

MILITARIZATION OF ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: A BANE OF DEMOCRATIC GROWTH*

NİJERYA'DA SEÇİMLERİN ASKERİLEŞTİRİLMESİ: DEMOKRATİK BÜYÜME İÇİN BİR ENGEL

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Abstract: Since the return to democracy in 1999, elections in Nigeria have been an integral component of the democratization process and a necessary exercise for good governance. However, in successive elections, the procedures and periods of electioneering have often been fraught with threats and risks of electoral violence, which has significantly contributed to undoing long and hard-fought democratic gains. Furthermore, incumbent leaders have been accused of using state power to intimidate opposition candidates and their support base, with election processes being abused by some African governments to impose undemocratic practices.

This paper focuses on the role of the military in influencing elections in Nigeria. It uses the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria as case studies. This paper argues that using the military in elections not only lacks a constitutional basis but contributes to electoral violence, deaths and destruction of property.

Keywords: Nigeria, Military, Election, Democracy.

Öz: 1999'da demokrasiye dönüşten bu yana, Nijerya'daki seçimler demokratikleşme sürecinin ayrılmaz bir parçası ve iyi yönetim için gerekli bir uygulama olmuştur. Bununla birlikte, birbirini izleyen seçimlerde, seçim propagandasının prosedürleri ve dönemleri, genellikle, uzun ve zorlu demokratik kazanımların geri alınmasında önemli ölçüde payı bulunan seçim şiddeti tehditleri ve riskleriyle dolu olmuştur. Ayrıca, görevdeki liderler, bazı Afrika hükümetleri tarafından demokratik olmayan uygulamaları empoze etmek için seçim süreçlerini kötüye kullanarak, muhalefet adaylarını ve onların destek tabanını sindirmek için devlet gücünü kullanmakla suçlanıyor.

Bu makale, Nijerya'daki seçimleri etkilemede ordunun rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Örnek olay incelemesi olarak Nijerya'daki 2019 ve 2023 genel seçimlerini kullanılmıştır. Bu makale, seçimlerde ordunun kullanılmasının yalnızca anayasal bir temelden yoksun olmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda seçim şiddetine, ölümlere ve mülke zarar vermeye neden olduğunu tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nijerya, Demokrasi, Askeri, Seçimler.

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Introduction

In the last couple of decades, elections in Africa, have not only been an integral component of its post-independence and democratization process, but a core tenet and utmost requirement for its engagement with the international community. Periodic and genuine elections are seen as a key component for enhancing the legitimacy of a government and strengthening the social contract between citizens and their governments.¹ However, in many African countries, the processes and periods of electioneering, have often been fraught with threats and risks of electoral violence, which has contributed greatly to undoing long and hard-fought democratic gains. Furthermore, incumbent leaders have been accused of using state power to intimidate opposition candidates and their support base, with election processes being abused by some African governments to impose undemocratic practices.

Although elections are only one component of the democratic and legitimisation process, where successful, have resulted in significant progress toward peace and stability in the region. However, election-related violence remains a concern, as incidents of electoral violence highlights how elections can hold grave implications for national and regional stability. In Africa, it is estimated that about 19 to 25 percent of all electoral processes experience mid to high levels of violence². Also, actions by the military and other security services, as well pose threats and aggravate tensions around the polls and undermine the credibility of their outcomes. Nigeria is no exception to this, as the presence and involvement of security services during elections, has been reported by some domestic and international election observers, which is threatening the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Militarization in the context of elections should also be understood as the increased deployment of military forces for various reasons, and this results in the domination of civil institutions in ways that affect the electoral process and its integrity. Since the 1999 elections, militarization has become a staple of the elections and this is tied to the characteristics of the Nigerian government as well as the great importance that political hopefuls give to securing state power. Research suggests that electoral politics in Nigeria is linked to the process of primitive accumulation, because there is no compromise or moderation and security lies only in the accumulation of state power, with the consequences being the detriment of genuine democratic rule³. Seeing that the central government is structured to wield majority of political power and resources, candidates resort to negative actions before, during and after the elections with little concern to the antidemocratic effects afterwards. It is also argued that the many years of military rule imposed on a civil society is what brought forth the political culture of militarization, where desperate politicians take up a combative

1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) Art 21, para.3

2 Dorina Bekoe. (2010). "Trends in Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Peace Brief 13, United Nations Institute of Peace*

3 Onuoha, F. C., Okafor, J. C., Ojewale, O., & Okoro, C. (2020). Militarisation of the 2019 general elections and electoral integrity in Nigeria. *The Round Table*, 109(4), 407.

stance ready to mobilise violence for political advantage, and on the other hand, those in power tend to mobilise the state power (military) in order to keep the political advantage that they have. The political environment as a result of historical precedent, encourages combative and confrontational postures instead of dialogue, negotiation, and consensus.

