Electoral Politics: Democracy and Electoral Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

Democracy in Nigeria has been fragile and fluctuating since independence as conflict, triggered by political rivalries, violence, ethnicity, religion and insecurity, poses a major threat to her democracy. The late Nigerian political scientist and theorist, Claude Ake in 1993, warned that external and elite support for electoral democratisation was not the same as actual democracy. He argued that the substitution of democracy for elections had resulted in a struggle for power at the polls by the elite groups. To this end, the incidences of electoral violence, political competition and insecurity have since become a constant nightmare and a serious source of concern to all actors participating in the electoral system. The cornerstone of democracy is the electoral process, with a viable Election Management Board (EMB) that conducts free, fair, open and secured elections. Electoral security is one of the focal points for a successful and effective administration of the electoral process. The electoral process must be geared towards building citizens' confidence, especially by ensuring that votes are cast anonymously and without coercion, while also making sure that election results reflect the collective will of the voters. With the aid of secondary sources of data, using content analysis, the paper concludes that defending elections not only involves

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protecting voting units and ballots, but also protecting the functions, resources and technologies that support election processes and which help manage voters and election results in Nigeria. In order to protect our electoral politics in Nigeria, there is a need for an effective and secure electoral process, laced with a credible and acceptable outcome. This paper emphasises on security as a crucial condition in the context of elections, such that it assists in establishing an enabling environment that is conducive to holding democratic polls.

Keywords: Politics, Election, Democracy, Electoral Security, Electoral process.

Introduction

Democracy in Nigeria has been fragile and fluctuating since independence as conflict, triggered by political rivalries, violence, ethnicity, religion and insecurity, poses a major threat to her democracy (Chatham House, 2022). Successive governments have struggled to create a sense of national unity in a complex country whose borders were drawn by British colonialists, incorporating more than 250 ethnic groups. Democratisation and development have progressed at different speeds in the country's disparate regions (Chatham House, 2022). Nigeria has a democratic constitution with a federal system patterned towards the United States' democracy. The executive is headed by the president, the legislature is formed by the National Assembly of Senate and House of Representatives, and the judiciary is headed by a supreme court. The cornerstone of democracy is the electoral process, as the very definition of a democratic country is one that conducts free, fair and open elections. Indeed, more than any other democratic norm, the concept of periodic election that counts the votes of citizens and allows a peaceful transition of power is the most fundamental tenet of America's understanding of a liberal world order (Rosenzweig, 2018; Chatham House, 2022).

However, some scholars have argued that Nigeria is not currently a true democracy due to its entrenched corrupt political class, its dwindling electoral participation, popular suspicion of the ruling class, shrinking civil

Olusegun Idowu

liberties, and weak democratic institutions. The late Nigerian political scientist and theorist, Claude Ake, in 1993, warned that external and elite support for electoral democratisation was not the same as actual democracy. He argued that the substitution of democracy for elections had resulted in a struggle for power at the polls by the elite groups and this is detrimental to our electoral processes (Soyebi, 2022). He submitted that countries like Nigeria were failing at democracy, not because they were not being faithful to the supposedly "universal" example set by Anglo-American politics. Rather, they were failing precisely because they were trying too hard to adopt its fashion (Ighodalo, 2012). He argues that electoral politics "as a means to power" was the pretence to democracy favoured by the "vested interests of its powerful sponsors western nations and international development agencies," and the African elite (Soyebi, 2022). To him, real democracy, that sprung from the bottom-up communal participation of ordinary Nigerians, was not in the interests of such groups. Ighodalo also argued that Nigeria's experience with elections has shown that the political elite has not fully come to terms with the referents of elections for democratic sustenance and national security (Ighodalo, 2012; Soyebi, 2022). More often than not, the elite has failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which prioritises politics of tolerance, conflict and consensus, bargaining and compromise, yet, they have resorted to bribing the electoral body and buying their way into seats, which makes a mockery of free and credible election. (Iproject.com, 2023). They see elections as warfare, characterised by inordinate and ambitious struggle for power and political relevance. Political parties which organise for elections are also, like armbands of men and women going to war, where there must be victors and the vanquished. Elections have become warfare, where it is a sin to lose and the winner takes all (zero sum game). This pattern of elections and electioneering process is dangerous for Nigeria's nascent democracy (Ighodalo, 2012: Soyebi, 2022).

