

Unveiling Security Agencies as Challenges to Electoral Integrity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Security is a significant part of electoral administration. This is especially true in emerging, nascent and budding democracy like Nigeria where the electoral systems are still largely evolving. The level of voters' turnout and political contestants' participation, the credibility of electoral results and ultimately the legitimacy conferred on the emergent government, largely depend on how well the security of the elections are managed. As such the role of security agencies in the management of elections in Nigeria occupies a strategic position in the electoral process, and by implication, the consolidation of democratic governance. And since such agencies play significant roles in organizing democratic elections, their actions or inactions could make or mar elections. However, since the emergence of the Fourth Republic, the role and conduct of security agencies in the electoral process has left much to be desired. The unprofessional and unpatriotic activities of these security agencies in Fourth Republic elections have in a lot of ways undermined the integrity and democratic quality of these elections. As such the paper is undertaken to unravel the role of security agencies in the unending electoral crisis afflicting democracy in Nigeria. The data for this paper are drawn from secondary sources while personal observation and interviews with security personnel were employed to complement findings from the literature. The conclusion of the study is that security agencies through their compromising roles in electoral fraud and violence, have become a major hindrance to the institution of electoral integrity and democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Keywords: Electoral Integrity, Electoral Security, Security Agencies, Fourth Republic and Electoral Administration.

Introduction

Security is an indispensable and integral part of electoral administration especially in transitory and nascent democracies like Nigeria where the electoral system is bedeviled by electoral fraud and violence. Security is also key to electoral credibility and integrity because the level of voters' turnout, the quality of political contestants, the credibility and acceptability of electoral outcomes and ultimately the legitimacy conferred on the emergent government – all largely depends on how well the security of the elections are managed. From the provision of basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations (Jega, 2013:xx).

It is equally worthwhile to note that since elections are generally conceived to be legitimate contest for the power resources of the state, they are bound to be confrontational and conflictual especially in politically underdeveloped society like Nigeria. This therefore requires the assurance of equitable and adequate security to create the right environment for free, fair, safe and credible elections. This certainly will go a long way to retain participants' confidence and commitment to the electoral process (Attoh, 2016:1). Evidence from the United Nations (UN) 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.

There is no doubt that since the emergence of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria's democracy has been battling with the issue of electoral corruption that manifests itself in the form of electoral fraud and violence. Though extant scholarship has identified several mutually related factors that hinder credible and democratic elections, the paper will investigate how the heavy involvement of security services in

the Fourth Republic elections have continued to compromise electoral integrity and democratization in Nigeria. The research is germane to contemporary discourse on electoral politics in Nigeria because in many ways, elections in Nigeria are akin to war. For one thing, mobilization of security service by the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for election is massive and akin to preparation for a major war (Mbah & Obi, 2014:1; Ibeanu & Egwu, 2007). All elections in the Fourth Republic have involved the assemblage of thousands of people composed of not only poll workers, party representatives and election observers, but also massive deployment of security agencies from the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to the Nigerian Military, Nigerian Customs, Nigerian Immigration, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and a host of other uniformed and armed organizations. Thus, the paper interrogates the crisis of electoral administration by largely attributing it to the heavy involvement of these security forces in electoral process of the country; this is particularly necessary given that elections ought to be a civic affair and its processes should be distinguished from preparations for war against a foreign enemy.

To achieve the purpose of the research, the paper has been divided into five sections beginning with the introduction. The second section focuses on the conceptual discourse on electoral integrity and security, the third presents a general overview of electoral challenges in the Fourth Republic, while the Fourth section examines the threat posed by security forces to free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. The paper ends with concluding remarks.

Conceptual Discourse on Electoral Integrity and Security

The two central variables of the study are electoral integrity and electoral security; the conceptual meanings and interplay between the concepts shall examine in this section. Electoral security is taken as the independent variable while electoral integrity is presented as the dependent variable.

Generally speaking for the purpose of our discourse, electoral integrity is seen as a fundamental attribute of democratic election; that is, an election that is free, fair, peaceful and credible. According to Mbah and Obi (2014:3) it is an electoral process and environment characterized by confidence, transparency, accountability and lawful conduct of all participants. In an electoral system where electoral integrity is promoted it presupposes respect for freedom of expression and free press, the right to vote and be voted for at elections, freedom of assembly and movement, freedom of association, non-discrimination and equal rights for all citizens, freedom from intimidation and a range of other fundamental human rights and freedoms that enhances the full and unhindered participation of the citizenry in the electoral process.

