoral umpire, two were senior security personnel while five were members of the public. The ten females were made up of three female politicians, two community leaders while the remaining five were members of the public. All 20 respondents were literate as the least educated had a minimum of first school leaving certificate. In addition, they were all active participants in the 2015 electoral process.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 20 respondents were interviewed consisting 10 males and 10 females. The age of the respondents was from 20 years to 62 years. That is the youngest respondent was 20years while the oldest was 62 years. In terms of education, the least educated of the respondents had a first School Leaving Certificate whereas the most educated had a Master of Science degree. There was no question on the religious affiliation of the respondents since the issue in context cross cuts religious affiliation.

Interviews

The interview guide comprised of semi-structured questions in order to obtain a nuanced response from the respondents. Respondents were asked to provide candid responses on all the questions raised and were assured that information provided would be absolutely confidential as their identities would be protected. The following questions were posed:

Should the military be involved in the electoral process?

When the question was posed to the respondents 15 (75%) of them said that the military should be involved in the electoral process to discourage desperate politicians from compromising the process. According to them evidence from the governorship elections in Anambra, Ondo, Edo and Ekiti has shown that when the military is involved in the electoral process that voters are reassured of their personal security to go cast their votes. In addition, they argued that most citizens believe that the military cannot be compromised therefore instilling more confidence in the process. In the views of some officials of INEC, Nigeria is not the only country where the military is deployed for elections. According to them:

"Argentina is one country where the military is used in

elections. They are involved in the distribution of the

election materials and this has provided some form of

stability to the process".

According to them, the Argentine experience may not be unconnected with her long history of military rule and the only way to stabilize the political process is to ensure that the military is given a role to play in the democratic process. In addition, Bangladesh is another country where the armed forces are involved in the conduct of elections and in India, the military are used to move electoral materials especially to remote places such as the Himalayas. In their views involving the military in the electoral process should not be seen as an aberration as their involvement stabilizes the process and engenders trust in the electorate.

What were the sources of insecurity in the 2015 elections?

One of the underlying conditions for insecurity is social division which could refer to ethnic, religious or a plethora of other dividing factors. Often exploited through elite political dialogue, these divisions exacerbate conflict during election times and are contributing

factors to insecurity. During the last concluded elections, the presidential election of March, 28th 2015, was almost violence free as the INEC Inter-Agency Consultative Committee was able to secure the process despite minor skirmishes by party thugs and miscreants. However, the governorship elections of 11th April, 2015 in Imo, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Abia states were characterized by pre-election and post-election violence and uprising by the citizenry. According to the all-20 respondents (100%), the situations in Imo and Rivers states were similar as the incumbent governors were formerly members of the ruling party who decamped to the opposition party. The government at the center was interested in who occupies the state house and had to deploy security to reign in the incumbents and their supporters. The result was massive violence and brigandage leading to an inconclusive election in Imo state which invariably was won by the opposition party after the affected local government areas were cancelled. In Rivers state, the incumbent failed to win the state for his new party as there were violence, killings and even public demonstrations by women calling for the cancellation of the election. The Independent Electoral Commission was forced to send a fact-finding committee to Rivers state to ascertain the veracity of the claim that election was not held in the state. In the end INEC concluded that there was no iota of truth in the allegation but the out-going governor refused to accept the result of the election. Two of the INEC officials likened the Rivers state situation to an intra-class struggle between the elites in that state. According to them:

"Why should the out-going governor use his power of

Incumbency to distort facts. Everyone knows that the new man was

his former chief of staff who fell out with him. If majority of the

people voted for him why should the ex-governor scuttle the mandate"?

Unfortunately for the people of Rivers state, the brunt of the elite power struggle was borne by ordinary citizens who suffered violence and even allegations that some persons were hacked to death. The situation of Rivers was akin to the Kenya elections of 2007 where elite power struggle degenerated to wanton killings and destruction of private property by party thugs and supporters.