Election is an important aspect of the democratic framework for governing modern political societies. It serves as an instrument or medium of political mobilisation, choice, and accountability. In the context of liberal democracy that has become the most popular form of democracy in the world, election facilitates the smooth transition from one civilian administration to another

and helps in legitimising sitting governments (Alaye, 2021). Elections play dominant roles in a democracy and these roles are hugely circumscribed in terms of portraying the popular will, inculcating political changes and actualising regime legitimacy (Alaye, 2021). Schumpeter (1947) notes that democracy ensures that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them. This means that democracy is all about conducting elections and choosing political leaders. It ensures how popular a government is and it reveals the social pact that exists between the government and the governed and this illustrates the basis of political authority, legitimacy and citizens' obligations. It also helps to shape and sharpen political accountability between the government and the governed via reciprocity and exchange. As Adejumobi (2000) posits: elections and the struggle for power are essential because they give the oppressed classes the chance to put the question of alternative ideologies on the agenda and therefore constitute an important stage in the socialist quest to extend democratic control to the social and economic as well as political sphere (Adejumobi, 2000).

This democratic method of arriving at acceptable political leadership is well expanded in Schumpeter (1942) articulation of this arrangement as the: institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. It is a method by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. Thus, central to the survival of democracy is the imperative of playing by the rule of the game. It is the conformity with this stated imperative that allows for uninterrupted transfer of power from one administration to the other (Adejumo, 2000). Once a sitting government knows that it can be voted out of power within the framework of periodic elections, it strives to pursue the socio-economic and political interests of the electorates who may switch interest to opposition parties if such a government fails to meet their expectations and aspirations.

However, the foundation to any strong democracy has been attributed to rule of law, governance, security and periodic election. It is the nerve centre of a viable and generally acceptable electoral system and the hallmark of democracy. Insecurity in the electioneering process poses considerable risks to both the perception and the reality of trustworthy election. Although

electoral security has a substantial impact on both the actual and perceived security of the election process. Security is an essential part of the electoral process; at best, it supports the credibility and overall success of an election, and at worst it can discredit elections and make them meaningless (Secure and Fair Election, 2015).

The credibility and legitimacy of the electoral processes is inextricably linked to electoral integrity and security. The Global Commission on Democracy, Elections and Security identified five major challenges to the conduct of elections with integrity. They are:

i.   Building the rule of law to substantiate claims to human rights and electoral justice;
ii.   Developing professional and competent electoral management bodies (EMBs) with full independence of action;
iii. Creating institutions and norms of multiparty competition and division of power;
iv. Removing barriers to universal and equal political participation; and
v.   Regulating political finance.

Each of these challenges requires a multidimensional response that combines political will, effective institutional design and effective mobilisation, implementation and management in practice (Global Commission on Democracy, Elections and Security, 2012; Ace project, 2023).

The Nature of Democracy
Simply put, democracy is a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. There are different forms. However, democracy can be exercised directly or indirectly by the people. In modern societies, it is by the people through their elected agents. In a brief by the U.S. embassy in South Korea, Strum posits that democracy may be a word familiar to most, but it is "a concept still misunderstood and misused" at a time when various actors assert popular support by claiming the mantle of democracy (Strum, 2017).

The brief stated further, that democracy rests upon a well understood group of values, attitudes and practices, all of which may take different

5

forms and expressions among cultures and societies around the world. Of a fact, democracies rest upon "fundamental principles and not uniform practices (Strum, 2017)." Core democratic characteristics include:

i) Democracy being a government in which power and civic responsibility are exercised by all adult citizens either directly or through their freely elected representatives. In addition, democracies must conduct regular free and fair elections open to citizens of voting age.

ii) Democracy rests upon the principles of majority rule and individual rights. In addition, the brief stipulates that one of the prime functions of a democracy is to protect some basic human rights such as freedom of speech, religion and full participation in the political, economic and cultural life of society.

iii) Democracy guards against an all-powerful central government and decentralises government to regional and local levels with the understanding that all levels of government must be accessible and responsive.

iv) The last principle is perhaps the most interesting as it states that democratic societies are committed to the values of tolerance, cooperation and compromise (US Agency for International Development, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, democracy is something much talked about as a set objective pursued with apparent vigour but not yet attained (Jega,1996). Nigeria's democracy was badly affected by the internal civil war and centralisation of power during the military era (Chatham House, 2023). The situation helped concentrate oil revenues in the hands of army officials (and their civilian cohorts) and seeded a powerful, wealthy, and often corrupt military/elite group (Oligarchs). The oligarchs militarised Nigeria's political space and disrupted the flourishing of democratic institutions and culture (Chatham House, 2023).

