



Partisan security agency and credible elections in Nigeria's fourth republic and beyond

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Abstract

The importance of election security has been significantly increased in Nigeria's voting process. This is due to the fact that the nation's electoral contests are often characterised by violence and fraud. This can be comprehended due to the state's dual function as both a regulator and the predominant participant in the economy. Accusations of professional misconduct by security officers assigned to ensure the safety and peacefulness of elections have frequently had a negative impact on the integrity and credibility of elections in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria. The responsibility of security organisations to safeguard electoral security before, during, and after elections has consistently been a matter of concern. This essay aims to establish a correlation between the political bias of security agencies and the integrity of elections in Nigeria's fourth republic and subsequent periods. The methodology of this study is grounded in Marxian post-colonial state theory and employs a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. The research asserts that security agencies adopted a biased stance before and during elections, compromising the credibility of electoral results. The policy implications include the fact that security institutions that are impartial and free from political influence are necessary for guaranteeing fair elections. It is essential to enhance the professionalism of these organisations, as it is an absolute requirement rather than an optional policy decision. It is advisable, among other measures, for them to realign and remove political influences in order to prioritise the welfare of the nation.

Keywords: Credible elections, Partisan security, Political class, Politicization

Introduction

Elections in Nigeria have acquired a disconcertingly unique character. Instead of being regular ceremonies in which qualified citizens willingly select their leaders based on long-established liberal democratic principles, elections in Nigeria have become stages for intense hostility and the display of extreme behaviour by the country's political elite in their unrestrained pursuit to maintain or gain control of the government. Assassination, bloodshed, violence, organised crime, electoral fraud, and other types of electoral malpractice are all examples of this brutality (Nnadozie, 2007; Omotola, 2010; Gbanijie, 2014) ^[25, 32, 15].

As political conflicts have descended into a chaotic and lawless condition, resembling Hobbes' concept of a state of nature, the importance of ensuring the security of elections has become a significant focus in the nation's electoral process. In the fiercely competitive realm of an electoral competition, it cannot be presumed that Nigerian political contenders will strictly adhere to the established laws and regulations. Hence, the participation of security agencies is crucial in ensuring electoral security (Ajayi, 2015) ^[3].

In the specific context of Nigeria, insufficient security protocols have had a negative impact not just on the administration of elections but also on the trustworthiness of the electoral process. However, the main concern in this matter is not just the creation and arrangement of a sufficient security system to meet the requirements of a specific election but also the competent and impartial attitude of security agencies responsible for upholding law and order and supporting the electoral authority in conducting trustworthy elections.

According to certain commentators, the first and second republics collapsed due to election problems (Diamond, 1988; Osaghae, 1998; Onebamhoi, 2011) ^[12, 34, 33]. During the 1964–65 general elections, there were instances of violence, malpractice, fraud, and intimidation. These events led to protests, rioting, burning, and the loss of over 200 lives in the defunct western region. The military took advantage of this situation to seize control (Osaghae, 1998) ^[34].

A similar tendency was noted at the general elections of the Second Republic in 1983. The National Party held control during the elections. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in Nigeria made a determined effort to take over states that had previously been under the control of opposition parties in addition to maintaining control of the federal government. This led to extensive violence after the elections, particularly in Ondo State, which was formerly a bastion of the defunct Western opposition party. The region's activities were duplicated through extensive acts of violence, resulting in numerous fatalities and extensive damage to property (Onebamhoi, 2011; Babarinsa, 2003; Awopeju, 2011; Adele, 2012) ^[33, 9, 8, 1].

In Nigeria's fourth republic, polls have been characterised by the conspicuous presence of security agencies both prior to and during elections. Paradoxically, their participation has undermined the trustworthiness of electoral results in most instances, as they are accused of exhibiting political bias in carrying out their responsibilities. This article aims to establish a correlation between the security apparatus, partisanship, and the credibility of elections in the Fourth Republic.

Conceptual Clarifications

Credible election: The concept of credible elections has been deeply embedded in the lexicon of Nigeria's electoral system. While it is considered that elections in mature democracies are generally free, fair, and conducted in a civilised manner devoid of fraud and bloodshed, this cannot be said of elections in a country like Nigeria, which is prone to manipulation and aggressive confrontation. Nevertheless, it may be challenging to establish a precise definition for a lawful election, as no singular explanation can fully encompass the fundamental elements of a trustworthy election. Therefore, it is more appropriate to define the essential attributes of a trustworthy election. According to the National Democratic Institute (2008) ^[22], credible elections are characterised by inclusivity, transparency, accountability, and competitiveness. Inclusiveness entails providing equitable opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate in the electoral process by voting and seeking public office. Transparency necessitates that the electoral process be conducted in an open manner, with all parties involved affirming that it was carried out with honesty and truthfulness.