Generally, during the elections, the military will; serve as members of the electoral management body; render administrative assistance and support, or provide protection for election materials and security against election related violence and misdemeanour. The level of involvement is what causes the contention about militarization of elections and there are two perspectives in this regard. On one end, it is argued that because of the level of violence characterised in Nigerian elections, combined with ineffective policing, it is necessary to deploy the military. Furthermore, the logistics required to transport election materials to difficult-to-reach areas provide justification for deploying military personnel. The other side of the argument states that military involvement is illegal and politicians use this to intimidate the opposition. It is also argued that force deployment also creates an air of fear and adds to voter apathy⁴.

Nigerian election cycles have been known to pose dangers to its masses and national security. However, free and fair elections for the concluded 2019 February elections, was a promise made by the incumbent government, as well as the country's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This prioritization was built upon the outcome of the 2015 electoral process which was deemed credible by its citizens, domestic and international election observers and monitors. This outcome saw the historic, peaceful and democratic transition of power to the opposition in 2015, when incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), conceded defeat to General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.) of the All-Progressives Congress (APC). Nevertheless, the concluded 2019 elections, was fraught with electoral violence, and the use of security agencies, before, during and after the period, left scores of Nigerians disenfranchised, killed and properties destroyed.

According to the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM), approximately 145 people were killed in election-related violence, 84 of which were in the South-South zone.⁵ Additionally, INEC reported in Rivers state that, "collation centres were invaded by some soldiers and armed gangs resulting in the intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials, with the PDP arguing that the "militarisation" of the elections depressed turnout in parts of the country, notably in the South-South and South-East zones." The EU-EOM also noted its "displeasure with the role played by some soldiers and armed gangs."⁶ Beyond the overall issue of the effect of the military on voters in various parts of the country, there were other concerns

4 Ibid, p.408.

5 European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria (2019) Final Report, p.35

6 INEC press release: (March 15, 2019). Rivers State Governorship Election.

of interference in the electoral process by military personnel, as noted by INEC and others in Rivers. This and other challenges in the overall electoral framework, led the EU-EOM in their report to advocate a need for “fundamental electoral reform” due to “systemic failings witnessed in the elections”.

Prior to the 2023 general elections, the President Muhammadu Buhari was cautioned by the human rights activist Special Advocate of Nigeria, Femi Falana to prevent the militarization of the elections, stating that instead of ‘terrorising voters’, soldiers be restricted to their bases and placed at alert⁷. A contradiction can be identified in that, even though the SAN cautioned the President against militarization of the electoral process, the open letter still suggests that as a result of movement being restricted, the police, and para-military forces should be deployed to maintain law and order during the general elections⁸. Casting back to the 2014 governorship elections, in reference to the excessive deployment of troops, the statement by the Civil group ‘Say No Campaign’ still remained valid in the 2024 context; *the over-whelming militarization of politics, engenders a consequent politicization of the military, that may lead to a situation where a politicized military strikes and cashes in on a general crisis partly created and partly reinforced by the militarization of politics and civic life, and truncates the democratic experiment*. Therefore, with the government not having dealt with societal and governance issues that inspire wanton violence during elections, the continued reliance on militarized force not only causes voter apathy and mistrust in the electoral process, voters are less likely to seek participation in the process entirely⁹.

The trend in voter turnout has been declining since 2011 which stood at 53.68%, 2015 saw a 47.09% turnout, with 2019 at 35.66%. With 25million people who voted in the 2023 general elections, the 29% voter turnout suggested the lowest turnout in Africa at the time according to the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)¹⁰. Reporting also suggested that citizens distrusted the elections, the poor economic conditions and violence also stood as reasons for the low turnout even though a lot more people were registered to vote at 93million which was the highest in any election. With the lack of confidence in the electoral process to produce a preferred leader, harassment and voter intimidation before the elections also created fear and disinterest, moreover, lingering fear of insurgent attacks combined with the currency scarcity issue affected the voting process in Northeastern Nigeria¹¹.

