



Appraisal of the Role of Electoral Observers/Monitoring Groups in the Conduct of Credible Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article focuses on the lessons that can be drawn from the previous general elections in Nigeria, with emphasis on the role of electoral observers / monitoring groups in ensuring the conduct of general elections. The paper relies on secondary data, sourced from journal articles, reports, and textbooks, among other archival materials and deploys qualitative content in analyzing so as to achieve the stated objective which is to appraisal the role of electoral observers / monitoring groups in the conduct of credible election in Nigeria. of the paper. It shows that the role of observers / monitoring groups serves as a boost to the integrity, and creditability of general elections in Nigeria. The groups also serve as mediators during an electoral dispute, as well as providing support logistics, and play the role of a watchdog in detecting electoral frauds. The paper revealed that the lack of wider coverage, accessibility, suspicion, and bias, remains obstacles to the group and finally, concludes that the activities of the electoral observers/monitoring groups would further ensure the integrity and credibility of the general election in Nigeria if the observed obstacles hindering their activities are removed.

Keywords: Nigeria; Election; Electoral Credibility, Election Observers/Monitors, Election Frauds, Democracy

Introduction

The conduct of free and fair general elections is a noble task that is achievable, if the stakeholders are committed to it in any given society. Achieving these noble tasks of free and fair elections depends upon the seriousness attached to it by the stakeholders including the election monitoring groups and observers especially in the context of a fledgling democracies like Nigeria. The election observation and monitoring during the general election in Africa or Nigerian by both local or foreign monitors or observers like the European Commission or European Union, and the American Government through various agencies and institutes, would help to strengthen the free, fair, and credibility of the electoral

process which needed in democratic system. Although to Usman, Salaam, & Wapmuk (2022), sees elections monitoring and observation especially by the international organizations and agencies as a form of continuation colonial and imperialist belief that foreign should attest to an election creditability before being acceptable as credible, free and fair in Africa and in particular Nigeria. The change of government through democratic means that includes creditable elections remains the most widely accepted means of transition of one administration to the other. Conducting a credible election is one sure way of effecting the democratic change of government. The credibility of an election provides the foundation for a democratic change

of government. Thus, no doubt, monitoring and observation of the electoral process is an important element of ensuring democratic change. And for an election to be declared impartial and credible the input of an independent monitoring and observation bodies cannot be overemphasized, as they contribute not only to ensuring the creditability of an election, but also build the confidence of the electorate and integrity of the election entirely (Adesina, 2012; Lawal & Onimisi 2015). Equally, the practice of observing or monitoring elections serves as an interventionist measure aimed at achieving democratic principles, ensuring the administration of free and fair election and adherence to electoral processes to make suggestions that can help improve future general elections (Tostensen, 2004). As it is commonly done in most democratic countries during electioneering invitation is extended to both local and international observers and monitors to give credit to the outcome of the election, strengthen the legitimacy of the elected political leaders, and to increase citizen acceptance of the democratic process (Adesina, 2012). The emergence of local and international election observers and monitoring has become norms during the electoral process across the sovereign states of the world (Thomson, 2014). The need to settle the creditability question and carrying a widely accepted election, and meeting the criteria set by the donor, as well as to conduct credible election that will be at par with international practice prompted the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigerian electoral body, to invite both local and international observers/monitors to observe the nation's general elections. This paper explores the crucial role of electoral observation and monitoring groups toward ensuring credible and acceptable elections in Nigeria as the country prepares for yet another general election. It reviews literature, particularly a couple of the reports of local and international observers and brings forth ways of improving the electoral process in the country through the activities of the electoral monitors and observers. The paper is divided into five sections, such as the introduction, understanding some basic concepts and theoretical underpinning, an overview of elections in Nigeria: 1999-2019 and the role of election

monitoring and observation towards creditable general election in Nigeria, obstacles to electoral monitoring and observation in Nigeria, the way forward and conclusion.