Accountability pertains to the entitlements of citizens concerning the conduct of other participants in the political process. Competitiveness necessitates providing suitable and fair opportunities for residents to participate in political candidacies. In a similar vein, Alim (2015) ^[6] delineated the attributes of a credible election as follows:

1. Elections must reflect popular desires.
2. Participation is mandatory for all qualified political parties.
3. The public must have some faith in the process.
4. There must be a level playing field for political parties

and candidates.

Evidently, the aforementioned indicates that a trustworthy election is primarily concerned with ensuring contentment among all participants in the electoral procedure, ensuring that the process is devoid of any form of manipulation, and ensuring that the election outcome, to a considerable degree, accurately represents the wishes of the voters.

Partisan security: To fully understand the notion of partisan security in this study, it is important to have a clear understanding of the terms partisan and security. A partisan is an individual who belongs to a political party or group and exhibits a personality characterised by unwavering, intense, or unjustifiable commitment to that particular group. Similarly, the term "partisan" implies a strong dedication or bias towards a specific political party, group, or cause. Security, in this context, pertains to the coordination and management of a nation's security apparatus, including the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, and State Security Service (SSS).

Nigerian security agencies, as state-owned organisations, are legally required to protect and defend the state and its citizens against any security hazard from within or without. The police have a legal obligation to uphold law and order, as stated in Section 4 of the Police Act. However, as stated in Section 217(2) (c) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the armed forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force) can assist civilian authorities in restoring order upon request from the President. In an ideal scenario, security agencies would exhibit the highest level of professionalism and impartiality in their conduct.

Partisan security is characterised by security agencies fulfilling their duties in a way that implies they are an appendage of a political party, specifically the governing party, and promoting the party's narrow partisan objectives through both covert and overt methods, even if these objectives are contrary to the national interest. There are concerns about the bias of Nigeria's security agencies during the elections of the fourth republic. These tools are commonly thought to have been employed for the purpose of instilling fear, tormenting, and causing annoyance to political adversaries, particularly those affiliated with the governing party (Ajayi, 2015) ^[3].

Indications of partisan prejudice by Nigerian security agencies during general elections

1. Intimidation and harassment tactics: Security agencies may exhibit partiality by employing intimidation and harassment tactics against political opposition members and their sympathisers. This may entail apprehensions, investigations, or further methods of intimidation, resulting in an imbalanced competitive environment.
2. Selective application of electoral laws: The presence of bias can be observed through the discriminatory application of electoral laws. Security services have the potential to selectively focus on specific political parties or candidates, resulting in uneven enforcement of the law.
3. Use of Force During Election Processes: The use of force during election processes can lead to security agents exhibiting partiality through the implementation of disproportionate force, particularly in regions where there is substantial backing for the opposing party. This can lead to voter disenfranchisement and create an inequitable electoral climate.

4. **Manipulation of Electoral Processes:** Electoral processes can be manipulated, leading to bias. Security agencies could engage in ballot manipulation, interference with voting procedures, or other actions that exhibit bias towards a specific political party.
5. **Partisan Loyalty of Security Personnel:** The partisan allegiance of security personnel can lead to prejudice, as their commitment to a specific political party or candidate may influence their actions and decisions. The credibility of the democratic process can be compromised if security agencies are seen as being biased towards a certain political interest.
6. **Abuse of Security Resources:** Security agencies may exhibit favouritism by misappropriating their resources to advantage a specific political faction. This may entail offering security escorts or other benefits to preferred candidates while disregarding others.
7. **Impact on Media and Public Perception:** Security agencies may endeavour to exert influence on media coverage in order to promote specific political entities. This can have an influence on shaping public opinion and affecting the overall equity of the electoral procedure. The presence of bias can be observed through the discriminatory application of electoral laws. Security services have the potential to selectively focus on specific political parties or candidates, resulting in uneven enforcement of the law.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Marxist theory of the post-colonial state. This theory has its underpinnings in the works of Marx and Engels (1977) ^[19], who viewed the state as an instrument in the hands of the dominant class to ensure their continued dominance. Following Marx and Engels, scholars like Alavi (1973) ^[5], Miliband (1977) ^[21], Ake (1985) ^[4], Ekekwe (1986), and a host of others have adapted this view of the state to the specificities of states at the periphery, most of whom emerged from colonial rule, hence the tag of post-colonial states. The major assumption of this theory is that the post-colonial state is a creation of imperialism, and its development trajectory and philosophy are dictated by the interests of the metropolitan capitalists and their local collaborators, the so-called indigenous bourgeoisie, and not by the interests of the majority of the citizens. For Ekekwe (1986), the colonial state provided the foundation upon which the post-colonial state rests and, like its precursor, provided the enabling environment for primitive accumulation by the metropolitan bourgeoisie and their local counterparts. The post-colonial state characteristically plays a dominant role in the political economy of the state. With a weak and parasitic political class lacking a base for independent development, the state becomes an avenue for the acquisition of economic resources for survival. This explains why the power struggle to capture and control the soul of the state is fierce. Incidentally, the state exhibits limited autonomy in mediating inter- and intra-class struggles. Ake (1985:9) ^[4] aptly captured this when he wrote that:

The unique feature of the state in Nigeria and this is typical of periphery formations generally, is that the state has limited autonomy. That is, the state is institutionally constituted in such a way that it enjoys little independence from the social classes, particularly the hegemonic class, and so is immersed in the struggle of the classes.

Thus, the state becomes an instrument in the hands of those who control its machinery to further their economic and political interests, deploying, if need be, its coercive apparatuses with a view to subjugating other contenders to state power.

In applying this theory to Nigeria, it is realised that the Nigerian state is a post-colonial state where the electoral contests to capture state power are always fierce. Because of its limited autonomy, the state becomes an instrument in the hands of those who control its machinery to harass, oppress, and intimidate political opponents before, during, and after elections using the security agencies.

The research methodology

The study predominantly employed an ex-post facto research design. Kerlinger (1977) ^[18] described ex-post-facto design as a form of cognitive investigation where an agent starts with the observation of a dependent variable and then examines the independent variable in a comprehensive manner to determine its potential correlation or influence on the dependent variables.

The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. The approaches employed for data collection encompassed observation and the utilisation of documentary sources. The information was derived from empirical observation and supplemented with scholarly literature, government publications, journals, newspapers, and online sources. This is predicated on the presumption that the event has already transpired and the data is present. We utilised the qualitative descriptive approach for data analysis to examine the generated data.

The character of electoral contests in Nigeria's fourth republic

The fourth republic of Nigeria commenced on May 29, 1999, after a period of over fifteen years of military governance, during which the civilian political class had a subordinate position in the country's political proceedings. The Abubakar regime's transition to a civil rule agenda provided a glimmer of hope and, indeed, motivation for the political elite. The initiative reached its pinnacle with the execution of the 1999 general elections and the accompanying transition to a civilian government.

Since 1999, the country has had a succession of general and local elections in which political parties and their candidates have played the role of competitors. The question of whether the nature of these elections significantly differed from those of the first and second republics and, to a lesser extent, the fourth republic is subject to debate.

Evidently, instances of electoral fraud and violence have tainted the political cycle since 1999, eroding confidence in democratic outcomes (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010; Omotola, 2010; National Democratic Institute, 2012) ^[32]. According to Awopeju, (2011:2) ^[8]:

The discretionary procedure has been emergencies ridden since 1999. It appears to be each progressive political race from that point forward has been more terrible than before ones... This was what happened after the 2003 and 2007 elections.

Although it might be contended that the 1999 general elections lacked violence and electoral malfeasance, the subsequent ones cannot be characterised in the same manner.

The 1999 elections can be attributed to the politicians' deliberate refusal to grant the military any means of maintaining authority. Widespread fraud significantly tainted the 2003 general elections. The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) mostly engages in electoral fraud. Apart from that, former President Obasanjo advised the nation against politicians equipping militias in the run-up to the elections. According to Adele (2012) ^[1], the subsequent 2007 elections did not produce a better outcome. This statement can be applied to the overall 2011 elections. The 2015 general elections were highlighted for the unprecedented levels of pre-election tensions and violence (National Human Rights Commission, 2015) ^[24].