There is a general consensus that elections are the indispensable tool of democracy. According to Annan (2013) for elections to embolden democracy, further development and promote integrity, they must be conducted with integrity (cited in USAID, 2013:5). Where there is electoral integrity, the bedrock of democratic principle of political equality is honoured; citizens select their leaders, and hold them accountable whereas where elections lack integrity, politicians, officials and institutions are not accountable to the public, which are denied equal opportunity to participate in and influence the political process. According to this position, public confidence in elections will be weak, and governments will lack legitimacy. In this environment democratic institutions become empty shells, devoid of the indispensable ethos and spirit of democracy (USAID, 2013:5).

Elections with integrity are important to values that we hold dear - human rights and democratic principles. Elections give life to rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights including the right to take part in the government of one's country through freely elected representatives, the right of equal access to public resources in one's country, and the recognition that the authority of government derives from the will of the people, expresses in "genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot (GCERDS, 2012:15).

Again, according to Annan (2013) in addition to promoting democratic values and human rights, electoral integrity can also yield other tangible benefits for citizens. Evidence from around the world suggests that elections with integrity matter for empowering women, fighting corruption, delivering services to the poor, improving governance, and ending civil wars. According to this view point when conducted with integrity, electoral processes are at heart of democracy's ability to resolve conflict peacefully. The ability of a society to resolve conflicts without violence requires debate,

information, interactions among citizens, and meaningful participation in their own governance, all of which have the potential to change people's minds and allow governments to make authoritative decisions. Electoral integrity can deepen democracy and enhance public deliberation and reasoning about salient issues and how to address them (USAID, 2013:5).

From the foregoing discussion, electoral integrity can be defined as any election that is characterized by the respect for democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as enunciated in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, transparent and peaceful in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle (GCEDS, 2012:16). In other words, for elections to have integrity it must be based on the rule of law, and must be conducted competently in a professional, non-partisan, and transparent manner, and just as important, voters must have confidence in their conduct. Ultimately, to speak of elections with integrity is to refer to elections that are conducted competently, professionally and democratically in a secured and peaceful electioneering environment.

To ensure electoral integrity especially in transitory and nascent democracies like Nigeria, there is need for effective electoral security. It is a very important factor in the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. In elections where security is guaranteed, political actors are mostly likely to abide and play by the rules of the game. Equally important is that the perception of the electorates on the state of security before, during and immediately after elections is a strong determination of voter behaviour and the level of their participation in the electoral process. If voters are assured that there is adequate security, there is likely to be high voter's turnout all things being equal. Conversely, fear of outbreak of electoral violence or breach of security is more likely to scare the voters away from the polling centres.

The significance of electoral security cannot, therefore be overemphasized. Electoral security is crucial for creating a conducive environment; electoral staff require to carry out their duties; for voters to freely and safely go to their polling units to vote; for candidates and political parties to organize rallies and campaigns; and for other numerous stakeholders to discharge their responsibilities under the constitution and the Electoral Act. Thus, the capacity and willingness of security operatives to provide adequate security in a non-partisan and impartial manner contributes immensely to the credibility and integrity of elections (Jega, 2013:xx; Cleen Foundation, 2015:1).

Again the conduct of security operatives in the electoral process is key to democratic deepening and governance as a result of the vital role free, fair and peaceful elections plays in the democratization process. Free, fair and peace election serves the purposes of legitimizing democratic government. According to Oni, Chidozie and Agbude (2013:49), elections strengthen people's attachment to the state; it creates an assurance to the people, about the political system in which they are. Election is one of the cardinal features of democratic government, and no matter how much a country boast of being democratic, the fact remains that the quality of democratic rights is a function of credible election. Election holds a central position in democratic government to the extent that any problem associated with the electoral process has direct impact on the political system. This makes free, fair and peaceful elections which are unimpeded by violence and intimidation central to functional democracy.

As such in an attempt to conceptualize election security, the paper adopted Fisher (2010) definition: He defined election security as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders, information, facilities or events. This is inline with Sisk (2008) definition. He conceived electoral security as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers; electoral information such as vote results, registration data and campaign materials; electoral facilities such as polling stations, computers and communication systems and ballot boxes; electoral events such as campaign rallies against death, damage, or disruption (cited in Obi, Chidozie and Agbude 2013:14). In other words, electoral security refers to figuring out the best possible measures to ensure or achieve conflict prevention, management, or mediation in management, or mediation in democratic elections. In their conceptual analysis of electoral security, Oni, Chidozie and Agbude (2013:50) identified three kind of electoral security. The first is physical security of equipment and materials. These include the electoral commission offices, election observer offices, media organizations, ballot boxes and papers, voters' register, result sheets, computers and communication systems employed in voter registration and vote tabulation among others (also see USAID, 2010). The second is personal security. This involves the protection of all electoral stakeholders, including candidates, voters, public

officials, election officials, security of party agents, election observers and media representatives (also see Fischer, 2008). Personnel security is vital to electoral integrity because people can be victims of assassination, torture, assault, physical injury, blackmail, kidnap or intimidation in attempts to influence their involvements and choices in an election. The third is electoral events. Events can be official in nature, such as voter registration exercise or election day activities, but also associated events such as campaign rallies, debates, and political party meetings (Fischer 2008, USAID, 2010: Oni, Chidozie & Agbude, 2013).

