

International Agency (USID) and Democratic Elections: A Prognosis to the Role of Security Personnels in Nigerian 2015 Elections



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ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of an international Agency (USAID) and Democratic Election; A Prognosis to the role of Security Personnel in Nigerian 2015 Elections. USAID and other international Agencies have relentlessly assisted both the emerging and consolidating democracies such as Nigeria, in conducting free and fair elections via provision of some forms of technical assistance so as to achieve credible elections and ensure improved governance but in spite of all these, events and happenings from developed democracies and across the globe have shown that the vitality of election security to the credibility of elections cannot be ignored because the conduct of free and fair elections to a large extent depend on the security system available in the country. This study anchored on Elite theory propounded by Pareto and Gaetano with descriptive qualitative method of data collection and Content analysis. It discovered that the fact that consistently undermined democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the varying degrees and measures of electoral violence so it therefore recommends that impartial and unbiased security agencies should be recruited for each election in order to prevent the reoccurrence of electoral violence during each election.

KEY WORDS: Election, Democratic, International Agency(USAID), Security, Electoral Violence.

INTRODUCTION

Without gainsaying, elections are at the core of the democratic process, therefore, elections that are free from pressure, inappropriate influence and fear is sacrosanct. To achieve this (i.e. free, fair and credible elections), continuing efforts are being made by state, non-state actors and international organizations to ensure free and fair conduct and administration of elections in order to guarantee and ensure credibility. Underscoring the utmost significance of credible elections worldwide, USAID and some other related international agencies over the last three decades have relentlessly assisted both the emerging and consolidating democracies in conducting free and fair elections. Over the intervening decades, these international organizations have provided some forms of technical assistance so as to guarantee credible elections and ensure improved governance and societal well-being in the country concerned. But be as it may, in spite of what agencies such as USAID and others have done in ensuring credible elections worldwide, findings from social survey, specifically from emerging democracies in the world, have shown that qualities of elections and electoral integrity are easily compromised in places where credibility of election and election administration were lacking or doubted. In this wise, the credibility of electoral results and the concomitant legitimacy it confers on the emergent government revolve around how well the issue of election security is managed. Events and happenings from developed democracies around the world have shown that the importance of election security to the credibility of elections cannot be overemphasized as the conduct and administration of free, fair and credible elections to a great extent depend on the security system available in any democratic setting. Hence, the development and employment of various security measures by various governments and electoral commissions in both consolidated and emerging democracies to guarantee election credibility and consequently prevent legitimacy crisis. Sean Dunne, commenting on the significance of elections security, avers that, reliable security during an electoral process is pivotal to enhancing participants' confidence and commitment to an election. He, inter alia argued further that security remains an inseparable part of the electoral process. In brief, the importance of a secured atmosphere for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections cannot be downplayed. To this effect, the unalloyed contributions of governments at all levels and the readiness of security agencies to deal with security challenges before, during, and after elections cannot be overemphasized.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the elite theory as the theoretical framework. The elite theory was first developed by two Italian Sociologists namely: Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca. The earlier versions of the theory emphasized personal attributes of leaders, which aided their hold or dominance in power positions. Later versions dwelt more on the institutional framework of society (Haralambos, 1999: 107). The thrust of the theory are as follows:

- Elite owes its power to its internal organization and forms a united and cohesive minority in the face of an unorganized and fragmented mass.
- Major decisions which affect society are taken by the elite, and these decisions usually reflect the interest of the elite rather than the wishes of the majority.
- The mass of the population is largely controlled and manipulated by the elite, passively accepting the propaganda which justifies elite rule. iv. Major change in society occurs when one elite replaces another. Pareto refers to this as “circulation of elites” and he noted that “all elite tend to become decadent.
- The rule by a minority is an inevitable feature of social life and that the ruling minority is superior to the mass of the population who lack capacity for self-government and require the leadership and guidance of an elite. Mosca (in Haralambos, 1999: 109).

Mosca corroborated that “the first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first”. vi. Pareto typified modern democracies as merely another form of elite domination. Mosca averred that democracy could be government of the people, “it might even be government for the people, but it could never be government by the people.