Democracy, for some, is about selective participation and representation, about access to power through electoral competition (Amuwo, Bach, Yann, 2013). This often translates into a winner-takes-all situation and the utilisation

of power to acquire the spoils of office. Hence, it becomes a licence for the mobilisation of communal sentiments (ethnic, regional, religious, etc.) as avenues for rapid upward mobility on the political ladder (Amuwo, *et. al.*, 2013). Simply put, it is about the private consumption of the so-called national 'cake'. For others, it is about representation and participation, but with the objective of equitable distribution of resources, fair play and justice, the institutionalisation of the rule of law and empowerment (Amuwo, *et. al.*, 2013). Conclusively, democracy in Nigeria is about equitable social provisioning, judicious sharing of the national revenues and the effective mobilisation and utilisation of societal resources, with accountability and good governance, responsive and responsible leadership and, thus, an antidote to corruption (Amuwo, *et. al.*, 2013). In this conception, popular empowerment is central to the issue of participation, involving not just casting votes in the choice of representatives and leaders but also input into the critical decisions which affect daily life and survival (Jega, 2013).

Electoral Politics in Nigeria
Elections in Nigeria have always been marred by various malpractices, insecurity and violence, ranging from election rigging, to ballot box snatching, political harassment and intimidation before, during and after elections, among others. The resultant effect of the foregoing is bringing in an unpopular government to power at federal, state and local government, which lacks legitimacy and popular acceptance. This is the bane of the Nigerian state, resulting in a legitimacy crisis, posing threat to law and order, security, rule of law, and development.

Nigeria's electoral politics is viewed as a problem of the oligarchic control of political power. Oligarchy or godfather networks, in Nigeria, constitutes an informal system of power based on "clientelism" that overlays or contradicts the formal structures of power. This is the bane of electoral politics in Nigeria and it results in all manners of struggle for power, instability, electoral malpractices and insecurity. The oligarchy-driven insecurity and instability have generated a strong and widespread sense of injustice among the Nigerian population (Yamanga, 2006). Governance in Nigeria has been characterised by inefficient yet authoritarian centralisation, a dearth of meaningful political representation, a culture of impunity, and a demoralising

7

climate of unaccountability. The combination of aggrieved injustice and the social misery of the majority, in turn, risks producing disillusionment with democracy, creates conditions igniting social conflicts and, most importantly, threatens the stability of Nigeria's political order (USAID, 2006: Yamanga, 2006).

USAID (2020) puts forward two essential political developments that can control elites' subjugation in Nigeria. they are:

1. Horizontal checks and balances among political elites: This requires the development of stable coalitions of elites that can check each other's abuses through democratic institutions, and whose competition with each other for power will push them to turn to the public for support. So long as this outreach to the public is done largely through the formal system (through electoral competition, lawsuits, executive-legislative battles, and so on), this creates increasing incentives for elites to provide more socially beneficial public policies.

2. Vertical elite-public relations: The main issue here is rendering the oligarchic elite more accountable and responsive to the public by altering their relationships within their power pyramids. In doing so, politics can expand from serving primarily the narrow interests of elites to the broader interests of the public, because elites come to see the pursuit of public interest as also being in their own private interests (USAID, 2006: Yamanga, 2006).