The situations in Abia and Akwa Ibom were similar in the sense that the out-going governors were bent on handing over to candidates from their parties. And the opposition wanted to cash in on the result of the presidential election to win those two states. The outcome was

political tension which resulted into conflicts and invariably violence. One of the female politicians was of the view that the main issue was election rigging. For her:

"the main problem is rigging as all the parties are involved.

It is when the opposition believe that they are beaten to the

game that trouble ensues. Let me tell you the 2015 elections

were scientifically rigged. Anyone that wins out-rigged the other.

After all, there were accusations of INEC adhoc staff been

replaced by staff believed to have sympathy for some political parties.

All the respondents were not impressed with the attitude of some of the politicians as according to them they were merely heating the polity to gain advantage for their own party. The paradox of the situation is that in the four states the citizenry were not involved in the conflict as they were desirous of a peaceful and credible election rather it is the rival parties and their supporters that were responsible for the various crisis. The implication is that elites desirous of capturing political power would deploy every manner of arsenal in their war chest to have an advantage.

What is the role of the political parties in election security?

The above question generated so much controversy as 10 (50%) expressed displeasure at government's involvement in election security. According them government should hold the political parties accountable by setting the parameters and allowing the political parties to drive the process and face serious sanction in the event of a breach. This group of respondents believe that the huge investment on election security could be channeled to other areas of need. Corroborating this assertion one of the key informants informed that:

" In Ghana, election officials go home with the materials till

election day. Thugs do not hijack the materials nor assassinate

the officials to enable them cart away the materials. Why

are we spending so much on elections. The amount of

money spent on elections is actually embarrassing".

The views of the informant are buttressed by the decision of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and Ghana Political Parties Programme (GPPP) that political parties work with security personnel to police elections. As a result of this decision which was one of the outcomes of the Workshop on Electoral Reforms in 2014, political parties have been asked to register their militias as security companies (Sunday Sun, 2015: 21). The rest of the respondents felt that since our democracy was still young that government should continue to assist inthe building of democratic institutions until they become totally independent. Incidentally, this group felt that the bane of election security was weak institutions and until the government was able to build those institutions the issues would remain in context.

What measures should INEC adopt to enhance the security of elections?

INEC's responsibility for election security could be captured in three main areas: agenda setting, planning and strategic coordination (Anyanya, 2013). This it has set in motion by setting up the Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security. The deployment of ICCES during elections has helped to reduce the incidences of violence and brigandage. Evidence from the Edo and Ekiti governorship elections corroborate the views of the respondents that this initiative by INEC has been a success in curbing insecurity. They averred that rather than wait for the elections that ICCES should be developed into a strong institution that would engage in preventive security through intelligence gathering. And this could be achieved by enlarging the scope by recruiting young university undergraduates, commercial sex workers and members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers to help gather intelligence. They further said that such structures could be replicated at community levels so that issues of insecurity would be nipped in the bud. One of the respondents was of the view that if INEC invests on a sophisticated intelligence gathering through ICCES it would succeed in reducing serious security issues during elections by as much as 60%.

What should be the role of the police in the electoral process?

Ideally, the police should have no role in the electoral process beyond the constitutional role of the maintenance of law and order. However, evidence from the 2011 elections has shown that when adequate preparations are not made towards elections the tendency has been insecurity and violence. For a fact all the respondents argued that if the police were provided with the necessary infrastructure with attendant welfare for officers and men that they would be in a position to secure the electoral process. One of the key informants argued that:

"Is it not the same Nigerian police men that are sent on peace

keeping assignments? Why do they excel when they are sent

out? The implication is that the problem is not with the officers

and men but the Nigerian system. For instance what is the salary

of an average corporal? Where does he live and is he provided

with the necessary logistics to perform his duties? These are

issues no government has bothered to tackle. Rather the public

continues to vilify and humiliate the NPF" We expect

the educated elites to position the police in line with global

best practices".

