Multidimensional
Election Security Threats
Challenges, Options & Opportunities
For Nigeria 2023 General Elections

Edited by Chidiebere Ugwu, Ekene Ikwelle, Abidemi Omotola

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Ekene Ikwelle
Abidemi Omotola

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Multidimensional Election Security Threats - A Background
Chidiebere Ugwu

In a few months' time Nigeria and indeed Nigerians will be going to the polls to elect the next president of the most populous black nation on earth. Elections in Nigeria usually comes with mix feelings because of the volatile and charged environment leading to the actual date of the election.

Elections are central to maintaining free and fair societies. While elections are the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century (Election, n.d.), elections in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999 have been characterised by some form of violence as a common denominator besides the allegations of electoral fraud and malfeasance, vote buying, voters' apathy and intimidations. Faced with these deficits, some commentators or observers have described elections in Nigeria as a sham. Failures of the electoral processes have been to a large extent attributed to intrusion and truncating of the process by external actors – thugs, rogue politicians, rogue electoral official etc, with the attendant effects of their interferences begs the question of the need to secure the elections, its processes, materials and personnel's.

Election security a critical issue in Nigeria today to ensure the legitimacy of the process. The 'Winner takes it all' and 'wining at all costs' has led to the introductions of non-state armed thugs to disrupt the process by unknown players

which has as a counterweight the introduction of armed state actors to secure the election processes to guarantee it legitimacy by the government. The securitisation of elections and the election processes became paramount for the survival of the country's young democracy.

Indeed, election security and ensuring the processes involved are fair, resilient, and safe is paramount to maintaining public trust in the democratic process. It is imperative that a country gets it right at all levels hence the need to secure the process to enable it deliver upon its mandates. Members of the Security Armed Forces have been active players in the electoral process, from securing the electoral material to physically securing the voting units. Election security protects all elements of election infrastructure—including election officials, federal partners, state and local government agencies, voting equipment and technology, and the vendor community. Securing election infrastructure is vital to maintaining public trust in the electoral process and system. This reality is particularly crucial as Nigeria heads into 2023 general elections with developments that have the potential to shape the election environment, such as the amendment of the electoral law, adoption of new technologies for election administration INEC Voters Enrollment Device (IVED), Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS), Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal), pervasive culture of vote trading and surge in youth's quest to obtain Permanent Voters Card (PVC) to enable them to participate in the upcoming elections.

General Objective is to map the multiple security threats to the 2023 elections and proffer robust recommendations that would inform proactive interventions to strengthen election security.

Identify and analyse security challenges, analyse the challenges identified while providing analysis of the political economic context of the 2023 elections. We also look at the question around accountability and justice systems and how they affect the elections. These will provide practical and concrete recommendations for enhancing the credibility and security of elections in general.

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Multidimensional Election Security Threats: Challenges, Options and Opportunities for Nigeria 2023 General Elections - An Exposé
Oseloka H. Obaze

Introduction

Nigeria, due to her size, ethnic composition, past military governance history, has its very unique peculiarities. These attributes, invariably, serve as corollaries to the role of the security sector in the electoral process.

Nigeria has commenced the march towards her fourth general elections since the return to democracy in May 1999. The 2023 elections, will perhaps like no other, be considered seminal for several reasons. While there will be several variables at play, *Security Threats* will remain a preeminent constant. There is also the generally expressed fear, that the 2023 elections pose a clear and present danger to Nigeria's corporate wellbeing, if not properly handled.

Like past elections, and most recently the 2015 elections, the prevailing sense of palpable threats, will once again translate into the United States along with the United Kingdom, France, and their European Union partners, leading the clarion call for credible and peaceful elections in Nigeria.

Inevitably, there will be challenges. Some will be intrinsic in societal norms and values, while others will be deliberately

orchestrated as means to desirable outcomes and ends. Several factors must be borne in mind.

First, elections Nigeria are deemed zero sum games. The general disposition is to view partisan politics and opposition politics as adversarial. As postulated elsewhere, this disposition arises in part, from our fixation, attitude, and "the incremental trend in Nigeria towards a *cancel culture*: the inclination to boycott, shun or ostracize those with alternative governance and policy viewpoints" (Oseloka, 2021). As Agbese postulated, "For most Nigerian politicians, politics is simply a win-win game by individuals for the benefits of individuals."

Second, unfettered election security constitutes the main guarantee for the credibility and peacefulness of an election. Absence of security or security guarantees will invariably affect electoral turnout and possibly electoral outcomes.

Third, it has been adduced that "As Nigeria heads toward the 2023 general elections, the issue of security will determine if the election holds or not." It is on record that in Nigeria, elections have been postponed due to threat assessments.

Fourth, in Nigeria, the weaponization of poverty is far more pronounced, inimical, and discernible in the electioneering realm than in any other public sector.

Fifth, the non-adherence to the rule of law has dire consequences for electoral processes, jurisdiction and ultimately contribute to electoral denials, voters'

suppression and other ills that undermine electoral legitimacy. Often, the absence of the rule of law also translates to lack of accountability and gross erosion of electoral credibility.

Sixth, as has been rightly asserted, "Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible election" (Mediayanose, 2018). Hence, I am of the view that the nexus between security and the conduct of periodic, genuine, free, fair and sufficiently credible elections are inextricable.

Seventh, our electoral processes and indeed our democracy are in danger due to the cancel culture and 'us versus them' attitude in politics, which dictates that you must lose so that they can win or retain power. So genuinely conducted elections are cancelled by fiats; free and fair elections are rigged, cancelled, or annulled.

Eight, the prospects of incendiary rhetoric becoming a tripwire that derails the elections is real. This explains, perhaps, why the contesting parties and candidates were called upon to sign a peace accord recently. The post-election violence 2011, remains a stark reminder of what is possible.

Interrogating the Challenges, Options and Opportunities

In interrogating the theme, Kwaja posited that, "INEC relies solely on the security sector for the security of the elections. The extent of synergy between the election management institutions and the respective security agencies, have implications for the outcome of elections, due to the roles

that each of the entities is expected to play in the run to the elections" (Kwaja, 2022).

This contention primarily, affirms that there is a collective understanding and acceptance that security threats exist before, during and in the aftermath of elections, and must be addressed within the ambit of the security sector.

I will preface the rest of my comments by acknowledging some of the broad views contained in the concept note. It is true that "elections in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999 have been characterised by some form of violence as a common denominator besides the allegations of electoral fraud and malfeasance, vote buying, voters' apathy and intimidations."

It has also been observed that "The history of elections in Nigeria since 1959 till date has, largely, been characterised by thuggery and violence among other notable electoral vices" (Awofeso, 2016). Nigerians still recall, and not very fondly, how in 2011, incendiary rhetoric precipitated post-election violence in northern Nigeria after the presidential elections. Numerous lives were lost, thousands displaced, and properties worth hundreds of millions destroyed.

Drawing from experience, most elections in Nigeria are considered shambolic, and end up in litigation. This has made election security a critical issue in Nigeria. Also from experience, it is safe to assume that security threats resulting in violence are prevailing; and that if it happened once before, it could happen again.

For our common purposes, I will devote the rest of my remarks to interrogating the Challenges, Options and Opportunities from the perspectives offered by our four presenters.

The 2023 elections will be held against a defining backdrop that will shape the civic space and election environment. These include increased eligible voters replete with a youth bulge, the amendment of the electoral law, and adoption of new technologies for election administration.

There will also be some constants. The 2023 general elections will be conducted around and across 36 states, and the Federal Capital Territory, the 774 local government areas, 8,809 Wards, 119,973 polling units. For the elections to be credible, each entity must be secure.

As we are already aware, several states in Nigeria are remarkable for their ungoverned spaces. Others suffer from a multiplicity of peace and security negating situations: with banditry and kidnapping ranking very high.

The Obvious and not so Obvious Challenges
It is generally agreed that a secure and resilient electoral process is vital to inspiring and sustaining public confidence in the democratic process. The integrity of any election can be determined by the prevailing security situation in a state.

Hence in contextualizing the prospects of real and imagined security threats the elections, cognizance must be taken of the subsisting environment. There will always be obvious and non-obvious challenges.

Nigeria is already, renowned for widespread incidents of kidnappings, terrorism, banditry, separatist agitation, ritual killings, cultism, herders and farmers conflicts, attacks on security agents, and other forms of criminalities.

If we were to empirically scale and benchmark the credible elections enabling environment in Nigeria, it would perhaps rank about 5 on a scale of 10, considering the ungoverned spaces, kidnappings, terrorism, banditry, separatist agitations and thuggery.

Since Nigeria ranks low in many development indices and on the corruption perception index, (scoring 24 out a 100) we can safely assume that those threats that are possibly induced by corruption will manifest before during and after elections. These will relate to institutional weakness of INEC. The credibility, robustness ad commitment of INEC is only as strong as the commitment of its leaders and staff to the rule of law.

Outsourcing arrangements, custody for sensitive materials, transportation and even the use of ad hoc staff all pose a threat to the electoral process due to abuse and corruption. Recently in various places, PVCS were found buried in gutters, when there should have been distributed or in safe custody of INEC officials. What this amount to is voter suppression.

What is important in making our collective assessment is that security threats are multi-dimensional or what has been referred to as "the physical or 'hard' dimension and the virtual or 'soft' dimension."

Indeed, INEC has identified some potential threats to the entire electoral process, including "intimidation and physical attacks on voters and political opponents…physical attacks and kidnapping of its personnel for ransom and arson attacks on its offices and facilities" (Amata, 2022). According to INEC, "between February 2019 and May 2021, 41 of its offices were attacked across the country" (Amata, 2022).

Whereas INEC is statutorily mandated and obligated to conduct free, fair, and credible elections, it cannot be assumed that the Organisation will conduct fair and credible elections: There are several militating reasons. We will touch cursorily on about a dozen:

1. Commitment and sanctity of mandate
2. Statuary and civic duty
3. Institutional weaknesses
4. Infrastructure, personnel, materials, partners, transmission
5. In Nigeria everything is transactional
6. Public awareness, orientation and trust gap
7. Correlation between electoral legitimacy and governance legitimacy
8. Inadequate financing and vote buying
9. Role of CSO/ NGOs and attentive publics, celerity, canvassing against hate speech, fighting words, trolling, fake news, value added
10. United Nation, European Union, African Union needs assessments and support skewered
11. Role of academics in electoral process

Conclusion

Our experts have tackled security sector oversight, gender dimension, cyber threats, INEC's inter-agency interface.

Entrenched and vested political interests could lead older politicians to mobilise money and violence to promote their electoral interests: the attitude of 'cancel culture' why it is inimical to women and youth and electoral credibility.

We must accept that part of the biggest threat to the election is that poverty has been weaponized.

The perverseness use of social media without attendant responsibility could be used for hate speech, incitation, misinformation and disinformation that may undermine security before, during and after elections. Trolling causes discontent and disconnect.

Non state actors are as dangerous as rogue state actors. Above all, absence of political will is the biggest threat.

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Security Sector Oversight of the Electoral Process

Lessons from Nigeria

Chris M.A. Kwaja, Ph.D., *fspsp*

Security Sector Oversight of the Electoral Process: Lessons from Nigeria

Chris M.A. Kwaja, Ph.D., *fspsp*

"Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible election. From the provision of the basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations" (Olurode, 2013).

Introduction

The strong connection between election and security has been well documented. The core assumption is that the credibility of an electoral process is highly dependent on the extent to which the security environment is safe for the conduct of elections. As the institution empowered by the constitution to conduct elections for state and national level offices, INEC relies solely on the security sector for the security of the elections. The same applies to the 36 State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) that conduct elections at the local government level. The extent of synergy between the election management institutions and the respective security agencies, have implications for the outcome of elections, due to the roles that each of the entities is expected to play in the run-off to the elections. In the case of the security sector, the roles or duties of each of the security agency is clearly spelt out in the constitution and other legal framework that guides their involvement in the elections.

Election security is critical to effective electoral administration and electoral integrity (Norris, 2013). It constitutes the main guarantee for the credibility and peacefulness of an election, which is measured largely in the context of the physical security of buildings associated with the elections; materials printed or produced; physical security of the electorates, candidates, representatives of political parties, election officials, domestic and internal observers; as well as security of information, computers, software, and election communication systems (IDEA, 2006).

As it stands, though the security sector is expected to ensure the electoral process is safe for the conduct of elections, the rise of non-state security actors have altered this reality. The prevailing security challenges in the country that are linked to armed banditry, insurgency, secessionist agitations, as well as ethno-religious tensions are fuelled and perpetuated by non-state security actors. In response to this non-state security actors, individuals, groups and communities have built but their own mechanisms for protection outside the Nigerian state. These two categories of non-state armed groups have the capacity to make or mar elections, depending on how they are engaged by the security sector of the Nigerian state.

Overview of the Security Sector in Nigeria
The security sector in Nigeria is divided into three main segments (Kwaja, 2017). The first is the "Armed Forces of the Federation" (Audu, 2019), made up of the military and its institutions, as captured in Section 217(1) of the 1999

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). The Armed Forces is composed of the Nigerian Army (NA), the Nigerian Navy (NN) and the Nigerian Air Force (NAF). For administrative purposes, the Armed Forces of the Federation is under the Ministry of Defence (MoD), while Operationally, the Armed Forces is saddled with the following responsibilities, which has to do with:

(i) Defending Nigeria from external aggression.
(ii) Maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders from violation on land, sea, or air.
(iii) Suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President.
(iv) Performance of such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly.

The second component of the security sector is made up of para-military security agencies (Bala & Ouedraogo, 2018), namely, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS), the Federal Fire Service (FFS), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), among others. For administrative purposes, with the exception of the Nigerian Customs Services that is under the Ministry of Finance, the others are directly under the Ministry of Interior.

The third aspect is the intelligence community; made up of the Department of Security Services (DSS), the Defence

Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) (Abdulahi, 2021). The Nigerian intelligence community is established by the National Security Agencies Act, CAP. 273, LFN, 2004 (as amended). According to Dokubo (2011:68), these are specialised agencies established for the purposes of collection of intelligence from within and outside the Nigerian state. They are also responsible for the provision of security services. While the DSS collects local intelligence and provides internal security, the NIA collects external intelligence. On the other hand, the DIA collects defence intelligence and security both within and outside Nigeria. Thus, the Armed Forces, the para-military agencies and the intelligence community, otherwise called the traditional security institutions, are collectively referred to as security and law enforcement agencies. Other law enforcement agencies with mandate relating to security sector oversights include the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) (Ali and Ali, 2022).

Executive Oversight of the Security Sector:

There are institutions and organisations, established by law and placed under the Executive arm of government for the purposes of coordination, control and supervision of the security and law enforcement agencies. The National Security Council, the National Defence Council, the Nigerian Police Council, the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), the Joint Intelligence Board (JIB), Police Service Commission (PSC) and the Intelligence Community Committee (ICC), advise the President on matters relating

to public security including matters relating to any organisation or agency established by law for ensuring the security of the Federation (see Sections 16, 17, 25 – 30 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended).

Other agencies such as the Federal Character Commission (FCC) established by Section 153(1)(c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) have a mandate of ensuring that the composition of the Government of Federation or any of its agencies (including the security sector) and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.

Legislative Oversight of the Security Sector:
The Legislature also has constitutional mandate relating to the oversight of the security sector, conducted through law making, appropriation and investigations among others. Section 4 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) vests legislative powers of the Federation and States on the National Assembly. Furthermore, Section 88 of the same Constitution empowers the National Assembly to direct or cause to be directed investigation into the conduct of affairs of any person, authority, ministry, or government department charged, or intended to be charged, with the duty of or

responsibility for executing or administrating laws enacted by the National Assembly and disbursing or administrating moneys appropriated or to be appropriated by the National Assembly. The essence of the exercise of these powers by the legislature is to expose corruption, inefficiency or waste in the execution or administration of laws within its legislative competence and in the disbursement or administration of funds appropriated by it.

Within the National Assembly, some of the committees with mandate for security sector oversight include, Army, Navy, Air Force, Defence, Interior, National Security and Intelligence, Police Affairs. These do not include other Committees that do not deal directly with the security sector, although, have oversight functions on them such as the Committees on Appropriations, Federal Character and Inter-Governmental Affairs, Finance, Establishment and Public Service, Public Accounts and Public Procurements among others.

Other Independent Institutions' Oversight of the Security Sector:

Independent institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Public Complaints Commission (PCC), civil society, the media and individuals also play critical roles in security sector oversight. Besides NHRC and the PCC established by government, the others are non-state actors. While the NHRC and PCC have undertaken specific steps towards monitoring the electoral process using their investigative powers, or working based on reports submitted to them, the civil society and media play

active roles in election monitoring. For instance, the establishment of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) by Nigerian civil society, represents one of the most proactive attempts to monitor, document and report on the conduct of the security sector in the electoral process.

