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Involvement Of The Nigerian Military In Elections: A Dangerous Trend For Democracy In Nigeria

Francesca Essien
National Defence College, Abuja

Abstract
Recent developments in the Nigerian political landscape have fuelled the belief that there is an increasing militarization of elections that stifles Nigeria's democratic system. Elections, the world over, are seen as processes leading to the selection of one or more persons for public offices. The selection processes are deemed democratic if they are free, fair, participatory, competitive, and legitimate. In every stable democratic society, election remains the essential ingredient of transitory process from one civilian administration to another. It provides citizens with the opportunity of exercising their constitutional rights to determine those that govern them. Elections are therefore, fundamental to democracy and it is often said that whereas it is possible to have elections without democracy, it is virtually impossible to have democracy without elections. Free, fair and credible elections thus, provide the basis for the emergence of democratic, accountable and legitimate governments.

Key Words: Military, Democracy and Elections

Introduction

Owing to the centrality of elections to the democratic process, emphasis has always been placed on ensuring credibility. One of the ways to making an election credible and peaceful is the issue of security (Igini, 2013). However, one of the challenges facing Nigeria today is how to choose leaders at different levels of government through a peaceful election. With the possibility of violence during and after the election, occasioned by a do-or-die attitude of self-centred political elites, the case for the deployment of soldiers to help maintain peace cannot be overemphasized. Though the involvement of the military in elections appears inevitable, their involvement in the electoral process has often raised concern on the necessity or otherwise of deploying soldiers to maintaining peace in the process. Some scholars have attributed Nigeria's history of electoral violence to the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters over the years.In particular, the active involvement of the military in the general elections has been seen by many as a dangerous trend for democracy in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Democracy

Democracy, literally means "Rule by People." It is a system of government where the citizens exercise power by voting. In a representative democracy, the citizens elect representatives from among themselves (Anifowose,2003). Thus, democracy is a political system that enables people to freely choose an effective, honest, transparent and accountable government.According to Diamond(1999), democracy consists of four key elements: a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; the active participation of the people as citizens in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

It therefore follows that for a democratic society to enjoy peace, government should not only be responsible to the people,

political power should also emanate from the popular will of the people and the state should be guided by and bound by the same will. As Diamond (2004) further argued, a democratic process involves three components, namely: decentralization that enhances the efficiency, quality and legitimacy of democracy, political culture which is a precondition for democracy to take root, especially as democratic values, beliefs, attitudes, norms and means must be embodied in a democracy, and the creation of a civil society that facilitates and enhances public participation in the democratic process and prevents abusive power from becoming concentrated at the center of society.

These democratic ingredients have been well summarized by Diamond and Morlino (2016) thus: all governments rest on some kind of mixture of coercion and consent, but democracies are unique in the degree to which their stability depends on the consent of a majority of those governed. Almost as a given, theories of democracy stress that democratic stability requires a widespread belief among both elites and masses that democracy is the best form of government for their society. Coming from a background of military dictatorship that destroyed democratic ideals, events in Nigeria since 1999, have shown that democracy has remained grossly unstable and the future seems bleak because of endemic electoral violence.

Elections

Elections, the world over, are seen as processes leading to the selection of one or more persons for public offices. Lindberg (2006) defines an election as a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Equally, Birch (2007) describes election as a tool for selecting representatives in modern representative democracies. According to Anifowose (2003), election is a process of elite selection by the mass of the population in any given political system.In the same vein, Rose (1978) sees election as a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies. Similarly, Omotola (2007) defines election as a method for the selection of persons to fill certain offices, through choices made by an electorate, under the rules and procedures of the electoral system.

