



# **Security Agents and Elections Security in the 2015 Nigeria's General Elections**

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## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Election security has been identified as a salient condition for the orderly and effective administration of elections. Unfortunately, the inability of security agents to offer election security in a competent, independent and professional manner, with due recourse to the rule of law particularly respect for the fundamental human rights of the electorates has been seen as one of the fundamental cogs in the wheels of election security in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, this paper critically examined the role of security agents in the conduct of 2015 elections in Nigeria. Relying mainly on secondary sources of data collection, the paper described how a notable departure from the past was noticeable in the conduct of security agents during the 2015 elections. While the paper concludes that there is room for significant improvement and a positive change, it canvases sincere, purposeful and determined commitment from the central government to make this realisable.

*Keywords: Elections; election security; security agents; Nigeria; electoral violence.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Election, worldwide has come to be seen as a popular and vital instrument for selecting public and political officeholders through voting. Indeed, it is regarded as a vital political right of expression of choice of leaders by the generality of the electorates where democracy thrives. In fact, a functioning democracy renews itself through credible elections. In all democratic societies, the conduct of elections is regarded as the most appropriate way of establishing the necessary link between the leaders and the led. As evinced in political theory, the legitimate power of a government is sourced solely from the consent of the electorates. However, the mechanism and process through which the consent of electorates are sought and derived is through regular conduct of elections. To this end, an election by universal suffrage is seen as the major expression of democracy.

As adduced to above, election globally, is recognized as the soul of democracy. In fact, feelers and evidences from all open and stable democracies of the world point to the fact that, election ensures a peaceful democratic means through which people compete for political powers and make collective decisions. In this context, election through the simple act of casting of votes creates room for eligible individuals through peaceful means to exercise their political rights by voting for those who they deem fit to represent them and their interests [1,2,3]. From the foregoing, it is an unassailable fact that election is indeed central to the operation and survival of democracy, hence, its description as *sine qua non* of democracy by Aristotle [4].

Universally, elections remain not only the heart of representative democracy but a virile instrument which constitutionally confers legitimacy on political leadership and a legitimizing institution for the sustenance of democratic order [5]. Whatever the case, it is important to note that at the very heart of the success of election is the important question of credibility. As attested to in extant political literature, credibility is so central to the issue of election conduct and administration [6,7].

Without gainsaying, elections are at the core of the democratic process, therefore, elections that are free from pressure, inappropriate influence and fear is sacrosanct. To achieve this (i.e. free, fair and credible elections), continuing efforts are

being made by state, non-state actors and international organizations to ensure free and fair conduct and administration of elections in order to guarantee and ensure credibility. Underscoring the utmost significance of credible elections worldwide, USAID and some other related international agencies over the last three decades have relentlessly assisted both the emerging and consolidating democracies in conducting free and fair elections. Over the intervening decades, these international organisations have provided some forms of technical assistance so as to guarantee credible elections and ensure improved governance and societal well-being in the country concerned.

But be as it may, in spite of what agencies such as USAID and others have done in ensuring credible elections worldwide, findings from social survey, specifically from emerging democracies in the world, have shown that qualities of elections and electoral integrity are easily compromised in places where credibility of election and election administration were lacking or doubted. In this wise, the credibility of electoral results and the concomitant legitimacy it confers on the emergent government revolve around how well the issue of election security is managed [8].

Events and happenings from developed democracies around the world have shown that the importance of election security to the credibility of elections cannot be over-emphasized as the conduct and administration of free, fair and credible elections to a great extent depend on the security system available in any democratic setting. Hence, the development and employment of various security measures by various governments and electoral commissions in both consolidated and emerging democracies to guarantee election credibility and consequently prevent legitimacy crisis. Sean Dunne, commenting on the significance of elections security, avers that, reliable security during an electoral process is pivotal to enhancing participants' confidence and commitment to an election. He, *inter alia* argued further that security remains an inseparable part of the electoral process.

In brief, the importance of a secured atmosphere for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections cannot be downplayed. To this effect, the unalloyed contributions of governments at all levels and the readiness of security agencies to deal with security challenges before, during, and after elections cannot be overemphasized.