Thus, it can be argued that the use and abuse of military influence in elections

7 Nwafor Sunday, (2023). *Falana to Buhari: Stop militarization of 2023 election*. Vanguard. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/02/falana-to-buhari-stop-militarization-of-2023-election/>

8 Ibid.

9 Azeez Olaniyan, PhD’ & Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao. *Election As Warfare: Militarization of Elections and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*. <https://docslib.org/doc/7289666/election-as-warfare-militarization-of-elections-and-the-challenges-of-democratic-consolidation-in-nigeria>

10 Beloved John (2023). *2023 elections: Nigeria’s voter turnout drops to lowest*. ICIR. <https://www.icirnigeria.org/2023-elections-nigerias-voter-turnout-drops-to-lowest/>

11 Ibid.

hinders democratic growth, because, military-induced or facilitated election-related violence may erode the trust of the masses in the election process and by extension, lead to lack of confidence in the wider democratic process. Furthermore, it raises fears and concerns about institutional biases; if these agencies act or are perceived to act in a partisan manner, they could undermine free and fair polls and heighten the risks of violence, particularly after the vote. This paper therefore examines the role of the military in perpetuating electoral violence. This is with the aim to minimize militarization of elections in Nigeria.

Democracy and Democratic Elections

Democracy is the most popular political system practiced in the world today and Africa is no exception. If we are to go by the media coverage of democracy, one could readily be led to believe that democracy is just a synonym of good governance. This is more so that the good governance and the success of many developed countries have been attributed to the practice of democracy, while the collapse and failure of several other regimes or governments have been explained mainly in terms of the absence of democracy. In a general sense “democracy” is used to describe a system of government in which ultimate power (or sovereignty) rests with the people.¹²

The system of democracy includes procedures, values and principles which are imperative to keep power in the hands of the people. Also, they strengthen state structures for greater transparency, rule of law and accountability in governance. This in turn gives political leaders, political groups and parties incentives to behave in ways that will enhance democracy, lawfulness, stability, and trust, rather than destroy them.

In most democracies, an essential procedure by which most essential decisions are taken is to subject them either to a popular election or a referendum. However, the process is not vulnerable to abuse, influence and manipulation by all parties involved. However, the extent to which the values and principles of democracy are practiced is up for debate. A distinction between what could only pass for electoral democracy and a more substantial form that may be termed ‘liberal democracy’ is crucial to understanding the limits and possibilities of democracy especially in Africa.

The UNDP Human Development Report emphasizes six principles to help characterize democracy and democratic election, namely:¹³

- An effective system that represents popular political interests with proper representation;
- The guarantee of universal suffrage through free and fair elections;

¹² Walter James Shepard. (1935), ‘Socialism, Fascism, and Democracy’, 180 *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, pp. 94-10.

¹³ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), (2002). *Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World, Human Development Report*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.4

- Effective separation of powers through well-functioning checks and balances;
- A lively civil sector that provides options for participating in politics;
- Media structure that is outside the influence of the state and corporations; and
- Military and security forces that yield to civilian interests.

It is important to harmonise the above descriptions of democratic elections with the widespread misconceptions of what democracy means in the African context. In a region still characterised by electoral season violence (against the electorate as well as the political actors, African nations are seen to struggle with their claim to democracy, when these basic guiding principles are often neglected before, during or after the electoral process.

Institutionalizing democracy and elections in Nigeria

Often hindered by various factors and like in many African countries, the journey towards democratization, according to Houngnikpo, has been treacherous¹⁴ and this treacherous description, clearly depicts the issues that have accompanied the process of electioneering and elections in Nigeria. These issues often revolve around the characterization of elections in Nigeria in terms of actors and their activities and has classically and progressively evolved all through its democratic transitions. Some scholars attribute these issues to the perception of Nigerian politicians, that elections are a matter of life and death and thus, manipulate the system and institutions to gain or hang on to power at all costs while in contemporary times, the changing shifts in the country's political, economic and security context have also been considered to be instrumental to the course of its elections.

As the campaigns for the 2023 elections kicked off, Lagos and Ebonyi states saw a high amount of aggression and use of political violence where representatives of the Labor Party were prevented from campaigning through intimidation and threats of violence. Furthermore, BBC reported that an official from the All-Progressive Congress (APC) alleged that generals from the Army held secret meeting with opposition leader of the People's Democratic Party. The army released an official statement denying all claims stating that 'The Armed Forces of Nigeria will never be part of any ignoble plot to truncate our hard-earned democracy'¹⁵. Interestingly, the claim of the military takeover had little response from the public, but this was owed to the many economic challenges plaguing average Nigerians. From rising insecurity, to fuel scarcity and shortage of currency, Nigerians were more worried about solutions

14 Houngnikpo, Mathurin C. (2016) *Guarding the Guardians: Civil-military Relations and Democratic Governance in Africa*. London: Routledge.