Elections are therefore an acceptable means of effecting changes in government in contemporary democracies. The selection processes are deemed democratic if they are free, fair, participatory, competitive, and legitimate. Free, fair and credible elections thus, provide the basis for the emergence of democratic, accountable and legitimate governments.According to Lindberg (2003), every modern vision of representative democracy entails the notion of elections as the primary means of selection of political decision makers. In this regard, Ojo (2007) described election as the "hallmark of democracy" while Chiroro (2005) sees it as the "heart of the democratic order." Election as a mode of devolution of State Power does not bring only benefits and is not without risks for democracy. In fact, elections generally have their own characteristics which make them a potential source of insecurity, conflict and instability for the democratic system as a whole if they are not well managed. The organization of really free and fair elections remains a real challenge to all democracies across the world. Evidently, the management of the electoral process is posing increased challenges to new democracies in general and Nigeria in particular. Elections, when they are not managed quite satisfactorily, can endanger the democratization process they intended to serve. When the management of the electoral process or the electoral process itself is of dubious quality, this can lead to instability or even threaten the entire democratization process. Moreover, when the electoral system is not well conceived and the conduct of elections is partial and bias, this can pave the way for deeper ethnic and regional divisions, loss of legitimacy of elected authorities, protest,

violence contestation, social explosion, doubt about institutions and result in violence.

Military

The military is an arm of government authorised to use lethal force, and weapons, to support the interests of the state and some or all of its citizens. The task of the military is usually defined as defence of the state and its citizens, and the prosecution of war against another state (Brown, 2003). The military may also have additional sanctioned and non-sanctioned functions within a society, including, the promotion of political agenda, protecting corporate economic interests, internal population control construction, emergency services, social ceremonies and guarding important areas. The military can also function as a discrete sub-culture within a larger civil society, through the development of separate infrastructures, which may include housing, schools utilities, food production and banking.

Constitutional Role of the Military in Elections

Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. The whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations from the provision of basic security to voters, to ensuring that result forms are protected. As Lindberg (2009) argued, election security constitutes a major component of the electoral process but has however, in respect of emerging democracies, been hampered by series of factors, which include faulty legal framework, poor technical management of elections, poor management of competition and opposition, poor management of electoral disputes, and past roles of security forces.

In Nigeria, elections are increasingly becoming major security concerns over how to secure the men saddled with the conduct of the elections; materials needed for the elections as well as the voters and the candidates standing for elections (Jega, 2012). Violence and unrest in the run-up to the 2011 polls claimed the lives of more than 800 people and led to the displacement of approximately 65 000 (Vanguard, 2011) In view of the above, the involvement of the Nigerian military in the electoral process, cannot be overemphasized, in providing security for the protection of electoral processes, in ensuring that voters exercise their civic duties without fear or intimidation, in creating a level playing field for all political parties, and candidates to canvass for the support of the electorate and in maintaining overall integrity of the democratic and electoral process. However, the alleged role of the military in the June 21, 2014 Ekiti governorship election sparked off a debate over the legality, desirability or otherwise of deploying troops to keeping peace during the general elections. Thus, the prevailing discourse emanating from Nigerian and international actors alike predominantly focuses on the actions of major stakeholders, including the political partisanship of the security agencies in the discharge of their duties during the elections (Omotola, 2010). As Olaniyan*eta l*(2015) argue, the mode of involving security forces and how they carry out their duties while participating in the electoral process, can be adduced as part of the fundamental causes of violence and insecurity during elections in Nigeria.

The argument centred on the constitutionality of the use of the military in civil duties, a category to which the conduct of election belongs, against the background of the problematic electioneering in the political environment. The 1999 constitution has provided a good frame work for the role of the military in democracy. Section 217 (2), states that, the Federation shall, subject to an Act of the National Assembly made in that behalf, equip and maintain the armed forces as may be considered adequate and effective for the purpose of defending Nigeria from external aggression; maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders from violation on land, sea, or air; suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the

President, but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly.