Understanding Some Basic Concepts and Theoretical Underpinning

Elections: The aspect of democratic participation that is relevant to our discussion is the conduct of an election. Consequently, democratic participation here means the extent to which the electorates are allowed to participate in the election of their representatives. It also means the frequency, the freeness, the fairness, and the consistency with which such elections are conducted. Because elections have become so pivotal to all successful democratic systems of government in any polity. Araba and Braimah (2015) put into perspective as follows an election remains a procedure or a part that includes choosing the individuals through a political party into public office to represent the people and exercise some degree of control over the affairs of the public. The process includes the selection of people to represent the entire citizens. Election is the most visible aspect of democracy in action because it provides the available means to the voting citizens to indicate their preferences for those they perceived as being worthy of rulership. The election provides the avenues for the actualization of ideas concerning the power of the electorate to choose among competing candidates for leadership positions. The election enables the voters to choose and by implication underscore the performance of a particular leader or leader who they consider worthier than others, for a specific public office. Elections allow people to choose policies and candidates. The centrality of elections to any democratic system of government graphically captured by Mackenzie and Robinson (2002) cited in Aluko (2010) when they wrote incisively that election provides that opportunity for the people to select the people in the life of a political system, and bear the profound and long-term consequences of that political system. Elections also have pedagogic value because it provides electorates political education. Normally achieved during campaigns and through jingles in radios and televisions. Because as political parties canvass for electoral

victory, they showcase their manifestoes and programs of action of what they intend to do if voted into office. Parties doing such, also include the methods by which their policies and programs can be achieved. Elections are the vehicles that drive democratic governance that in turn produces good governance.

Election Monitoring and observation: It is the process of scrutinizing and evaluating elections for ensuring their impartiality in terms of administration and organization, including placing individuals or officials from both local and international bodies with the specific mandate of observing the process leading to the outcome of the election (Adesina, 2012). The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance sees election observation exist intending to gather information during electioneering and make an informed judgment on the conduct of such elections based on the information collected from selected independent individuals or groups whose activities should not be such as to jeopardize their main observation responsibilities to assist promoting democratic tents (IDEA, 1999). The 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation clearly defines the election observation as the following: the gathering of vital information, through a systematic and comprehensive method using the existing provision, processes, and institutions procedures as it regards to the conduct of elections, an electoral related issues/environment. Election observes conduct an impartial and professional analysis of election through information gathered and conclusions are drawn from the character of the electoral processes (Cited in Cook, 2015). Rwelamira and Ailola (1994) viewed election monitoring beyond just observation, they see it as scrutiny and assessment of an election to determine its impartiality, administration, organization, and an assessment of the role of the security department, electoral law, and the actual election activities. According to Adesina (2012) election observers evaluate the electoral process because they are accredited to do so, the scholar further stated that the overriding responsibility of the election observers is to verify all the participating or competing political parties, groups and individuals enjoy maximum freedom of

institution, movement, expression and of course assemble without intimidation from anyone or capable coercion of thwarting the will of the people in society. Election monitors on the other hand, according to Adesina (2012) have some level of lawful authority over officials involved in the election and oversee the overall conduct of the elections. Election monitors ensure the overall conduct of election compliance with the set guidelines and certify that election conforms to an international standard. Chipfunde (2002) sees elections monitoring and observation as placing of independent officials or group of individuals representing local and international organizations for a specified time in a country organizing both local and national elections with a mandate of mindful observation of the process and outcome of their electioneering. At this junction, it is important to understand the types of electoral observers.

International Election Observers: The international observers are those set of observers that are most times not citizens of the country in which they conduct their observation. They are delegated international organizations or bodies or delegated by their country to be part of an observation mission (Albert, 2015). Experienced observers and young members of the international observers should work interchangeably because of the experienced of the knowledge of the country where the election is to be observed, and their professional experiences (Albert, 2015). It is important to stress that the number of members to participate in the international observation and monitoring mission is determined by the mandating agency, having in mind the adequate regional representation of the Member States of these bodies and organizations (Albert, 2015). Furthermore, international observers can be grouped into two according to Albert, 2015), which are the Long-term international observation and short-term international observation. The Long-term international observation is interested in the level of preparation of the electoral administration, the condition put in place for a successful poll, the campaign, through this process, their knowledge of the country is broadening, and they make contact with all stakeholders for a wider understanding of the country electoral process.