15 Chris Ewokor. Nigerian election 2023: Nigeria military denies coup plot claim ahead of poll. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-64616772>

to the economic crisis than political maneuvering by politicians they now largely distrust.

In a similar scenario, the Department of State Services (DSS) the governments security agency released a statement saying it uncovered key interests plotting for an interim government in Nigeria, and the statement was released following a week-long protest by a civil group the ‘Free Nigeria Movement’ over the outcome of the presidential elections. The group had submitted letters to various embassies (ECOWAS, UN, US, British) that the Nigerian government annul the election and enact an interim government because the elections were marred with irregularities. This is a situation where, as a result of the tense and confrontational nature of the Nigerian political environment, the citizens find themselves in the middle of power tussles between politicians campaigning for power and the incumbent group that has access to the military capacity of the state¹⁶. Moreover, the militarization of elections in Nigeria has had the runoff effect of demonstrating to Nigerians that general elections have since become a do-or-die affair. It is also contradictory because concerned politicians spend tremendous amounts of money campaigning for support and influence from voters, but will simultaneously disrupt the electoral process through sponsoring violence that causes voter apathy and heavy-handed responses from the government in the form of military deployments.

Since the 1959 elections, acrimony, bitterness, killings, maiming amongst others have accompanied elections in Nigeria.¹⁷ Nwolise argues that following the 1959 elections, Nigeria starts to face rising levels of electoral violence that impacts people and society physically, psychologically, and structurally.¹⁸ The tactics devised by politicians at time, included inflation of voters registers, stuffing of ballot boxes with illegal papers, frustration of opponents from filing in their nomination papers, arson, to killing of political opponents. Like the 1st Republic, election violence has also characterized the 5 other Republics, which represent Nigeria’s democratic trajectory, further entrenching deep-seated political crisis and exacerbated ethnic, regional, religious, and class cleavages. As opined by Ochoche, electoral related violence, is the employment of force by political parties or their supporters to intimidate the opponents and the use of threats against their opponents to win the elections.¹⁹

During the 2014 governorship elections in Ekiti, members of the All-Progressive Congress were prevented by military personnel from entering the state capital to join

16 Seun Opejobi (2023). 2023 election: we did not woo military to take over govt in Nigeria – FNM replies critics. Daily Post. <https://dailypost.ng/2023/03/30/2023-election-we-did-not-woo-military-to-take-over-govt-in-nigeria-fnm-replies-critics/>

17 Philip Terzungwe (2018) Electoral Fraud, Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Peace and Development*. Pg. 32-47

18 Osisioma B C Nwolise, Electoral Violence and Nigeria’s 2007 Elections, (2007) *Journal of African Elections*. Vol.6, Issue 2. P 155-179

19 Ochoche, S A. (1997) Electoral Violence and National Security in Nigeria’. *Africa Peace Review, Journal of the Centre for Peace Research and Conflict Resolution 1(1)*.

a party rally, in what the media²⁰ described as ‘a commando-styled operation’. It was also reported the to oversee security concerns during the elections, a 73,000-strong security contingent was deployed for this reason. Furthermore, while a Federal High Court in Nigeria had ruled against the Nigerian Armed Forces be involved in election conduct, the 2019 elections saw President Muhammadu Buhari put the military in a shoot-on-sight directive against electoral offenders. The militarization of election also delivers a chilling effect to citizens. With anxiety from expected violence, social uncertainty against populations witnessing the deployment of military hardware, vehicles or aircraft to monitor electoral conduct, citizens are less likely to participate in voting processes under such conditions. Reports suggest with the voter turnout at 35%, it was the lowest record turnout on the continent, and also a signal to mistrust in electoral process and overall disenchantment²¹.

In the context of this article, electoral violence is simply violence committed throughout an election season, especially before, during, and after the elections²² by the military. Even though politicians are primary actors, the object and subject of this article is the military or armed forces, otherwise known as the perpetrators. This is based on their abuse of powers to unfairly favor incumbents and disrupt the conduct of free and fair elections, even though other conventional disruptions and irregularities that often characterize elections in Nigeria occur. From the above submissions, it can be argued that politicians have been the primary actors who will give anything to remain in power through their manipulation of electoral processes. Furthermore, the winner takes all attitude by political parties and politicians has been detrimental to the goal of multi-party systems of government. It should be stated here that, despite the goal of national unity which the government of Nigeria government professes to ensure, political intolerance amongst Nigerian politicians still persists.