Some legal practitioners believe that constitutionally, the military has a role to play in the electoral process in Nigeria. They argue that the deployment of troops in "aid" of civil authority is legal and constitutional, but such a deployment must be approved or regulated by the National Assembly. However, with respect to the governorship election conducted in Ekiti State in June 2014, the Appeal Court in Abuja declared that the deployment of soldiers in the Ekiti governorship election was wrong. The Federal High Court, Lagos, also declared the use of soldiers in an election is undemocratic (Nwauzor, 2015). Similarly, the Federal High Court in Sokoto, presided over by Justice RM Aikawa, ruled that the constitution does not grant the President power to deploy soldiers "for elections". Opponents to military deployment further argue that the courts have consistently enjoined the Federal Government to desist from involving the armed forces in the conduct of elections. In two separate judgments, both the Federal High Court and the Court of Appeal ruled that the armed forces have no role to play in the management of elections in Nigeria. Citing the case of Buhari v Obasanjo (2005) 1 WRN 1 at 2000, Abdullah PCA observed *that in spite of the non-tolerant nature and behavior of our political class in this country, we should by all means try to keep armed personnel of whatever status or nature from being part and parcel of our election process. The civilian authorities should be left to conduct and carry out fully the electoral processes at all levels* (Falana 2014). Again in the leading judgment of the Court of Appeal in *Yussuf v Obasanjo* (2005) 18 NWLR (PT 956) 96 the Court of Appeal held that *"It is up to the police to protect our nascent democracy and not the military, otherwise the democracy might be wittingly or unwittingly militarized (*Falana2015*).*

Civil Rights Organizations (CROs) also argue that the military have no role in the elections. To them, the State is obligated to confining to the Police which can handle security during election, but would only be required to stay some 300 metres (Udinma,2015). Specifically, APC, being the leading opposition party in 2015, strongly opposed the deployment of soldiers for the 2015 general elections. Speaking from a constitutional perspective, the party struggled to use the Judiciary to prevent President Jonathan, from deploying the military for the elections based on his constitutional powers under Sections 217 and 218 of the 1999 Constitution. Relying on Sections 215 and 217 of the Constitution, they noted that though the President of the country has the powers to deploy armed forces, such powers are only applicable to the suppression of insurrection, including insurgency and aiding the police to restore order when it has broken down (Jibueze, 2015)).

Giving his ruling on an Application filed by Gbajabiamila in which he sought a declaration that the deployment of soldiers for election duties by President Goodluck Jonathan is unconstitutional, Justice Ibrahim Buba of the Federal High Court, Lagos on March 23, 2015 held that President Jonathan cannot deploy soldiers for election duties without authorisation by the National Assembly pursuant to Sections 215 and 217 of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended)(J. Jibueze 2015).He was of the opinion that, any election which is militarised through the deployment of soldiers where there is no insurrection is anti-democratic and not in consonance with constitutional democracy and civil rule. He also declared that, the army is not needed for civil duties, nor does the law make any provisions for military involvement in civil duties though soldiers can vote in their barracks. According to him," the time has come for us to establish the culture of democratic rule in the country and to start doing the right thing, particularly when it has to do with dealing with the electoral process which is one of the pillars of democracy … we should, by all means, try to keep armed forces and military from being a part and

parcel of the electoral process" (Mordi, 2015)

Involvement of the Military in 2015 Elections

Owing to the loss of lives after the 2011 general elections and the general insecurity in the country occasioned by the Boko Haram crises, the government resorted to heavy deployment of military forces throughout the country. In 2015, President Jonathan ordered the deployment of soldiers in all the States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory for the March 28 and April 11, general elections. For the former President, the heavy deployment of military forces for the elections was considered necessary given the country's recent violent electoral history. Inherent in the rationalization of the President is the notion of supreme power of the state to maintain the security of lives and property. This flowed from the earlier experience of widespread destructions and killings during elections. Section 14 (2b) of 1999 Nigeria Constitution as amended states that, "the welfare and security of the citizens shall be the primary purpose of the government". Moreover, the 2015 election was significant, with the potential to make or mar the country's democracy and threaten its peace and security. A key challenge was that the election was held against the backdrop of the violent insurgency by Boko Haram sect. Furthermore, given the politicisation as well as the unprecedented fractionalisation of political elites along ethno-regional and religious lines of identity, the 2015 election took on the appearance of a war, threatening the survival of the country (Jimoh, et.al.2015).This explained the presence of a high number of security forces in the 2015 election, an occurrence that was witnessed for the first time in Nigeria.