To this end, transforming the political elites in Nigeria is a herculean task but can be achieved through the following:

i. Strengthen formal political institutions that foster a healthy balance of power among the elite. Clearly, efforts that bolster the relative power of the legislative and judicial branches against the executive branches are essential in this regard. Strengthening the powers of the states and local governments *vis-à-vis* the federal government is also essential, as is decentralisation of presidential controls over public revenues. The enabling environment, however, is not yet as advanced as it could be for progress in this area, and the Government

Olusegun Idowu

of Nigeria needs to first take some steps towards decentralisation. At present, local government in Nigeria is not autonomous.

ii.   Strengthening the informal balance of power among the political elite through the development of viable political opposition and a vibrant civil society. At the same time, elite access to violent means must also be curtailed.

iii. Strengthening formal institutional arrangements that encourage and force political elites to view the public interest as a personal political priority, particularly through credible elections, transparency, and accountability mechanisms. In addition, there should be the provision of increased formal avenues for public participation in the policy process, through community associations and other local governance approaches.

iv.   Impacting the informal relationships between elites and the public by strengthening public influence through an aggressive media, vibrant civil society, and improved economic status. Undermining elite access to violent means is also essential in this regard (USAID, 2020: Yamanga, 2006).

To this end, for democracy to flourish in Nigeria, the formal democratic system and the rule of law must gain greater prominence and eventually, primacy over the godfather system (Oligarch/Elite group) and its politics of might (money bag politics) make right (USAID, 2006: Yamanga, 2006).

Security and Electoral Security in Nigeria
The basic definition of "security" is the state of being free from danger or threat. Security is more than the absence of physical threat or an armed conflict; it is an environment where individuals can thrive and exercise their rights freely. It requires access to education and health care, democracy and human rights, and economic development. It is a state where citizens' rights are enforced and citizens are treated fairly by state institutions (Bastick, *et. al.*, 2013). Security means different things to different people and institutions. Governments often focus on what makes the state secure such as strong borders, a powerful military force, a viable economy, a secured

9

internal security of the state etc., but most people focus on day-to-day security for themselves and their families.

Security is an essential part of the electoral process and a crucial condition in the context of elections, such that it assists in establishing an enabling environment that is conducive to holding a democratic poll. It is the nerve centre of a viable and generally acceptable electoral system and the hallmark of democracy. The cornerstone of democracy is the electoral process, as the very definition of a democratic country is one that conducts free, fair and open elections. Indeed, more than any other democratic norm, the concept of a periodic election that counts the votes of citizens and allows a peaceful transition of power is the most fundamental tenet of America's understanding of a liberal world order (Rosenzweig, 2018).

In practical terms, election and electoral security can be defined as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders, information, facilities, and events (Fischer, 2002). Election security involves efforts to ensure fair, accurate and safe elections. This can include a variety of activities that happen before, during and after elections. A narrow explanation of the term might address only efforts to protect traditional election infrastructures such as voter registration databases, voting machines, polling units and election results. Another election security definition is that which concerns candidates, campaigns regulating political advertising or fundraising, providing physical or cybersecurity assistance for campaigns or combating disinformation or misinformation in the political debate. However, security concerns affecting campaigns can differ from those for safeguarding voting and electoral process (Idowu and Afolabi, 2023).

Electoral security entails the protection of stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media, and observers; electoral information such as the results of the vote, registration data and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and collation centres; and electoral events such as campaign rallies against death, damage or disruption (Ace Project, 2023). From a broad perspective, three kinds of electoral security can be identified according to United States' Agency for International Development (USAID, 2010):

Olusegun Idowu

i.   Physical security concerns the protection of facilities and materials. The physical security which concerns securing facilities and materials. These include the electoral commission offices, registration and polling stations, political party offices, election observer offices, media organisations, ballot boxes, ballot papers (voted and un-voted), voters' register, computers and communication systems employed in voters' registration and vote tabulation among others (USAID, 2010: Oni, Chidozie and Agbude, 2013).

ii.   Personal security concerns electoral stakeholders. This concerns the protection of all electoral stakeholders, including candidates, voters, public officials, election workers, security forces, party agents, election observers and media representatives (Fischer, 2008). Personal security is very important because people can be victims of assassination, torture, sexual assault, strategic displacement, physical injury, blackmail or intimidation in attempts to influence their involvement and choices in an election (Oni, *et. al.*, 2013).

iii. Information security concerns the protection of the physical ballot papers and ballot boxes, computers and communication systems. It also involves electoral events such as voters' registration programmes or Election Day activities, and associated events such as campaign rallies, debates, and political party and coalition meetings (Fisher, 2008: USAID, 2010).