Militarization of elections in Nigeria have been shown as a disincentive to massive participation of the Nigerian woman in electoral politics. Voter intimidation, political exclusion discourage citizens and compromise trust in the electoral processes and women and children are the major victims just like in any other violent environments during conflicts for instance. The 2010 report from the Center for Women Global Leadership expressed the opinion that election violence, intimidation and other forms of violence are also tactic to prevent women from electoral competition with the aim of confining them to sedentary and docile areas of society. This is a cynical ploy especially in times when social outcry demands that women be more represented in politics in an operational and participatory capacity²³. It is undeniable that women

20 Nosa Igbadolor. (2022). *Need to demilitarize Nigeria's 2023 general election*. Business Day. <https://businessday.ng/politics/article/need-to-demilitarise-nigerias-2023-general-election/>

21 Ibid.

22 Anthony Egobueze and Callistus Ojirika (2017) Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for Political Stability. *Journal of Scientific Research & Reports* 13(2): 1-11, Article no. JSRR.20750

23 Inokoba, P.K. and Zibima, T. (2014), "Militarization of the Nigerian electoral process and the political disempowerment of the Nigerian woman", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 3 No. 9, pp. 1836-1847.

are underrepresented in politics, scholars have also argued that electoral violence is a serious disincentive to women participating in politics, moreover, as the perpetration of the violence and militarization of elections is a primarily male-dominated activity, it must be noted that in most cases, women are more of the victims than perpetrators of the violence.

Military involvement in Nigerian elections with a focus on the 2019 general elections

Half a century since the 1st Republic, involving the military in elections in Nigeria is no longer news, thanks to the polemic statutory provision of Section 218 of the Nigerian Constitution, which clearly empowers the president of Nigeria to deploy the military in such circumstances as he deems fit, to give effect to effective security of the nation or any part thereof.²⁴ With hindsight, this provision and other statutory accompaniments, has been well exploited by past presidents, as previous history of past elections abounds where periods of electioneering and elections in Nigeria have been tainted by instances of militarism and violence before, during and after elections. Nwosu for example, states that dating from the first republic, every election in Nigeria has ended with one form of disruption, violence or the other, and the 2019 elections which was the 6th general elections, in the 4th Republic, lived up to this reputation.²⁵

The consequences of militarizing the election usually includes; *Human rights violations* and the unprofessional conduct of security forces which dampens citizen morale more. These actions involve sweeping arrests, unexplained detentions that result in human right violations and even deaths. For instance, the military was accused of being involved in the deaths of 16 people in Abonema in Rivers State, when many others were arrested unlawfully²⁶.

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria were scheduled to hold in February and March respectively, with presidential and national assembly elections leading, and state and local government elections following suite. Though 69 political parties fielded candidates in the elections. Prior to the 2019 general elections, the Nigerian Army announced the commencement of Exercise Eke III, otherwise known as Python Dance in all parts of the country in preparation against challenges anticipated during and after the elections. Similarly, on 16th February, 2019, President Buhari activated provisions of the constitution, when he invited the military into the election scene, urging the armed forces to be “ruthless” with anyone who interferes on the pools²⁷. The Nigerian Army in obeying this clarion call by the president, deployed 95% of

24 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (1999), Section 218

25 Nereus I. Nwosu. (2000). Thirty-Six Years of Independence in Nigeria: *The Political Balance Sheet: Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente. Anno 55, No. 2 pp. 151-166*

26 Freedom Chukwudi Onuoha , Joachim Chukwuma Okafor , Oluwole Ojewale & Chigozirim Okoro (2020) Militarisation of the 2019 general elections and electoral integrity in Nigeria, *The Round Table*, 109:4, 406-418, DOI: 10.1080/00358533.2020.1788764

27 <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/africa/africa-top-stories/nigerias-electoral-body-cautions-buhari-atiku/ar-BBTPCSe?li=BBKhQr3>

its operatives²⁸ and assured the electorate of its strict adherence to professional code of conduct before, during and after the elections. Given the prominence of these elections and in reference to the antecedents that have followed past elections, local and international election observers expressed their fears that the army's election deployment plan remained unknown and contravened section 29(3) of the Electoral Act 2010 of INEC, which provides that:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law and for purposes of securing the vote, the Commission shall be responsible for requesting for the deployment of relevant security personnel necessary for elections or registration of voters and shall assign them in the manner determined by the Commission in consultation with the relevant security agencies. PROVIDED that the Commission shall only request for the deployment of the Nigerian Armed Forces only for the purpose of securing the of securing the distribution and delivery of election materials and protection of election officials.