The same holds true for local elections, such as those conducted inside specific states, as it does for general elections. The localised acts of extreme cruelty and manipulation of the electoral process by politicians and their hired armed groups during the governorship election in Bayelsa State on December 5, 2015, and the National/State Assembly re-run elections in Rivers State on March 19, 2016, served as clear examples of the characteristics of electoral competitions in the fourth republic.

The consistent nature of election contests is justifiable, particularly considering the inherent characteristics of the Nigerian state. The government's control over the economy has remained strong. According to Animashaun (2010) ^[7], it serves as both a regulator and the primary participant in the economy. The dominant position of the state results in a limited availability of opportunities beyond government-related endeavours. For the political elite, being marginalised from the political and economic framework leads to a life of destitution. The consolidation of oil revenues, which have historically been the main source of funding for the government and future governments, goes hand in hand with this. Due to the dominant position of the state, the ability to acquire official authority has become a fundamental way for the parasitic political elite to accumulate and maintain power. Consequently, it is inevitable that this access is greatly esteemed (Olurode, 2013) ^[31].

The politicisation of security in Nigeria

The politicisation of Nigerian security is a long-standing phenomenon that dates back to the post-independence era. As Obiukwu, Udumaga, and Akor (2014) ^[28] observed, there were ongoing disagreements concerning the essential conditions for military recruitment and promotion at the time of independence. Therefore, while individuals from the northern region advocated for a system that relied on bravery, or more precisely, predetermined numerical limits, individuals from the southern region preferred a system that relied on educational credentials and demonstrated ability. Undoubtedly, the northerners emerged victorious, mostly due to their numerical superiority in the House of Representatives rather than the soundness of their case. The implementation of the quota system indicated the introduction of the federal character principle in the recruitment and promotion of security service personnel. Despite the federal character principle, the main issue is that political and sectional considerations are what drive promotions to the highest ranks of the security services. Consequently, security professionals openly demonstrate their political allegiance or loyalty and are then rewarded with career progression.

Ogunna (2003) ^[29] states that under military rule, the military is deployed from their barracks and incorporated into civil

society to carry out government duties. During this time, the military, including the officers involved in the political process, became politically influenced. As a result, these officers are continually engaged in state politics. Their focus lies on the daily political matters and the process of resolving or determining them—such as who holds power, the reasons behind their authority, and the timing of their governance.

Another evident manifestation of the politicisation of Nigerian security is the government's utilisation of it. The government often utilises security agencies to perpetuate the suppression of the population and deprive them of their suffrage in elections. This specifically originates from the colonial era. Quedraogo (2014:1) ^[36] observed the following regarding African militaries, including Nigeria's:

African militaries built during the colonial period were intended to protect the government, not the populace... Without fundamental guiding principles, the entwining of political, military, and economic interests have persisted and, at times, intensified in the decades since colonialism's demise. Control of the military has traditionally been considered a means of gaining dominance and wealth in Africa... This has resulted in the politicization of the military, as well as constant rivalry and plotting between politicians and security leaders seeking an advantage. One evident result of security agencies' politicisation has been the deterioration of professionalism and the adoption of a political posture.

An alarming occurrence in Nigeria's security services is the gradual resurgence of ethnicity (northernization) by Buhari's administration, whereby individuals from the northern region are assuming nearly all vital roles in security agencies and paramilitary organisations. Take the appointment of security chiefs and the recent elevation of senior police officials as instances. Those from the north are promoted more frequently than those from the south. This flagrantly contravenes the fundamental principles of impartiality, legality, and impartiality enshrined in the Constitution, as well as the notion of federal character. Furthermore, it deviates from globally recognised standards for a society that has multiple ethnicities. Instead of resolving the country's already unstable security situation, this imbalance often leads to more conflict among the security forces, which has significant ramifications for reducing the threat of insecurity that now plagues the nation. From a close look, the incumbent administration seems to follow the same pattern as above.

Nigerian security's partisanship and the credibility of electoral outcomes

In principle, security agencies ought to demonstrate allegiance to the Nigerian state rather than the ruling party. Nevertheless, it has been noted that due to the politicisation of the security forces in Nigeria and the involvement of their personnel in elections under the Fourth Republic, their impartiality is heavily doubted. It is important to acknowledge that instances of electoral fraud, such as ballot stuffing, removal of ballot boxes, invalidation of ballot papers, sneaking in of unauthorised ballot papers into counting centres, disappearance of election officials, intimidation and harassment of political opponents, and various other electoral wrongdoings, flourish in an environment of biased security. Commonly, allegations of election fraud and falsification arise, implicating security