Specifically, however, due to the spate, enormity and magnitude of electoral violence that characterized the general elections between 1999 and 2011 in Nigeria, there were serious misgivings from within and outside Nigeria about whether the government would be able to provide adequate and well-coordinated security that will ensure the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in 2015. Against this backdrop, this paper relying mainly on secondary sources of data collection critically examined the role of security agents in the conduct of 2015 elections in Nigeria.

The theoretical underpinning for this study is structural functionalism. This theory, no doubt, is a consensus theory; it views society as being built on equilibrium, order, interrelation, and balance among parts as a means of maintaining the smooth functioning of the whole. In no small measures, structural functionalism has contributed to our understanding of how different parts of societal structures fit together and how each part contributes to the stability of the whole society [9]. According to the theory, all social institutions are structured to provide for the needs of the society [10]. Talcott Parsons was an important American advocate of Functionalism. He is best recognised for identifying how various institutions must work together for the smooth operations of the society as a whole [9].

This postulation implies that various body parts of a society must show a high level of integration [11]. Be as it may, structural functionalism does not stand with the positive effects alone; it also has some negative effects which make institutions dysfunctional. Institutions are dysfunctional if they are not fulfilling the purpose for which they were founded or do not fulfil the needs of the people. They are dysfunctional if they cause havoc or chaos in the society by failing to bring order and stability in the society.

As evident above, this article has adopted structural-functionalism theory to explain issues surrounding security agents and elections security continuum in the 2015 Nigeria's general elections in Nigeria due to its inherent predictive-explanatory powers. In consonance with the major basic assumption of structural-functionalism, the article stresses that the participation of security agents in an election particularly in developing countries cannot be gainsaid, as the success of such election depends largely on the ability of security agents to create a safe and secure environment where people can participate in electoral processes

without fear, intimidation, and pressure before, during and after elections. In sum, the theory, on the one hand, stresses the fact that availability of security agents that are impartial and willing to perform their constitutionally defined roles will go a long way in achieving credible elections. On the other hand, however, the absence of impartial security agents would no doubt compromise the integrity of electoral processes and quality of elections.

## 2. METHODS

This article relies mainly on secondary sources of data collection; to this end, the paper through literature search described a notable departure from the past in the conduct of security agents during the 2015 elections. To achieve this, search strategy for the literature used in the review made use of such search terms such: General Elections, Nigeria, Election security, Security Agents, and Democracy. In a bid to get related and relevant literature upon which the review would be based, a pool of online and offline literature were sourced from outlets such as Google Scholar, Questia online library, Emerald Databases, Library catalogue among many others. Through this means, over 53 publications were realised; however, 27 of them that bore semblance with general elections and security in Nigeria and some other countries in Africa were selected for the article.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Elections and Insecurity of Elections in Nigeria Before 2015

*"The health of any democracy, no matter its type or status, depends on a small technical detail: the conduct of elections. Everything else is secondary." Jose Ortega Gasset in 1930.*

This subsection provides a snapshot of all the major elections conducted before and after independence and the concomitant violence in Nigeria.

Nigeria of 21<sup>st</sup> century can be well described as one of the budding democracies in the world. The country which once seemed immune to democratisation particularly during the long spell of military dictatorship and failed democratic experiments finally returned to a democratic rule in 1999. Although, democracy in Nigeria is still regarded as a burgeoning one, yet the journey towards democratic process and activities

evolved even before the country became a sovereign state in 1960. Specifically in 1923, the first set of political associations and parties were formed mainly to buy legitimacy for the colonial government through limited franchise extended only to Lagos and Calabar [12,13]. Indeed, during colonial administration, the electoral process was restrictive on the conditions of residence and property. This was partially so because democratic governance was seen by the colonialists as a transformational experiment and the fact that the colonialists never intended to relinquish power to the indigenous political elites [14,15,16].