Roles and Relevance of Security Sector Oversights on the Electoral Process:

With a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres, an estimated population of 200 million (2020), over 250 ethnic groups and 400 languages and dialects, Nigeria is clearly one of the most populous and diverse countries in the world. It operates a federal system with 36 states, a Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and 774 local government areas. It is also one of the most complex countries in terms of electoral geography with 8,809 Wards, 119,973 polling units and 1,556 (2019 GE) electoral constituencies for which elections are conducted every four years (INEC, 2022), as well as a prospective voter population of 92.6 million people.

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria and the 200 Electoral Act (as amended), recognizes the centrality of election and the importance of its security. In this context, there are several oversight institutions and actors that play critical roles towards the security of the electoral process. Such institutions and roles bother on public safety, security of electoral materials, as well as the conduct of the security personnel among others.

Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES)

The establishment of the ICCES represents the major lesson learnt with respect to the role of the security sector in the electoral process. At the instance of INEC under the leadership of Professor Attahiru Jega, the ICCES was established 2010. Prior to its emergence, the relevant agencies that make up the country's security sector, operated with little or no synergy and coordination on issues relating to elections (Verjee, Kwaja, AMC & Onubogu). As a structure with the primary mandate of ensuring coordination within the security sector on election issues, the ICCES was established to:

(i)   Ensure that all security personnel are in the right places and, therefore, avoid role conflicts at all registration centres or polling stations.

(ii)   Mapping of areas where elections would be conducted in order to determine flashpoints, violent prone youth's places, polarized political group communities.

(iii)   Review of confidence building measures for the public, and where necessary show the availability of potential force and in appropriate cases ensure low visibility of force and diminished threat.

(iv)   Track persons granted arms licenses for possible illegal arms acquisition and distribution to individuals.

(v)   Gather intelligence on activities of key political actors and supporters and guiding rules of disclosure to actionable agencies.

(vi)   Ensure the suitability of the voting booth and the approach route for delivery of materials and equipment.

(vii)   Undertake risk and vulnerability analysis of the electoral environment and actors; and

(viii)   Ensure mobility of security personnel and accessibility of relevant stakeholders during the elections.

At the national level, ICCES is co-chaired by the INEC Chairman and the National Security Adviser, with membership drawn from relevant security agencies such as Ministry of Police Affairs, Nigeria Police Force, Police Service Commission, Ministry of Interior, Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigerian Prisons Service, Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Air Force, Department of State Services, National Intelligence Agency, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Nigerian Customs Service, Federal Road Safety Commission, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Federal Fire Service, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) among others.

At the state level, the Joint State Election Security Committee made of the state Resident Electoral Commissioner (including Administrative Secretary, Head of Operations Department and Public Affairs Officer) various security agencies, namely, the Police, Department of State Security (DSS), the Navy, the Air Force and officers of para-

military organizations such as Customs, Correctional Services, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Civil Defence Corp etc, to plan and coordinate security of elections.

Since the security of elections falls squarely in the hands of the statutory security agencies (INEC, 2022), through its operation plans and strategies, ICCES was able to conduct nationwide vulnerability assessment and has developed comprehensive strategies for supporting plans and procedures to guide and support INEC operations. ICCES created opportunities for the institutionalization of operational orders and re-strategizing on the part of the major Security agencies in terms of Code of Conduct during the elections. Despite these efforts, some challenges relating to the security of the electoral process that are yet to be effectively addressed include: welfare and remuneration of security personnel on election duty, recruitment of fake security personnel by politicians, weak synergy between some of the security agencies due to inter-agency rivalry among others.

As the lead agency for the security of elections, the police have a wide range of election-related roles to play. The Justice Mohammed Uwais led committee on electoral reform identified these roles to include:

(i)   Guaranteeing peace and safety throughout election process.
(ii) Restoring peace and safety after disorder that may be engendered by delimitation of constituencies.

(iii) Safeguarding the security of personnel, materials, and values for voter registration.

(iv) Safeguarding the security of life and properties of citizens during voter registration, political campaign, and voting.

(v) Ensuring the safety of electoral officers before, during and after elections.

(vi) Providing security for politicians during campaign.

(vii) Ensuring and preserving a free, fair and safe atmosphere for election campaign by all parties and politicians, without discrimination.

(viii) Maintaining peaceful conditions, law and order around the polling units and collation, or counting centres,

(ix) Ensuring the security of sensitive election materials at voting and collating or counting centres and during transportation.

(x) Ensuring that election materials are not hijacked, destroyed, or fraudulently altered by any group or person.

(xi) Ensuring that politicians do not intimidate, corruptly induce, or manipulate the electorate at voter registration and polling centres; and

(xii) Maintaining security around the election petition tribunals.

Specific Roles of the Security Sector in the Context of Elections Under ICCES:

Office of the National Security Adviser

- Liaise with the Service Chiefs to assist INEC.

- Ensure security surveillance during registration / election.
- Coordinate the activities of ICCES.
- Monitor the performance of security agencies during voter registration and elections.
- Dissuade public officials from misusing security details attached to them for political ends.

Ministry of Police Affairs

- Provide support to the Nigeria Police to perform their role during elections

Nigeria Police Force

- Provide adequate personnel to man / maintain order at polling units, registration area centres and other INEC facilities.
- Provide security for registration / election equipment and other materials during delivery, registration / election / retrieval.
- Apprehend law breakers and prosecute them.
- Dissuade public officials from misusing police security details.
- Confine suspected troublemakers to keep the peace.
- Conduct pre-emptive raids on criminal hideouts.
- Work with recognized local / community security outfits to monitor illegal activities during the registration / election.
- Enforce restriction on movement of persons that may constitute nuisance during registration / election.

Police Service Commission

- Monitor the registration / election process, particularly the performance of police officers on election duties.
- Train police officers on conduct during elections.
- Develop a reward system for police personnel who perform creditably during election.
- Develop and share with the police a template to monitoring activities of police officers on election duties.

The Nigerian Army, Navy and Air Force

- Provide surveillance in the vicinities of registration/election areas as determined by rules of engagement to be developed by ICCES.
- Assist in restricting movement (Land, Air and Waterways) during the registration / election exercise.
- Assist in protecting registration / election materials where police and other agencies are not able to do so.
- Establish a Standby Rapid Deployment Squads in all States in case of serious crisis.
- Assist in delivery of INEC materials where necessary.
- Assist in retrieving INEC registration / election where necessary.
- Prepare to assist and evacuate civilians in the case of serious crises.

State Security Services

- Monitor the registration / election closely and alert INEC and other security agencies, especially in the framework of ICCES on security problems.
- Develop a framework for sharing intelligence regularly with other agencies during the registration /election.
- Enforce restriction on movement of persons that may constitute nuisance during registration/election.
- Assist in the security and the deployment of registration/election equipment and other materials.
- Assist in the enforcement of rules and regulations guiding the registration / election exercise.
- Confine key troublemakers and their sponsors ahead of the registration / election.
- Conduct mop-up operation of illegal weaponry and raid of criminal hideouts

National Intelligence Agency

- Monitor likely external threats to the registration / election (arms trafficking for purposes of registration / election, etc.).
- Develop a framework for sharing intelligence regularly with other agencies during registration / election.

National Drug Law Enforcement Agency

- Intensify surveillance of hard drug production, movement and use.
- Conduct pre-emptive operations on hard drug dealer and users' hideouts.

- Closely monitor vicinities of registration / election areas for drug use likely to lead to violence

Nigeria Customs Service
- Closely monitor imports into the country at all ports and border crossings points to prevent imports that could undermine the registration / election process and security (Weapons, fake registration/election materials, etc.).
- Liaise closely with other security agencies to cover all porous border areas.
- Assist INEC to clear bottlenecks in importation of registration/election equipment and materials.

Nigeria Immigration Service
- Closely monitor Immigration of foreign nationals likely to undermine registration / election (Illegal immigrants brought into for registration / election).
- Provide personnel to help man registration/ election centres.
- Liaise with customs to monitor flights that might bring illegal registration / election materials.

Federal Road Safety Corps
- Enforce traffic regulations and control movement of vehicles and persons around registration/election venues.
- Intensify spot checks on roads to dissuade activities that could undermine registration / elections.

- Provide personnel to help man registration /election areas and protect registration / election materials.
- Enforce restriction on movement of persons that may be in force during registration / election.

Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps

- Provide personnel to help man registration / election areas and protect registration / election materials.
- Work with recognized local / community security outfits to monitor illegal activities during registration / election.
- Intensify the monitoring of vandals during election periods.
- Intensify surveillance on critical infrastructure especially at polling units and collation centres.
- Provision of Civil Defence Ambulance for evacuation at INEC Headquarters for any emergency and disaster that may occur.

Nigerian Correctional Service

- Provide personnel to help man registration / election areas and protect registration / election materials.
- Enforce restriction on movement of persons that may constitute a nuisance during registration / election.

Ministry of Interior-NSCDC

- Civil Defence sniffer dogs at INEC Headquarters against planning / planting of bombs.
- Provide Civil Defence Ambulance for evacuation at INEC Headquarters against any emergency and disaster that may occur.

Federal Fire Service

- Protect INEC warehouses and offices from threat of arson by disgruntled members of the public.
- Conduct Search and Rescue operations during emergencies.
- Evacuation of victims and dead persons to health care facilities.
- Provide support against any Fire outbreak.

EFCC and ICPC Specific Functions

- Monitor party and Campaign finance.
- Track illegal financial flows in the electoral process.
- Monitor and check vote buying.
- Sensitize public and election officials against economic and financial crimes / corrupt practices related to elections.
- Contribute personnel to manning electoral activities when required.
- Provide early warning threat / assessments of financial crimes and corrupt practices in the electoral process.
- Arrest, investigate and prosecute in collaboration with INEC breaches of electoral laws on campaign finance and vote trading.

The foregoing, illustrate one of the major reforms undertaken by INEC towards ensuring it delivers its mandate of conducting peaceful and credible elections in Nigeria. By clarifying the roles of the security sector in the electoral process, oversight, checks and balances, as well as

accountability are made easy through such concrete mechanisms for role differentiation and expertise. ICCES made it possible for the security sector to utilize a common platform for the coordination of security matters and pulling of resources towards addressing common security challenges (Jega, 2013), towards ensuring a secured electoral process. Despite this level of success, the 36 states of the federation do not have the same level of effectiveness of both representation and proactiveness, which presents a real challenge for the security sector.

Election Security and the Security of Elections in Nigeria

The conduct of elections is a very complex undertaken. The success or otherwise of an election is highly dependent on the nature of security infrastructures put in place, which makes security indispensable in the conduct of credible and violence free elections. In this context, provision of security for the electorate, political party primaries, rallies and on the day of voting, are all components of the election cycle that are given security considerations by agencies of the state with the primary mandate of guaranteeing the security of the electoral process as enshrined in the constitution, electoral act and other policies relating to the conduct of elections.

Some of the key initiatives designed by INEC to deal with challenges arising from the insecurity of the electoral process include:

(i) Developing special Electoral Security Strategy & Plans (ESSP) which will define roles for different agencies based on their competence, profile and capacity as well

as allocating resources to match assigned responsibilities in a transparent and accountable manner

(ii) Conduct of initial nationwide Security Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) with specific focus on implications for INEC facilities, human material assets and operations.

Within the Nigerian state, the Police is the lead agency with mandate for the security of election (Ese, 2019), which is viewed largely as an internal security issue. Though forbade from direct participation in matters relating to elections (Ezeamalu, 2015), the military continue to play a key role in the Nigerian electoral process due to the level of insecurity in the country. In some instance, such involvement has generated mixed reactions as a result of either the utterances of the military as an institution (Abuh & Olaniyi, 2019), or the conduct of its personnel on election duty, which bothers on human rights violations (Vanguard, 2019).

Options Towards Effective Security Sector Oversight of the Electoral Process:

(i) **Strengthen Civil-Military Relations:** While the security sector is critical in ensuring security for the conduct of elections, the civilian population is key to providing the information required for action by the security agents. In this context, attention should be given to strengthening the relevant departments within the military structures, towards a more harmonious relations with the civilians. On the part of the civilians,

key voices such as religious and traditional leaders, women and youth groups, as well as other social networks should be utilized as the link between the military and the civilian population.

(ii) *Strengthen Police - Community Relations on Peaceful and Credible Elections*: Though different forms of police-community platforms exist across the country, they were established largely to deal with issues relating to public safety and order, with little focus on elections. This critical platform should be strengthened through specialized training given to its members with focus on how citizens can better collaborate with the police and other security agents in securing elections.

(iii) **Integrate Civil Society into ICCES**: Civil society will serve as a key link between ICCES and the people, as well as supporting them to establish an observatory for the monitoring adherence to the code of conduct and rule of engagements by security agents. By taking such a proactive step, the civil society is better placed to play a critical role of serving as bridge-builders between ICCES and the people.

(iv) **Strengthen Capacity for Early Warning and Early Response**: Security agencies should work with communities towards putting in place effective and comprehensive mechanisms for tracking early warning signs and responding to them. The fact is that

the challenge is often not about early warning it has more to do with the extent to which they are responded to, using the existing infrastructure. On its part the government should provide the security agencies with the necessary equipment that are needed to make their work easy, and result driven in ways that increases citizens' trust.

(v) **Monitor the Activities of Non-State Security Actors**: Though non-state security actors have played important role with respect to insurgency in Adamawa State, they have been active in the conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. INEC should work with other security agencies in ensuring they monitor their activities towards ensuring they operate within the ambit of the law.

Conclusion:

Elections are the hallmarks of democracy, and they serve the purpose of peaceful change of government, thereby conferring legitimacy on the institutions that manage the electoral process in ways that respects the will of the people (Kelvin, 2018). Beyond the role of the electoral management institution in the conduct of the elections, its credibility is measured by the extent to which security is guaranteed and there is effective oversight on the agencies responsible for the provision of security. Where effective oversight of the security sector is in place, it's always the combined effort of the legislature, executive, other independent institutions and the civil society that perform this oversight roles.

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Gender, Youth & Election Security in Nigeria
Reflections for 2023 General Elections

Prof. Freedom C. Onuoha

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Introduction

Elections play a crucial role as the fulcrum on which the wheel of democracy revolves. Genuine democracy is built on the principle of popular participation and representation of citizens in all institutions and processes of governance in a state. In Nigeria, however, the practice of democracy has been largely male-dominated despite the huge demographic strength of women and the youth (Onuoha, 2009). While women and the youth have been the dominant demography in the Nigerian electoral process, their marginalisation and limited representation in political institutions are very well in evidence since the return of democracy in May 1999.

For example, the national average of women's political participation in Nigeria remains at 6.7% in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the global average of 22.5%, the Africa regional average of 23.4% and the West African Sub Regional Average of 15% (Alimi, 2021). Similarly, the youth account for over 60% of Nigeria's population. They also constitute over 60% of eligible voters in Nigeria. Yet less than 5% of them are actively involved in policymaking in the country (Sahara Reporters, 2017; Onuoha, 2018). This paradoxical situation has underpinned the conclusion that "democratic politics in Nigeria suffers from an inclusivity deficit" (Onuoha, 2019, p.75).

As Nigeria heads towards its seventh general elections since the return to democratic rule, some observers contend that the youth and women could conveniently determine the winners of the forthcoming elections since they constitute the larger percentage (75%) of registered voters (Akinyemi, 2022). During the 2023 elections, a projected 95 million voters would elect candidates for 1,491 constituencies, comprising one presidential constituency, 28 governorship elections, 109 senatorial districts, 360 federal constituencies and 993 state assembly seats (Oguntola, 2022). The extent to which women and youth can determine the process and outcome of the 2023 election depends on how much they can mobilise their numbers to their advantage.

In addition, an atmosphere of spiralling insecurity could have a hugely negative impact on voter turnout and the integrity of the 2023 polls (Achi, 2022). Rising insecurity is now the new normal in Nigeria, evidenced by widespread incidents of kidnappings, terrorism, banditry, separatist agitation, ritual killings, cultism, herders-farmers conflicts, attacks on security agents, and other forms of criminalities. Past elections have been characterised by brazen acts of violence largely perpetrated by political thugs (PLAC 2020). But the speed, spread and scale with which violence has evolved make the 2023 elections particularly concerning (Onuoha and Ojewale, 2022). Thus, election security is a defining factor of Nigeria's electoral process, as the youth have been used in past elections for electoral dirty jobs such as ballot box snatching, destruction of polling units and thuggery in support of politicians who paradoxically have

dominated the political arena at their own expense. Also, material and monetary inducements have been deployed by politicians to undermine the credibility and integrity of recent past elections in Nigeria (Onuoha & Okafor, 2020).

The foregoing, therefore, sets the stage for the crucial discourse of gender, youth, and election security in the context of the forthcoming general elections in Nigeria. The rest of the chapter is organised under seven sections. Following this introduction, the second section clarifies the key concepts – gender, youth and elections security. The third section presents the theoretical framework that guides the analytical aspect. The fourth section critically examines some of the cross-cutting issues that implicate gender and youth vis-a-vis election security in respect of the 2023 general elections. The fifth and sixth sections highlight the implications of the factors for election security and the key findings of the study, respectively. The last section contains the conclusion and relevant recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

The terms gender, youth and election security are not only pivotal to the present discourse but also could mean different things to different people in different contexts. To aid clarity, a conceptual overview of the terms will be undertaken.