The INEC Chairman also believed that the military had a role to play in the general election. He, however, was of the view that they should be restricted to designated checkpoints, to make sure people do not traffic arms or engage in any conduct that could tamper with the electoral process.It is to this extent, that Professor Jega, during the appearance of INEC at the Senate on 15 Feb 2014, reiterated the preparedness of the electoral body to conduct the General Election but maintained that only the military could guarantee security during the election **(**Akinfenwa, 2015). Consequently, on election days, security personnel from Nigeria's Police, Civil Defense Corps and an array of other domestic security agencies were deployed to polling units in adequate numbers, while members of the Nigerian Military were posted onto roads and at state and national borders to enforce movement restrictions.

Partisan involvement of the military in 2019 Elections

The 2019 elections bore the hallmark of the 2015 elections. In the run-up to the keenly contested elections, the political atmosphere was tensed by intense party campaigns and sporadic incidents of political violence. Political tensions were also fueled by the high stakes of the presidential election. The contest featured the incumbent Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Alliance (APC), and Atiku Abubakar, the candidate of the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) and a former vice president. The security situation was fragile with continued sporadic attacks by Boko Haram and other armed groups in the Northern regions of the country. Despite the challenges and the tension caused by INEC postponement of election meant to take place on 16th February, Nigerians went to the polls to elect a president and national legislators, on 23rd February 2019; and on 9th March to elect governors and state assembly members.

Although the 2019 general elections have come and gone, a lot of concerns have been raised on the credibility of the process based on the alleged involvement and conduct of the military in the entire exercise. Taking cognizance that the military did not, in any way, influence the outcome of the 2015 Presidential election in

which the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan suffered an electoral defeat by the leading opposition party, Nigerians thought that under the current dispensation the Army would not deviate from the time tested professional code of conduct, adherence to best global practices and destroy the credibility of the military institution. During the 2015 election, troops were restricted largely to highways leading to areas considered volatile, to make sure that arms were not moved from place-to-place during elections. However, in the 2019 elections, soldiers were physically present at polling stations, as well as collation centres. There were reports of how some overzealous soldiers acted in a manner deemed to have undermined the credibility and sanctity of the elections. Men in uniform intimidated or blocked voters from getting to polling stations; snatched ballot boxes and instigated needless violence in some states across the country (Premium Times, 10 March, 2019).

According to Nze (2019), prior the 2019 general elections, there was never a time dedicated to the discussion on the military taking part in the election at the various inter-agency consultative meetings with INEC. At such consultative meetings, the agencies which participated were the Police; the Department of State Services (DSS); the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC); and sometimes the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). Prior the elections, INEC called for a new approach to the deployment of security forces during the election. The INEC chairman Mahmood Yakubu stated that the new security architecture for 2019 general elections was consistent with the provision of Section 29 (3) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended), which states, "Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law for purposes of securing the vote, the Commission shall be responsible for requesting for the deployment of relevant security personnel necessary for elections or by registrations of voters and shall assign them in a manner to be determined by the commission in consultation with the relevant security agencies – provided that the commission shall only request for the deployment of the Nigerian Armed Forces for protection of election materials and protection of election officials"(Electoral Act, 2010.)

In line with this, INEC Chairman said the Commission's request for the deployment of the Nigerian Armed Forces was only to secure the distribution and delivery of election materials and protection of election officials. He said, INEC in particular, was committed to ensuring that elections were organised in such a manner that the security agencies were not perceived to be running parallel arrangement with INEC. Rather, it should strictly be INEC's plan for the election that should be implemented. He also noted that the Nigerian Police remains the lead agency for election security while other security agencies play supportive roles to the Nigerian Police (This Day, 2019). However, speaking during an emergency meeting of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Abuja, shortly after elections were postponed by INEC, President Buhari was quoted as saying that, anybody who decides to snatch (ballot) boxes or who tried to interfere with the elections would be doing so "at the expense of his life".