At the time when colonialism was holding sway in the country, political association like Peoples Union and political parties such as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the then Lagos Youth Movement that later transformed into the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (CNCN), the Action Group (AG), the Northern People Congress (NPC) and the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) evolved within Nigerian political landscape and elections were held until the period of first republic [12,17]. In the same manner, the second, third and fourth republics witnessed unprecedented growth in the number of political parties and elections were equally held for the selection of political decision makers in the country [18].

Virtually all the elections conducted so far in post-colonial era Nigeria were marred with one form of violence or another. From colonial era till the fourth republic, no election conducted in the country was totally free from a sort of dissatisfaction from electorates or in its worse form, election violence. For instance, during the colonial rule, the regional houses of assembly elections that were conducted in line with electoral system introduced in 1951 constitution engendered widespread dissatisfaction among some Nigerians in 1952 due to poor conduct and administration of these elections [19]. For instance during 1951 election in Kano, the Colonial Administration in a bid to give undue advantages to candidates of Emirs made frantic efforts in frustrating Northern politicians who had the support of southerners. The colonialists resorted to the manipulation of elections via communal lines. The southerners who were allies to the affected northern politicians were intimidated, victimized and were denied the opportunities of holding public meetings [20].

Similarly, in 1964, the first post-independence election which was a straight contest between the two political alliances that emerged from merger of different political parties, i.e. Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) recorded massive violence which eventually claimed significant number of lives of many Nigerians mainly in the western region of the country [21,22]. According to Osaghae [18], Akinwumi, [23], the massive protests, demonstrations and the immediate violence that accompanied 1964 Federal elections and 1965 Western Region elections contributed in no small measure to the termination of the first republic by military coup in 1966.

Like other elections conducted during the First Republic, elections conducted in second republic did not fare better. The electoral process of second republic was also fraught with irregularities of phenomenal sum and this eventually led to electoral violence across the whole of Nigeria. Most especially, the Nigeria's second election in Second Republic which was organized by a civilian government was greatly manipulated in favour of the ruling party, National Party of Nigeria, (NPN) in two states known as strongholds of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) i.e. Oyo and Ondo. Consequently, the announcement of the official results of the election, by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), was greeted with unprecedented outbreak of electoral violence that resulted into human and material losses by political opponents [24].

The 1992-1993 elections were no exception to others before it in terms of electoral violence they attracted and generated. In spite of the fact that both the local government and gubernatorial elections were earlier conducted in order to usher in the Presidential Election and Third Republic respectively; the then military head of state, President Babangida unilaterally annulled the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election that was described locally and internationally as the freest and fairest election in the post-colonial era. However, the annulment of this election heralded another significant amount of crises in the south-western part of the country. This development however, resulted into premature termination of the Third Republic [25].

Years after the collapse of Third Republic, Nigeria returned to civil rule after decades of military rule. The elections brought in Chief

Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of Nigeria and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in the country. Indeed, the elections of 1999 were not characterised by deep-seated violence but it did witness a remarkable contestation of results. The reason adjudged for this was because of political scepticism and apathy that pervaded the entire electoral space before the election which made many not to participate in the electoral processes due to their lack of trust in the military regime that promised handing over of power to politicians in 1999. However, this cannot be said of 2003 general elections, the first election to be organized by a civilian regime since the birth of fourth republic. The 2003 general election is known for its high level of organized crime and several political killings of opponents that were perpetrated during the electoral process. It is recognised and known as the most corrupt and fraudulent elections to be conducted in the post-colonial Nigeria [26]. Indeed, the elections were marred by unprecedented irregularities and massive rigging.

In 2007, particularly before the general elections, the sense of insecurity of Nigerians was heightened and many Nigerians were of the opinion that they were poorly protected due to several unresolved political killings and other forms of abuses meted on them. All these happened at a time when Nigerian Police appeared as one of the institutions listed as most corrupt in Nigeria by Transparency International [27]. The 2007 elections to a greater extent is seen by social surveyor as the election that deepened electoral crises in Nigeria. The election unlike previous ones attracted highest number of post-election litigations so far in the country; and consequently contributed to agitation for intense electoral reforms in the country. During 2007 elections, massive irregularities that were characterised by upward review of voting figures, announcement of results where elections were inconclusive or not held, as well as manipulation of the security services became the order of the day [28]. Attesting to enormity of irregularities and flaws that characterized 2007 elections, President Umaru Musa Yar'adu who rode on the back of the same election to become the president admitted that the elections were flawed; hence his promise for reformation of electoral process to enhance free, fair and credible elections in 2011.