Gender - The term *gender* has been subjected to varying interpretations. There are as several definitions of gender as there are people, scholars and institutions trying to grapple

with it. According to the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP (1986), the term gender denotes:

> The qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally than biologically determined. Gender includes how society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change over time, gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology (p.258).

Amali (2003) defines gender as socially constructed and culturally variable roles that men and women play in their homes. It is a structural relation of inequality between men and women, manifested in labour markets, in political structures as well as in the household. It is reinforced by customs, laws and specific development policies. In other words, gender is a "social construct that establishes and differentiates statutes and roles between men and women, particularly in the way they contribute to, participate in, and are rewarded by the economy and the prevailing social systems" (National Population Commission, 2001, p.3). Gender concerns involve women as well as men, boys and girls. Hence understanding gender means understanding opportunities, expectations, responsibilities, and constraints as they affect both men and women in any given society.

More often, people confuse sex with gender. While sex differences are biologically determined, gender differences,

which refer to ideals, rights, traits, and expectations based on masculinity and femininity, are socially and culturally constructed. Thus, in identifying gender, there are socio-economic attributions and roles, which characterise the status and life performance of women/girls as a distinct social category from men/boys. A striking feature of the gender system in any society is that it is characterised by inequality. This is usually expressed in terms of asymmetry in the access to resources and structures of power and authority. It is important to note that although gender involves women as well as men, discourses on gender especially in Nigeria usually focus more on women as they struggle to realise their full potential in a highly patriarchal society.

Youth - The concept of youth is particularly elusive and contested. Youth is a very heterogeneous group encompassing people of various ethnicity, religion, race, gender, and class. At least four major definitional interpretations of the term are identifiable in the extant literature, namely: youth as an age category; as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood; as a social construct; and as a 'social shifter' (Table 1).

Table 1: Major Definitional Interpretations of Youth

Perspectives	Definitional and Interpretative Focus
Categorist	Interprets youth as persons between certain officially designated age brackets.
Transitionist	Presents youth as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood.
Constructionist	Understands youth as a "mere social creation", entailing that the way society organizes its labour, values and symbol influences how the youth is defined.
Relationist	Treats youth as a relational term incorporating identity, time and space; thus, young people are not a fixed category, neither historically, politically, culturally, socially and personally.

Author's elaboration

Though varied in their interpretations, these definitions are useful in that they call for caution in dealing with youth matters and the necessity to put in place effective policies and varieties of programmes to mobilize, empower and channel the energies of youths to a positive end in society (Bomoi, 2007). Without prejudice to other definitions by member states, the United Nations defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Essentially for policy purposes, most African countries adopt the age

category definition. For instance, Kenya and Malawi define youth as 15-39 years of age; in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Madagascar and Senegal as 15-35 years of age, and in South Africa 14-35 years of age (Richter and Panday 2007). In Nigeria, the youth is defined as "all young persons of ages 18-35, who are citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (National Youth Policy, 2001, p.3). This is the definition of the youth adopted in this article.

Election security - A secure and resilient electoral process is vital to inspiring and sustaining public confidence in the democratic process. The integrity of any election can be determined by the prevailing security situation in a state. From the provision of basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations (Olurode, 2014). Because of this, election security has attracted wide usage in media, academic, policy and development circles.

Olurode (2014), for example, defined election security as the safety of electoral personnel, election materials and information, the electorate and some stakeholders involved in the electioneering process. But Moha & Yigit (2015, para 2) offer a more elaborate definition of election security as "all aspects of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers; electoral information such as vote results and registration data; electoral property such as campaign materials, ballot papers, result sheets and indelible ink; electoral facilities

such as polling stations and counting centres; and electoral events such as campaign rallies against disruption, damage or death".

Election security refers to the absence of developments that have the potential to compromise the integrity of property (assets and materials) and processes deployed in the conduct of elections or that could undermine the safety and wellbeing of persons lawfully taking part in an election in participatory, observatory, monitoring, supervisory, administrative, supportive and protective capacities regarding primary and/or general elections (Onuoha, 2019, p.8). It covers the preservation and protection of both physical and virtual entities, processes, materials, information, machines, platforms, structures and activities involved in the conduct of the election. If seen in this way, election security bothers on the absence of real or potential threats to the safety, functionality and integrity of the core election elements – persons, property and processes (3 'P's) – without which, the election cannot reasonably proceed (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Potential Security Threats to Core Election Elements

Threats
Targets

Assassination
Intimidation
Abduction
Extortion

Vectors, Candidates, electoral officials, observers, etc
PERSONS

Assets & Facilities, etc
PROPERTY

Vandalism
Hijack
Arson
Theft

Core Election Elements

Targets

PROCESSES
Network & Data, etc

Targets

Threats

Threats

Cyber Attack
Misinformation
Disinformation
Data Breaches
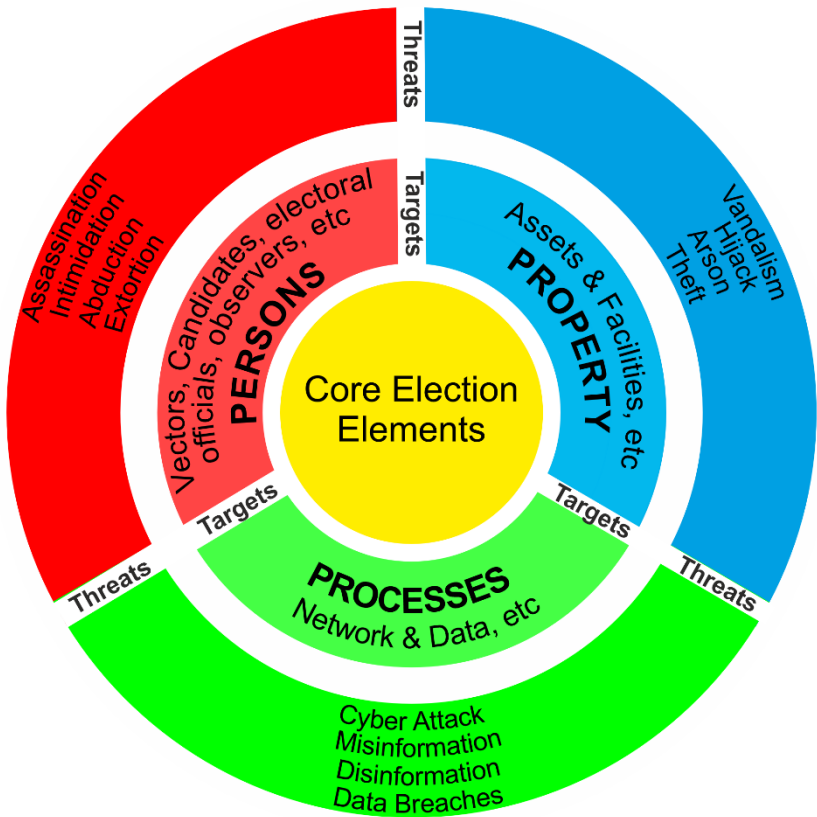
Source: Onuoha (2022)

It consists of two principal dimensions: the physical or 'hard' dimension and the virtual or 'soft' dimension. The physical dimension focuses on measures at ensuring that relevant

tangible elements such as election materials, persons, and properties are protected. The virtual (online) or soft dimension focuses on protecting and preserving the intangible electronic processes, networks and data crucial to the electoral system. For too long, this aspect of election security has been neglected in emerging democracies due to the limited application of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in the electoral processes. Yet, it is very critical, especially with the growing embrace of electronic and online processes, facilities and platforms in election administration (Onuoha & Akogwu, 2019). Hence, data integrity and protection of online activities or processes are crucial elements of the soft dimension of election security. Given the growing incidence of cybercrimes and electronic manipulations, the importance of the virtual or online aspect of election security cannot be overemphasized.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a theoretical bridging of Marxian political economy and Arnsteinian Ladder of Citizen Participation (LCP) theory as its framework of analysis (Stenning, 1926; Arnstein, 1969). Although the variant of political economy appropriated here is traceable to the works of Karl Mark, a modification by Ake (1981) is however adapted. The Marxian political economy uses dialectical materialism as its methodological approach. The core theoretical assumption is that:

> Once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material

> needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social [including gender] relations arise from the organisation of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system and even its modes of thought (Ake, 1981, p.1).

This theoretical approach is anchored on four methodological assumptions. First, it gives *primacy to material conditions*, particularly economic factors, in the explanation of social life. Second, it emphasises the *dynamic character of reality*. This requires that the analyst views society as something full of movement and dynamism, the movement and dynamism being provided by the contradictions which pervade existence. Third, it focuses on the *relatedness of different elements of society*, especially economic structure, social structure, political structure and belief system. Fourth, it treats *problems concretely rather than abstractly*, by adopting a developmental perspective that reveals not only how social phenomena come to be what they are, but also to make reasonable conjecture as to what they might become (Ake, 1981:1-8).

Concerning the youth and gender relevance in Nigeria, a proper application of this framework would lead the analyst to arrive at the following conclusions. First, those from economically privileged groups (men) tend to be better educated, have higher social status, and are more 'successful' professionally and politically. This suggests that

economic inequality tends to reproduce itself endlessly in a series of other inequalities evident in society. Second, those who are economically privileged (men) act to preserve the existing social order while those who are disadvantaged (women and the youth) struggle to reverse the prevailing social order, particularly as it relates to the distribution of resources – wealth, power, position, influence and assets – in the society. Thus, the economic structure sets the general trend of political interests and political alignments. Third, in so far as there is wide economic inequality in a society, such a society cannot have political democracy because political power will tend to polarise around economic power; further creating and reinforcing the exclusion of certain groups (like women and youth). And finally, the socio-cultural values tend to support the preservation of the existing division of labour, distribution of resources and reward systems in that society.

The Marxian political economy approach captures the complex forces and contradictions that shape and define the youth and gender questions in Nigeria. Its fundamental assumption that a focus on the economic substructure is crucial for understanding other superstructures (politics, ideology and religion) of a society is quite apt, much as its postulation that political structure in turn affects the economic substructure is logical. Given the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian state, the theory suggests that the poor socio-economic conditions of women and youth in Nigeria account for their low representation in politics and governance in the country. Similarly, political power in

Nigeria shapes the contours of the socio-economic development of the country. Hence, women's and youth's restricted access to political and decision-making structures have repercussions for their access to other vital resources of society.

What this suggests therefore is that if politics were to be a game of numbers in Nigeria, women and youth are bound to occupy a percentage of the available political and decision-making positions commensurate with their demographic strength. However, the political economy reality shows that those (especially men) who control a greater share of the economic resources and structures of the state also control the political structures (sites and relations of power). Therefore, those who control political power in Nigeria use it to sustain structures (laws, relations and regulations) that protect their interests while masking marginalisation. These theoretical insights help to elucidate the marginalisation of youth and women in Nigerian politics.

The assumptions of the political economy approach resonate with the fundamental postulations of Arnstein's LCP theory (Arnstein, 1969). The core proposition of the LCP theory is that without an authentic reallocation of power — in the form of money or decision-making authority, for example, — participation (such as voting during elections) merely allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo. It holds that representation and participation of all groups in society are fundamental to the existence of a vibrant democracy. In

other words, a vibrant democracy requires that all social groups have a voice in how they wish to be governed, while institutions tasked with the exercise of this civic duty must provide spaces that allow for full and effective participation (Zvaita & Tshuma, 2019).

The LCP theory sheds light on the reality of youth, gender and elections in Nigeria. It captures how empowered public institutions and officials deny power to citizens (marginalisation), and how levels of citizen agency, control, and power can be increased (the redistribution of power) (Organizing Engagement, n.d). It highlights two important aspects that are essential in our analysis of the electoral process in Nigeria concerning youth and gender. These are *citizen participation as citizen power* and *empty ritual*. Citizen power implies that the citizenry is given full and adequate support to participate in democratic processes, including electing public officials. Empty ritual describes situations where citizen participation is skewed in favour of certain constituents; in the case of Nigeria, the male-dominated insular political class.

The ability of the electorate to participate in electoral processes ideally becomes an essential process that ensures a vibrant democracy. In addition to the electorate seeing themselves as crucial partners in the building of a progressive society, in a vibrant democracy, the electorate usually has the power to control the behaviour of those they elect. The implication here is that citizen engagement through voting processes gives the electorate the ability and power to decide who gets to govern. However, if the process

of participation is skewed and twisted to benefit only a select group, then participation becomes an empty ritual (Zvaita & Tshuma, 2019). Under these circumstances, the electorate's disenchantment with political processes becomes at best a deficit, and at worst, a threat, to democracy. The utility of this blended framework would become clearer in the subsequent discussion.

Critical Issues on Gender, Youth and Election Security

The demand for full and equitable participation of women and youth in public life and leadership space in Nigeria had consistently dominated public discourse due to the key role they play in the political process. Despite the adoption of initiatives, policies and legislation to brighten their chances in the political leadership space, such as the National Gender Policy (2006), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Gender Policy (2014), and the "Not Too Young To Run" Act (2018), among others, Nigerian women and the youth have been largely underrepresented in governance structures.

Women and the youth constitute a huge percentage of the Nigerian population. The total projected population for 2021 was 211,493,324 with women constituting 49.99% and men 50.01%. Also, Nigeria has the largest population of youth in the world, with a median age of 18.1 years. About 70% of the population are under 30, and 42% are under the age of 15 (Akinyemi and Mobolaji, 2022). Women and youth demographic size offers great potential for impactful political participation in deciding electoral outcomes. However, available data revealed that women still do not have equal

access to decision-making and power-sharing at all levels in the country, compared with their male counterparts. Due to overlapping political, economic, social and cultural factors, women and youth political representation in Nigeria remain significantly low compared to their demographic strength in Nigeria. The analysis that follows focuses on some of the cross-cutting issues that implicate gender and youth concerning elections security come the 2023 general elections.
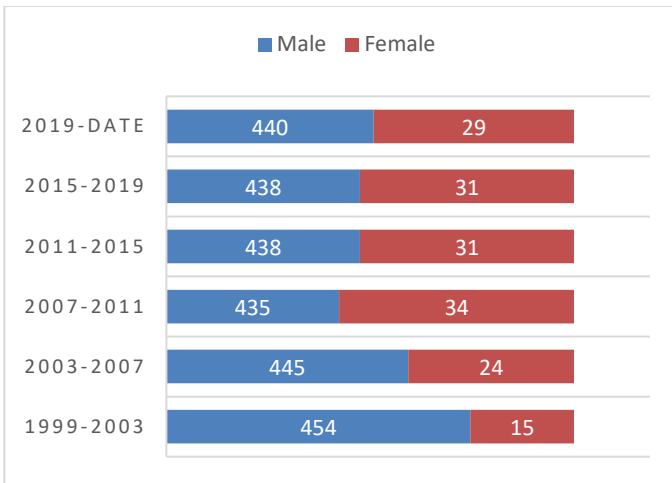
Entrenched Patriarchy

The underrepresentation of women and youth gained root due to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society, much of which was obvious from the pre-colonial era till date (Yakubu and Eromosele, 2022). Although the politicians who took over power from colonialists were relatively young, the post-colonial character of the Nigeria state that places excessive premium on political power spurred them to perpetuate themselves in office through patriarchal vestiges and political recyclism (Onuoha, 2009; Adesola & Ako-Nai, 2010).

Patriarchy influences the way laws are made as well as how wealth is distributed in post-colonial Nigerian society. This has implications in terms of the disparities in women and youth's abilities to access power, resources and key roles in society – which create an imbalance of power within relationships between men and women. Amidst patriarchy, some African countries such as Rwanda have been able to increase women's representation in political and decision-

making positions through constitutional reforms and the adoption of affirmative action. But in Nigeria, patriarchal and parochial socio-cultural considerations have subverted attempts at legislative redress of this situation. For instance, the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill, which was first introduced in 2016 seeks to guarantee women's rights to equal opportunities in the workplace, equal rights to inheritance for both male and female children, equal rights for women in marriage and divorce, equal access to education, property/land ownership, and inheritance, among other things, was rejected again in 2021, with male lawmakers contending that from Islamic and socio-cultural standpoints, equating possibilities for women and men infringes on the provisions of the Qur'an and also the Bible (Ozor, 2022).