APPLICATION OF THE THEORY

The governing elite in Nigeria deriving from their social characteristics and privileges of office operate as a formidable team against the mass (people) who are encumbered by daily pressure for sustenance and necessities of life. The manipulative tendencies and tool by the elite inhibit any genuine effort to advance common cause in form of qualitative education, shelter, basic infrastructure and other social amenities as deliverables of democratic governance. Madunagu (2005: 1) validated this in his assertion that “the dominant fraction of the Nigerian ruling classes does not use the wealth they loot...for the benefit of „their people“, although these poor people whose names are invoked in vain are often mobilized to fight their imaginary enemies”. The reference to looting of the nation’s wealth above reinforces the serial argument by scholars and public analysts/social commentators that the governing elites in Nigeria (past and present) are complicit in resource plunder, and as an extension of the colonial state, the post-colonial state represented by the governing elite is also predatory and exploitative. Additionally, Onyishi (2007: 197) documented that “...the post-colonial state never became a reflection of the contending social forces within society. This inorganic character of the emergent Nigerian state meant that it would...not encapsulate a social contract The challenge of service delivery, infrastructural deficits and qualitative life for citizenry among others demonstrate that the expected democratic dividends have not been delivered. The governing elite in Nigeria may have become decadent and ineffective due to pleasures of easy living and privileges of power in the words of Pareto. ANEEJ (2004: 16) reinforced this issue while identifying the existence of a predatory state and elite in Nigeria, and submitted with finality that “this may therefore explain the lack of development in the country...” From independence to date, Nigeria has witnessed the “circulation of elites” as theorized by Pareto; this implies that one elite replaces another in order that major change in society can occur. It is however doubtful if major and qualitative changes had taken place to position the country in the big league in development terms.

ELECTIONS AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Election security in Nigeria, particularly since the introduction of multi-party election in 1999, has been the subject of scholarly discussion and writing. Multiple reviews of works of scholars’ in this area has reaffirmed the fact that, the place of effective and efficient functioning of security agents cannot be overemphasized as far as the conduct of free, fair and credible election is concerned in any democratic setting. As evinced by Adele Jinadu, election security transcends voting and other activities taking place on the voting day alone. Literally, electoral security has been ably expressed ‘as the deliberate prevention of electoral governance from distortions, violations and manipulations; in such a way that legitimacy of democratic elections and democratic political succession would be guaranteed’. As a whole, securing election begins from taking steps necessary in ensuring the safety of the electoral process and at the same time creates a safe and secured environment, which in turn would allow electorates to participate in electoral process without undue pressure, intimidation, and fear before, during and after voting exercise (UNOWA, 2009). In addition to the above, electoral security involves the physical security of items such as buildings, vehicles, election materials and gadgets; and personal security of people such as electorates, representatives of different political parties, observers, staff and workers of the body saddle with the management of elections; and the general public. Specifically, in 2015 Nigeria’s general elections, security agencies were engaged to provide basic security to voters, people at political rallies and electioneering campaigns, conventions election

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materials, electoral staff, observers, party agents, and other stakeholders before and on the days of elections. Closely related to the foregoing, are unalloyed contributions of security personnel to ensure there is a free, fair, safe and lawful atmosphere electioneering campaigns for all parties without discriminating against any party and candidates around polling and collation centers. In addition to this, guaranteeing the security of election materials during transportation, at the voting centers, during registration of voters, and during elections records update and other electoral events are without doubt part of the constitutional responsibilities of security agents during every election in Nigeria. At this juncture, there exists the need to establish the fact that the onerous task of achieving free, fair and credible elections does not solely lie with election regulatory body alone. From the time of conduct of elections in 2011, security agencies, particularly the Nigerian police have recorded little or no success in curbing electoral violence in the country. In spite of the fact that provision of adequate security before, during and after elections is part of the constitutionally assigned responsibilities and functions of police department, the agency has not fared well as far as policing elections is concerned [37]. In so much that election security challenge in Nigeria cannot be totally divorced from general problems of insecurity and security environment arising from kidnapping and abduction, incessant bombings, kidnapping and abduction as well as armed robberies, yet, insecurity associated with conduct of elections has been on the rise mainly because security agents whose presence during elections is mainly to enhance the delivery of electoral services have rather chosen to remain tools in the hands of politicians for perpetrating electoral malpractices. Without mincing words, history of elections in Nigeria (apart from 2015 general elections) is chequered with electoral violence of phenomenal proportion while a considerable portion of the blame is put at the doorstep of security agencies. To many Nigerians, memories of complicity by security operatives in facilitating electoral fraud in the past elections still lingers. Another common problem associated with security agencies which reared its ugly head in all past elections in Nigeria and which have consequently undermined election security is the paucity of enforcement. Despite the enormous powers conferred on security agencies, there has been a recurrent failure on their part to expeditiously prosecute electoral offenders in all past elections before 2011. In spite of the enormity and commonness of antics of political thugs in virtually all elections conducted in the country so far; the Nigeria Police rarely enforced the legal instruments prohibiting armed thuggery before, during and after elections despite the fact that this is well entrenched in Section 207, 225 and 227 of the 1979, 1989, and 1999 constitutions of Nigeria. A case that readily comes to mind is that of Late Chief Lamidi Adedibu who was known to have maintained loosely organized group of thugs for the purposes of electoral contests [37]. Adedibu up to the time of his demise was not arrested for once by security agents (this of course was due largely to his connection with the ruling party) in spite of the fact that he was keeping and maintaining something similar to private army. The similitude of what can be termed as high level partisanship of security operatives in the country re-enacted itself two days before June 21, 2015 Gubernatorial elections in Ekiti state.