While short-term international observers appear in the country a few days before the actual voting and leave a few days after the elections, with a greater number of observers, their presence is felt across the regions of the country with a focus on the final days of the poll, especially polling day, the counting of votes, results and the announcement of the voting outcome. The European Union Election Observation (2016) stated that short-term assessment and report election environment, the implementation of voting procedures, the implementation of the procedures for the counting of votes, tabulation, and publication of results.

National or Local Observers: The national observers are the citizens of the country where the election is being held. This set of persons are volunteers and are members of civil society organizations, and interest groups who want to ensure the democratic principles are followed through a credible and transparent election. It is important to note the local or national observers have in-depth knowledge about the country, which is an asset, and they extend their technical expertise to organizing political debates of their country (Albert, 2015). The paper adopts consociation theory. Consociationalism theory is synonymous with power-sharing, corporatism among conflicting class, the recognition of diverse groups, with the aim of stabilization of governmental functions. The theory also focuses on the strict adherence to the survival of the arrangement of power, and more importantly, the survival and continued existence of democracy and the avoidance of crisis (Hassel, 2006; O'Leary, 2005). Consociationalism theoretically applied by McGarry & O'leary (2006) who traced it to the Netherlands because of the role it played in the country agreement, co-operation of the social elites in the stabilization of democracy. These scholars opined that the theory shows state, territories, ethnic, linguistically or historical difference divides people, thus for prudent, and effective governance of such regions consociationalism principles must come to play (McGarry & O'leary, 2006). In the context where an election is seen as a struggle amongst ethnic groups, which leads to a crisis, the fundamental role of the electoral monitoring and observers comes to play. Both international and local

monitoring and observers' groups can champion the need for consociation principles or method of sharing the power to avoid a crisis. The mediational role of the electoral monitors and observers can prompt up consociation amongst political players, thus settling potential crisis in a multi-linguistic and highly pluralist society such as Nigeria.

An Overview of Elections in Nigeria: 1999-2019

General elections in Nigeria over the decades have been with gory tales of electoral malpractices, with have effectively affected the nation's polity. A look at the country's general elections from 1999 to the latest General Election in 2019, the electoral processes have been mired with various issues ranging from rigging, violent attacks, falsification of results, and destruction of properties. The major characteristic of the Nigerian election over the decade has been massive rigging, violence, ballot snatching, and the increasing number of deaths resulting from post-electoral conflict (Araba and Briamah 2015). The Fourth Republic witnessed electoral violence from the 1999 general election caused by the perceived compromise by the electoral body and stakeholders, thus affecting the entire electoral process. The 1999 general election was conducted under the regime of the military junta of General Abdusalami Abubakar, which brought in General Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who defeated Chief Olu Falae of Alliance for Democracy (AD), and the All-Peoples Party (APP), recorded pockets of violence across the states of the federation, but both national and international observers regarded the election as relatively peaceful. This period in Nigeria's electoral history has seen an era where armed youth employed by the political elites to engage in election malpractices not minding the consequence (Human Right Watch, 2014). The 2003 general election also witnessed violence and malpractice which higher than the 1999 general elections. The report of the Human Rights Watch (2004) indicated that the election was characterized by "low intensity armed struggle" by thugs hired by the political class and the prevailing issue of intra-party and inter-party conflicts characterized this period. The