Entrenched patriarchy has meant that men dominate in both elective and appointive political positions in Nigeria. In the 1999 general elections in Nigeria, only 1.82% — 28 of 1543 elective offices at the national level — were won by women. This increased to 4.2% in 2003 and rose to a high of 6.4% in 2011, before falling in the next two general elections to 5.65% and 4.17% in 2015 and 2019, respectively (Alimi, 2021). In the National Parliament (Senate and the House of Representatives), there are only 29 women (about 6% of the total) compared to 440 men since 2019 (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Representation in the National Assembly by Gender: 1999 – 2019

	Male	Female
2019-DATE	440	29
2015-2019	438	31
2011-2015	438	31
2007-2011	435	34
2003-2007	445	24
1999-2003	454	15

Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1261110/gender-representation-in-national-parliament-in-nigeria/

Political representation of women and youth has been grossly undermined by the predominance of a powerful class of male political elite who have historically run the political system through political *recyclism*. By political *recyclism*, we mean "the tendency of the political class to network, monopolize and recycle elective and appointive positions among the older generation of politicians who are undemocratic, despotic and resistant to change" (Onuoha, 2009, p.4). The male political elite has tended to perpetuate themselves in office through elite recycling. But occasionally they use tokenistic co-optation of a few women to attract a toga of gender face. It is therefore not 'surprising that in Nigeria, a Minister in 1970s is made a Minister in 1997'. More so, a President in the 1970s is made a President in 1999.

By recycling positions among themselves, the political leadership marginalises women and youths by shrinking opportunities for them to gradually master the democratic rudiments as well as participate effectively in making decisions that affect their lives. There has been an increase in the clamour for a change of political gladiators in the leadership structure of Nigeria to accommodate more young people in leadership and decision-making since May 1999. In response, the political class has disingenuously co-opted some young people using a consanguineous-patronage strategy to blunt genuine agitation for youth inclusion. As aptly noted by Sunday (2022, para. 2):

> *The recycling seems unchecked and has entrenched itself in the Nigerian political system so much so that it has created a "Political Monarchy," a situation in which children of the older political gladiators are suddenly the only choice available for appointments and elective posts like it happened in the just concluded (2022 party) primaries where political sons, biological sons and daughters got elected as flag bearers.*

The reality is that electoral politics in Nigeria is typically framed as a space for politically experienced men, and while women are often disadvantaged in accumulating experience to run for office, young people are systematically marginalized because of their young age, limited opportunities, and projected lack of experience (iKNOW, 2017).

Economic Marginalisation

As the 2023 general elections draw nearer, the ability of women and youth to participate as contestants for elective positions in Nigeria is severely constrained by their weak economic position. Women own only 20% of enterprises in the formal sector and only 11.7% of Board Directors in the country are women. The situation is partly explained by women's limited access to finance, which is worsened by their lack of access to acceptable collateral (Olokor, 2021). In addition, high rates of unemployment and poverty are crucial indicators of their disadvantaged economic position with debilitating impacts on their political resilience and relevance in the scheme of things. As of March 2022, Nigeria has over 70 million people (representing 33% of Nigeria's over 200 million population) living in extreme poverty - the highest in Africa (Oluwole, 2022).

Women and youth are worst hit by poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, about 23 million Nigerians are without jobs. While 31.8% are men, women make up 35% of the unemployed population in the country. Although women make up less than 50% of Nigeria's population, they account for more than 70% of Nigeria's poor population. Unemployment and poverty rates are particularly high among the youth. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Labour Force Report, unemployment among young Nigerians (15-34 years) stood at 21.72 million or 42.5% of the estimated 29.94 young Nigerians in the labour force. The national unemployment rate stood at 33.3% as at December 2020. With youth population estimated at 60% of Nigeria's

total population of about 215 million, it means that about 45 million Nigerian youths are jobless (Olawoyin, 2022).

Their weak economic strength further incapacitates them politically given the highly monetised nature of electoral politics in Nigeria. This starts with the party primaries, where participation is often dependent on the ability to mobilise fees and to win support through financial favours. Much more is even needed for security purposes as well as media coverage during electioneering. The highly monetised nature of electoral process from the party formation, party primaries, intra-party and general public campaigns to the election proper, all put women and youth at a disadvantage. Data in table 2 reveal the exorbitant nature of the expression of interest and party nomination forms for the 2023 elections fixed by the two major parties in Nigeria. The APC posited that the high fees were fixed to separate the "men from the boys"; an ignoble acknowledgment that the political offices were being sold to the highest bidders.

Table 2: Cost of Expression of Interest and Party Nomination Forms of the APC and PDP for the 2019 and 2023 Elections

S/N	Elective Position	APC		PDP	
		2019	2023	2019	2023
1	President	₦45,000,000	₦100,000,000	₦12,000,000	₦40,000,000
2	Governor	₦22,500,000	₦50,000,000	₦6,000,000	₦21,000,000
3	Senate	₦7,000,000	₦20,000,000	₦3,500,000	₦3,500,000
4	House of Representative	₦3,850,000	₦10,000,000	₦1,500,000	₦2,500,000
5	State House of Assembly	₦850,000	₦2,000,000	₦600,000	₦600,000

Source: Compiled from Onuoha F.C (2019, p.87) and https://infomediang.com/cost-of-party-nomination-forms-nigeria/

The extremely prohibitive financial cost of such forms further discourages credible women and youth from engaging in partisan politics. Worst still, the recent 'dollarisation' of party primaries of the two major political parties further dimmed the prospect of women and youth making any major inroads in the 2023 elections. For instance, it was alleged that each delegate to the PDP presidential primaries held on 4 June 2022 in Abuja was bribed to the tune of between $30,000 and $50,000 (Edun, 2022). Given the highly monetised nature of Nigerian electoral politics, meeting the conditions for contesting or gaining elective positions is extremely prohibitive financially and otherwise for women and the youth. This explains how those who are economically disempowered (women and youth) become politically powerless despite their demographic strength. For instance, the list of political candidates for national elections (Presidential, Senatorial and House of Representatives – House of Representatives) for the 2023 general elections released by the INEC in September 2022 reveals the grossly low number of women contestants. For legislative elections, 1,101 candidates are vying for 109 Senatorial seats and 3,122 candidates for Federal Constituencies i.e. House of Representatives seats, making a total of 4,223 candidates contesting for 469 legislative positions. In terms of gender distribution, 3,875 candidates are male, made up of 35 for Presidential and Vice Presidential, 1,008 for Senate and 2,832 for House of Representatives. Compared to 381 females comprising one for the Presidential, 92 for Senate, and 288 for House of Representatives (NAN, 2022). About

the same level of gender disparity is evident in the list of political candidates for the State elections (Governorship and House of Assembly) just released in October 2022.

Practice of Voter Inducement

Another pertinent factor that will impinge on women and youth participation, with the potential to undermine security during the 2023 general elections is the pervasive incidence of vote trading (buying and selling of votes) during elections in Nigeria. Over the years, INEC has continued to modify its processes to close some of the loopholes that were hitherto exploited by politicians to fraudulently win elections, such as ballot box snatching. As a result, politicians have realised the futility of relying on old strategies of rigging elections or manipulating the electoral process to their advantage. With nearly half of Nigeria's population living below the poverty line, it has become easier for politicians to influence the voting choices of the poor through financial and material inducements in the form of vote trading (Onuoha and Okafor, 2020). Not surprisingly, research has shown that poor voters are much more susceptible to material or financial inducements than wealthier voters in an election, and people living in rural areas are at higher risk of vote buying than people living in urban areas due to high poverty rate in the rural areas (Jensen and Justesen, 2014). While poverty is not the singular reason why people sell their votes, it is a very prominent factor. Given that women and young people are among the worst hit by poverty in Nigeria, they are highly vulnerable to material and monetary inducements by politicians.

Vote buying is one strategy that politicians, especially incumbent officeholders such as Governors, have used to sway electoral politics to their advantage. This they do by using slush funds available in the form of security votes. A security vote is a special monthly allowance available to the 36 states which the Governors are expected to use for combating security threats in their respective states. This secretive financial envelope is estimated at over US$670 million (₦241.2 billion) a year (Onuoha and Okafor, 2020). Although the allocation of security votes has no constitutional basis, the practice is not explicitly prohibited. However, weak legislative oversight and poor accountability mechanisms allow successive presidents and governors to misappropriate the funds or simply embezzle it. Most times, the fund is utilised for the realisation of their political ambitions, especially for buying votes during elections. For instance, out of 36 states of the federation, there are no female governors, only two female deputy governors. A pertinent deduction that can be made from this is that the governors who are all male are in the position to use the security vote to corruptly 'secure' votes for their candidates during the forthcoming elections. It is unlikely that the unemployment, poverty and inflation rates currently facing Nigeria would experience such dramatic turnaround enough to improve the livelihoods of Nigerians and forestall vote trading before the February 2023 election date (Kareem, 2022).

Mobilisation of Violence

Violence and intimidation of both voters and candidates is another critical factor regarding the issue of gender and youth in the discourse on election security. In Nigeria, excessive premium is placed on politics as the medium of accessing state powers and resources. Given this situation, political actors are unconscionably desperate to win elections. This approach hardly encourages moderation because winning an election at all costs becomes the primary consideration and calculation of all politicians. Hence, "the political class includes violence as part of their political strategy to retain political power or to assume political power" (Iroanusi, 2018, para.9). As a result, the struggle for political power becomes a "do or die" affair with politicians resorting to violence for undue electoral advantage.

In rhetoric and actions, politicians therefore drive and mobilise violence for their selfish political ambition. In rhetoric, politicians often appeal to ethnic, tribal and religious sentiments to manipulate or misinform the youth. In action, they recruit and arm youth groups or criminal gangs to carry out assassinations, kidnappings, and intimidation against voters, election officials and opponents. Remarkably, elections in Nigeria since independence have largely been characterised by violence. This has persisted even with the return to democracy. Some 100 people were killed in election-related violence in 2003; about 300 people in 2007; and some 800 people in 2011 (Bekoe, 2011; Onuoha, *et. al.,* 2020). Between 14 October 2018 and 20

February 2019, SBM Intelligence (2019) documented 67 incidents of election-related violence resulting in 233 fatalities. The conduct of the 2023 general elections will not be different from this trajectory.

The mobilisation of violence is one of the means through which the male-dominated political class 'empowers' and employs the youth to further 'disempower' women and other citizens during elections. Studies have shown that the overwhelming majority of people who are used for political thuggery and electoral violence are youth, most of whom are male (Ogbeide, 2013; Dudouet, 2015; kuczynskirf, 2016; Samuel, 2017). Although the vast majority of young people are neither violent nor interested in violence, politicians sometimes successfully manipulate and mobilise young people to initiate or escalate violent actions to achieve their political objectives (The Electoral Knowledge Network, n.d). They use such thugs to abuse, harass, intimidate and sometimes murder female political candidates.

This strategy is integral to political recyclism, as older politicians use such armed youth gangs to scare away voters, the majority of whom are young people and women. A large number of those that engage in electoral violence get away with it and this has become a motivation for politicians to freely engage in electoral violence of all kinds (Adeyemi, 2011). Thus, the threat of violence is a serious factor that has hampered women's participation in politics since they can neither provide the huge amount of money required to make a major impact nor mobilise violence on a large scale to win elections. Given the huge number of

unemployed youths coupled with the current strike by university teachers the use of youths as thugs, hoodlums and canon-fodders during political campaigns become all the more pernicious.

Power of Social Media

Social media is yet another factor that implicates youth, gender and election security ahead of the 2023 general elections. In the past, the traditional media (print and electronic) in Nigeria especially the privately-owned ones have always been strong instruments of sensitisation and mobilisation of people towards democracy even in the dark days of brutal military dictatorship (Ajayi, 2007). Given that the dominant media outlets then were either owned by very few private individuals, mainly politicians, or by the government, there was very little room for citizens to freely engage in political debates or set agendas for political discourse.

However, with the increasing penetration and usage of the internet and social media, the dominance of the traditional media as the fulcrum of political activism is increasingly being dismantled especially by the youth who constitute the bulk of social media users in Nigeria. Available statistics indicate that there were 109.2 million internet users in Nigeria in January 2022. Nigeria's internet penetration rate stood at 51.0% of the total population at the start of 2022. There were 32.90 million social media users in Nigeria in January 2022, which was equivalent to 15.4% of the total population (Kemp, 2022). As shown in Figure 3, WhatsApp is the most-used social media platform in Nigeria. However,

Twitter appears to be the most volcanic in shaping and driving political narratives and discourses in Nigeria. In June 2021, Nigerian authorities imposed a ban on Twitter that lasted for seven months after it removed a post from President Muhammadu Buhari that threatened to punish regional secessionists. The ban led many users to simply switch platforms or circumvent the ban with VPNs, an illustration of the difficulty of clamping down on online activities (Obadare, 2022).

Figure 3: Most-used Social Media Platform in Nigeria: February 2022
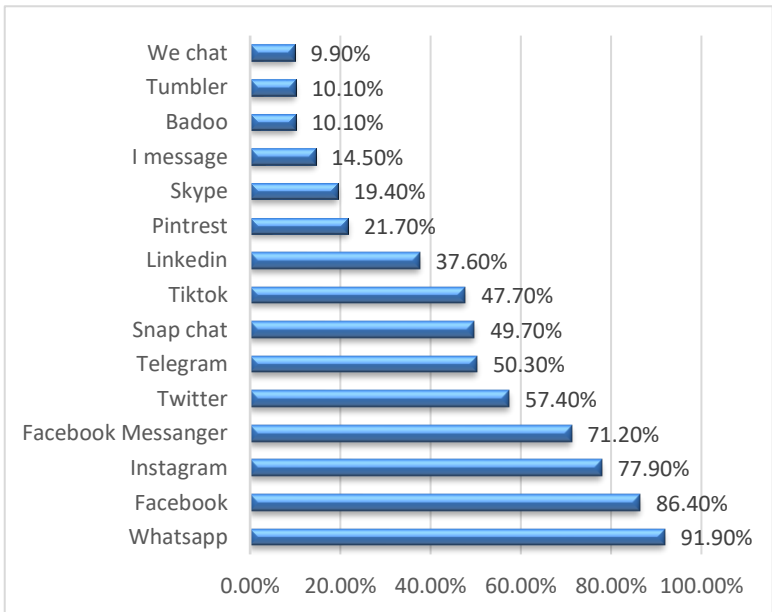
Source: Kemp (2022).

Some studies done in Nigeria during the 2015 elections indicate that social media played a significant role in turning popular support amongst young voters against the then administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. By the 2019 presidential election, social media had grown in reach and relevance in Nigeria (Peterside, 2022). However, the youth demonstrated the tremendous power of social media when they organised massive protests against police brutality in October 2020 - the #EndSARS protests (Onuoha, Okoro, & Iwar, 2021). That singular expression of youth discontent, especially the effective coordination of the protest before it was allegedly hijacked by hoodlums and state interference, not only revealed the power and influence of social media but also the growing political determination of the youth to challenge the unjust political order in Nigeria. As rightly extrapolated by Ojewale (2020, para.9):

> '… the #EndSARS protest has shown the ingenuity of young Nigerians to organize, and the possibility of translating #EndSARS to a political cause remains very strong. Indeed, about half of the registered voters in Nigeria are aged between 18 and 35—meaning the youth will hold a lot of electoral sway in the 2023 election, in which case, if they effectively organize, they could topple the current political establishments—both the major parties of the All Progressive Congress and Peoples Democratic Party—and generate genuine democratic change in Nigeria.'

Indeed, it appears as though social media in Nigeria has caught fire ahead of the 2023 general elections. The most prominent marker of the emerging landscape is the growing disruptive 'youth power', exemplified by their ability to dominate the space and use it in shaping discourses and narratives. Social media is offering young people the opportunity to translate their demographic power into concrete political influence and force. This is very much evident in their capacity to connect virtually on social media and regroup massively on the streets in the form of protests and rallies. This accounts for why supporters of the major presidential candidates address themselves as 'Obi-dients' and '*BATists*'. While the '*Obidients'* are supporting the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi, the 'BATists' are the supporters of the presidential candidate of the APC, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. In this wise, it has been noted that the LP and the supporters of its presidential candidate are deploying social media effectively, as "the majority of those spreading the "Obidient" gospel are youths who form a major demographic in the voting population" (Sunday, 2022, para.8).

Such reawakening on the part of the youth and mobilisation through social media will be critical in shaping the nature of the 2023 general elections. Herein lies the potential for electoral violence before and during the 2023 elections on account of the contradiction of two extremes of desperation. Already, a groundswell of frustration has created a mass of young people who are desperate to end the recycling of the older generation of the political class. They are currently

using social media to mobilise and inspire others for the 2023 elections. This move will clash with the interest of entrenched old-generation power holders who will deploy massive resources to break into their ranks. Meanwhile, the high level of unemployment, poverty and drug abuse among youth create a large pool of misinformed and impressionable elements whom the old generation of power holders could successfully manipulate to cause violence in furtherance of their political and electoral interests.

As the 2023 elections approach, political actors and political parties are jumping on the social media bandwagon, and the landscape of political communication in Nigeria has never been so heterogeneous, fragmented, energetic, chaotic, creative, and equally polarising at the same time (Peterside, 2022). Although largely dominated by young millennials and young adults, older people and politicians are equally appropriating it for political visibility, relevance and mobilisation.