Weaknesses in electoral security, especially in conflict-prone societies and those that experience high levels of violence, will expose electoral stakeholders, information, facilities and events to violence (USAID, 2010).

In any election, authorities take steps to ensure that voters, candidates, poll workers, observers, and other actors involved in an election experience the process free from fear or harm. They ensure that sensitive election materials are kept secure. The specific security requirements for a given election will vary greatly depending on the context. In places with ongoing conflict, or where there is a significant potential for violence, securing an election will need to address a multiplicity of factors and will likely involve deploying relatively large numbers of security personnel, such as police or

military forces, to protect physical locations, individuals and the process (Open Election Data, 2023). Likewise, in a place without conflict, there should be an adequate plan in place to secure and store election materials, protect and safeguard any technological devices used in the election process in order to prevent hacking or manipulation (Open Election Data, 2023).

The potentials for violence in election periods come from political, economic and social dimensions of a society (Open Election Data, 2023). Effective violence mitigation plans often include identifying early warning signs, mobilising citizen monitoring and mitigation efforts, dispatching properly trained security forces, enlightening and educating the public, among other things (Open Election Data, 2023). Multiple institutions, including the electoral body, government ministries and other relevant bodies, may be involved in creating a secure election environment. These institutions work to develop, implement, and review security measures throughout the electoral process. Civil society organisations, trade unions, religious and traditional leaders, and the media, also play important roles in creating a secure electoral environment. They equally mediate, build intolerance for violence, observe the electoral process and as such enhance public confidence in order to secure electoral participation. In many countries, like Kenya and Nigeria, plans for electoral security take into account such activities by civil society (Open Election Data, 2023).

Electoral violence is violence intended to influence the electoral conduct of voters, contestants, officials, or other actors and/or to affect the electoral outcome. Electoral violence involves any use of force with the intent to cause harm or the threat to use force to harm persons or property involved in the electoral process (Open Election Data, 2023). Typically, electoral violence happens among or even within the camps of electoral competitors in depraved efforts to gain office through elections. Forces opposed to democratic governance may attack electoral targets to advance their quest for power outside of electoral competition (Open Election Data, 2023). Other violence, based on personal animosities or grievances between population groups, may take place in an election period, though it is not directly related to elections. Election security planning has to consider the potentials for all of these types of violence and how to prevent, mitigate or end them while respecting fundamental rights (Open Election Data, 2023).

Election Management Board (EMB)

The complexity and specialist skills necessary for electoral management require that an institution or institutions be responsible for electoral activities (Ace project, 2023). Such bodies have a variety of shapes and sizes, with a wide range of titles to match, such as Election Commission, Department of Elections, Electoral Council, Election Unit or Electoral Board (Ace project, 2023). The term electoral management body (EMB) has been coined to refer to the body or bodies responsible for electoral management, regardless of the wider institutional framework in place (Ace project, 2023).

An EMB is an organisation or body that has the sole purpose of, and is legally responsible for, managing some or all of the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments such as referendums, citizens' initiatives and recalling votes, if those are part of the legal framework (Ace project, 2023). The essential (or core) elements include:

    i.   determining who is eligible to vote;
    ii.   receiving and validating the nominations of electoral participants (for elections, political parties and/or candidates);
    iii. conducting polls;
    iv. counting votes; and
    v.   tabulating votes.

If these essential elements are allocated to various bodies, then all bodies that share these responsibilities can be considered EMBs. An EMB may be a stand-alone institution, or a distinct management unit within a larger institution that may also have non-electoral tasks (Ace project, 2023).

In addition to these essential elements, an EMB may undertake other tasks that assist in the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments, such as voters' registration, boundary delimitation, voters' education and information, media monitoring and electoral dispute resolution (Ace project, 2023). However, a body that has no electoral responsibilities other than, for example, boundary delimitation (such as a boundary delimitation commission), electoral dispute resolution (such as an electoral court), election media monitoring (such as a media monitoring commission),

13

or the conduct of voters' education and information (such as a civic education commission), is not considered an EMB because it is not managing any of the essential elements identiûed above. Similarly, a national population or statistics bureau that produces electoral registers as part of the general process of population registration is not considered to be an EMB (Ace project, 2023).