The centrality of electoral security to electoral integrity, that is credible, free and fair elections cannot be overemphasized. Adequate security is required to protect all eligible participants in the electoral process without fear of intimidation, coercion or violence is largely dependent on the availability of adequate security that ensures conducive and peaceful atmosphere are for electoral activities. Where the activities of security agents are found wanting, the citizens may not have confidence in the election and may question the credibility and legitimacy of the government that emerges from the process and this may portend serious legitimacy crisis in the polity (Oni, Chidozie & Agbude, 2013:50). Again the conduct of security operatives is yet another critical issue to electoral integrity. For security agencies to serve as a medium to ensure credible and peaceful elections, they must be professional in their conduct: they must not be overzealous in dealing with security challenges; they must be guided by the rule of law in their engagement with electoral participants; in dispensing their duties they must be fair to all electoral stakeholders; they must respect human dignity and rights of the electoral participants; and there must be an effective accountability mechanism that will deal with potential cases of impunity exhibited by errant officers (Chukwuma, 200; Alemika, 2003). These are some of the ways that the operations and conducts of security agencies can help ensure democratic and credible elections in a democratic polity.

Nature of Electoral Politics and the Need for Securing Elections in Nigeria

There is no gainsaying that like previous republics, electoral violence and insecurity has been the major albatross to peaceful, credible and democratic electoral politics and administration in the Fourth Republic Nigeria. Virtually all elections especially 2007 and 2011 elections in the present political dispensation have been tainted with tension, violence and blood. Even the so-called intra party primaries and elections have been characterized by one form of violence or the other. Thus, over the years, electoral processes in the history of Nigeria's democratic governance have continued to be marred by extraordinary display of rigging, "do or die" scheming, ballot snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulation of voters' list, brazen falsification of election results, the misuse of security agents against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Omotola, 2010; Oni, Chidozie & Agbude, 2013).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that there are different manifestations of electoral violence such as murder, arson, abduction, violent seizure and destruction of material, etc (Jegede, 2003:31). These acts are masterminded and perpetuated by individuals and groups with the intension of influencing the outcome of elections or deter elected officials from consolidating their positions after elections. Accordingly, Ogboaya, (2007:5) sees electoral violence to mean all forms of organized act or threat, physical, psychological and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing political opponents before, during and after an election, geared towards influencing the outcome of the electoral process to one's selfish desire. As evidence in all Fourth Republic elections, election-day violence is the most celebrated and documented electoral violence. At the structural level, election-day violence includes deliberate use of both political thugs (or private army) and security personnel against political opponents and their supporters, etc. Politicians also use this to destroy electoral materials and prevent voters perceived to be in support of their opponents from voting (Shaapera, Obadahun, & Alibaba, 2014:61). In analyzing dimensions of insecurity in the electoral process, the former chairman of INEC Professor Attahiru Jega argued that electoral insecurity pervades the entire electoral cycle. In his presentation to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in 2012, Professor Jega identified at least thirteen sets of security issues during the election cycle. These include physical attacks on INEC staff and facilities, attacks on security personnel on election duties, misuse of security orderlies by politicians especially incumbents, attack on opponents, attacks on members of the public, violence at campaigns,

intimidation of voters, snatching of election materials, kidnapping and assassination of political opponents (Jega, 2012:2).

Political tension, violence and bloodletting has been part and parcel of electoral politics and administration of the present political dispensation; the aftermaths of all the Fourth Republic elections-2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 General Elections –have posed grave threat to the shaky democracy and political stability of the Nigerian Federation. As a result of the heat, high tension and passion associated with elections in Nigeria, it has turned this vital ingredient of democracy into a violent battle that has often resulted into the death of many politicians, their supporters and innocent citizens. There is persistent and widespread intimidation of voters as well sponsored and organised thugs spread fear across communities in the build up to elections. In any case, elections in Nigeria is a winner takes all situation in which loser lose everything and winners win everything, akin to payment of reparation by an enemy defeated in a war (Jega, 2012:1).