Implications for Election Security

In light of the foregoing analysis, the following extrapolations encapsulate the implications for election security.

a. Entrenched political interests would lead older politicians to mobilise money and violence to promote their electoral interests against growing agitation by women and youth for a share of political and decision-making positions.

b. The dominance of male contestants in the forthcoming 2023 general elections bodes a higher risk of electoral violence and continued marginalisation of women from political life.

c. The high rate of unemployment and poverty, especially among young people, suggests a large pool of persons that could be manipulated by politicians to undermine security during elections.

d. If not properly monitored, there is the possibility that social media would be used for hate speech, incitation, misinformation, disinformation and deepfakes to undermine security before, during and after elections.

Some Key Findings

Set below are some of the most important findings of this study:

i. Youths and women form the larger percentage (75%) of registered voters for the 2023 general elections.

ii. Political and decision-making positions have been largely male-dominated despite the huge demographic strength of women and the youth

iii. The male-dominated political class use tokenistic co-optation strategies to subvert inclusive democracy in Nigeria.

iv. The underrepresentation of women and youth in political leadership is reinforced by patriarchy, economic marginalisation, and the highly monetised nature of Nigerian politics.

v.   Social media offers the youth a veritable opportunity to translate their huge demographic size into concrete political force in the 2023 elections if they can leverage online connectivity to mobilise massively offline to vote for a candidate of their choice.

vi.   The contradiction of two extremes of desperation involving youth anxious to end the recycling of political leaders and entrenched old-generation power holders desperate to breaking into their ranks will underpin electoral violence during the 2023 general elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As Nigeria heads toward the 2023 general elections, the issue of security will determine if the elections hold or not. And the extent to which women and youth can gain positions in the political and decision-making structures will define how inclusive or restrictive Nigeria's governance process has become in over two decades of uninterrupted electoral democracy. Patriarchy, economic inequality, voter inducement, mobilisation of violence and social media are some of the core factors that will not only shape the level of women and youth participation in the 2023 elections but also election security. Drawing from the analysis and key findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered.

Capacitation through awareness creation: Need for capacity-building programmes targeting women and youth

that will enable them to understand how some political leaders use the politics of exclusion or tokenistic co-optation to subvert inclusive democracy in Nigeria. In this wise, civil society organisations should partner with the media and other relevant structures in the society (traditional and religious bodies, professional associations, and community-based groups) to intensify awareness creation and sensitisation programme for the youths on the need to shun violence and resist the temptation of politicians incentivising them to serve as their thugs.

Strategic engagements for force multiplication: Incentivising women and youth-led organisations to embark on aggressive advocacy and campaign to conscientize and mobilise young persons to form a critical mass as they did during the #EndSARS movement and vote massively for credible candidates at the local, state and federal level elections. This is possible through collaborative initiatives like utilising technology for political mobilisation and participation during the 2023 general elections. This will enable women and youth optimise their demographic strength and leverage the same to bring about positive change in terms of increasing the number of women and youth in elective positions as well as electing credible persons committed to promoting an inclusive governance agenda.

Monitoring of campaign finance: Nigeria's anti-graft agencies should partner with the INEC to evolve a robust collaborative mechanism for undertaking detailed and effective monitoring of political and electoral financing in

Nigeria. Such collaborative frameworks should be deployed towards preventing and punishing corrupt practices such as vote buying. In addition, voter education campaigns should be expanded to counteract the effects of vote buying on voting behaviour.

Neutralising violent entrepreneurs and actors: State security and intelligence outfits need to discreetly and proactively neutralise violent youth wings or militias of politicians and political parties to prevent their mobilisation or deployment for political thuggery and election-related violence. This requires timely conduct of threat assessment, profiling of criminal elements or political thugs, proactive deployment for visibility policing, and strategic communication to counter violent incentives and narratives.

Framework for responsible use of social media: Civil society organisations and media practitioners should initiate robust engagement with government agencies to evolve an acceptable guideline as a useful framework for promoting a culture of responsible use of social media in Nigeria. This will encourage users to exercise due diligence to avoid perpetrating unwholesome acts or sharing content in the social media that is capable of creating tension and violence before, during and after the elections.

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Cyber Threats & Managing Election Narratives

Olajumoke Ganiyat Jenyo, PhD

Cyber Threats and Managing Election Narratives
Olajumoke Ganiyat Jenyo, PhD

Introduction

Election has been widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of representative democracies. Ensuring credibility, transparency and fairness in its processes and outcomes remains the hallmark of consolidating democracy across the globe. In the 21st century, there is overwhelming interference of technologies in the conduct, process, management and delivery of elections.

Significantly, the adoption and momentous use of cyber technologies-internet related computers, mobile and smart devices have become component parts of election related activities. And have gained currency and underscored the basic role of elections as the driving force behind the notion of democracy (Badmos, 2019). Basically, the use of new technologies like Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), Smart Card Reader (SCR), Electoral Ballot Printer (EBP), E-Collation, Internet Voting System, Designated Electoral Software and Application, Optimal Mark Recognition, Biodata Voter's Adaptation Number System, amongst others, are strategies designed towards the attainment of credibility, integrity and accountability of election. However, in each cycle of an election, the direct and indirect use of computers and other technologies introduces several risks to election integrity. This is because, over reliance on these sophisticated technology-based systems in the electoral process has left a large volume of delicate information potentially prone to challenges (Reuter, 2018), and the

implementation of certain electronic data management technologies can trigger post-election disputes (IFES 2018). In addition, these have posed threats to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information and facilities as regards votes and voters, candidates and parties, and the overall election processes (Cheeseman et al., 2018 & Brown, et al, 2022).

Also, the use of these technologies has disrupted traditional parts of the elections such as maintaining voters' lists, verifying voters, casting and counting votes and announcing election outcomes manually. It also x-rays how cyber security influence broadens the electoral environment - campaign, and data management by candidates and parties, online campaigns, social media, false or divisive information, and e-voting. Thus, the experiences of the United States of America (USA), in the 2016 and 2020 elections, Australia and Canada have shown that cyber security issues are capable of posing a serious threat to the public confidence in election outcomes when they are not properly managed (USIST, 2012). These cyber threat activities are not carried out in a vacuum, they are undertaken by cyber criminals, politically motivated actors, hacktivists, state-sponsored actors and thrill-seekers (CCSE, 2021),

The attendant challenges connected with the use of technologies in the conduct of election shows that no country in the world is completely immune from cyber-attacks and threats. Regrettably, election compromise has become prominent in African countries as a result of the

undemocratic nature of power struggle and transition within political systems. The political actors deploy every means including manipulation of religion, ethnicity, politics of marginalization, propaganda and false information as well as the manipulation of new technologies. The political actors influence the media to promote ethnoreligious campaign messages to determine electoral outcomes. For example, the use of campaign propaganda coupled with hate speeches, and questionable information contributed to the historic defeat of an incumbent in Nigeria's 2015 presidential election (Okolie, Enyiazu & Nnamani, 2021).

The attainment of election integrity requires a lot of regulatory frameworks such as Electoral law (Nigeria Electoral Act, 2022) which sketches essential requirements and constraints on electoral processes, as well as authorizing, barring or directing the use of particular technologies or data sources in elections; Privacy and data protection laws are relevant in many respects, such as concerning the collection and processing of data relating to voters and the private lives of candidates, and the use of digital marketing tools by campaigns; Cybercrime laws such as breaches of electoral law as well as Public procurement law, despite these legal provisions, elections continue to face serious cyber security threats that have continued to undermine its integrity.

Although the causes, profiles, intensities and countermeasures to cyber threats differ from one country to another, it is apparent that many developing countries, especially, Nigeria are more susceptible to the menace of

hardware and software of new technologies on the basis that their political process is characterized by an inadequate capacity to address some of these emerging technological challenges and manage the narratives that surround elections (Bidemi, 2019).

In light of the above background, this paper sets out to examine the causes, types and potential cyber threats and narratives that surround the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper gears to investigate the implication of cyber threats and election narratives for election security in the forthcoming 2023 election. Finally, it proposes to offer implementable recommendations to mitigate cyber threats on election security against the 2023 general elections.

Methodology

This paper is a product of qualitative-library research. It adopted an exploratory research technique. Data collection was carried out through the secondary method of the documentary approach. The documentary method of data focuses on the systematic process of obtaining data by analysing existing documents. It is concerned with a comprehensive evaluation of documents that contain relevant information about a particular phenomenon or situation under consideration. The adoption of this approach found support from the opinion of McCulloch (2004) who claimed that a documentary method of data is used to assess a series of documents surrounding an event or value or to construct a superior narrative through the study of multiple documents connected to a phenomenon

or individual. It is used to interrogate, categorize, interpret and identify the limitation of physical sources especially, written documents (Payne & Payne, 2004; Okolie et al, 2021). In this paper, data were generated from books, official documents, journal articles, historical documents conference papers, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, internet material related to election, propaganda (election narratives), ethno-regional social relations, election security, cyber threats and official information from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Meanwhile, the gathered information from these documents was analysed using content and thematic analytical instrument. Analysis in the paper was anchored on the political economy approach. The approach was considered appropriate because of its multidisciplinary nature to holistically address the issue under consideration.

Conceptual Clarifications
Certain issues that constitute variables in the topic under investigation are conceptualized as follows:

Election Narrative
Election narrative is a terminology used in political science parlance to explain the manner which storytelling can influence and affect knowledge of reality in politics and political activities (Shaul, 2006). Put differently, election narrative as Fisher (2003) observed is a basic tool of communication and a mode of thought that is employed to polish communication with the particular information out of which meaning is constructed. Indeed, it is considered as

a platform through which political actors perceive their political reality and achieve their agenda. Election narrative, according to Arizoma (2022) are categorized into three namely (i) Continued falsehoods about prevalent election fraud, (ii) threats of violence and citizen policing of election, and (iii) divisive posts on government policies that constitute the vocal point of the electoral campaign.

A synthesis of review of the existing empirical studies shows that, election narrative has the capacity to prompt bleakness through the value it provides rather than the truth that is articulated (Francisca & Jessica, 2018). It is based on this that Josephine et al. (2018) claimed that election narrative is an instrument and a theoretical construct used by political actors in order to manipulate the perspectives of the electorates and the general public within their environment and change their relationship between social groups such as political parties and the candidates in an election. It has been established that certain form of election narratives happens out of the sentiments already within a culture of a particular political system and therefore, political actors take advantage of that to influence the votes electorates cast in an election (Patterson et al, 1998). For example, the narrative of cultural loss that characterized Donald Trump's campaign was constructed on the ethical fear that was prevalent in the USA during the electioneering period. The narrative that coloured the 2016 US election basically centred on the Hillary Clinton e-mail controversy: Russian interferences during the election, immigration policy and economic policy. These and many more were coined to generate

emotion capable of overshadowing facts (Polleta & Jessica, 2017).

By and large, election narratives are undertaken using some tools as Arizoma (2022) identified thus:

a. Political Speeches: this is considered as one of the most popular tools used to convey election narrative in a democratic setting.

b. Propaganda: It is a tool frequently employed by political actors to influence the opinion, perspectives and views of electorates and the general public as well as widen and interweave their narratives into realities of society. It encompasses the use of falsehoods and the elimination of facts which is detrimental to the election outcomes. Besides being considered a political tool, propaganda is also regarded as a means through which ideologies are constructed by manipulation of political realities (Jeffery, 2013).

c. The Media (Mass and Social Media); the media plays a significant role in the fabrication, facilitation and perpetuation of election narratives. For example, in Australia, the media was used as an instrument for spreading the narrative created for the Children Overboard Affairs to the public (Kaken, et al. 2013). More importantly, the media played a great role in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections not only within the USA but also across the world (Kluvers et al, 2019). Also, the election campaign stressed the aggregate relevance of social media in influencing political or election narratives because

it has become the most effective platform to access news sources (Polleta et al, 2017)

Thus, from the above conceptualization, it can be inferred therefore that election narratives serve some purposes, which includes but not limited to generating misinformation about elections such as rigging and snatching of the ballot box and other election materials; neutralizing or working against perceived threats in society as acting against common threats increases political support base and distract attention from fundamental problems within the polity; It is used as a potential tool in an election to solicit support from the general public for a particular political party or candidate. Finally, it is employed to generate inflammatory online discussion that can be felt in the real world.

Cyber Threat

Cyber threat refers to cyber operations or non-cyber actions that tamper the confidentiality, integrity, availability and reliability of digital devices, systems, networks or data (CTIIC, 2020). This implies that cyber threat occurs due to disruption initiated by the threat actors which temporarily adversely changes or inhibits the operation of the victim's network. Consequently, results in the manipulation, disruption, denial, degradation or destruction of computers, information or communication, network, physical or virtual infrastructure controlled by computer or information system or information resident therein. In other words, Cyber threat is a digital attempt targeting availability,

confidentiality and integrity of data, systems or networks (NIS, 2018).

In another continuum, Imperial Cyber Security Solution (ICSS, 2021), stated that cyber threats are acts performed by individuals with harmful intent, whose goal is to steal data, and cause damage to or disrupt computing systems. Cyber threats can originate from a variety of sources, from hostile nation-states and terrorist groups to individual hackers, to trusted individuals like employees or contractors, who abuse their privileges to perform malicious acts.

Hackers such as individual hackers can target organizations using a variety of attack techniques. They are usually motivated by personal gain, revenge, financial gain, or political activity. Hackers often develop new threats, to advance their criminal ability and improve their personal standing in the hacker community. Finally, malicious insiders such as an employee who has legitimate access to company assets can abuse their privilege to steal information or damage computing systems for economic or personal gain. Insiders may be employees, contractors, suppliers, or partners of the target organization. They can also be outsiders who have compromised a privileged account and are impersonating its owner (ICSS, 2021). The most popular types of Cyber threats include malware, social engineering, Man in the Middle (MitM) attacks, Denial of Service (DoS), and injection attacks.

Malware - Malware is an abbreviation of "malicious software", which includes viruses, worms, Trojans, spyware, and ransomware, and is the most common type of cyber-attack. Malware infiltrates a system, usually via a link on an untrusted website or email or an unwanted software download. It deploys on the target system, collects sensitive data, manipulates and blocks access to network components, and may destroy data or shut down the system altogether (ICSS, 2021).

Social Engineering Attacks - The social engineering threat involves tricking users into providing an entry point for malware. The victim provides sensitive information or unwittingly installs malware on their device because the attacker poses as a legitimate actor. Some of the major types of social engineering attacks include *baiting*, the attacker lures a user into a social engineering trap, usually with a promise of something attractive like a gift card. The victim provides sensitive information such as credentials to the attacker. Pretexting in this case, the attacker pressures the target into giving up information under false pretences. This typically involves impersonating someone with authority, for example, an IRS or police officer, whose position will compel the victim to comply (ICSS, 2021).

Phishing: In this case, the attacker sends emails pretending to come from a trusted source. Phishing often involves sending fraudulent emails to as many users as possible but can also be more targeted. For example, "spear phishing" personalizes the email to target a specific user, while

"whaling" takes this a step further by targeting high-value individuals such as CEOs.

Vishing: the imposter uses the phone to trick the target into disclosing sensitive data or granting access to the target system. Vishing typically targets older individuals but can be employed against anyone.

Smishing (SMS phishing): the attacker uses text messages as the means of deceiving the victim.

Piggybacking: an authorized user provides physical access to another individual who "piggybacks" off the user's credentials. For example, an employee may grant access to someone posing as a new employee who misplaced their credential card.

Tailgating: an unauthorized individual follows an authorized user into a location, for example by quickly slipping in through a protected door after the authorized user has opened it. This technique is similar to piggybacking except that the person being tailgated is unaware that they are being used by another individual (ICSS, 2021).

A Man-in- the Middle Attack - This form of threat involves intercepting the communication between two endpoints, such as a user and an application. The attacker can eavesdrop on the communication, steal sensitive data, and impersonate each party participating in the communication. Examples of MitM attacks include WiFi eavesdropping, email hijacking, and Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) spoofing. Denial-of-service (DoS)

attack overloads the target system with a large volume of traffic, hindering the ability of the system to function normally. An attack involving multiple devices is known as a Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attack, HTTP flood DDoS, Synchronised (SYN) flood, or Network Time Protocol (NTP) amplification (ICSS, 2021).

Injection attacks - Injection attacks exploit a variety of vulnerabilities to directly insert malicious input into the code of a web application. Successful attacks may expose sensitive information, execute a DoS attack or compromise the entire system. Here are some of the main vectors for injection attacks: SQL injection, code injection OS command injection, and cross-site scripting, among others (ICSS, 2021).

The imperative of the conceptualization of this term is that the contemporary conduct of election revolves around the use of digital technologies in all the election activities, pre-election, on election day and post-election periods. The world democratic process continues to be affected by cyber threat activities. These activities are carried out against three major actors namely, political participants, election facilities- voter registration, election database and political actors (Canadian CSE, 2021).

The Canadian CSE, (2021) reported that Cyber threat activity has both short and long-term consequences on democratic processes. It is capable of affecting the popularity of or support for candidates, amplifying false or polarizing information as in the case of the USA 2020

presidential election, questioning the integrity of the election, the process and the results, promoting the desired election outcomes, distracting voters from important election issues and reducing voter turnout (Penny -cook& Rand, 2020). Meanwhile, the long effect of the menace of cyber threat activity in elections will be responsible for decline in public trust in the democratic process, lowering trust in journalism and the media, creating division in international alliances, increasing polarization and decreasing social cohesion, weakening confidence in leaders, and promoting the economic, geopolitical, or ideological interest of hostile foreign countries (Foreign threats to the 2020 US Federal Election, 2021).