officers who collude to benefit the current officeholder. The fact that Nigerian security agencies consistently show bias during elections has become a recurring issue in the country's politics. For far too long, Nigerians have been let down by our security agencies' apparent partisanship during elections and servile allegiance to political leaders. Regarding for example, during the 1983 general elections, the then-ruling National Party of Nigeria exploited the malleable police to perpetrate one of the most horrific electoral frauds in the country's political history. During this running Fourth Republic, elections have been highly militarised. The widespread deployment of the military during elections in Nigeria has been a topic of controversy and public indignation among Nigerians. However, successive administrations at the federal level justified the use of military forces in the electoral process, viewing it as a crucial responsibility of the government to protect lives and resources during elections. Ajayi, (2006) ^[2] observed that although the police, military, and paramilitary forces played a crucial role in enhancing security and preventing election-related violence in certain regions, their presence had a negative impact on voter enthusiasm and resulted in decreased voter turnout.

Security experts were dispatched to collaborate with and safeguard the ruling party. They did nothing to prevent political hooligans from snatching ballot papers in the majority of polling stations... Rigging was carried out calmly in the form of vote box stuffing by the majority of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) agents, in collaboration with election officials (Ajayi, 2006:6) ^[2].

Before the elections in 2003, law enforcement authorities employed tear gas on Senator Chuba Okadigbo, the vice presidential candidate of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), as well as other party members, during a political rally. Senator Okadigbo died shortly thereafter due to complications arising from gas inhalation. By undertaking these and comparable measures, the police effectively conveyed a distinct message to the opposition, indicating their alignment with the ruling party in the forthcoming elections. During Obasanjo's presidency in Nigeria, the deployment of security forces was used as a means of intimidating and excluding members of the opposition and many Nigerians. This involved various tactics, such as the misuse of arrest, detention, investigation, and prosecution powers by organisations like the EFCC, police, and the office of the Attorney-General of the Federation before the 2007 elections. Similarly, the re-run elections that followed also exhibited a similar pattern. The military was mobilised for the re-run of gubernatorial elections in Kogi, Adamawa, Cross Rivers, and Ekiti States on March 29, 2008, April 6, 2008, May 25, 2008, and April 2, 2009, respectively, creating an atmosphere resembling a war mobilisation. This heavily militarised and tense environment is certainly not conducive to the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections.

The 2007 general elections were remarkable not only for the substantial presence of security personnel but also for the active support and promotion of electoral fraud by these forces leading up to and during the polls. Unsurprisingly, a lot of violence, instances of police brutality, and various human rights violations marred the 2007 elections, depriving common Nigerians of their fundamental rights. Voters residing in areas including Ughelli North, Ughelli South,

Okpe, Patani, and certain portions of Bomadi and Burutu Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Delta State were completely deprived of their right to vote. Within Edo State, specifically in Ward 4 of Ika North East LGA, individuals affiliated with the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) were observed engaging in the act of marking ballot papers with their fingerprints at the polling station situated at Ngala Primary School. Electoral fraud and manipulation of outcomes were widespread in Anambra, Imo, Rivers, Delta, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo, Adamawa, Kogi, Enugu, Benue, Kano, and Cross River states, among other regions. The presence of armed gunfire and a significant deployment of security personnel in Ikot Ekpene LGA, Akwa Ibom State, dissuaded several voters from participating in the electoral process. Additionally, there were reports of armed men engaging in coerced voting in the states of Edo, Delta, Enugu, Ekiti, and Rivers. The police in certain states exerted strong control over voters in specific districts, instructing them on where to place their thumbprints (Mbah and Obi, 2014). The act of manipulating the vote was characterised by the use of armed tactics in politics.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo proclaimed the 2007 elections a matter of life and death in a frantic endeavour to install his puppet, the late President Umaru Yar'Adua, as the president. In order to achieve the objective of installing Yar'Adua, the government effectively used security forces to actively seek out and intimidate the opposition. Based on the evaluation of the elections by the European Union observer team, Nwolise (2007: 169, 173) ^[26] noted,

The elections were marred by poor organisation, a lack of fundamental transparency, far-reaching procedural anomalies, critical proof of misrepresentation, particularly during the result collation process, voter disappointment at various stages of the procedure, a lack of comparable conditions for hopefuls, and numerous instances of violence. Thus, the elections did not live up to the aspirations and desires of Nigerian citizens, and the process cannot be termed sound. Residents were harmed, annoyed, apprehended, beaten, and executed by security agents. The overwhelming presence of well-equipped police officers and combatants insured voter apathy in multiple locations... The then Inspector General of Police, Sunday Ehindero, directed his state commissioners of police to clamp down on people organising or causing dissent walks on May 1, denying residents the opportunity to vent their grievances about the method in which their ballots were cast and had been stolen.