The statement drew condemnation from politicians, human rights activists, lawyers and prominent Nigerians who condemned the President's statement in declaring that death awaited ballot box snatchers during the elections. Members of the organized civil society community who were equally concerned insisted that the military must never be used to influence the manipulation of the electoral process to favour the incumbent. Similarly, the Speaker, House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, described Buhari's order as a call for extrajudicial killings. The statements, according to him, clearly indicated that the military had been given a central role and co-opted into the conduct of the elections, despite the fact that it has no constitutional role in the electoral process (Global Observatory, 2019). Also,

the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and Campaign for Democracy (CD), condemned the shoot at sight order, saying such a call was outside the provisions of the constitution and the electoral laws. The CDHR National President Ugwummadu, also argued that the call on the military and the police to shoot ballot boxes snatchers is unconstitutional. Also, the CD National President, Usman Abdul, saw the call by the President on ballot boxes as uncalled for and unconstitutional(Punch, 2019).

In a similar manner, a Human Rights Lawyer Femi Falana (SAN), urged President Buharito withdraw the illegal directive as soon as possible. Equally, Sebastine Hon (SAN) said the President's directive to the military was clearly unconstitutional. He noted that, Section 33(1) of the Constitution guarantees the right to life. To this extent, life can only be terminated in accordance with due process of law. Due process of law in this case, includes the execution of death sentence by a court of law or tribunal, or during insurrection or war, or acting in self-defence but does not include shooting an electoral offender. Equally, the CD National President, Usman Abdul, opined that the President was wrong in issuing such an order because there were adequate provisions in the law to deal with electoral offences during the elections (Daily Post, 2019).

Two civil society groups, Save Democracy Women (SDW) and Impact Future Nigeria (IFN), also staged a peaceful protest in Abuja over what they called "the militarisation of the 2019 general elections". They condemned the involvement of the military in the elections (Vanguard, 2019). But their protest evidently did not stop the deployment of troops for what ordinarily should be a civil engagement. President Buhari insisted that his directive was meant only for trouble makers and election riggers. The PDP cautioned the Chief of Army Staff , Lt.Gen. Tukur Yusuf Buratai against dragging the military into politics — a sensitive issue in Nigeria where there have been six successful military coups since independence in 1960. But the army chief said his men would obey their orders.

It was therefore not surprising that there was heavy military deployment for the elections. Whereas the presidential and National Assembly elections were held without much incidents involving security agencies, the governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections on March 9th , witnessed interference from security agencies, particularly the military. In a public discourse dominated by retired soldiers, elder statesmen, the civil society, lawyers and religious leaders, they condemned the conduct of soldiers deployed for security duties in some parts of the country during the elections(Vanguard, 2019). This observation was confirmed by local and foreign observers who condemned the roles played by the military during both the February 23rd and the March 9th elections, which they said fell short of international best practices. The unanimous position of the European Union (EU), Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2019; the Joint International Observation Mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI); the National Democratic Institute (NDI); Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and the Integrity Friends for Truth and Peace Initiative (TIFPI) in their preliminary reports, noted that the way the elections were conducted fell short of standard in many respects, made worse by the partisan involvement of the military(Sahara Reporters, 2019).