THE USE OF SECURITY MEN IN UNDERMINING THE 2015 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

The 2015 general elections, the fifth since the beginning of fourth republic (the republic is the longest one ever in the country) as predicted by scholars to be the most heated and hotly contested general elections in the history of democracy in Nigeria even months before a single vote was cast. These varied, though related predictions were all premised on the spate of violent acts that preceded the preparations for and the conduct of 2015 elections, most especially between the two major political parties (the ruling People's Democratic Party-PDP and All Progressives Congress-APC). Another distinct reason alluded for such predictions was hinged on the fact that 2015 general election would be the first in the history of elections in Nigeria when opposition party was considered strong enough to wrestle power from the ruling part. This line of thought was a watershed because Federal level power has never been rotated between political parties through democratic process before 2015. In line with the above, preparations for the elections elicited unprecedented concerns for voters, security managers and other users of the electoral system within the country and beyond. Indeed, the highlighted elections-related concerns became more intense and exasperated by other existing security challenges such as Boko-haram dastardly acts, bombs attacks and kidnappings, orchestrated armed robbery and violent clashes between opposing political groups in the country. Another concern was the huge doubt about the capability and capacities of the President Jonathan's government to match its talk with work by effectively mobilizing, coordinating the deployment of security personnel to secure 2015 elections. Eventually, the much anticipated 2015 general elections took place in the midst of myriad security concerns, particularly, the steady rising wave of Boko Haram insurgency in the country. The presidential election was conducted on March 28; the election was perhaps, one of the most bitterly fought in the annals of elections in Nigeria. Indeed, the polls occurred after a controversial six-week postponement following insistence by the National Security Adviser and other security related agencies that the election should be postponed for the newly constituted multinational force to accelerate battle against insurgents in the North-eastern part of the country which has been suffering attacks from terrorist sect, Boko Haram. In all, the conduct of security agents had a positive impact on the entire electoral process; their efforts consequently, prevented electoral violence in many areas and thus facilitated the overall peaceful conduct of elections. Apart from providing security for INEC materials and officials particularly in the midst of security threats; security agents were able to provide secured atmosphere that enabled Nigerians to throng polling booths to exercise their rights to choose their representative leadership (CDD, 2015). In the final analysis, the elections were hailed by many local and international observers as free and fair; nonetheless, the electoral process

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was regarded as an imperfect, but visibly a maturing one. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was commended from all quarters for organising the elections in a professional and credible “manner particularly under challenging circumstances” and also for setting up the Inter-Agency Consultative committee on Election Security which to a considerable extent helped in achieving relatively orderly and effective administrations of 2015 elections. In line with the extent of serenity that pervaded the entire political landscape in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections, the Punch Newspaper of April 29, 2015 avers that the general view of the security presence at polling units was positive, unlike other previous elections in Nigeria. According to this newspaper, police were visible in all polling stations and were not obtrusive. The conduct of security agents during the elections was generally seen as mature and professional. Indeed, to a considerable extent, a notable departure from the past was noticeable in the conduct of security agents during the 2015 general elections. In fact, contrary to expectations of many Nigerians, rivalry common among different security agencies was nonexistent unlike before. In its place there was an effective coordination of all security agencies that participated in 2015 elections under the group known as Inter-Agency Consultative Committee. The elections throughout the country was devoid of incidents of inter agencies rivalry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Elections and election administration in Nigeria have long fascinated political and other social scientists. Scholars at different times have argued that part of the factors which have consistently undermined democratic consolidation in the country is varying degrees and measures of electoral violence (before, during and after election) which have become infused into political processes of the country and is gradually turning itself to the national face of Nigerian politics. For much too long, violence has almost become synonymous to elections in Nigeria. As a transitional democracy, elections have created a number of precarious situations that have constantly threatened the stability of democracy in the country. Various past elections in Nigeria have underscore the fact that the provision of secured environment and general security during elections is one of the necessitating factors for conduct of free and fair elections. Findings from scientific research works on past general elections in the country have shown that politicians and electorates would have no other choice than to play by the rules of the game in the context where security is guaranteed. In essence, election security which can largely be made possible by the presence of impartial and unbiased security agents will enhance and guarantee the delivery of electoral services. In relation to the above, one of the most important agencies responsible for achieving free, fair and credible elections especially in transitional democracy such as Nigeria’s is security. In many developing societies, security agencies are recognized as ‘markers’ or ‘guardians’ of polls; to many, their presence and activities on, before and after elections could make or mar success of any election. In Nigeria, security agents especially the police have been perennially lampooned for their partisanship during elections. The absence of adequate election security over the years has compromised the democratic qualities of elections in Nigeria. Security agents have been accused of not being independent, competent, and have consistently failed to discharge their responsibilities professionally with due recourse to the rule of law particularly respect for the fundamental human rights of the electorates. Indeed, and rather unfortunately, the inability of security agents to act within these ethical codes during previous elections is seen as one of the fundamental cogs in the wheels of election security in Nigeria. Fortunately, however, a notable departure from the past was noticeable in the conduct of security agents during the 2015 elections; several ills associated with security agents during past elections have been blocked so far, however, there still exists room for significant improvement.

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