Despite the enormity of promises for reformation of electoral process by successive administrations and election regulatory bodies in

Nigeria; 2011 general elections came and were not without any major hitch. What would have been the success of the election was to a considerable extent marred by large scale killings and destruction of properties in many parts of the country, specifically in Akwa Ibom state and some areas in the northern part of the country. Although, the election was overwhelmingly recognized as free and fair by many observers yet remarkable irregularities which later snowballed into large scale pre and post electoral violence were recorded in all states in the country [25]. In the words of scholars such as Lewis [29], Orji [30] and Anikwe & Kushie [31], 2011 post-election violence that started in Bauchi and Gombe states and later spread to other Northern states like Kano, Adamawa, Niger and Kaduna was unrivalled in the annals of electoral violence in Nigeria in terms of its magnitude, severity and consequences. According to these sources, the violence resulted into the death of a large number of people while many were displaced and valuable properties were equally destroyed. The outcome of the elections and the varying degrees of violence that accompanied it, inter alia informed President Goodluck Jonathan's setting up of a 22 man committee members led by Ahmed Lemu to specifically look into the causes of the elections' attendant crises.

In relation to the foregoing, scarcely can one point to any previous election in Nigeria that was not marred by irregularities and violence in spite of the fact of provision of material, non-material and large deployment of personnel from relevant security agencies within the country to secure these elections. This, however, raises some posers such as, 'is election security feasible in a country like Nigeria? Or when is Nigeria going to get it right as far as election security is concerned? Who should be held responsible for growing election insecurity in the country and what are the ways out of this logjam?

### **3.2 Security Agents and the conduct of Elections in Nigeria**

Worldwide, elections and election conducts are supposed to be a peaceful and harmless exercise through which electorates in any democratic setting accept or reject the offer of a candidate aspiring to become a public officeholder. Unmistakably, however, the insatiable nature and quest of man for power, position, influence and wealth has ingloriously transformed what ought to be an innocuous process to a full-fledged battle of wits and physical

might in many countries. The incessant election irregularities and the concomitant violence which in many cases characterize elections in many fledgling democracies have further reiterated the need for genuine, purposeful and worthwhile election security.

It has been long established worldwide; most especially in stable democratic societies, that one crucial way of consolidating democracy and to out-rightly discourage democratic reversal is successful conduct of elections within established legal and infrastructural frameworks. This claim is premised on the fact that election affords electorate the opportunity to exercise their civic rights to democratically choose their intending leaders on one hand, and on the other, to reject any non-performing or underperforming leader that do not merit re-election. As evident in many consolidated democracies globally, electoral process has become a veritable tool for achieving, though in part, national security. What this means is that, the mere realisation or understanding of the populace that they possess the requisite power to choose new set of leaders aspiring to state leadership during next elections might go a long way in restricting them from resulting into violent acts whenever there are cases of election irregularities. But for this to happen, election security that translates into securing the following: election, election materials, election personnel, electorates, as well as election environment must be put in place. This underscores the overarching importance attached to security agents and their contributions in electoral process.