The February 23rd presidential and National Assembly election, was marred by violence that claimed, at least, 53 lives and left many more wounded. The governorship and house of assembly elections that followed on 9th March were perhaps more virulent as arm-wielding security personnel compromised their professional credibility in open partisanship that has now put to question the integrity of the armed forces. The EU Observer Mission during its assessment of the elections said that electoral transparency was limited by

restrictions to journalists and observers in five states (Okey, 2019) Journalists from respected media houses were obstructed from reporting in certain areas. Civil society groups reported that military and security agents denied citizens and observers access to eight collation centres in three states, and that they were further denied access in a number of others by INEC personnel or threatening groups(Sahara Report, 2019). Men in uniform intimidated or blocked voters from getting to polling stations, snatched ballot boxes and instigated needless violence in some states across the country

The case of Rivers State stood out as a sad reference point. The INEC Head of Voter Education and Information in Rivers State confirmed that soldiers invaded INEC Office in Port Harcourt and embarked on a partisan, selective screening of voters (AIT, 10 March, 2019).Soldiers and Policemen blocked the gate of the State Headquarters of INEC in Port Harcourt, on March 10th , 2019. Fears gripped residents as the State Headquarters of INEC was condoned off by fierce looking soldiers, anti-riots policemen and other security agents who were jointly patrolling the city ahead of the much awaited results of the just concluded governorship and state assembly elections. (AFP 2019).The EU Report stated that EU observers and Nigerian civil society observers were prevented from entering the INEC Office in Rivers by military personnel. The military reportedly harassed INEC officials, chased away accredited political party agents and prevented election observers from observing process. Civil Society Observers reported the hijacking of election materials, and incidents of abduction, assault, and harassment of election officials by persons in military uniform (..).Soldiers were said to have been instrumental to the disruption and consequent suspension of electoral processes in Rivers state. An INEC official admitted that their office was besieged by the military and results of the election were confiscated, thus rendering impossible their collation task (Nigerian Pilot, 2019).

On 10th March, INEC suspended all electoral processes in Rivers complaining of widespread violence and disruption to the elections. According to the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, headed by Clement Nwankwo, no fewer than 58 Nigerians were reportedly killed during the election, with Rivers State accounting for 30 of this number (Channels Television).Nwankwo specifically blamed military involvement in the elections, especially as it borders on participating soldiers not taking directives from INEC officials. He noted that this was the first time since the return of Nigeria to democratic rule in 1999, that the army was playing a direct role in the elections. In his words "this is destroying our democracy; this is not the democracy that we saw when we went to vote in 2015 or in 2011. This is very dangerous to our democracy "(Ebonugwo & Kumolu, 2019). He stated that if Nigeria must survive, then the country must take a stand on what to do about military involvement in elections. He argued further that, if the military is not able to take directives from INEC, then the law should be amended to ensure they are immediately removed from involvement in any way in elections. Following the unprofessional conduct of some military personnel, especially the invasion of the collation centre in Rivers State, the INEC Chairman said that he did not request for the deployment of soldiers in its collation centres.

Expressing the same view, the Executive Director TIFPI, Livingstone Wechie said TIFPI observed the alleged involvement of the Army and other security operatives in the elections in Imo, Zamfara, Kaduna, Akwa Ibom, Edo and Ogun. TIFPI observed that men in Army and other security uniforms disrupted the election process in these states, though they also opined that there must have been the use of fake soldiers and infiltration of some of the security formations. He, however, expressed disappointment that the Army

high command had earlier given an assurance that the military will provide security and not interfere in the process. The Executive Director, in his report, advised the Army authorities to fish out any of its men that may had interfered in the election in any of these states, including possible infiltration in their circles (Vanguard, 2019). Also expressing deep concern over the development, the British High Commission in Nigeria condemned the military interference in the election in Rivers State in particular, saying that it does not augur well for democratic process as it would affect the ability of INEC staff to conduct an impartial election.