Data Integrity

Data integrity refers to the overall accuracy, completeness, and consistency of data. It also means the safety of data in connection to regulatory compliance and security. The integrity of data is secured when the information stored in a database remained complete, accurate, and reliable no matter how long it is stored and or frequently it is accessed. (Zafar, et al, 2017). Lending support to the above, Boritz (2011) is of the opinion that data integrity is a maintenance of, and the assurance of data accuracy and consistency over its entire life cycle. Therefore, since election processes and democratic activities, in general, have been digitalized partially or fully across the globe, information concerning election are stored in the cyberspace - *election database*, using modern technologies. Thus, election databases refer to a set of files that contains information about political

subdivisions and boundaries, all contests and questions to be included in an election, and the candidate for each contest (CTIIC, 2020). The sanctity of these databases is essential to achieve the integrity of election outcomes. However, data integrity failure occurs when there are any unintended changes to data as the result of storage, retrieval or processing operation, including malicious intent, unexpected hardware failure, and human error, if the changes are the result of unauthorized access, it may also be a failure of data security Prabhakaran (2006).

By inference, therefore, election data integrity is concerned with the performance measure or service that guarantees that data stored in the electoral management body has not been accidentally or maliciously modified, manipulated, altered or destroyed by cyber threat actors or attackers. Hence, data integrity aims to prevent unintentional changes to election-related information (Davidson, 2017). Cyber threats may come in form of manipulation of the operational environment - software, hardware, materials, documentation, and the interference required for voting equipment operations used by the election personnel, maintenance operations, polling unit workers and voters. Cyber threat is also being considered as a product of cyber operation (CTIIC, 2020). Both cyber threats and cyber operations against the election data take place within the cyberspace.

Basically, two major types of data integrity have dominated the literature of cyber security threats - Physical (Data)

Integrity and Logical (Data) Integrity, Prabhakaran (2006), Scannel (2015), and Imran, et al. (2017).

a. Physical (Data) Integrity

Physical Data integrity focuses on challenges that are connected with correctly storing and retrieving of the election information connected with physical hardware, those that fall within electromechanically faults, design flaws, material fatigue, corrosion, power outage, natural disasters, and other special environmental hazards like extreme temperatures, ionizing radiation, among others. In other words, physical integrity is concerned with the protection of the wholeness and accuracy of the election information as it is stored and fetched. However, when natural disasters strike, power goes out, or hackers disrupt data function in the electoral management database, physical integrity is compromised. Human error, storage erosion, and several other issues can also hinder programmers, internal auditors processing managers and system programmers to obtain accurate data.

b. Logical (Data) Integrity

Logical integrity helps to protect data (election-related data) in the database of the election management body from human error and hackers. Logical integrity of information can be achieved in four ways namely: *Entity Integrity* which can be realized through the use of a primary key in the storage of data, *Inferential Integrity* is concerned with the use of a foreign key in the storage of data, while *Domain Integrity* is achieved when the columns in a relational database are declared upon a defined domain.

Finally, *User-Defined* integrity refers to a set of rules specified by a user to secure election-related data in the Election Management Body (EMB) database.

However, irrespective of the types, data integrity is affected by certain factors such as human error, transfer errors, bugs, viruses and compromised hardware. Thus, the essence of data integrity of election-related information is to enhance transparency, integrity, legitimacy and credibility of the entire electoral and democratic processes.

Legal Framework and Paradigm Shift in the Electoral Process in Nigeria

Adequate regulatory and policy regime such as electoral law is sacrosanct to electoral integrity (Brown, et al. 2020). This is because the legal document in consonance with the ground law of a country outlines structural requirements and challenges on electoral processes as well as permitting, forbidding or authorizing the use of certain technologies whether partially or wholly for the conduct of elections such as the Nigerian Electoral law and Public Procurement law which governs the way in which public bodies such as INEC obtain digital technologies for the conduct of the election. The new Electoral law 2022 is a reviewed version of the 2006 and 2010 electoral Acts. The conduct of the 2023 elections will be carried out under the new electoral framework.

Although, a number of governorship elections had been conducted after the enactment of the new acts such as the Ekiti and Osun states elections. The legal framework allows

INEC to review results made under financial inducement, extends the time for campaigns from 90 to 150 days, and provides for the use of technology to determine the mode of voting and transmission of results (Hassan, 2022). These measures can help manage situations where inaccurate results are returned, expand the opportunity for politicians to visit the nooks and crannies of the country if they so desire and cure the chaotic, vulnerable manipulation and unnecessary vague process of aggregating results. The provisions in the new Electoral Acts are discussed in detail below:

a. Extension of Timeframe for Publication of Election Notice

The new Act provides that the Commission shall, not later than 360 days before the day appointed for holding of an election under this Act, publish a notice in each State of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory stating the date of the election and appointing the place at which nomination papers are to be delivered (Section 28(1), Electoral Act, 2022).

This notice is to be published in each constituency in respect of which an election is to be held (Section 28(2), Electoral Act, 2022). This is in contrast to the provisions of the erstwhile Electoral Act which provided that the Commission should publish this notice not later than 90 days before the date of elections (Section 30(1), Electoral Act, 2010) The effect of this extension of time is to give the Commission more time to prepare for the election and also give the political parties no excuse as regards the candidacy and the

partisan and propaganda politics that comes with choosing a candidate and preparing for a campaign.

Under the new Act, political parties are mandated to submit the list of their sponsored candidates who have emerged from valid primaries conducted by the party, not later than 180 days before the date appointed for a general election (Section 29(1), Electoral Act, 2022). This is in contrast to the former Act which prescribed that this submission should be done not less than 60 days before the date of general elections (Section 31(1), Electoral Act, 2010).

The change in the timeframe to submit the names of party candidates from 60 days to 180 days makes it compulsory for political parties to conduct their primaries early enough to meet up with the submission of their list of candidates at least 180 days before the general elections. The new Act provides that the period of campaigning in public by every political party shall commence 150 days before polling day and end 24 hours prior to that day (Section 94(1), Electoral Act, 2022). This is different from the provisions of the former Act which prescribe that campaigns shall commence 90 days prior to the polling day and end 24 hours prior to that day (Section 99(1), Electoral Act, 2010).

The impact of this provision is the extended time given to political parties to disseminate their campaign messages to the populace and the corresponding extended time for the electorate to decide what party and candidate would receive their votes.

b. Provision for Central Electronic Voter Database - The new Act provides that the Commission shall keep the Register of Voters at its National Headquarters and other locations, provided that the Register shall be kept in electronic format in its central database, in addition to being kept in manual or hardcopy format (Section 9(2), Electoral Act, 2022). Under the former Act, this Register was kept in manual or hardcopy format only (Section 9(2), Electoral Act, 2010). This provision is laudable as it will promote transparency and effectiveness in the Commission's record-keeping and in tracking the number of registered voters who will be voting in the upcoming elections, thereby curbing illegal voting by non-registered voters (Eme,2022).

c. Technological changes in electoral process - Under the new Act, the use of electronic devices such as smart card readers, electronic voting machines and other technological devices, is allowed in the accreditation process for voters and in the general conduct of elections (Section 47(2) and 41 of the Electoral Act, 2022). Furthermore, the new Act provides for the electronic transmission of election results in accordance with the procedure determined by the Commission.

d. Revision of Definition of Over voting - Under the new Act, where the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of accredited voters in that polling unit, the Presiding officer shall cancel the result of the election in that polling unit (Section 51(2), Electoral Act, 2022). Number of accredited voters refers to the number of

intending voters accredited to vote in an election on Election Day (Section 153, Electoral Act, 2022). Under the former Act, it is when the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of registered voters in that polling unit, that the Presiding officer shall cancel the result of the election in that polling unit (Section 53(2), Electoral Act, 2010).

Based on the provisions of the new Act, 'over voting' would mean where votes cast at a polling unit exceed the number of accredited voters and not the number of registered voters as provided in the former Act (Eme, 2022).

e. Provision of Presidential aspirants - The Electoral Act requires that parties submit the names of their candidates 180 days before the elections, thereby allowing for the legal resolution of fractious primaries ahead of the voting day. In signing the Electoral Act, President Buhari also requested that the section that precludes political office holders from participating in party primaries and voting during congresses be deleted, as it breaches participation rights. However, the National Assembly refused to make this amendment. This meant that several of Buhari's ministers were unable to contest for elective office unless they first resigned their positions.

Drawing an inference from the above analysis, however, rather than mitigating the role of money in politics, the Act has amplified the campaign finance limit from one billion naira to five billion naira for presidential candidates. The ceiling for all other elected positions has also been

augmented fivefold, but without any efforts to improve the scrutiny of compliance limits, they are still likely to be exceeded. Also, the financial implications of an extended election season are already putting strain on an economy that has hobbled in and out of recession in the last seven years. The naira is fast loosing value as the demand for the dollar as instrument by political aspirants to shore up their chances increases.

These no doubt pose serious potential threats to the integrity and security contents of the forthcoming general election.

Dynamics of Political Narratives and Perceived Cyber Threats Surrounding the Forthcoming 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.

In almost every democratic country, particularly in nascent and transitional democracies, the electoral process is prone to risks and threats, due to some narratives that becloud its processes, especially from the pre-election to the post-election period. Nigeria is no exception due to her heterogeneous nature, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. The political and democratic experiences of the country from the pre-independence to the post-independence periods show that political party formation, electioneering activities - voting patterns and voting behaviour, among others, are constructed along ethnic, religious and cultural contours. Thus, towing the path of political narrative postulations, certain forms of election/political narratives happen out of the sentiments already within a culture of a particular political system and

therefore, political actors take advantage of that to influence the entire democratic process, particularly the votes electorates cast in an election.

One of the major phenomena that constitute narratives as the 2023 elections draws closer is the country's battle nodes of complex insecurity. The Boko Haram conflict that distinct the 2015 election based on which political campaign and propaganda as an instrument of election narratives was construed by the ruling party against the incumbent president is yet to be quelled, and with bandits operating across the North-West, violent secessionist agitation escalation in the South-East and farmer-herder clashes ongoing across the country, the 2023 election is set to take place amidst nationwide insecurity and economic poor performance (Hassan, 2022). The June 5 attack on a church in relatively stable Ondo State, in South-West Nigeria, which saw more than 50 people killed, was an obvious reminder of the insecurity challenges that will make the safety of election materials and personnel a major challenge for INEC.

Also, the issue of internal party crises that ensued from the violation of *unwritten party gentleman agreement principle of rotational presidency*, especially in the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) which depicts a clear manifestation of politics of marginalization and exclusion of one section of the country against another. At the PDP convention, when the decisive movement was delivered by the governor of Sokoto's decision to stand down, handing his delegate votes to Atiku consequently leading to the

emergence of Alhaji Abubakar Atiku as the PDP flag bearer in the forthcoming presidential election speaks to the fact that the mandate of the Southerners was hijacked, and this subsequently led to the pulling out of some Southern members of the party. Also, the politics of marginalization that played out earlier before the conduct of the PDP primaries forced Mr. Peter Obi a southerner to resign his membership from the party and joined the Labour party to form a third force in the bid towards the 2023 general elections.

Meanwhile, the potential third forces that could increase the likelihood of Nigeria's first-ever presidential run-off election are Peter Obi, 60, who withdrew from the PDP primary contest and will now run as the Labour Party flag bearer, and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, 65 (Hassan, 2022). While Obi has nurtured a significant online following among younger voters, Kwankwaso is equally popular among youths in his native Kano State. The attempt to create a formidable third force seems to have been midwifed as the Peoples Redemption Party, New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), National Rescue Movement (NRM) and the Nigeria Labour Congress have all agreed, for now, to an alliance to run under the banner of the Labour Party. A joint Obi-Datti ticket could shake up the presidential race.

Furthermore, the emergence of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the presidential flag bearer of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) after much of internal politics that played out in the electioneering process on June 8, out of the initial field of 28 candidates who paid N100 million each to

purchase the party nomination forms. The APC presidential primaries saw frontline South-West candidates such as the governor of Ekiti State, Kayode Fayemi and former Ogun State governor, Ibikunle Amosun, stepping down, and handing Tinubu their bloc votes. However, the decision of the party for the same faith *Muslim-Muslim* ticket that produced Ahmed Tinubu and Ibrahim Shettima, a former governor of Borno State as running mate continues to generate a lot of criticism on social media. It also amplifies the politics of marginalization of one religious' faith against the other within the Christian and Muslim folds.

Fundamentally, the adoption of modern technologies for the conduct of the election process and transmission of election results as stipulated in the new Electoral Acts 2022 has equally constituted cardinal points in the formation of narratives around the forthcoming elections among politicians, political parties and party supporters among the masses.

Thus, given the high-stake nature of electoral contestations in Nigeria, many strategies including media propaganda have been deployed to gain the support of the electorate. Basically, of the three varieties of propaganda featured prominently on the mass and social media in the build-up to the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election, namely ethno-religious propaganda, externally oriented propaganda, and politicians-activists-propelled propaganda (Bidemi, 2022). The first reflects the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the Nigerian state in which political actors seek to manipulate the sensibilities of voters. Above all, the

diverse character of the Nigerian state is a proximate condition for sensitivity and political mindfulness of the citizens while electing leaders. Through well-crafted ethno-religious messages, political actors and loyalists of the major contestants aroused the sentiments of the vote. Hiding under the umbrella of the prevailing political narratives in the country, political actors, social media influencers and political party supporters in the name of campaigns employ mass and social media to spread fake news and hate speeches on social media. Hence, social media and fake news are the biggest threats to human existence not only to elections (Afunanya, 2022; The Guardian). Fake news is a major cause of violence in our society and poses the biggest threat to the 2023 general elections.

On the other hand, cyber threat focuses on key targets in the democratic process and some of these attacks are directed at voters, political parties and election and their infrastructures (CCSE, 2021) In the build up to the 2023 general elections, below are perceived cyber threats that if not properly managed can undermine the integrity and outcomes of the elections.

The fact that section 41 and 47 (2) of the 2022 Electoral Acts provides for the use of electronic devices such as smart card readers, electronic voting machines and other technological devices, during the accreditation process for voters and in the general conduct of elections as well as the electronic transmission of election results in accordance with the procedure determined by the Commission and section 9(2) of the Electoral Act, 2022 provides that INEC

keeps Register of Voters at its National Headquarters and other locations, provided that the Register be kept in electronic format in its central database, in addition to being kept in manual or hardcopy format. Considering the low amount of technological infrastructure and availability of power supply in Nigeria to maintain the physical and logical integrity of the election data and database against any form of malware, social engineering, man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks, denial of service (DoS), and injection attacks, achieving completeness and accuracy of election database will be a herculean task.

Also, on the list of potential threats identified by the electoral commission is the snatching and/or destruction of election materials. The snatching of election materials (ballots) has sadly also become a trend in every election cycle in Nigeria. In recent times INEC offices and personnel have been under attack, particularly in the south-eastern part. INEC has again identified this in its assessment report of the 2023 general election. In addition to this, the commission noted the disruption of polling, counting of ballot papers, and tabulation of results as a potential threat in the upcoming election. Other threats and risks pointed out by INEC include vote trading, diversion of sensitive election materials, and forgery of result sheets as well as fake news, misinformation, and blackmail in the media. While these are not necessarily new in Nigeria's elections, they are becoming increasingly concerning as they have negatively affected past elections and could impact the electoral processes and integrity of the

elections as a whole in the forthcoming elections if not addressed.

Therefore, a synthesis of the above analysis reveals a strong connection between the prevailing political narratives, the perceived cyber threats occasioned by the legal framework and modern technological facilities gaps in the process of digitalizing democratic process in the country and the challenges of enhancing election security in the forthcoming 2023 general elections.

Nexus of Election Narratives and Cyber Threats; Implications for Election Security in the Forthcoming 2023 General Polls in Nigeria

Election security in all its ramifications, physical, personnel and infrastructure, is essential to the organization, planning and process of democratic election. Nevertheless, as transition and nascent democratic elections like Nigeria are becoming digitalized through the use of modern technologies in virtually all the levels and stages of election activities, cyber election threats and the narratives that becloud the democratic process have posed serious challenges to their ability to conduct free and fair elections. Even developed countries like USA, Italy, France, Germany, Ukraine, etcetera, have experienced cyber interference in their democratic processes due to Cyber threat or attacks (Piccolino, 2015 & Bidemi, 2019). Drawing from the above premises, the following are identified as security implications of the prevailing political narratives and cyber threats for the conduct of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

a. Promoting a desired election outcome contrary to the general will of the electorate. The fact that social media provide a megaphone for domestic actors with many followers such as influencers, individual with verified account and public figures, fake news, misinformation, disinformation and ethno-religious and cultural narratives promoted by these prominent personalities will have impact on the elections and may also undermine democratic institutions and processes. In addition, the legal provision of the 2022 Electoral Act which makes upward review of campaign financing without any efforts to improve the scrutiny of compliance limits only further strengthens the use of money as a political tool to promote voters' inducement through vote buying thus undermining the integrity of the entire process.