Different EMBs may be established for different electoral processes. In Mexico and Poland, the EMBs are responsible for both presidential and parliamentary elections; in Australia, the national EMB deals with national-level elections, while state-level elections are the responsibility of separate state-level EMBs. In the United Kingdom (UK), the arrangements for the conduct of elections and referendums are separate (Ace project, 2023).

Some bodies that are not engaged in any of the essential elements of elections may nonetheless be popularly regarded as EMBs. The US Federal Election Commission (FEC) defines its mission as 'administering and enforcing federal campaign finance laws'. However, such institutions do not qualify as EMBs under the deûnition above (Ace project, 2023).

In addition to the division of functional responsibility for different elements of the electoral process, electoral responsibilities may be divided between bodies at different levels (Ace project, 2023). For example, some elements of the conduct of elections may be managed by a national-level electoral commission, a ministry (such as the Ministry of the Interior) or a national government agency, while others are implemented by local-level commissions, regional branches of government departments or local authorities (as in Spain) (Ace project, 2023). The term EMB may also apply to a national electoral commission that co-manages elections together with local authorities, such as the Swedish Election Authority, which coordinates ballot paper printing, the distribution of seats and the announcement of results at the national level (Global Commission on Democracy, Elections and Security, 2012; Ace project, 2023).

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria
Elections are key elements of democratic processes which provide for transparent and peaceful change of government and distribution of power through an Independent Election Management Board (Akinduro, 2014: Ace

project, 2023). It is important to note that the Election Management Board (EMB) plays a crucial role in election security, as its credibility plays a significant role in preventing electoral violence. Indeed, credibility has even been named as "the most valuable asset any EMB can possess" because it can dramatically enhance electoral security. The origin of Electoral bodies in Nigeria can be traced to the period before Independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections ((Akinduro, 2014: Ace project, 2023). The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), established in 1960, conducted the immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively. The electoral body was, however, dissolved after the military coup of 1966. In 1978, a new Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. FEDECO organised the elections of 1979, which ushered in the Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It also conducted the general elections of 1983 (Ace project, 2023).

In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha, which earlier dissolved NEC in 1993, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which also conducted another set of elections into Local Government councils and to the National Assembly. These elected institutions were, however, not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha, in June 1998, aborted the process (Ace project, 2023). In 1998, General Abdulsalam Abubakar's Administration dissolved NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to, among other things, organise elections into various political offices in the country. The functions of INEC as contained in Section 15, Part I of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (As Amended) (INEC, 2023) include the following:

  i.   Organise, undertake and supervise all elections to the offices of the President and Vice-President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a State, and to the membership of the Senate, the

15

House of Representatives and the House of Assembly of each state of the federation;

ii. Register political parties in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and Act of the National Assembly;

iii. Monitor the organisation and operation of the political parties, including their finances; conventions, congresses and party primaries;

iv. Arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties, and publish a report on such examination and audit for public information;

v. Arrange and conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote and prepare, maintain and revise the register of voters for the purpose of any election under this constitution;

vi. Monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties;

vii. Conduct voter and civic education;

viii. Promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes; and

ix. Conduct any referendum required to be conducted pursuant to the provision of the 1999 Constitution or any other law or Act of the National Assembly.

The body organised all transitional elections that ushered in the 4th Republic on May 29, 1999. It has today repositioned itself to deliver credible elections that would sustain Nigeria's nascent democracy. As a permanent body, INEC comprises the workforce recruited since 1987 under the defunct National Electoral Commission (NEC). Its presence has been established in all the 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory as well as in the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria (INEC, 2023).

In all, the country has had five Electoral Management Boards. They are:

i. the Electoral Commission of the Federation (ECF) that conducted the 1964 federal elections and 1965 regional elections;

ii. the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) that conducted the transitional elections in 1979 and the controversial 1983 elections that ended in a return to military rule;

Olusegun Idowu

iii. the National Electoral Commission (NEC) that managed the three-year transition programme and ended with the annulled 1993 elections;

iv. the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) that was established by General Sani Abacha to manage his transition programme, which was aborted after his death in 1998; and

v. the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC, which is the longest-serving EMB in Nigeria's history. It has conducted seven elections: the 1999 transition election; the 2003 election, which was the first election successfully conducted under civil rule in Nigeria; the 2007 elections, which facilitated the first civilian regime change in Nigeria; the 2011 elections; the 2015 elections which was won by an opposition party; the 2019 elections and the just concluded 2023 elections.