Additionally, a technical working group made up of seven members and assembled by the National Human Rights Commission to look into the events surrounding the 2007 and 2011 general elections came to the conclusion that there was strong evidence indicating that the police, judiciary, and even INEC played a significant role in perpetrating electoral fraud in the country (Neutrality of Security Agencies, 2015).

Equally notable were the gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo States in 2012, Anambra in 2013, Ekiti and Osun in 2014, Bayelsa in late 2015 and early 2016, as well as the state and national assembly re-run elections in Rivers State in early 2016 and 2017. To enhance the security of the gubernatorial elections and parliamentary rerun elections in the mentioned seven states, the Nigerian Federal Government deployed a significant contingent of soldiers and other security

operatives, in addition to the police and other civil law enforcement agencies. The 2014 Osun State governorship elections were characterised by an unusually extensive deployment of military forces. An astounding 73,000 security forces were mobilised to provide security throughout the election, making it one of the most heavily militarised elections in history. The 2014 governorship election in Ekiti and the 2016 Rivers State rerun parliamentary elections saw the deployment of 12,000 and 28,000 security troops, respectively (Vanguard 2016) ^[38]. The security forces deployed in the respective states comprised the police army, personnel from the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the State Security Service, and other paramilitary units. The Nigerian Navy and Air Force were deployed during the elections in Rivers and Bayelsa states due to the notable political ramifications and the topographical features of the deltaic and riverine environments. The Navy employed gunboats to conduct surveillance of the canal and deter the involvement of diverse insurgent factions. Meanwhile, the Force employed helicopters to carry out surveillance on the abundant wetlands and streams in the two states (Inokoba and Okoro, 2020) ^[17]. The significant deployment of Nigerian security personnel for electoral purposes is seen as a worrisome development for the nation's advancing democracy, as elections should ideally be peaceful events and their procedures should be separate from military preparations for a foreign enemy.

However, the security personnel's actions during the Ekiti election cast doubt on their dedication to protecting lives during electoral processes. Evidence suggests a purposeful endeavour to specifically target and intimidate members of the opposition party, since a substantial number of All Progressive Congress (APC) members were apprehended and held in custody before the elections. Meanwhile, members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were granted the freedom to participate in any activities they considered essential to achieving success. In addition, the leaders of the All Progressive Congress (APC) were prevented from entering the capital of Ekiti State and were excluded from participating in their extensive gathering prior to the election as a result of the intervention of troops and other security agencies in a highly organised operation (Olaniyan and Amao, 2015) ^[30]. The then administration and powerful politicians also misused military and other security personnel during the Rivers 2016–2017 legislative re-run elections and the Bayelsa State 2015–2016 governorship elections. Within the framework of Rivers State, several election monitoring organisations have made observations and allegations concerning the utilisation of soldiers and the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) by the current All Progressive Congress (APC) federal government. Their purported intention was to instill fear in both voters and proponents of the opposition party, the PDP. In particularly severe situations, these security personnel have been accountable for the fatalities of electoral operatives affiliated with the People's Democratic Party (PDP). There were reports of troops in Gokana Local Government Area (LGA) in Rivers State attempting to confiscate electoral materials designated for the APC party in wards 2 and 3 of Bodo City. During this episode, when the military tried to prevent their escape with the materials, they caused the deaths of two members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Furthermore, there have been documented instances of military and SARS personnel confiscating voting materials in four out of the nineteen

wards of the Etche LGA (Inokoba and Okoro, 2020) ^[17]. The 2015/2016 gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa State also demonstrated a similar sequence of events and reports of the misconduct of security forces in Nigerian political processes. Local elections further exemplify the political nature of security agencies. Before the August 2014 governorship election in Osun State, the All Progressives Congress (APC) claimed that the police, military, and Department of State Security personnel were sent to the state for the poll with the intention of supporting the People's Democratic Party rather than serving the nation. The party claimed that the Department of State Security's (DSS) display of power in Osun, the interference with Governor Aregbesola's support by both the Police and the DSS, and the presence of the Minister of State for Defence and the Minister of Police Affairs in the state before the election were all evident signs of the security organisations' bias towards the state (Osun political decision, 2014).