With reports from the Ekiti and Osun States 2022 governorship elections, nearly all observers reported that the cases of bribery of voters and inducement were prevalent in virtually all the 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 30 LGAs in Ekiti and Osun states respectively contrary to the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022. The electorate's willing placement of monetary values on their votes without weighing the consequences of their decisions was premised on the prevailing economic hardship in the land. This has questioned the efficacy of the 2022 Electoral law as a legal framework upon which the forthcoming election will be anchored.

b. Calling into question the legitimacy of election process and results. In view of the identified legal framework and

infrastructure gaps identify with the administration of election using modern technologies, cyber threat actors, could take advantage of this and attempt to undermine trust in elections or suppress voters' turnout by alarming content on websites, social medial account, networks and devices use by INEC. The cyber threat actors can also take advantage of these lacuna to manipulate online information to influence voters' opinions and behaviour, hack social media accounts, networks and devices of major political parties, candidates and their staff, among others not only to generate false information that is specifically geared towards causing harms, make false claims appear legitimate or otherwise as well as creating official seeming content such as deep fake, but also generate misinformation spread without the intention to cause harm (Journalism, Fake news and Dissemination, 2021) and above all undermine the completeness and accuracy of the election data bases. The sanctity of the database is essential to achieve integrity of the 2023 election outcomes. However, these potential cyber threats and political narratives are capable of causing data integrity failure through these malicious intent, unexpected hardware failure, and human error, that can lead to failure of data security against the forthcoming election.

Lending credence to the above analysis, the report of the findings in the Osun and Ekiti 2022 gubernatorial elections revealed that there were inconsistencies in the data on the permanent voter card collection across over 10 local government areas in Osun State. Also, that the total number of collated for 30 polling units was greater than the total

number of registered voters in those polling units. These inconsistencies were recorded in 12 LGAs and this consequently led to legitimacy question of the election outcomes. Contrary to the provision of Section 51(2), Electoral Act, 2022 which makes provision for the definition of over voting and states that 'where the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of accredited voters in that polling unit, the Presiding officer shall cancel the result of the election in that polling unit.' The inability of the Act to curb such practices in the just concluded Osun governorship election speak loud of the inefficiency of the new electoral law. This poses serious challenge to security of the 2023 general election.

c. Reduce voters' turnout - Though fake news, misinformation, and blackmail in the media are not necessarily new in Nigeria's elections, they are becoming issues of increasing concern. These have negatively affected past elections and could impact on the electoral processes and integrity of the elections as a whole in forthcoming elections if adequate steps are not taken. In this regard, disinformation by cyber threat actors can act to prevent INEC message of enfranchisement from being clearly communicated to voters.

Disinformation can be used to convince politically unattached Nigerians to remain apathetic and not register to vote, or in any case cast vote in the coming election. The likely rampant misinformation and disinformation that will continue to emerge in the lead up to voting day may have

fewer Nigerians voting next year than in 2019. In addition, given the prevailing insecurity across the country, the physical, personnel and infrastructural attacks on INEC institutions which led to difficulties in registering for permanent voter cards in unsecured areas in Northern and South-Eastern parts of the country will further deter future participation. In support of this analysis, just 34.75% of eligible Nigerians voted in 2019 and a similarly low, or lower, turnout in 2023 would further undermine the credibility of the poll with the current prevailing political narratives around the forthcoming general elections.

d. Increasing polarization and decreasing social cohesion.

The prevailing political narratives arising from the electioneering activities of the political parties in recent times no doubt trails the line of political and religious marginalization. The asserted southern political marginalization as demonstrated in the present internal political crisis of the opposition party, the PDP and the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as well as the purported fake news, misinformation and disinformation that have dominated the mass and social medial are all manifestation of the determinants of polarization of the country along northern-southern divide and Muslim- Christian divide which can reduce our social cohesion. The negative impact of these variables to the coming election is that electorate voting behaviour will be influenced along these lines of divides and this is anathema to the security and unity of the country.

e. Other security implications include reduction of the Nigerian trust in the democratic process, lowering trust in journalism and the media, weakening confidence in the Nigerian leaders, promoting the economic, geographical or ideological interests of hostile foreign states among others.

Major Findings

So far, the connection of cyber threat and election narratives, and its implications for security of the 2023 general election has been examine. Within the framework of this research the following findings were recorded:

1. That the perceived cyber threats and prevailing political narratives around the 2023 election are born out of the social injustice, political and religious marginalization of one section of the country against the others, and of one religious' sect against another in the highly heterogeneous Nigerian society. This no doubt is capable of generating the use of hate speeches, campaign propaganda and abuse of social and mass media by politicians to achieve their goals and disrupt social cohesion.

2. That there is a strong connection between the prevailing political narratives, the perceived cyber threats triggered by the legal framework and modern technological facilities gaps in the process of digitalizing democratic process in the country and the challenges of enhancing election security in the forthcoming 2023 general elections, due to inadequate modern technologies on the part of INEC to confidently guarantee both physical and logical integrity of election data in the data base of the organization against any form of

malware, social engineering, Man-in-the-Middle attacks, Denial of Service, and Injection attacks, and frequent physical and cyber-attacks on the personnel, infrastructure and election material of INEC across the country.

3. That the perceived cyber electoral threats, prevailing propaganda on the social and mass media and gaps in the new 2022 Electoral Act have far reaching security implications for the integrity, legitimacy of the election process, reducing voters' turnout, amplifying faults through misinformation, disinformation and unguarded statements, distracting voters from important election issues, among others in the forthcoming 2023 general election if not properly managed.

4. That potential vulnerability of the perceived electoral cyber security threats are not limited to technology, but are also human, political, procedural, and legal in dimension. Hence, the need to facilitate and secure electoral processes as much as possible against unanticipated threats, illicit incursions, system failures, human error, perception issues, or unfounded or excessive legal challenges becomes imperative if the credibility and legitimacy of the process and outcomes of the elections are to be achieved.

Recommendations

In view of the above findings, the following implementable recommendations are proffered as means of ensuring security, integrity and legitimacy of the conduct and outcomes of the forth coming 2023 general elections:

1. There is urgent need for the Federal government through the National Broadcasting Regulatory Commission to establish, adopt and establish media fact-checking tools like the *Politifacts* which finds out when politicians are making false claims; *Truth-O-Meter* that tells the voters whether the politician is saying the truth or not, and *Flip-O-Meter* that tells when politicians are flip-flopping promises during campaign. This is because fact-checkers treats people as rational actors - it equips eligible voters with right information needed to make right and informed political decisions. As a corollary, fact-checker would help political actors to articulate issue-based campaign programmes reflecting the peculiar challenges of Nigerian state rather than relying on disinformation, misinformation and hate speeches as viable means of gaining access to political power.

2. The EMB in Nigeria should adopt and implement the following four cardinal exposure approaches:

a. Technology exposure approach, since some of the important tool INEC might consider using to avoid crashes are designing system, testing, set-up, configuration, piloting and auditing followed by contingency planning for the forthcoming election, The EMB should have back-up for the new technologies, also have advanced network monitoring capabilities to determine with some degree of certainty, the nature of events that occur in its systems and adoption of error detection software. Having a strategy on ground would allow the EMB to react quickly, apply contingency

plans from back-up as a means to achieve data integrity in his data base against hackers.

b. Human exposure approach, INEC should adopt monitoring physical access to servers to prevent insider attacks on the election data base with the organization website. This can be achieved through doubling up IT experts, when logging into sensitive servers, never using wireless networks for sensitive LANs to avoid close proximity, fraudulent Wi-Fi access attacks, control regularly by the ICT supervisor for compliance and abuse. Also, adoption of data security strategy to avoid having outdated or underutilized election systems that can lead to inefficient data management.

c. Political Exposure approach, INEC should carefully plan and execute procurement processes for election technology and develop sound communication and consultation mechanism on cyber security issues. Also, greater collaboration is required with the law enforcement agencies and intelligence personnel. In terms of legal and regulatory procedure, development of strategy document, operational plans, and training material and other manuals and guidelines are required on time.

Conclusion

The heavily relied upon multifaceted technology in electoral processes by the EMB globally has created new security challenges related to protection and safekeeping of election data in digital form and related computerized systems for efficient and cost-effective management of democratic

elections. Most countries now computerize and digitalize at least part of their elections, from the use of e-voting to electronic voter databases. However, the issues around cyber threat in elections are therefore increasingly universal and are becoming more dynamic. Thus, for many African nations especially Nigeria, the danger and threats of cyber-attack in election are imminent therefore, INEC and Nigerian government must be conscious of the current trends in election security which is changing rapidly more and more toward cyber security than the regular physical policing system.

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Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security
An Agenda for a New Strategy

Antonia T. Simbine, PhD & Hakeem Tijjani, PhD

Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES): An Agenda for a New Strategy

Antonia T. Simbine, PhD & Hakeem Tijjani, PhD

Introduction

It is no doubt that Nigeria's pre-electoral, electoral and post electoral phases of election have experienced one form of insecurity or another. As a result, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in 2010, established the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) with a view to facilitating effective election security management. In order to aid the work of the Committee, a unified Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for All Security Agencies in Electoral Duties was developed by the Chairman of INEC in collaboration with the heads of two other institutional partners in election security management (the National Security Adviser and the Inspector General of Police).

Thus, security - the absence of any threat or harm, whether physical or emotional - is crucial in order to achieve smooth elections and ultimately, development. It is, therefore, imperative to understand that security is not only needed, but INEC alone has the authority to make decisions about its role in election security, particularly in relation to safeguarding the vote. This is true in so far as only the Commission has the authority to request the dispatch of the pertinent security personnel required for elections or voter registration, and it is its responsibility to allocate them after consulting with the relevant security authorities.

Electoral insecurity needs to be understood from the more abstract or allegorical space of fear to more concrete evidence of destruction of both electoral materials and structures but also officials, as has been recorded in many geopolitical zones especially. With the dimension that electoral insecurity has reached in Nigeria, it is incumbent on ICCES to step up its strategies on preventive rather than reactive measures. This has become even more imperative as terrorism has been on the increase across all the geo-political` zones, killing and displacing many Nigerians.

Contextualizing and Conceptualizing ICCES and electoral security

Electoral security according to Yoroms (2017:10) is defined as "the whole gamut of security architecture involving election management institutions and processes, electoral legal instruments, security forces and civil society electoral monitoring bodies which are brought together to ensure credibility in the electoral security governance." This gamut is catalogued this gamut into four basic expectations. In other words, election security is attained with the following:

- Assurance that election officers would be able to move election materials around and operate freely on election days.
- Candidates are chosen under free and fair conditions within their political parties and organize their campaigns without any fear of violent attacks.
- Voters can freely get to their polling units and cast their votes, and vote counting, and transmission of results are unhindered and peaceful.

- Persons dissatisfied with election outcomes would choose the peaceful option of taking their grievances to court rather than resorting to the self-help option of violence.

Critical Issues Pertaining to Election Security

Free movement of election materials - The first section of this deals with the operational and logistical plans that are made immediately following every general election until election day, in this case, Saturday, February 18, 2023. The reason for this is because INEC typically begins its preparations with a variety of evaluation and lessons-learned workshops, on the basis of which changes in systems and procedures are devised, put into practice during off-season elections, and then adopted for the next general election. The second aspect of this is the freedom of action for election officials on election days. The end-of-tenure elections in Ondo, Edo, and Ekiti amply demonstrated the growing cooperation between INEC and security organizations. However, given the nation's security condition, this may not fall under INEC's exclusive purview.

Candidates are chosen under free and fair conditions - Although INEC is legally obligated to oversee political parties, they (political parties) are free to choose the dates, locations, and procedures for candidate selection based on their standards. An already stressful and unstable environment that the country is facing, the need to regulate these procedures, as in the past, are areas that promote unchecked carpet crossing, produce friction, and result in violence. Such an environment is frequently carried over into

the campaigning period, when parties not only vie for public attention by competing for media and physical space, but also when resentful politicians spoil the broth inside their own parties after falling short in internal party elections.

Free movement of voters and peaceful transmission of results - The INEC has been working diligently to enhance the voting process on election day. Efforts like delimitation, which led to an increase in the number of polling units (from 119, 974 in 2019 to 176, 846 in 2021), the introduction of technology in the voter registration process from manual registers kept in old hard cover notebooks in 2011 to electronic registers and Bimodal Voter Accreditation Systems (BVAS) in 2021 are examples of this.

Discouraging self-help option of violence - The Election Management Body (EMB) prefers that disputes about election results, whether they were held by the Commission or within political parties, be resolved and decided in court rather than turning to violence as a form of self-help. To the judiciary's credit, this obligation is typically carried out honourably. At other times however, the Commission must deal with delayed or conflicting decisions that have an impact on or prolong the nomination process.

Regrettably, operationalizing the above four signs of free and fair elections in a dangerous climate is impossible. Indeed, election fraud is made possible by lack of security. Furthermore, electoral security operates at two realms – the realm of the electronic security, which is termed in this paper as the software electoral security and the physical realm that

is termed the hardware electoral security. Both realms of electoral security are capable of undermining the stability of elections in Nigeria.

It is important to note that electoral insecurity (that is seriously becoming an anecdotal phase of Nigeria's democratic system) is not peculiar to Nigeria as a developing country. Developed countries have their own share of electoral insecurity too. What is significant with the developed states is that their institutions have been strengthened to overcome any form of insecurity from the hardware realm. The developed states are still struggling with the software realm of electoral insecurity. A typical illustration of the software electoral insecurity is the case of cyberattack of the United States during the 2016 presidential election that ushered in President Donald Trump. While this may be international politics at play, as the Russian government also attacked Ukrainian presidential election of 2014, this informs that no state is insulated from electoral insecurity. Furthermore, it is not surprising that the software form of electoral insecurity is not new. Mohan and Wall (2019:110) state that "there is a long history of political and electoral interference by US government and corporate interests in Central America, for example, in Honduras from 1911 and El Salvador in 1944 and 1960."

Critical issues for ICCES

The contextualization of ICCES that this paper attempts to pursue may not be new. The Commission has attempted to pursue this but in a localized manner. INEC, through its research arm, the Research and Documentation

Department (R&D) of the Electoral Institute (TEI), has attempted to conduct a systematic investigation to establish facts about electoral insecurity. R&D conducts the Election Security Threats Assessment (ESTA) by deploring its tool, the Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool (EVMAT). This is used to elicit information from both experts and the general public living in the area. This tool reveals potential election risk factors in an election. It, consequently, identifies early warning signs and provides adequate and appropriate responses. However, the performance of EVMAT itself needs to be systematically improved upon, and the instruments used in eliciting information need to be technically upgraded to achieve the purpose it is set out to do without injuring the good motive of the Commission. The objectives of ICCES are woven around preventive security measures which ought to include research. Undoubtedly, scientific research must provide evidence-based facts. These facts are important in revealing appropriate measures before the conduct of the election.

This notion is understood by the framers of ICCES who have framed its five objectives around preventive measures: to coordinate the design of a comprehensive election security management system for INEC, develop locally focused plans for providing security before, during and after elections, harmonize the training, deployment and actions of security personnel on Election duties, assess existing security threats across the country that have implications for elections and produce a red, amber and green electoral security map for the country, which will be regularly updated, and advise INEC on rapid response to security

threats around elections, including voter registration. Also, ICCES is to ensure a reduction in transaction costs to INEC for dealing with individual security agencies on issues of elections, evaluate the performance of security agencies on election duties and recommend improvements and sanctions, where necessary; and harmonize the election budgets of security agencies and source funding commonly, if possible.

Paradoxically, the deployment of EVMAT, which may likely respond to the five objectives of ICCES has not been widely deployed to cover all elections. Importantly, even though it is seldomly done in a few elections, success stories have been recorded where it is deployed. For example, where the conduct of research in preventing electoral violence has been adopted, electoral security has been recorded. However, this has not been made possible in every election, hence the necessity of a research component into the composition of ICCES. This may serve as another objective of ICCES.