In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) assumes responsibility for federal, state elections and referendums, while the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) are only responsible for local government elections.

Powers and Functions of the Independent National Electoral Commission
The 1999 constitution mandates the commission to organise elections into executive and legislative offices at the federal and state levels; to register, monitor and regulate political party operations; to monitor party finance and campaigns; to create and maintain a register of qualified voters; to delimit constituencies for representation in the National Assembly, according to the number of seats provided in the constitution; to delegate its powers to Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs); and to carry out other functions conferred on it by an act of the National Assembly (INEC, 2022). The Electoral Act adds the conduct of voters' education and the prosecution of electoral offences to INEC's responsibilities. The commission is also empowered to recruit its staff and issue guidelines and regulations to guide the conduct of elections (INEC, 2023). Primary stakeholders of INEC include institutions such as the legislatures, various political parties, the

17

executive branch of government, the Security agencies, INEC staff, States' Resident Electoral Commissioners, INEC National Commissioners, voters, the media/press, the electorate, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), various components of judicial systems, election observers and donors. While other more loosely affiliated, secondary stakeholders include vendors, suppliers and the general public (INEC, 2023).

Electoral Violence and Voters Turn-Out in Nigeria
Most elections in the Fourth Republic have been regular, generally free, and credible, although this varies considerably by region and election cycle. Violence is a lingering feature of elections in Nigeria. The height of electoral violence in Nigeria, according to Dataphyte research, was in 2011, while the least violence was recorded during the just concluded 2023 general election.

**Trend of electoral violence-related deaths during general elections since 1999**
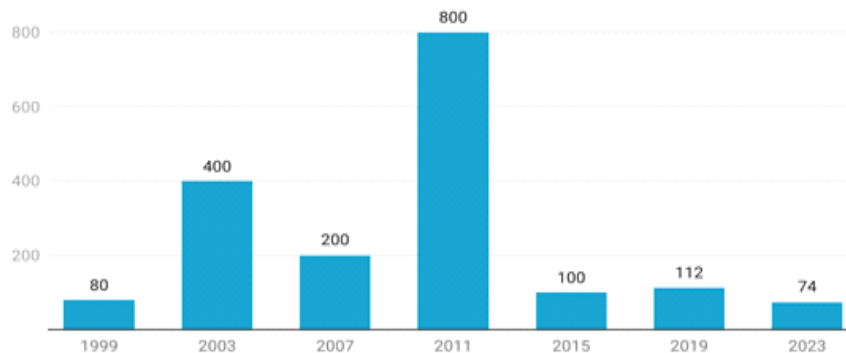
NB: Figures often differ in literatures owing to differences in time of publication and in some cases, data across years that lead to a particular election are estimated and attributed to an election year.
Chart: Dataphyte • Source: Dataphyte Research • Created with Datawrapper

Voter's turnout has steadily decreased over the years as voters have become disillusioned by the recycling of political candidates, money bag politics, the lack of internal democracy in political parties, and the failure of the government to deliver on their campaign promises and real progress.

Olusegun Idowu

Percentage of Voter Turnout in Nigeria's General Elections
Voter turnout has been on a steady decline since 2007
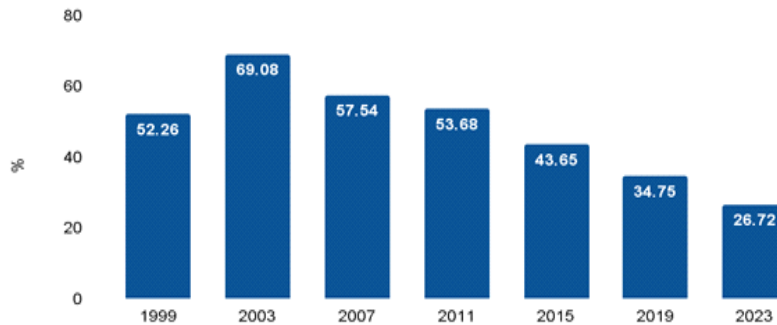
Source: INEC; IDEA I Chart: Dataphyte