Before the 2015 elections, supporters of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Imo State confidently asserted that they would have unrestricted access to and cooperation from security services. They argued that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had previously controlled elections and believed it was now their chance to do so. This study's author, who hails from Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State, provided evidence of this confident claim at the March 28, 2015 Presidential/National Assembly elections held during the 2015 general elections. During the aforementioned elections, members of the APC engaged in violent behaviour and employed armed groups to prevent the senatorial candidate of the People's Democratic Party from entering the local government collation centre. The security forces present at the centre failed to intervene and take any action against these individuals. On April 11, 2015, a comparable incident took place during the Governorship/House of Assembly elections. A prominent member of the PDP party from Obowo visited the L.G.A. collation facility and experienced a direct and explicit threat to his life. Upon reporting the event to the Divisional Police Officer, he was instructed to comply with the miscreant's demands in order to maintain peace. Considering the potential opportunities, it is necessary to scrutinise the authenticity of the elections.

The aforementioned event was a child's play in comparison to the significant incident that took place on July 23, 2016, during the re-run election for the Imo North senatorial seat. The security personnel were found to have unlawfully seized election documents, tampered with ballot boxes, and coerced unsuspecting voters in support of the APC ruling party. The ward collation officers of INEC hastily departed and subsequently reappeared the next morning at the INEC office in Obowo L.G.A. Shortly thereafter, a lengthy procession of cars, accompanied by armed security forces (both military and police), swiftly arrived at the INEC office and insisted that the collation of results take place at Obowo L.G., in direct opposition to the directives of the Resident Electoral Commissioner of Imo State. The outcome of the Local Government Area (L.G.A.) did not align with the subtotals derived from the 107 polling booth results recorded in the INEC Form EC 8A. Agents from the PDP and APC parties, as well as the duly appointed INEC presiding officers, have all properly endorsed these subtotals.

In related vein, the 2019 Nigerian general election was also militarised. It was noted that there were instances in the elections where the military acted outside of the limits

allowed by the electoral 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 the protection of election officials. In apparent contravention of this, troops 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. Incidents of partisan involvement in the elections by the military, particularly in Rivers State, occurred. The police also acted in ways that suggested it was partisan in the elections (Ukpong, 2019)^[37]. The security forces in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria have undermined the integrity of elections by deliberately obstructing election observers from accessing specific regions. Their intention is to hide instances of electoral fraud and deter close examination, asserting that certain regions are dangerous or susceptible to violence. This enables their political associates to participate in election misconduct (Buba, 2013)^[11]. The involvement of security forces in Nigerian elections has clearly had a negative effect on the transparent, democratic, and credible conduct of elections in the country.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the information provided, it is evident that there are several policy implications. Firstly, it is acknowledged that security agencies have become politicised due to party influences.

Only security measures that are depoliticized and impartial may effectively assist in guaranteeing credible elections. The ruling elite bears a patriotic duty to safeguard these institutions from any political interference and to limit their involvement only to activities mandated by the constitution and laws.

The security system should endeavour to maintain political neutrality, not only during elections but also in the periods preceding and after them. These agencies should actively combat the corrupting influence of power and money. Stringent sanctions should be enforced against personnel who conspire with politicians to engage in electoral fraud.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the lack of professionalism exhibited by these firms is the reason behind their tendency to show bias. Continual efforts to shift towards professionalism are required in this context. Finally, the manner in which the authorities involve these agencies before and during elections requires legislative participation by enacting a new law that clearly defines their involvement in the political process.

Conclusion

Elections in Nigeria, in most areas, bear a striking resemblance to armed conflict. They exhibit a propensity for both violence and dishonesty. The fact that the government controls the economy and gives the political elite and their associates unrestricted privileges to use the state's economic resources can help explain this phenomenon. Given the atypical nature of election conflicts in Nigeria, it is imperative to enforce adequate electoral security measures. The participation of security agencies in elections at all levels

is a prominent feature of the Fourth Republic. This study uncovers that although these security agencies are designed to function with maximum professionalism and impartiality, they have been discovered to be biased, meaning they act in ways that promote the ruling party's specific partisan objectives while carrying out their responsibilities. This partisanship is cultivated by the needlessly politicised security institutions, which originated during the colonial period and have persisted into the post-colonial age.

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