On its own part, the umbrella body of opposition parties in Nigeria, the Conference of United Political Parties (CUPP), accused the APC-led Federal Government and the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai, of using the militarisation of the electoral process to reintroduce military rule in the country. The group also condemned what it termed as government's attempt to overthrow the electoral process in Rivers State with APC thugs and the military. According to them, the undemocratic activities of the military and other security agencies in Rivers State are tantamount to treasonable felony. Some other observers traced the excesses of the soldiers to a comment credited to President Buhari when he ordered security operatives to shoot those who dared to snatch ballot boxes during the elections. Media reports and video captured soldiers overrunning the home of a state official and even chasing after female residents with guns drawn in River state. Though the military high command refuted the allegations, ascribing the atrocities to "fake soldiers," there were no reports of any arrest and many Nigerians see the defence as an afterthought. Soldiers even blocked international observers from performing their duty of monitoring the conduct of the elections (Punch, 2019)

Ironically, the heavy presence of soldiers during the elections did not deter thugs and other undesirable elements in many polling units where they unleashed violence with impunity(..). The CDD in its own assessment of the elections, specifically decried what it described as the weaponisation of the entire process which aided the harassment, intimidation and assault of election officials, observers, journalists and voters. According to a report signed by its chairman, CDD-EAC, Prof. Adele Jinadu and CDD Director Idayat Hassan: "The weaponisation of the election and abductions of INEC staff and the ad-hoc staff is worrisome and constitutes a drawback to the progress made since 2011.

Political analyst estimated that the 2019 elections had the lowest voter turnout since the country returned to civilian rule in 1999 (Emeka, 2019). It is not out of place that one of the factors leading to low turnout of voters was the heavy presence of soldiers in the streets which could have instilled fears in some electorate thereby preventing them from coming out. IFN convener, May Uneku blamed the low voter turnout — just 35 percent — on the heavy presence of troops in the streets. The group also observed that the just-concluded elections, were a total charade because there are video and pictorial evidences of people screaming for their lives, as military men were harassing and shooting people. She condemned, in totality, the involvement of the military in the 2019 elections (Global Observatory).While voter turnout could have been influenced by many factors, some have speculated Nigerians may be losing faith in the freedom and fairness of the process.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, elections have become the source of violent political, ethnic, religious and communal conflicts since independence in 1960. Politicians have, over the years, become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power; more reckless and greedy in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them. The first security challenge facing electoral conduct in Nigeria is therefore, that of securing the

men and materials for the election. If securing men and material is challenging, securing the voters and the candidates in Nigeria is even more daunting. This situation coupled with the increasing security challenges in the country has necessitated the increased involvement in internal operations including election duties.

During the 2015 elections, military personnel were not stationed at polling units but were deployed to strategic places across the country to provide security and ensure peaceful and hitch-free elections. Military involvement in the election was restricted to patrols, as soldiers patrolled major roads and mounted checkpoints in strategic locations nationwide. Analysts and election observers questioned the rationale for deploying troops for purely civil matters. They argued that the deployment of soldiers was "an aberration". Majority of Nigerians complained that the military actually interfered in the last electoral process. Never in the history of elections in Nigeria did the country witness such impunity in the election process as was the case in the just concluded election. Some southern states saw heavy presence of the military especially during the governorship elections. There were reports of how some overzealous soldiers acted in a manner deemed to have undermined the credibility and sanctity of the elections. Soldiers in brute force invaded INEC collation centres in different parts of the country and chased away accredited political party agents, election monitors and news men.

This claim of forceful interference of soldiers in the electoral process was also corroborated by both national and international election observers who said soldiers were complicit through their excesses in the outbreak of violence that claimed many lives during the elections as was the case in Rivers State. CLEEN Foundation and international observers reported that personnel in military uniform engaged in sporadic shooting and killings, voter and observer intimidation, and theft of electoral materials. Though the involvement of the military appear inevitable, given the security situation in parts of the country, there is a general opinion that their role needs to be regulated. It is the statutory duty of the Nigerian Police to carry out election duties, without having the armed forces instill fear in the citizenry during elections. Such a practice is not good for our democracy and should be discouraged. Until the return to civilian rule in 1999, the Police had always been in charge of providing security during elections. Most experts are of the opinion that if the Police is well-equipped, it should be able to provide security nationwide, including during elections.

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