At this juncture, it is important to bring to fore that, before the 2015 elections, which brought about the installation of President Buhari, the deployment of the military was challenged in court by the then opposition, based on the above-mentioned provisions of the Electoral Act. A ruling stopped the deployment of the military during the elections and this judgment was adhered to. The 2015 general elections have been adjudged to be the most peaceful elections since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 even though the period of this election, was also considered to be the deadliest, security-wise, as the conflict landscape in Nigeria was heavily colored by Boko Haram attacks in the North East.

The foregoing is not intended to minimize the importance, capacity and efforts of the military in contending with contemporary security challenges but to argue the legality of their deployment, their posture of neutrality during times of national call by their pay masters and also to question their display of open and forceful action in the course of carrying out these assignments. While the Nigerian military in recent days, has been criticized by citizens and the international community of gross human rights

²⁸ Assessed on 20.07.2019

²⁸ Stella Eneche, available on <https://businessday.ng/ng-election/article/we-have-deployed-95-percent-personnel-for-elections-army/>

violation²⁹, there is also no denying that the inexorable violent relationship between the police, armed forces and civilians appears to be the norm rather than the exception in Nigeria. States like Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Anambra witnessed a large deployment of soldiers' days before elections as against Borno, Adamaawa and Yobe states, which have been the hotbed of terrorist attacks and operations of bandits since 2009. During the elections in Rivers state, activities of the military turned the state into a war zone, chasing away accredited voters and party agents, election monitors and killing of at least 30 civilians;³⁰ all these led to the disruption and rerun of elections in the state. Recall that Rivers and Akwa Ibom, states are strong hold states of PDP, the strongest opposition party, and one may wonder why 95% of a nation's military will be deployed to carry out election duties when other pressing security challenges threaten its peace and security and could use the services of its gallant troops. PRNigeria reported on activities of the Nigerian military prior to the 2023 general elections stating the role played to ensure peaceful conduct. The report stated the deployment of troops during the voting days stressing that the troops had been instructed to remain neutral and to not interfere in campaign activities³¹. Although the reports suggested the neutrality of the military, an atmosphere of tension is still created and does not necessarily serve the intended purposes especially among regular Nigerians who have experienced one too many heavy-handed actions of both the military meant to protect them and the desperate politicians they are to be protected from. Two persistent questions about this phenomenon remain; will the use of the military remain a feature of Nigeria's democratic, and indeed, its elections landscape, even if deployment is at a reduced rate and at what juncture does the legality of the Constitution supersede the provisions of the Electoral Act?

Conclusion

The use of the soldiers in elections is not unique to Nigeria or African countries, but these incidents go to show the fragility of Nigeria's democracy and the impotence of the institutions set up for checks and balances. This article argued how the use of the military in elections lacks constitutional basis and contributes to electoral violence, deaths and destruction of property: these to political elites, may be

Assessed on 20.07.2019

29 Amnesty International Nigeria. (2018), No Accountability for Human Rights, Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review, 31st Session of the UPR Working Group.

30 Davies Iheammachor, 5/3/19. Available on <https://allafrica.com/stories/201903050322.html>.
Assessed on 20/07/2019

31 Mukhtar Ya'u Madobi (2023). Military: Towards Ensuring Peaceful 2023 Elections in Nigeria. PRNigeria. <https://prnigeria.com/2023/01/15/military-towards-ensuring/>

acceptable losses as they try to hold positions of advantage during the elections. We also stated that violence does not occur simply because Nigeria holds elections, but because of the tendency of the political elites, individuals and groups to impose their will on the people, abuse state power and as well as have military interference become impediments to the development of democracy.

Thus, in conclusion, the first step in reversing these undemocratic practices in Nigeria and in other fragile democracies in Africa and beyond, is the implementation of constitutionalism into political culture. In practice, the constitution must be able to give power and credence to the interests of people and sectors of society. Citizens also have a role to play in the strengthening of democracy and boosting the integrity of election process. There must be broader and deeper level of political participation than the minimum activity implicit in the vote. In this regard, participation must not end in just voting but should include the continued involvement in the political process i.e unions, advocacy groups, organizations, as well as protests.

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