But the fundamental question is: why has election that should be a routine, peaceful event through which citizens select their political leaders become a warlike enterprise in which property are wantonly destroyed and people are killed and maimed? One dominant explanation of electoral insecurity in Nigeria like most fragile democracies in Africa points to harsh socio-economic realities which have led to the emergence of a pool of unemployed and jobless young people who are easily enticed into violent activities by desperate politicians. It is suggested that rather than a blessing, Africa's youth bulge has become the most pressing source of insecurity, particularly during election periods. However, according to some scholars like Jega (2012:3) are quickly to aver that while the youth bulge may be a trigger factor in election insecurity, it is not a sufficient explanation because it fails to explain why many other countries with similar demographic characteristics have peaceful elections. This point to the fact that there are other intervening variables that convert what should be the most productive part of the population into cannon fodders for election violence.

A second explanation identified by Jega (2012:4) suggests that elections in countries like Nigeria are marked by insecurity because of their recency. The central argument of this position is that security challenges in elections constitute only a phase in the growth of electoral democracy that will pass with time. The major limitation of this evolutionist argument is that: one, it failed to give us a time frame before Nigeria could attain peaceful and credible elections and secondly, the explanatory model is not supported by empirical evidence because election insecurity seems to be getting worse in intensity and ramifications, suggesting that it has nothing to do with fundamentals phase but with fundamentals of the system (Jega, 2012:4).

Another common explanation is one of the weak political and electoral institutions and laws. This position has led to the call for the reform and strengthening of the electoral institutions and laws in order to empower institutions like the INEC to discharge its responsibilities more effectively (Obi, 2008). However, we do not think that the problem is one of weak or inadequate electoral laws. Rather, electoral insecurity is largely a product of electoral corruption a situation whereby the stakeholders especially the political contestants either refuse to adhere to the rules or subvert the rules of the electoral game. However, this should not be seen as a voluntary matter, whereby politicians and other stakeholders choose to obey the rules or not to obey them. Instead, the refusal of the political class to obey the electoral laws is fundamentally linked to the political economy and the class structure of the Nigeria State.

Apparently, in our attempt to explain the crisis of election administration and security in Nigeria, we largely attribute it to the class structure of the Nigerian State and consequently, the undemocratic and unethical values, attitudes and beliefs the political gladiators carry into electoral politicking in the country. Ake (1996:86) in his explanation of the fierce and warlike nature of electoral politics in Nigeria largely attributed it to the decadence, unproductive and unpatriotic political class. As a result of its historical dislinkage from productive forces the Nigerian ruling class is economically weak, lacking economic base, the Nigerian ruling class has continue to use political power, particularly the control of the state power, to amass wealth in an attempt to consolidate its material base. Thus, the capture of the state power inevitably becomes a matter of life and death. This is the primary reason why the struggle among political elites for the control of the state is so intense, anarchic and violent (Inokoba & Kalagbor 2016:12). Preparing for elections in Nigeria involves not just bribing of voters, electoral officials and

security personnel but also buying and recruiting political thugs (or private armies) to carry out violent acts such as intimidation, kidnapping, killing and arson against political opponents. It is therefore less surprising that all elections in Fourth Republic Nigeria have been characterized by so much violence, bloodletting and killings. The political elites sees election as a do-or-die affairs; that is game where the winner wins all and the loser losses everything (a zero-sum-game politics) (Wenbowei, 2011:119; Inokoba & Kalagbor, 2016:13; Ibaba, 2016-An Interview).

Apparently, under the environment of impurity and lawlessness demonstrated by the political gladiators in their quest for state power, fundamental political attitudes and norms necessary for enthronement of democratic elections are jettisoned. In the politicians combative and lawless struggle for political offices, there is no room for democratic principles, virtues and attitudes such as the sense of sportsmanship and fair play; political moderation, bargaining and tolerance; no accommodation and respect for the rights of political opponents, respect for the political rights of the electorates; and reverence for electoral laws, processes and institutions. The absence of these democratic virtues, obligations and niceties among Nigerian political contestants is what has turned the country's elections into acrimonious, lawless and war-like contest for the instruments of the state.

The lawless and desperate nature of political contestants in Nigeria has turned its electoral process and environment to one of the most insecure in the world. In some other jurisdictions such as Ghana, Benin Republic, Togo, Botswana, South Africa, India and Liberia, election security does not pose such a formidable challenge. In these political climes, politicians, generally, respect electoral institutions and laws and act with less impurity, electoral bureaucracies could be better trusted and security personnel act more professionally. In India for instance, particularly during elections, police command come under the control of the Chief Electoral Officer. Ghanaian and Benin election officials could transport electoral materials from one point to the other without fear of snatching of the materials or being abducted. They could take personal custody of election materials a day or two before the elections and without fear of election materials being snatched by hoodlums or election officials being abducted. Election environment in these climes are far better secured than in Nigeria. Apparently, the violent and insecure electoral environment and politics is largely an outcome of the undemocratic and unethical attitudes, perceptions and conduct of the Nigerian political class. This intense unsecured environment in Nigeria's electoral process has made it imperative for the massive deployment of security agencies to secure the electoral environment (Olorode & Hammanga, 2013:47).