Election security in Nigeria, particularly since the introduction of multi-party election in 1999, has been the subject of scholarly discussion and writing. Multiple reviews of works of scholars in this area have reaffirmed the fact that, the place of effective and efficient functioning of security agents cannot be overemphasized as far as the conduct of free, fair and credible election is concerned in any democratic setting. As evinced by Adele Jinadu [32], election security transcends voting and other activities taking place on the voting day alone. Literally, electoral security has been ably expressed 'as the deliberate prevention of electoral governance from distortions, violations and manipulations; in such a way that legitimacy of democratic elections and democratic political succession would be guaranteed'. As a whole, securing election begins from taking steps necessary in ensuring the safety of the electoral process and

at the same time creates a safe and secured environment, which in turn would allow electorates to participate in electoral process without undue pressure, intimidation, and fear before, during and after voting exercise (UNOWA, 2009). In addition to the above, electoral security involves the physical security of items such as buildings, vehicles, election materials and gadgets; and personal security of people such as electorates, representatives of different political parties, observers, staff and workers of the body saddle with the management of elections; and the general public. Specifically in 2015 Nigeria's general elections, security agencies were engaged to provide basic security to voters, people at political rallies and electioneering campaigns, conventions election materials, electoral staff, observers, party agents, and other stakeholders before and on the days of elections. Closely related to the foregoing, are unalloyed contributions of security personnel to ensure there is a free, fair, safe and lawful atmosphere electioneering campaigns for all parties without discriminating against any party and candidates around polling and collation centres. In addition to this, guaranteeing the security of election materials during transportation, at the voting centres, during registration of voters, and during elections records update and other electoral events are without doubt part of the constitutional responsibilities of security agents during every election in Nigeria.

At this juncture, there exists the need to establish the fact that the onerous task of achieving free, fair and credible elections does not solely lie with election regulatory body alone. Other stakeholders such as the press, politicians, government, security agents and even the ordinary citizens in the country, have considerable constitutionally defined roles to play in facilitating and achieving credible elections. Corroborating this stance, Fru [33] demands, though not in order of importance, an equitable and fair electoral framework; a generally accepted code of ethical behaviour in political and press freedom; a professional, neutral and transparent election administration; accountability of all participants; integrity safeguard mechanism and the enforcement of the election laws and other relevant laws as necessary conditions for ensuring free, fair and equitable elections.

But of all these stakeholders, however, the security agents (comprising personnel of Police,

Navy, Air force, Civil Defence Corps, Immigration, Road Safety Corps etc) are the only one constitutionally saddled with direct provision of election security in Nigeria. In other words, security agents are the main group saddled with the responsibility of protecting the integrity of the electoral process. This explains the reason for experts opinion that say that, the capacity and willingness of security agencies in enhancing adequate security in a non-partisan and impartial manner would contribute immensely to the credibility of elections; and that, the dearth or absence of adequate election security in any society of the world would compromise the democratic qualities of elections.

In this wise, the question that calls for attention at this point is, how have security agencies fared in securing elections in an impartial and professional manner since independence in Nigeria? No doubt, Nigeria's democracy is an emerging and nascent one in which forces of democratization are still unfolding and electoral systems and processes are still evolving. Historically, elections in Nigeria are all riddled with varying degrees of conflict. In the same vein, electioneering campaigns have not fared better; every campaign before elections in the country was riddled with pettiness, intolerance and violence of different forms. Also, several intra and inter-party violence which later dovetailed into abductions and assassinations are documented. Affirming the obvious, almost all the past elections in the country so far were overshadowed by tales of irregularities, intimidation and harassment of voters, use of security personnel against the opposition with impunity, and occasional use of security personnel to rig elections [34,35].

Indeed, many of the difficulties surrounding the problem of securing free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria right from the first post-colonial era election of 1963 till 2011 elections are due to the varying degrees of abuse of election-related procedures and rules, at all levels of electoral governance. Unlike experiences of some other West African countries, election security has posed a formidable challenge in Nigeria. Politicians are guilty of intentionally flouting electoral institutions and laws. Ever since, the integrity of elections in the country has been compromised and rubbished largely because of widespread irregularities that characterized the gamut of electoral process in Nigeria [36].