prevalence of electoral violence in the country's general election was worsened in 2011 when the violence that following the presidential election led to the death of hundreds of persons and the destruction of properties. The conduct of 2007 general elections, for instance, was accompanied by a worsening contraction of the principles of democratic tenets and it negates principles of the free and fair electoral procedure. The 2007 general election, like the various elections characterized by ballot snatching, vote-rigging, clear manipulation of votes and voters' lists as well as falsification of election results, and, a product of deadly and raped electoral process (Madu, 2010). The credibility of the 2007 general elections was also questioned by the elected President Umar Musa Yar' Adua himself although he was left off the hook Supreme Court in a split decision, the election brought so many pains and misery to the electorate, electoral officers, security agencies and stakeholders. The 2007 general elections have established beyond any shred of doubt by stakeholders such as the electoral monitors, observers, NGOs both local and foreign that the elections were riddled with irregularities. The 2015 General Elections that occurred in Nigeria were unique and historic because it was the first time in the political history of the country that an incumbent president was defeated or voted out of office by an alliance of opposition parties, and it was the first time the defeated candidate in a general election would publicly accept defeat, congratulate the winner in the sportsmanship (Yimovie, 2017). The 2015 General Election characterized by a pocket of irregularities, such as late delivery and distribution of voting materials in some states of the federation, especially the southern states (Udu, 2015). The 2015 presidential election, in particular, witnessed according to Zaggi (2015:18) "late arrival of electoral materials; malfunctioning of Card Readers; insufficient and, in some cases, none availability of electoral materials; overcrowding in polling units, and voting throughout the night, which exposed the voters to high risks." The 2019 general election in Nigeria witnessed one of the most violent post-electoral processes in the history of the country's democratic practice. The general election was characterized by the loss of lives recorded during and after the election, while the ballot box

snatching was the order of the day, burning of properties including the Independent National Electoral Commission offices housing sensitive and non-sensitive materials, which meant for the election, the houses of top political aspirants were not excluded (Onimisi & Omolegbe, 2019). The 2019 electoral outcome further compounded the perceived irregularity in Nigeria's electoral system because of the overbearing influence of security agencies during the election and heightened impunity amongst the political elites, which prospered the violence witnessed during the elections. The heavily inflammatory campaign characterized the 2019 general elections across the political diversity contributed in no small measures the electoral violence witnessed in the country.

The Role of Election Monitoring and Observation Towards Creditable General Election in Nigeria

Democratic governance which is essentially based on the product of free, fair and credible elections is the best form of government worldwide. The beauty of democratic system of government derives from the fact that the apparatus of governance, such as the executive and legislative is controlled by the representatives of the people duly elected by the people. Even the concept of democracy itself is based on fair play, rule of law, representativeness, tolerance and respect for the right of others. The product of a democratic system of government is invariably good governance. Good governance presupposes the provision of social, economic and developmental infrastructure for the people within the framework of rules and regulations governing that society. Considering the importance of credible election in a democratic system such as Nigeria the role of election monitoring and observation in ensuring a credible election cannot be overemphasized. Amongst the locally based observers/monitoring group in Nigeria is the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), which is a combination of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/Civil Society organizations (CSOs) with similar purpose of ensuring free and fair elections, and all-inclusive political participation free of imitation and violence, and with strict adherence to the laydown principles governing the electoral process. While international observer groups,

whose activities are noticeable in Nigeria are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), Human Rights Watch, the European Union Election Observers Mission (EU EOM), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and many others. Like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) equally helps ensure credible electoral process, boost awareness of the importance of elections as an essential aspect of democratic governance, wider freedom of choice, expression of opinions and safeguarding of human right (Thomson, 2014). These International observers do not only contribute financially to the success of elections in Nigeria, but they also ensure that the election meets international standards, free and fair, transparent, credible and free of violence of any form. The election monitoring and observation further play the following role in strengthening the election in the election in the country:

Providing Integrity and Creditability to the Election: The fundamental duty of local and international election observations is to assess the quality of elections, through an established standard in which general elections are evaluated (Carothers, 1997; Daxecker, 2012). The activities of electoral observation and monitoring help to boost the confidence of the citizen and the international community about the election (Adesina, 2012). Since creditability of an election is interwoven with the integrity of the electoral process, thus the monitoring and observation group can assist in deterring fraudulent activity during the election process. The integrity of the electoral process can be better ensured by the activities of both local and international observer groups and monitoring organizations, by emphasizing the need to conduct the electioneering process in accordance with the guidelines as prescribed in the constitution of Nigeria (Adesina, 2012). Election observation and monitoring do not give credibility to governments it equally promotes democratic consolidation in the country (Obutudu, 2003). Local and international election monitoring and observation groups can contribute greatly to

strengthening and dissemination of basic standards of election administration in Nigeria by stressing the need for comprehensive voters' registration/voters register, which must be displayed at various polling units before elections, training of electoral officials, and use of voter cards (Carothers, 1997). Local and international monitors and observers inspire voter confidence in terms of the integrity of the electoral process such as the voting process, the evaluation of legal, political and social environment in which the election is being conducted (Chigudu, 2015).

Mediation: Bjornlund, Bratton & Gibson (1992) stresses the need for electoral observers to step into mediating role when disputes arise between the competing political parties or groups to reduce tension during the electioneering period. For instance, mediation before, during and after elections helped in averting what would have been being a major political crisis after the presidential election in 2015 in Nigeria. religious organizations, peace advocacy groups, observers and monitoring groups ensured that major political parties and their candidates were made to sign a peace deal before the elections, pledging their support to a peaceful atmosphere and to ensure they accept the outcome of the results and seek redress in court if they are dissatisfied. Election monitoring and observation play the third-party role of conflict resolution and serves as an effective mechanism for the resolution of crisis and for constructing legitimate governmental structures that would be acceptable most of the citizen (Garber & Bjournlund, 1993). And the presence of observer groups reduces the potential for crises and wide range violence, by playing the role of mediating body between domestic actors, thus increasing the likelihood of all parties respecting the electoral outcome (Daxecker, 2012; McCoy, Garber, & Pastor, 1991; Van Cranenburgh, 2000).

Support Mechanism: The monitoring and observation group provide some measure of support during the pre-election stage, during and after the election phases, they emphasize the need to employ the electoral laws by demanding some level of compliance with the existing guidelines by both government officials and voters

(Obutudu, 2003). The presence of the electoral observation group constitutes a source of a psychological boost for the voters and the candidates contesting an elective position because these observers can uncover electoral irregularities and thus ensure the citizens of the creditability of the process (Mair, 1997).

Serves as Watchdog: The monitors and observers in an election, such as Nigerian general elections serve as a watchdog to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the voters, candidates seeking an elective position and all those who have one or two roles to play before, during and after the elections. Through the activities of these monitoring and observer bodies, the staff of the electoral commission is kept on their toes in the discharge of their duties once aware they are being watched constantly. They will therefore be mindful of their impartiality to have creditable and transparent elections.

Provide Confident: The presence of both local and international monitors and observers' mission can ease the fear of electoral intimidation, violence amongst the citizen, and the report of these groups can draw attention to poorly conducted elections and misconduct before, during and after elections thus boosting their confidence of the electorate on the entire electoral process (Cook, 2015). The presence of international observers and monitors helps provide knowledge and by their shared experience the local electoral body can improve the entire electoral process in the country (Cook, 2015). Furthermore, electoral monitors and observers in general elections can boost the trust of the citizens on the election outcome, and tend to reduce the influence of incumbents' manipulation.

Detecting Electoral Fraud: a role electoral observers and monitors can play in general elections in Nigeria and other parts of the world is detecting potential and actual electoral fraud by drawing the attention of concern stakeholders to it and subsequently prevent it in some cases (Carothers, 1997). International observers through their activities can reduce corrupt behavior and detect electoral fraud by electoral

officials. Through the activities of local and international monitoring and observers groups the likelihood of exposing electoral manipulation and fraud is increased and detected, while published reports can assist in drawing attention to fraudulent elections in the country (Daxecker, 2012; Hyde, 2007; Carothers, 1997).