Importance of Electoral Security

In order for an election to be inclusive, participatory, competitive and ultimately reflect the will of the people, it is essential that electoral contestants can campaign; citizens can cast informed, secret ballots without fear of retribution; officials can effectively administer the process; and civil society, media and parties can engage and observe, free from fear and harm. In many places, EMBs help coordinate processes and personnel to protect various aspects of elections (Openelectiondata.net, 2023). The security plan for a given election must take into account the implications of deploying armed personnel. While their deployment can be necessary where potentials for electoral violence are significant, their presence may intimidate or dissuade citizens from participating (Openelectiondata.net, 2023). Input from civil society in the planning phases can help ensure that citizens' concerns are more fully considered and that they are informed about the measures in place to ensure their security.

At the same time, electoral security requires more comprehensive measures than deployment of security forces (Openelectiondata.net, 2023). The analysis of past incidents and patterns of violence is vital for allocating anti-violence resources. Identifying early warning signs is necessary for preventive measures, while addressing rumours concerning potential or

19

actual incidents of electoral violence is important for mitigating potentials for violent reactions. Often, this means that information must be available in near real-time to be effectively used (Openelectiondata.net, 2023).

The physical security of election materials is also critical. If sensitive materials, especially ballot papers and ballot boxes, are not adequately secured, there is the potential for actual or perceived manipulation, diminishing public trust in the process and acceptance of the outcomes. The public and electoral contestants must be informed of this aspect of electoral security to have confidence in the integrity of elections (openelectiondata.net, 2023).

The public should be able to see that effective measures are being developed to provide electoral security. Information about election security measures can bolster citizens' trust in the process and enable full participation as voters, candidates, poll-workers, observers, or CSOs. Civil society groups and contestants can examine the security measures in place to determine any necessary reforms going forward (Openelectiondata.net, 2023). With access to information about the election, security apparatus and decision-making process, civil society, political parties, and media can make sure that the EMB and/or the security forces are following election processes/procedures and playing a positive role. Creating an election observers situation room during election can also help observer groups better assess the process from an impartial perspective (Openelectiondata.net, 2023).

Furthermore, having access to information about how electoral crimes are prosecuted, and who is responsible for prosecuting electoral crimes, is also important to the success of an election. The judicial institution as a major stakeholder in election management must be accountable for the proper prosecution of crimes and redress of complaints and provide timely, accurate information to those seeking justice for an act of electoral violence (Openelectiondata.net, 2023). The negative effects of electoral security in the attainment of democratic consolidation in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised; they includes voters' apathy, political violence, dis-enfranchisement, loss of lives and properties, increased distrust between the government and citizens: wastage of resources through damages of government properties, socio-political and economic effects, increased agitation for self-determination among others.

Conclusion

Democracy is essential to the survival of the Nigerian nation; however, it has not yet delivered a considerable uplift in living standards for most Nigerians. But it remains the only system of government which can offer the hope of reconciling the extraordinary plurality of religions, ethnicities, and political traditions of its large population. Democracy is the system of government which can create a fair and just society without resorting to oppression or the annihilation of considerable parts of the population. As such security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Election and electoral security is the process of protecting electoral stakeholders, information, facilities, and electioneering events. Thus the provision of basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensure that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations. From that broad understanding of security, electoral security, therefore, can be said to imply protection or safety from any form of impediment that can distort the conduct of credible election within the context of acceptable democratic principles, tradition and culture.

The main challenge for democracy and politics in Nigeria is the political elites and clientele party politics, which is mostly a contest for power to distribute elites and patronage. Nigeria's democracy can only be strengthened through a revolutionised political system, better quality political parties, efficient electoral security, more independent and diversified media, a stronger electoral management body and well-resourced judiciary. Nigeria's security architecture (Law enforcement and security forces) must be committed to constitutional democracy rather than regime security and protecting elites. Sustaining democracy in Nigeria will need more than free and fair elections but a collective will to follow its principle squarely.

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21

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