From the first post-colonial election of 1963 till the time of conduct of elections in 2011, security agencies, particularly the Nigerian police have recorded little or no success in curbing electoral violence in the country. In spite of the fact that provision of adequate security before, during and after elections is part of the constitutionally assigned responsibilities and functions of police department, the agency has not fared well as far as policing elections is concerned [37]. In so much that election security challenge in Nigeria cannot be totally divorced from general problems of insecurity and security environment arising from kidnapping and abduction, incessant bombings, kidnapping and abduction as well as armed robberies, yet, insecurity associated with conduct of elections has been on the rise mainly because security agents whose presence during elections is mainly to enhance the delivery of electoral services have rather chosen to remain tools in the hands of politicians for perpetrating electoral malpractices. The compromising posture of security agents particularly the police in favour of the ruling parties in 1964 and 1965 regional elections in the west (then, Nigeria was running a decentralized system of police powers, there were both regional and federal police) which prompted some members of UPGA to resort to a violent demonstration known as 'operation wet e' – an operation that resulted into arson, maiming and killing of political opponents is far from being overhyped [21]. In a similar fashion, security agents were also accused of being responsible for some of the fraudulent and violent practices that characterized the conduct of general elections held in 1979, 1983, 2003, and 2007 [34].

Specifically, the despicable acts and compromises of security officers in 2003 and 2007 elections especially in rural polling areas were unparalleled and unrivalled in the annals of elections in the country. Several reported cases of multiple thumb printing, stuffing of ballot boxes, and many other forms of misconducts by electoral and security officers were made. Other common low points attributed to security officials in 2003 and 2007 elections are reckless abandonment of polling booths while election was going, and cases of security personnel not reporting to their deployed polling units on election days. Others are deployment of fake security personnel and a situation where policemen intentionally conceal their identity on the day of election by not properly displaying their names and service number tags during elections.

Specifically, events and happenings during 2011 general elections are pointer to the fact, that, security agents who in the light of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and other related Electoral Acts are expected to be guided by the highest sense of professionalism, to be impartial, neutral and non-partisan among political parties or groups competing for various electoral offices are often not independent of the party in power. This explains why some security personnel blatantly engage in political intimidation and aid the government in power to perpetrate violent and fraudulent electoral practices. Severally, varying degrees of accusations were made regarding the inappropriate actions and inactions of police during elections. To many Nigerians, police are not to be trusted and are not believed to be acting only in the interest of the public. They have often been accused of putting up lacklustre performances whenever they were to protect the rights of the citizens during conduct of elections while they are seen to be a ready tool in the hand of some factions of the political class. Without mincing words, history of elections in Nigeria (apart from 2015 general elections) is chequered with electoral violence of phenomenal proportion while a considerable portion of the blame is put at the doorstep of security agencies. To many Nigerians, memories of complicity by security operatives in facilitating electoral fraud in the past elections still lingers.

Another common problem associated with security agencies which reared its ugly head in all past elections in Nigeria and which have consequently undermined election security is the paucity of enforcement. Despite the enormous powers conferred on security agencies, there has been a recurrent failure on their part to expeditiously prosecute electoral offenders in all past elections before 2011. In spite of the enormity and commonness of antics of political thugs in virtually all elections conducted in the country so far; the Nigeria Police rarely enforced the legal instruments prohibiting armed thuggery before, during and after elections despite the fact that this is well entrenched in Section 207, 225 and 227 of the 1979, 1989, and 1999 constitutions of Nigeria. A case that readily comes to mind is that of Late Chief Lamidi Adedibu who was known to have maintained loosely organized group of thugs for the purposes of electoral contests [37]. Adedibu up to the time of his demise was not arrested for once by security agents (this of course was due largely to his connection with the ruling party) in

spite of the fact that he was keeping and maintaining something similar to private army.

The similitude of what can be termed as high level partisanship of security operatives in the country re-enacted itself two days before June 21, 2015 Gubernatorial elections in Ekiti state. In the emerging scenario surrounding the preparations for the election according to report credited to Vanguard Newspaper of 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2015; stalwarts of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) from Abuja, the capital territory and others from outside the state were given easy access to Ekiti state; whereas former Governor Rotimi Amechi of Rivers State, some other Governors and other stalwarts in the opposing party, All Peoples Congress (APC) were barred by security operatives from entering Ekiti to attend a rally organized by their party.