The key informants informed the author that the "Hero's Grant" which was used to take care of officers who died in the line of duty had never been reviewed and that it was in 1992, thirty two years after political independence that an in-house scheme known as "Police Welfare Insurance Scheme" was started with a loan of N7.5 million from the Police Cooperative Society and then the federal government later supported the scheme with the same amount which was then used to pay back the loan. All the respondents advocated for a 21st Century police force that will be in tandem with global best practices. According to them, the first thing is to review the welfare of the officers and men. Second, ensure that they are properly housed in modern barracks, provide them with modern communication equipment and then train and continue to retrain them. For them if all these initiatives are implemented the Nigerian Police Force will be in a position to provide security in any election in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Democracy is anchored on losers accepting the results of elections and on citizens' confidence on the sanctity of the secret ballot and their votes. Achieving trust worthy elections requires balancing security, funding and involving all the stakeholders to act with responsibility and civility not impunity. Information from the generated data has shown that one of the factors that causes conflict and invariably insecurity is the perception of the electorate towards the process. For instance, when the umpire puts measures that increase

actual security they win the confidence of the electorate who respond accordingly. On the contrary when the electorate perceive that the process has been compromised they respond negatively. A good example is the issue of the electronic card reader which was used for the first time during the last election. In places where they did not malfunction voters responded with enthusiasm and the elections recorded minimal security breaches. But in states where the card readers failed the voters perceived a form of disenfranchisement from the umpire and resorted to self -help especially when the umpire advised that they resort to manual accreditation. It became a license to inflate the votes since they were given a negative stimuli through the malfunction of the card readers. The lesson is that the umpire must be perceived to be an impartial umpire by both the electorate and the political parties. Anything to the contrary is a recipe for conflict, violence and brigandage which ultimately may derail the whole electoral process. Concomitantly, voters' education is one area that has not been fully explored as discovered prior to the 2011 elections. Voters' education should not be a one off initiative embarked on just during an election period. It should continuous and INEC should explore the possibility of incorporating it into civic education in primary and secondary schools. Over time it will create generations of enlightened voters who would view elections as a contest and not a do-or-die affair.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conventionally security of the electoral process comprises the policing and the management of security during elections. The challenge of securing elections and election management in a world where insecurity is rife is a daunting task for both INEC and the government of Nigeria. However, the presidential election of March 28th 2015, has shown that where the will exists the state can rise above issues such as social divisions and insurgency to manage an election. The challenge for transition states especially in Africa is how to manage its social divisions to ensure participatory inclusivity during elections. This issue becomes germane in view of the fact that electoral violence as experienced in Kenya in 2007 and in Nigeria in 2011 arose from perceived injustice emanating from social divisions. Significantly, it is this feeling of exclusion that gave fillip to situations of conflict experienced during the April 11th 2015, governorship elections as candidates and their parties came into the election with the mind-set of winning at all costs because of the 'winner takes all' syndrome characteristic of our politics. To change this mind-set and ensure properly managed elections political parties should desist from having a strangle hold on their candidates seeking political office. In the light of the foregoing the paper recommends the following:-

- INEC's initiative with the ICCES is laudable but should be enlarged to incorporate other stakeholders and replicated at the community levels.
- Funding has always been a problem in election management and this is fundamental to credible elections. Therefore government should provide adequate funding for INEC and if possible independent of the civil service.
- Incorporating civil society organizations into ICCES will help to confer more credibility on the committee.
- Government should walk the talk by providing adequate funding to all its institutions especially the police to insulate its personnel from corruption.
- Where electronic devices are used in the electoral process the fidelity of such devices must be guaranteed by INEC by ensuring that its staff are trained on the use of such devices ahead of elections.
- Finally, sanctions must be applied promptly whenever there is a security breach during elections to deter potential criminals as justice delayed is justice denied.

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