Security Agencies as Threat to Electoral Integrity in Nigeria

From our analysis of the nature of electoral politics in Fourth Republic Nigeria, it is quite glaring that without the involvement of security operatives in the country's elections, political competition and rivalry among desperate and lawless politicians could degenerate to the Hobbesian state of nature where not only the fragile democracy will be threatened but also the national security of the Nigerian state. As such the Nigerian security agencies specifically the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) are saddled with the constitutional responsibility of ensuring the success and credibility of elections in Nigeria. To a large extent, the success or failure of any election is dependent on the conduct and performance of security operatives on election duty. Events during the build up to elections raised public fear about the safety and security of those participating in the process as voters, election officials, and even among candidates and political party agents. It is therefore very essential that security personnel on election duty display the highest level of integrity, neutrality, professionalism and sense of duty in order to reassure the voters that their safety and security are guaranteed. The conduct of security operatives as acknowledged above has a way of contributing to the credibility and integrity of the electoral process (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2015:59).

What is apparent from the foregoing is that absence of adequate security or politically impartial and peaceful polling environment will surely affect the quality of service rendered by electoral officers to voters. This situation will surely be unsatisfactory and integrity question will creep into the electoral process. This may adversely affect voters' participation and voting behaviour. A combination of these circumstances would call to question both the credibility of the elections and their outcomes. This situation would in addition do untold damage to the quality of democracy in the country and the legitimacy enjoyed by the benefiting government (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2015:59).

Hence, the protection of human life, voters, electoral materials and officials, and the preservation of lawful and orderly electoral processes are necessary for free and fair elections. The security agencies have a crucial responsibility to provide proper security at the time of elections to enable citizen elect their leaders under a peaceful atmosphere devoid of corruption, fraud, fear, coercion, intimidation and violence. According to Oyadiran and Toyin (2015:57) the security forces in a democratic society can never be called upon to perform any role more important or honourable than this. This is so because of the role credible and democratic elections plays in the stability of the nation as well as in democratic consolidation and governance; and respect accorded to the country by the comity of nations at the global level.

As much we acknowledge the central role security agencies play to enhance security and credibility of Nigerian general elections, several researches and reports have revealed how the unprofessional conduct of security operatives have contributed to violence and insecurity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections (Idowu, 2010; Cleen Foundation, 2011; Mbah & Obi, 2014). Our central argument is that these instances of professional misconduct by security personnel deployed to make elections safe and peaceful have often of adversely affected electoral integrity and credibility in Fourth Republic Nigeria.

First and foremost, one very obvious way the involvement of security agencies in elections in Fourth Republic Nigeria has to do with the motive and purpose of such deployment. Ideally, the deployment of security agencies for election duties ought to be dictated by objective criteria such as security report about possible outbreak of violence (that is, flashpoints); the size of the voting population in each polling unit, the number of polling units and their distances; and several other logistics reasons that influence the deployment process. This does not approximate the Nigerian reality. Rather subjective factors such as pecuniary and political considerations are the major deciding elements in the decisions of deployment of security personnel for electoral duties. We shall examine the issue from two levels: the influence of subjective biases or preferences among security officers and the impact of the political demands made by political holders on the security establishment. At the department level, it is important to point out that those who undertake deployment and those to be deployed have interests to protect. They have their biases against being posted to some areas and have political interest as well. All these cannot but impact on their decisions. Some states and even Local Government Areas are perceived as rich in resources and being on deployment there even for a few days in some of them would attract pecuniary benefits. Whereas being posted to some states may be regarded as punitive. Basically, this is the reason why some security personnel would lobby and even bribe to be posted to the so-called juicy and rewarding areas rather to areas that are considered as dry or too risky (Olorode & Hammanga, 2013: 72). It is therefore less surprising that we have high incidence of complicity of security operatives in electoral fraud and corruption in Nigeria; for them electoral duty or exercise is not call to national duty, rather these security officials see it as an avenue to make easy and quick money from 'generous' and desperate politicians.

Another way through which the deployment of security officers for electoral duty are compromised is the over bearing influence of powerful political figures on the posting process. Politicians believe that security personnel can influence electoral outcomes and they therefore try to cultivate their friendship. Security personnel in general but, police officers in particular, are expected to look the other way when electoral mal-practices are being perpetuated. According to Olurode and Hammanga (2013:73), Nigerian politicians therefore often include the cost of buying the loyalty and support of security personnel in their election budget. This in a lot of ways explains why security officers on electoral duty become partisan in their exercise of their electoral responsibilities. Instead of conducting themselves professionally, they end up been tools in the hands of their politician paymaster to perpetrate electoral corruption. In the process the electorates are disenfranchised and denied their fundamental civil rights of deciding who should govern them.