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

### **3.3 Security Agents and the Nigeria's 2015 Elections**

In sharp contrast to the prevalent practices in many advanced democracies of the world, where security forces play no other role in the electoral process beyond their constitutionally assigned task of maintaining law and order due to their successful annihilation of factors that engender election-related crises; elections in Nigeria and some other countries in West Africa have persistently remained a major cause of worry, violence and insecurity [38]. Specifically, in Nigeria, all elections conducted from independence era till the period of general



elections in 2015 brazenly contravene several provisions of the Nigerian Electoral Acts. This, therefore, is an indication to the fact that elections are potential sources of violence and conflict in Nigeria.

The 2015 general elections, the fifth since the beginning of fourth republic (the republic is the longest one ever in the country) as predicted by scholars to be the most heated and hotly contested general elections in the history of democracy in Nigeria even months before a single vote was cast. These varied, though related predictions were all premised on the spate of violent acts that preceded the preparations for and the conduct of 2015 elections, most especially between the two major political parties (the ruling People's Democratic Party-PDP and All Progressives Congress-APC). Another distinct reason alluded for such predictions was hinged on the fact that 2015 general election would be the first in the history of elections in Nigeria when opposition party was considered strong enough to wrestle power from the ruling part. This line of thought was a watershed because Federal level power has never been rotated between political parties through democratic process before 2015.

In line with the above, preparations for the elections elicited unprecedented concerns for voters, security managers and other users of the electoral system within the country and beyond. Indeed, the highlighted elections-related concerns became more intense and exasperated by other existing security challenges such as Boko-haram dastardly acts, bombs attacks and kidnappings, orchestrated armed robbery and violent clashes between opposing political groups in the country. Another concern was the huge doubt about the capability and capacities of the President Jonathan's government to match its talk with work by effectively mobilizing, coordinating the deployment of security personnel to secure 2015 elections.

Eventually, the much anticipated 2015 general elections took place in the midst of myriad security concerns, particularly, the steady rising wave of Boko Haram insurgency in the country. The presidential election was conducted on March 28; the election was perhaps, one of the most bitterly fought in the annals of elections in Nigeria. Indeed, the polls occurred after a controversial six-week postponement following insistence by the National Security Adviser and other security related agencies that the election should be postponed for the newly constituted

multinational force to accelerate battle against insurgents in the North-eastern part of the country which has been suffering attacks from terrorist sect, Boko Haram.

In all, the conduct of security agents had a positive impact on the entire electoral process; their efforts consequently, prevented electoral violence in many areas and thus facilitated the overall peaceful conduct of elections. Apart from providing security for INEC materials and officials particularly in the midst of security threats; security agents were able to provide secured atmosphere that enabled Nigerians to throng polling booths to exercise their rights to choose their representative leadership (CDD, 2015). In the final analysis, the elections were hailed by many local and international observers as free and fair; nonetheless, the electoral process was regarded as an imperfect, but visibly a maturing one. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was commended from all quarters for organising the elections in a professional and credible "manner particularly under challenging circumstances" and also for setting up the Inter-Agency Consultative committee on Election Security which to a considerable extent helped in achieving relatively orderly and effective administrations of 2015 elections.

In line with the extent of serenity that pervaded the entire political landscape in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections, the Punch Newspaper of April 29, 2015 avers that the general view of the security presence at polling units was positive, unlike other previous elections in Nigeria. According to this newspaper, police were visible in all polling stations and were not obtrusive. The conduct of security agents during the elections was generally seen as mature and professional. Indeed, to a considerable extent, a notable departure from the past was noticeable in the conduct of security agents during the 2015 general elections. In fact, contrary to expectations of many Nigerians, rivalry common among different security agencies was non-existent unlike before. In its place there was an effective coordination of all security agencies that participated in 2015 elections under the group known as Inter-Agency Consultative Committee. The elections throughout the country was devoid of incidents of inter agencies rivalry.