The composition of ICCES is essential to the achievement of the objectives of the Committee. It contains almost all the security agencies in Nigeria. Chairing ICCES is the National Security Adviser while the Independent National Electoral Commission's Chairman serves as the co-chair. Nevertheless, it is critical to remember that the INEC Chairman leads the INEC team to the ICCES at the Federal Level. The INEC team comprises of INEC National Commissioners, INEC Resident Electoral Commissioners at the state level, INEC Directors, and INEC Officers

associated with Election Security. The 19 bodies that are in the Committee are listed below:

1.   The Office of the National Security Adviser
2.   Ministry of Police Affairs
3.   Nigeria Police Force
4.   Police Service Commission
5.   Ministry of Interior
6.   Nigeria Immigration Service
7.   Nigeria Prisons Service
8.   Nigeria Army
9.   Nigerian Navy
10.   Nigeria Air force
11.   State Security Service
12.   National Intelligence Agency
13.   National Drug Law Enforcement Agency
14.   Nigeria Customs Service
15.   Federal Road Safety Corps
16.   Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps
17.   Federal Fire Service
18.   National Youth Service Corps
19.   Independent National Electoral Commission

The formation of INEC's ICCES, in collaboration with other security agencies, provides opportunities for election authorities and security agencies to have the chance of working together to design measures that can ensure a peaceful election. The ICCES gave the major security services the chance to reconsider how they were approaching the Code of Conduct during the elections and

institutionalize operational directives. This Code of Conduct was strictly adhered to at many polling locations, resulting in a seamless and friendly environment for voters to cast their ballots during the general elections in 2015. It was on this achievement that INEC built its preparation and successful conduct of the 2019 general elections, which has been equally described as a free and fair election. However, the challenges that electoral insecurity poses towards the preparation of the 2023 general elections need to be taken seriously and strategies put in place to abate such frontally.

The resurgence of insecurity in elections especially with the preparation for the 2023 general elections requires that ICCES strategize to ensure free and fair elections. This is imperative more so with more ferociously occurring insecurity in many parts of the country. There have been a series of attacks on INEC's infrastructure and personnel (See Table 1). This prompted the Chairman, Prof. Yakubu to declare, during an emergency meeting of ICCES in 2021, that the Commission witnessed a total of 41 events involving intentional attacks on the Commission's infrastructure during the previous two years. 21 of these occurrences occurred in 2020, and nine of them occurred in 2019. Eleven offices of the Commission have experienced vandalism or arson over the past four weeks from thuggery, Boko Haram and bandit attacks during election (Vanguard, 6 June 2021).

Table 1: Nature and Forms of Attacks on Some INEC Infrastructure

Year	Nature of Attacks	Place	Incidence	Form of Attack
3 February 2019	Office burnt down	Office at Isiala-Ngwa South Local Government		Hardware
10 February 2019	Office burnt	Qua'anpan Local Government	Ballot boxes, cubicles, PVCs and other sensitive materials burnt	Hardware
9 March 2019	Office set ablaze	Ezza North Local Government		Hardware
September 10, 2020	Electoral materials destroyed	Office at Akure, Ondo State	5,141 card readers were destroyed	Hardware
October 2020	Office vandalized	Office at Arochukwu Local Government, Abia State.	Electoral materials vandalized	Hardware
13 December 2020	Office burnt down	Office at Aba South Local Government, Abia State	All electoral material and office equipment were destroyed	Hardware
2 May 2021	Office was set ablaze	Office at Essien Udim Local Government, Akwa Ibom	345 ballot box, 135 voting cubicles, megaphones, water tanks office furniture	Hardware
9 May 2021	Office was set ablaze	Office at Ohafia Local Government, Abia State	All electoral material and office equipment were destroyed	Hardware

13 May 2021	Office burnt down	Udenu Local Government, Enugu State	Office and electoral materials destroyed	Hardware
16 May 2021	Office burnt	State headquarters office, Enugu	6 vehicles set ablaze; 2 others destroyed	Hardware
18 May 2021	Office burnt down	Ebonyi Local Government and Ezza Norh Local Government, Ebonyi State	All ballot boxes destroyed, voting cubicles destroyed, generating set, office equipment	Hardware

Source: Compiled by the author, data is culled variously from secondary sources such as Vanguard (6 June 2021, Punch (19 April 2022).

According to Hafiz Ringim, a former inspector general of police, 520 people, including nine National Youth Service Corps members, perished in the violence that followed the results of the 2011 elections (Punch, 19 April 2022). An estimated 626 people, including one INEC employee, were also killed throughout Nigeria in the six months between the beginning of the election campaign and the start of the 2019 general and supplementary elections (ThisDay, 3 October 2022). Though ICCES has been a successful electoral inter-agency committee, the exclusion of academic/research components into its work is considered a major drawback.

Why is the academic/research component in ICCES necessary?

Just like the general insecurity situation in the country that, seemingly, had hitherto defied solution as a result of its prevalence and dimension, electoral violence is assuming a

dangerous trend because it has manifested in kidnapping, banditry, and hijacking, among others. This may have a catalytic effect on the forthcoming elections. Situation Room, a civil society organization observes thus:

> … the threat from Boko Haram had grown in recent months, with fresh attacks in Maiduguri against Nigerian security forces and thereby threatening the conduct of elections. Most foreign election observer missions had declined to observe the elections in the North-East region of Nigeria (Situation room, n.d.).

It is preponderantly important to have a component of research in the composition of the Committee so that pockets of electoral violence that have destroyed INEC infrastructure and also created fear in the minds of eligible election workers and voters would be prevented. When voters do not turn out (adequately) to vote, it is a bad omen for the country's democratic consolidation. Hoglund and Jarstad (2011:38) pointedly link electoral insecurity to a broken democracy. They argue that the methods used to stop election-related violence are inextricably linked to the initiatives taken in transitional societies to lessen conflict and advance democracy. According to the authors, it is possible to note that the conditions necessary to effectively manage and avoid electoral violence are frequently not present. This is so because election-related violence is a sign of a broken democracy or an authoritarian regime that nonetheless holds elections. Consequently, in order to reduce electoral insecurity, the author propounds five strategies: monitoring,

mediation, legal measures, law enforcement and self-regulation.

The Strength of ICCES

The main bulwark for the success of ICCES thus far is the unification of the body in which several security agents have brought their security experiences and strategies to bear on electoral security. Such unification has not been found in any agency of government in the country. Supporting this thesis, Olusola Odumosu, the Director for Public Relations of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), as cited by a national daily, The Guardian (14 October 2022), observes that the reassurance of the propensity of ICCES to overcome challenges inhibiting electoral security in Nigeria resides in its conglomeration of security agents. According to Olusola Odumosu, the only way to achieve national security is through collaboration and synergy among security agencies, as no single organization has exclusive control over how to tackle security difficulties.

The Weakness of ICCES

One major weakness of ICCES is that its composition is state centric. It is preponderant on ICCES to reflect the democratic system of the country. ACE Electoral Knowledge Network Project (n.d.) posits that in order to simplify their operation in an election, security officials may occasionally find it necessary to pursue liaison with and engagement with the local community. Thus, it is important for ICCES to have its composition diffused with a view to containing the civil society. Such diffusion in the composition of ICCES would avail the regional informal security networks to participate in

the security of elections. This is likened to the involvement of anti-corruption agencies Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) in electoral security. For example, against the background of vote buying that occurred in the last gubernatorial election of 18 June 2022 in Ekiti State, while speaking at a special meeting of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) held in Abuja, INEC Chairman Prof. Mahmood Yakubu admitted that vote-buying continues to be a significant issue for the Commission. Nevertheless, he commended the security and anti-corruption agencies for quickly detaining some of the individuals in charge of what he called a "brazen assault" on Nigeria's democracy during the election (Voice of Nigeria, 4 July 2022).

Furthermore, in conglomerating an array of security agents such as displayed by ICCES, financial implications for INEC cannot be underestimated. This is imperative more so with the finances of various security agencies in the country that are dwindling as a result of many security engagements including the fight against terrorism. According to ACE Project (n.d.), security and electoral authorities may disagree over the terms of the payment for security services. If there is disagreement, it will mostly be about who should bear the costs—whether they should be borne as part of the election process (and thus by the electoral administration body), or as a responsibility of the security forces—and the significant costs associated with such massive operations (and therefore by the budget of the security forces).

ICCES Lacks Gender Inclusiveness

It is imperative for the composition of ICCES to be gender sensitive since both men and women are victims of deficiency in electoral security. In Nigeria, at almost every element of political organization, men have always manoeuvred themselves into every political machinery. Reuters (13 February 2019), quoting INEC, reports that election results highlight how males control Nigerian politics. It adds that the electoral commission estimated that women made up 47% of registered voters in 2019, yet they were underrepresented in politics. The implication of this is that ICCES ought to have some feminizing outlook in electoral security. This would serve as an entry point for the Committee to address electoral violence against women before, during and after elections. In other words, ICCES can increase the number of women on their team, explore the security apprehensions exclusive to gender in operational planning for electoral security, and direct myriad of violent cases against women to gender focal points or gender desks.

The gender relativity of ICCES can take the form of female groups inclusion into its security operations. The women groups would assist the Committee in conducting risk assessments for women, which can be incorporated into the entire security assessments, and this would to a great extent, address violence against women. UNDP and UN (2017) states that electoral umpires can locate hotspot locations and create efficient monitoring and mitigation measures by conducting risk assessments, mapping Violence Against Women in Election (VAWE), and including

this dimension into general security evaluations. In order to ensure the safety of women throughout the voter and candidate registration processes, ICCES can make changes to the location, operating hours, and security procedures of candidate registration offices. It can also keep voters' names and other identifying information private (anonymous registration).

ICCES is Overcentralized

It has been observed that ICCES is only operating actively at the centre, both at federal and state levels. Such important security mechanism of the electoral umpire needs be domesticated across all layers of government in the country. In other words, ICCES should have wider operational management scope than it is currently doing. This is imperative for it to have grassroot effects. This is because electoral insecurity that has pervaded the country often occurs at the local level than it happens at the centre. Intuitively, therefore, it would be of significant importance for the country to have ICCES arm active at both local government and state levels. Data on electoral insecurity can then be collated symmetrically across these two tiers of government, while the state would serve as the processing block, ICCES at the centre would coordinate other arms and also serve as the decision-making arm. ACE Project (n.d.) notes that, in an election, security officials may occasionally find it necessary to pursue liaison with and engagement with the local community, arguing that this can be helpful. It suggests a trustworthy security focal point (or team) may be chosen as a dedicated route for election-related security issues if further action is required.

Key Findings

Key findings arising from this paper is that much as the ICCES is a joint committee of INEC and other security agencies, it has been bedeviled with the following:

1. There is a gap between ICCES and academic/research with regard to electoral security.

2. There is a little systematic investigation on electoral security before the general elections.

3. There is no effective monitoring to ensure that the causes of population displacement are addressed.

4. Electoral security is still not present as personnel of INEC are being attacked and properties belonging to the Commission are destroyed.

5. ICCES is not gender sensitive in its composition.

6. ICCES is state centric in its composition.

Conclusion

It is apparent that politics in Nigeria like any other African country will continue to witness pockets of insecurity as the players have not realized the importance of elections that it is meant to provide for the public good via the election of individuals who share in the feelings of their fellow men and women. It is, therefore, necessary that ICCES strengthens its committee by integrating and partnering with academia/research thinktanks for evidenced based facts. It is necessary that ICCES has first-hand information on electoral security in order to deploy its strategies. Such strategies cannot be deployed without the conduct of

systematic investigations. This makes the integration of research component into the work and operations of the ICCES a necessary approach.

Recommendations

Monitoring: Supervision and Shaming - Election-related actors, including voters, election workers, political parties, and the electoral administration, are expected to operate impartially and professionally. While electoral monitoring missions serve a variety of purposes, the primary focus is on observing and documenting violence.

Mediation: Transfer of Trust to a Third Party - In the technique of negotiation known as mediation, an outsider tries to involve the parties in a process whose goal is to resolve a dispute or conflict through communication and compromise. The foundation of mediation in tense situations is trust-building. When the participants in election disputes or violent acts do not trust one another, they may nevertheless be able to trust a neutral third party who is committed to mediating the situation. Mediators may make an effort to take into account the worries of each actor, look for agreements, and be successful in persuading the actors to agree to alter their behaviour. A variety of different actors participate in election-related mediation: electoral management bodies may send out mediation teams; local NGOs and/or community organizations may support and coordinate mediation efforts; and international organizations or states may take on higher-level mediation between the disputing parties (Hoglund and Jarstad, 2011:38).

Legal Measures: Setting Standards - This strategy's most crucial mechanism is that the law clearly defines the rules of engagement and establishes the criteria for political activity. This approach is transparent and open to ensure that both politicians and regular persons are aware of the judicial norms. It offers a legal framework for controlling behaviour and aids in resolving conflicts through adjudication and judicial remedies. The election law frequently lays forth the basic judicial framework to handle electoral violence. Such legislation could outline the legal restrictions on the use of force, the purpose and authority of the organizations in charge of managing elections, and the requirements for candidates (Hoglund and Jarstad, 2011:38).

Law Enforcement: Deterrence and Accountability - The legislative restrictions on the use of violence are powerless instruments if electoral laws are not upheld. By presence, supervision, investigations, arrests, and use of force, the police and other security forces, in some cases, ensure that electoral laws are upheld. The ongoing debate and possible establishment of an Electoral Offences Tribunal (EOT) may help curtail election-related insecurity.

Self-Regulation: Cultivation of Political Tolerance - By taking such actions, society as a whole can foster democratic norms of tolerance and moral commitment to nonviolence. Political parties and community-based organizations, including commercial cooperatives, religious institutions, and civil rights organizations, among others, can play important roles as agents of violence prevention from below. Local agreements between electoral stakeholders and

cooperatively agreed-upon discussions are included in the self-regulation strategy. The election-related parties use this tactic to try and control both their own and other people's behaviour. This bottom-up, neighbourhood-based approach has evolved into institutionalized peace mechanisms in South Africa (Hoglund and Jarstad, 2011:38).

Creation of a research component with ICCES - ICCES should create a research component in which investigation would be conducted before the election. There should be a collaboration between ICCES and academics.

ICCES needs to be domesticated - ICCES should be decentralized in a way that it's arms at both local government and state levels would be more active. This would allow quicker understanding of issues of electoral security within communities. The operational management scope of ICCES operations should be broader than it is at the moment. This is essential for the crucial security mechanism to have a widespread impact.

The composition of ICCES should be diffused to include civil society - ICCES should involve the civil society groups in its composition. This is necessary for the Committee to pursue liaison and engagement with the local communities.

ICCESS should have gender inclusiveness - ICCES should have gender inclusiveness by admitting female civil society groups and more female security agents into its security operations. The women groups would assist the Committee in conducting risk assessments for women, which can be incorporated into the entire security assessments. This

would, to a great extent, address violence against women before, during and after elections and as well, tackle gender inequality.

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List of Abbreviations

ABIS	–	Automated Biometric Identification System
APC	–	All Progressives Congress
BVAS	–	Bimodal Voters Accreditation System
CCSE	–	Canadian Communication Security Establishment
CTIIC	–	Cyber Threat Intelligent Integration Centre
DDoS	–	Distributed Denial-of-Service
DIA	–	Defence Intelligence Agency
DoS	–	Denial of Service
DSS	–	Department of Security Services
EFCC	–	Economic and Financial Crime Commission
EMB	–	Election Management Body
EOT	–	Electoral Offences Tribunal
ESSP	–	Electoral Security Strategy & Plans
ESTA	–	Election Security Threats Assessment
EVM	–	Electronic Voting Machine
EVMAT	–	Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool
FCC	–	Federal Character Commission
FCT	–	Federal Capital Territory
FES	–	Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung Nigeria
FFS	–	Federal Fire Service
HoR	–	House of Representatives
HTTPS	–	Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure
ICC	–	Intelligence Community Committee
ICCES	–	Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security
ICPC	–	Independent Corrupt Practices Commission
ICSS	–	Imperial Cyber Security Solution
ICT	–	Information and Communications Technology
IDPs	–	Internally Displaced Persons
IFES	–	International Foundation for Electoral System
INEC	–	Independent National Electoral Commission
IReV	–	INEC Result Viewing Portal
IVED	–	Voters Enrolment Device
JIB	–	Joint Intelligence Board
LAN	–	Local Area Network
LCP	–	Ladder of Citizen Participation

LGA	–	Local Government Areas
MitM	–	Man in the Middle
MoD	–	Ministry of Defence
NA	–	Nigerian Army
NAF	–	Nigerian Air Force
NCS	–	Nigerian Correctional Service
NCS	–	Nigerian Customs Service
NDLEA	–	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency
NHRC	–	National Human Rights Commission
NIA	–	National Intelligence Agency
NIS	–	Network and Information Systems
NIS	–	Nigerian Immigration Service
NLC	–	Nigeria Labour Congress
NN	–	Nigerian Navy
NNPP	–	New Nigeria Peoples Party
NPF	–	Nigeria Police Force
NSCDC	–	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps
NTP	–	Network Time Protocol
NYSC	–	National Youth Service Corps
ONSA	–	Office of the National Security Adviser
PCC	–	Public Complaints Commission
PDP	–	People's Democratic Party
PRP	–	Peoples Redemption Party
PSC	–	Police Service Commission
PTSD	–	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PVC	–	Permanent Voters Card
SIEC	–	State Independent Electoral Commissions
SVA	–	Security Vulnerability Assessment
SYN	–	Synchronize
TEI	–	Electoral Institute
TMG	–	Transition Monitoring Group
UN	–	United Nations
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
USIST	–	US National Institute of Standards and Technology
Wi-Fi	–	Wireless Fidelity

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