Another aspect of the deployment of security personnel for electoral purposes that is dangerous to electoral democracy and integrity is the over militarization of the deployment process by the incumbent political class in government. It is generally understood that the whole concept of electoral security is essentially a civil exercise to be dominated and controlled by the police force empowered by the constitution to carry out such function. It therefore becomes worrisome when there is a massive

militarization of the electoral process and environmental mainly carried out by the government of the ruling political party. Onapajo (2014), drawing references from a number of elections conducted in Nigeria between 2007 and 2011 argues that in terms of influencing election outcomes, the incumbent has been more associated with violence during elections than the opposition. It has a lot to do with the incumbent party's control of the coercive instruments of the state; these they use to full advantage in order to attain a pre-determined electoral outcome (see Olaniyan & Amao, 2015:72).

It is therefore not surprising that over the last 9 years (2007-2016), one issue which has drawn criticism and public fury from Nigerians is the massive deployment of the military during elections in Nigeria. Most notable among these elections, were the governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States in 2012, in Anambra (2013), in Ekiti and Osun governorship elections in 2014, governorship elections in Bayelsa State (late 2015 and early 2016) and state and national Assemblies re-run elections in Rivers State (early 2016 and 2017). Rather than relying on the police and other civil law enforcement agencies to provide the security needed during the gubernatorial elections and parliamentary rerun elections in the seven states mentioned above, the Nigerian Federal Government deployed large detachment of soldiers and other security operatives in these states to assist and ensure peaceful conduct during the election. Out of all the above cases of heavily militarized elections, that of Osun State stood out; the state governorship elections in 2014 had a massive and unprecedented presence of 73,000 security contingent to oversee security concerns during the election (Ayayi, 2014). While 12,000 and 28,000 security personnel were deployed to 2014 governorship in Ekiti and 2016 Rivers State rerun parliamentary elections respectively (Vanguard 2016). In all the concerned states, the deployed security forces included the police army, men of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDS), State Security Service and other paramilitary forces. The Rivers and Bayelsa elections because of the high political stakes involved and the deltaic and riverine terrain of both states, the Nigerian Navy and Air force were involved in the elections. While the Navy patrolled the waterway in their gun boats to checkmate the involvement of different factions of militants, the Force deployed their helicopters for surveillance of the several swamps and creeks of the two states. This massive deployment of Nigerian security forces for election purposes is seen as a worrisome development for the country's evolving democracy; given the fact that elections ought to be a civil affairs and its processes should be distinguished from preparations for war against an enemy nation.

However, the incumbent government at the centre are quick to justify the militarization of the electoral process- they see it as a fundamental responsibility of the state to protect lives and property during elections. President Goodluck Jonathan in rationalizing the heavy presence of security forces in Ekiti and Osun elections, argued that it was as a result of the wide spread destruction and killings during and after the 2011 elections (Olaniya & Amoa, 2015:17). Other proponent of the deployment of troops for the elections, the militarization of the Ekiti election was indeed necessary, considering the cases of violence that characterized the pre-election campaign by the three main political parties the PDP, APC and the Labour Party (LP), which participated in the election. Lending credence to this position, the Transition Monitory Group (TMG), a civil society group which regularly monitors the conduct of elections in Nigeria also justified the deployment of soldiers for elections in the country including the Ekiti election citing past experience where politicians take elections as an act of war, as a case in point (Okpi, cited in Olaniyan & Amao, 2015:75). The TMG chairman, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, argued, that the success recorded by the INEC in Ekiti may not have been possible if the soldiers were not on ground to ensure security (Okpi cited in Olaniyan & Amao, 2015:75).

However, the unprofessional conduct of security operatives during the Ekiti election put to question the motive of securing lives during elections; in what appears to be a ploy to persecute the opposition, a large number of members of the APC were arrested and detailed before the elections, while leaving members of the PDP to do whatever they feel like doing to ensure victory. In addition, the APC chieftains were denied entry into the Ekiti State capital and prevented from participating in their grand rally few days before the election by soldiers and other security agencies in a commando styled operation (see Olaniyan & Amao, 2015:71).

The misuse of military and other security personnel by the incumbent governments and some powerful politicians was also replicated in the Rivers 2016/2017 legislative re-run elections and Bayelsa State 2015/2016 governorship elections. In the Rivers State situation there were observation and

allegations by several election monitoring groups of how soldiers and the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) were deployed by the incumbent APC Federal government to intimidate voters and the opposition party, PDP faithful and agents. In some extreme instances PDP election agents were killed by these security forces. For instance in Gokana LGA of Rivers State, it was reported that soldiers in attempt to hijack election materials for the APC in wards 2 and 3 in Bodo city killed two members of the PDP who wanted to prevent them from fleeing with the materials. In similar cases, it was also reported that out of the 19 wards of the Etche LGA, soldiers and SARS personnel hijacked election materials for 4 wards.