But despite the remarkable and tremendous positive feats attributed to the security agents during 2015 elections in many parts of the country; certain loopholes, irregularities and

misconducts were also traced to a segment of security agents before, during, and after the elections. For instance, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) report of 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 indicated that there were record of cases of intimidation and harassment of voters by overzealous security agents in Sokoto state during presidential and National Assembly elections. Worse still, the group (CDD) also reported that voters were equally stopped by the same security agents from taking photos and recording the voting processes in the same state (Premium Times, July 29<sup>th</sup> 2015). In the same vein, another dimension of excessive and varied impulsively unprofessional acts of security agents during 2015 general elections was captured by a Non-governmental Organisation, *the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA)*, the NGO accused the security agents of failing to act while the electoral processes were being disrupted during governorship and House of Assembly polls in Rivers state. The group further reiterated Police's non-response stance to distress tweets by Nigerians regarding snatching of ballot boxes, voters' intimidation, violence and INEC staff harassment through their Twitter Verified Account@PoliceNG during the election [39].

In the similitude of what happened in Rivers state, security agents were also accused of duplicity based on the fact that nobody was brought to justice by the agency despite compelling evidence of underage voting as reported in some national dailies in Kogi and Bauchi states during 2015 general elections (This Day 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2015 - <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles>). Particularly, during the countdown to 2015 general elections, some of the activities of police and other security agencies were seen by many people as issues that could aggravate tensions during the polls and consequently undermine the credibility of the elections. Palpable fears were raised in many quarters particularly in Rivers state where the conduct of some senior police officers portrayed the agency as one that could be manipulated to serve the interest of the ruling party, PDP. In addition to this, the actions and pronouncement of the Department of State Security Services (DSS) suggested some degrees of institutional bias in favour PDP even before the conduct of 2015 general elections.

It is instructive to note, however, that various security biases and partiality recorded in the 2015 general elections and many others before it occurred in states and communities where the

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

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Elections and election administration in Nigeria have long fascinated political and other social scientists. Scholars at different times have argued that part of the factors which have consistently undermined democratic consolidation in the country is varying degrees and measures of electoral violence (before, during and after election) which have become infused into political processes of the country and is gradually turning itself to the national face of Nigerian politics. For much too long, violence has almost become synonymous to elections in Nigeria. As a transitional democracy, elections have created a number of precarious situations that have constantly threatened the stability of democracy in the country. Various past elections in Nigeria have underscore the fact that the provision of secured environment and general security during elections is one of the necessitating factors for conduct of free and fair elections. Findings from scientific research works on past general elections in the country have shown that politicians and electorates would have no other choice than to play by the rules of the game in the context where security is guaranteed. In essence, election security which can largely be made possible by the presence of impartial and unbiased security agents will enhance and guarantee the delivery of electoral services.

In relation to the above, one of the most important agencies responsible for achieving free, fair and credible elections especially in transitional democracy such as Nigeria's is security. In many developing societies, security agencies are recognised as 'markers' or 'guardians' of polls; to many, their presence and

activities on, before and after elections could make or mar success of any election. In Nigeria, security agents especially the police have been perennially lampooned for their partisanship during elections. The absence of adequate election security over the years has compromised the democratic qualities of elections in Nigeria. Security agents have been accused of not being independent, competent, and have consistently failed to discharge their responsibilities professionally with due recourse to the rule of law particularly respect for the fundamental human rights of the electorates. Indeed and rather unfortunately, the inability of security agents to act within these ethical codes during previous elections is seen as one of the fundamental cogs in the wheels of election security in Nigeria. Fortunately, however, a notable departure from the past was noticeable in the conduct of security agents during the 2015 elections; several ills associated with security agents during past elections have been blocked so far, however, there still exists room for significant improvement.

This position, is in tandem with the conclusions of studies such as Ibrahim and Ibeanu [40] and Ugochukwu [41] that underscore the fact that conduct of elections in Nigeria, particularly election security has greatly improved, however, there is still room for further improvement in subsequent elections in the country. In a nutshell, achieving such an improvement, that is, a situation where security agents would offer election security in a competent, independent and professional manner requires sincere, purposeful and determined commitment from the central government who must ready and not willing to influence various security agencies to their advantage during elections.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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