The 2015/2016 gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa State also followed a similar sequence of events and narratives on the unprofessional conduct of security forces in Nigerian electoral processes. Our interview with some security personnel that took part in the said election reveals a new twist to the general narrative concerning the unprofessional and undemocratic conduct of security forces in Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections. As a result of the volatile nature of the political environment of the state due to the presence of several factions of militants and other warlords coupled with the fact that the election was heavily monetized and commercialized by the two dominant political parties- the PDP and APC, the security apparatus for the election was shared between the two dominant parties during the Bayelsa governorship election. Though APC government at the centre was in charge of the coercive instrument of the Nigerian state, on the field the Bayelsa state government under the control of PDP through the massive injection of cash into the election was able to buy some of the security operatives to their side and made them to do their bidding during the election. Under this environment where we had APC and PDP security forces, our contacts in the security apparatus also revealed that there was a tacit understanding between the factionalized security forces for each to maintain and respect their respective spheres of influence. Equally, the militants and their commanders were also shared by the two principal political parties. It was therefore not surprising that the 2015/2016 Bayelsa State governorship election was massively monetized and stained with so much violence and blood especially in the hotly contested Southern Ijaw LGA.

Apparently, as a result of the militarization of Fourth Republic elections, favourably electoral outcomes that political gladiators could not obtain through free, peaceful and credible elections, they now achieve through the help of security/military forces. Instead of deploying security forces to ensure peaceful and credible elections, the police, the army and other security operatives are now been employed by politicians to acquire and sustain state power. This is what Ibeanu (2007:10) and Mbah and Augustine (2014:9) refer to as "the primitive accumulation of votes". This involves the abusive use of state power and human rights especially the fundamental right to vote, by powerful individuals in their bid to acquire or hold onto political power. It is this undemocratic behaviour of contestants that is responsible for human rights abuses such as torture, killing, maiming and disenfranchisement that have characterized all elections in Fourth Republic Nigeria. The notoriety of the militarization of the electoral process of the state at the disposal of the incumbent governing elites are nurtured and deployed to ensure their hold to political power. For one, socio-political rights of citizens are trampled upon in the process of either maintaining or acquiring political power. For another, the use of security operatives which supposed to maintain law and order in the protection of citizen rights have become instrument for obviating the enjoyment of human rights at elections in Nigeria.

It is an acknowledged fact that voters' turnout in all the Fourth Republic elections have been very poor. One fact that election observers and scholars have attributed to this low turnout of voters has been the highly uncivil, violent and militarized environment that have characterized all elections in the Fourth Republic Nigeria especially the "do-or-die" 2007 elections by former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Inokoba & Zibima, 2011; Inokoba & Kumokor, 2011). Though the intention of the heavy militarization of opposition states by the previous and present incumbent central governments was to intimidate and run down the opposition parties, the electorates are the ultimate losers as most of them as a result of the massive presence of the military forces and their war machines, become too scared and shy away from the polling centres. Like a war zone, the troops from the joint military forces took their respective positions. In the Ekiti elections, almost every 100 metres from the entry point into the state, these multi-security forces mounted various check points with blood-hound dogs sniffing for any breach

of the peace by supporters of the various political parties (Olaniyan & Amao 2015:77). This definitely is not a conducive and safe environment for elections.

One election that was notoriously characterized by massive deployment of military force and violence which resulted to the intimidation and disenfranchisement of voters and supporters of the opposition parties was the 2007 general elections. The elections was declared as a do-or-die affairs, as President Obasanjo made it clear to the nation and the electoral commission that PDP will do everything to win the elections at all costs. Under Obasanjo's watch as Nigerian President the deployment assumed a major form of intimidation and disenfranchisement of members of the opposition and many Nigerians. This took several forms; the abuse of arrests, detention, investigative and prosecutorial powers as witnessed in the activities of the EFCC, police and the office of the Attorney-General of the Federation prior to the 2007 elections (Mbah & Obi, 2014:18). Likewise, the subsequent re-run elections followed similar pattern; the mobilization of the military for the re-run of the 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 was akin to the mobilization for war. This highly militarized and tension soaked environment definitely is not the kind of civil, peaceful and conducive environment required for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections.

As expected, the 2007 elections witnessed widespread violence, police torture and other human rights abuses that denied ordinary Nigerians their basic rights. Voters in places like Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Okpe, Patani and some parts of Bomadi and Burutu LGAS of Delta State were totally disenfranchised. In Edo State, particularly in ward 4 of Ika North East LGA, PDP members were seen thumb printing ballot papers in the polling station located at Ngala primary school. Vote rigging and falsification of results were rife in Anambra, Imo, Rivers, Delta, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo, Adamawa, Kogi, Enugu, Benue, Kano and Cross River states, among others. In Ikot Ekpene LGA of Akwa Ibom State, gun shots and heavy security presence of the security forces deterred many voters from voting. It was also reported that the armed personnel committed forced voting in Edo, Delta, Enugu, Ekiti and Rivers states respectively. In these states voters in some wards were forcefully directed by the police as to where to thumbprint (Newswatch, 2007, cited in Mbah & Obi, 2014:18). The vote rigging was defined by armed politics.

Election observers and scholars have also argued that it is under this highly militarized and violence prone environment that all manners of electoral fraud and violence are committed by the political gladiators. For instance, lending their voices to the heavy militarization of the Ekiti elections, civil society groups, under the aegis of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) condemned the conduct of the security forces and argued that the heavy presence of security personnel in the elections provided an avenue for the rigging of the election; according to the civil society groups even if the electorates are scared of coming out to vote, there will be surplus voting cards which unscrupulous politicians can use to the detriment of one another and more importantly, the credibility of the election. This scenario was played out in Southern LGA (with the largest number of registered voters) during the Bayelsa State 2015 governorship elections. The result of this LGA was cancelled by the INEC largely as a result of the stupendously high votes allotted to the APC contestant, Chief Timipre Silva whoit was alleged used his closeness to the powers that be at Aso Rock (the Presidency) to invade the Southern Ijaw communities with well-armed security forces as well as armed militants and their commanders. Under this high tension and violent environment the APC governorship candidate was able garner enough votes that would made him governor of Bayelsa State with victory only in just two local government areas. This was not to be as the results from the controversial LGA ware cancelled by the INEC (interviews with election observers and security personnel).

There are also reported cases of the complacency (or docility) of security agencies to deal with on-the-spot breach of electoral rules and regulations; this is a situation where the security agents at the polling station adopt as a sit-down-and-look attitude. The inaction of the security forces to a clear breach of procedures at polling stations may not be unconnected with inducement by political parties for them to turn a blind eyeto the glaring cases of electoral malpractices.

In relation to the above point the unprofessional conduct of some members of the joint security forces posted to volatile states to curtail security infraction have sadly become security problems to the

electoral process. With their allowances and logistics augmented by the various state governments or influential politicians, it is less surprising that they end up switching their allegiance to their benefactors as opposed to their statutory role of protecting the state, citizens and ensuring a peaceful and orderly electoral process. At times, security forces have even protected unscrupulous politicians and their political thugs (or hired armies) at the polling stations even when they breach extant electoral laws. As earlier reiterated we have several instances where incumbent Governors have manipulated the security forces to intimidate and harass both the electorates and their political opponents in their respective states.

Also closely related, is the connivance between politicians and security agents to disrupt polls in areas/polling units where they have weak support. This is usually done by orchestrating violence (sometimes with the support of security personnel) in order to get the election results in such areas cancelled or out rightly create security situations that will make conduct of elections in such areas impossible. A recent example of this scenario was the 2016/2017 re-run legislative elections in River State.

Another way by which security forces have compromised electoral integrity in Fourth Republic Nigeria is through creating hurdles (or difficulties) to scare election observers (or monitors) from certain areas. It is reported that security agents, in their bid to cover electoral fraud, discourage observers and monitors from visiting certain areas under the guise of insecurity or violence, thereby providing opportunities for the perpetration of electoral malpractices by their political paymasters (Buba, 2013:125).

It is apparent from the foregoing that the active involvement of security forces in Fourth Republic elections in Nigeria has done more harm than good to transparent, democratic and credible electoral administration in the country.

Concluding Remarks

We have argued that in spite of the indispensable role of elections in the consolidation of democracy in Fourth Republic Nigeria, elections in the country however have continued to suffer wanton abuses and gross violation of its sanctity. While we argued that security agencies are critical to the success of election as credible election requires among others high degree of neutrality, alertness and commitment of security personnel to maintain law and order, ensuring the security of voters, candidates and election materials, our findings, however revealed that the Nigerian security forces have become a major hindrance and constraint to the institution of electoral integrity and transparency in the country. In most of the Fourth Republic elections we discovered that they have failed to conduct themselves in a professional manner. There are several instances when they were not neutral and fair but rather showed open support for a particular party and candidate. They have also connived with their political benefactors and party thugs and gangsters to rig, victimize and intimidate voters and political opponents alike. What is evidently clear from our findings is that the Nigerian security agencies through their compromised and unethical roles in Fourth Republic elections, they have become real threat to electoral integrity and the democratization process in Nigeria.

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