Obstacles to Electoral Monitoring and Observation in Nigeria

Financial Issues: Globally, observes and monitoring groups face financial difficulties. Because finance is vital to the success of any project. Sometimes, government policies on elections can also create financial difficulties for observes/monitoring groups. For example, in Zimbabwe, where the government amended the electoral law, monitors and observers fell under the supervision and responsibility of the Electoral Supervisory Commission. The accreditation for foreign observers was based upon the payment of a fee of US\$100, while local observers were expected to pay an accreditation fee of Z\$1000 for their accreditation (Obutudu, 2003). Electoral observation and monitoring are costly, especially general election because of the geographical terrain of the country, difficult face in accessing areas and ineffective transport system, which invariably requires greater finance handy.

Suspicious Issue and Bias: There is suspicious concern about the monitors and unit of observers coming from the government or the administration in power by the electorate and the candidate for an election about the possibility of bribe by the government. It negatively influences the report of the monitoring groups. It is the same vain that Adebisi & Loremikan (2013) observed that "some groups are covertly sponsored by the state authority and as such, take brief from the state." This situation of cause, cast doubt on some of the reports of the monitoring and observer groups among the electorates. And, in some cases, election observers and monitoring missions are accused of being biased and that their presence at the polling units tends to give undue legitimacy to an improper electoral system or process (Chigudu, 2015). While governments who are bent on cheating during and after the election can invite electoral observer groups who

will most ignore some electoral manipulations by the government in power (Beaulieu, 2013).

The lack of Wider Coverage: It is imperative to note that most of the activities of monitors and observers cover the rural or polling units in Nigeria. Thus, most election monitors or observers do not adequately cover the entire gamut of the electoral constituencies during and after elections, hence cast doubt about the adequacy of the report of these bodies (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013). Furthermore, election monitoring and observation groups covering cities in Nigeria exclude remote villages and rural areas where rigging and irregularities are perpetrated, thus dampening morale and confidence of the people who are aware of the rigging and irregularities perpetrated but unreported.

Electoral Violence: Another obstacle that can constraint the laudable role of electoral monitoring and observers is electoral violence. Violence has been defined as the use of physical force intended to cause injury or destruction of life and property. Increasingly, apart from physical force violence also perpetrated by word of mouth through emotional abuse and psychological incitement, hence the term verbal violence. Include hate speech. In the intensity of political campaigns during elections, politicians are carried away to do and say, which cause injury, anger, incites the public, particularly their opponents who also wish to reply in kind, thus fuelling a circle of verbal and physical violence. Electoral violence is a type of violence intended to cause injury, harm and destruction to political opponents, particularly during an election. Such violence be intra-party or inter-party. The main purpose is to weaken or destroy an opponent (Warisu, 2015). The perpetrators of electoral violence are political parties, politicians, their supporters, journalists, agents of governments, election administrators and the general population. This electoral violence includes threats, assaults, murder, and destruction of property, physical and psychological harm.

Electoral violence in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. Nigeria has experienced chronic electoral violence since its transition to

democracy and civilian rule in 1999, including more than 15,700 election-related deaths. High stakes combine with readily available guns for hire in the form of organized crime gangs and a historic lack of prosecution of perpetrators to make electoral violence a relatively attractive tool of electoral competition, even within political parties (International IDEA and Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012: 5 cited in Warisu, 2015). According to Chairman of INEC, Professor Jega, in a paper he delivered at a Sensitization Workshop, on nonviolence in Abuja is reproduced here for emphasis that the Attitude and the disposition of political parties and its candidates should all determine to a large extent whether we will have peaceful and non-violent general elections. International IDEA and Kofi Annan Foundation further state that parties and contestants have a great responsibility, which includes peaceful conduct of elections. This does not stop with conducting a peaceful election, there are other agencies that the election management body has an important responsibility. It has to do its job with competence, with professionalism and with non-partisanship.

Refusal to concede defeat precipitate political and inter - communal violence on both sides. All stakeholders should be on the alert of the need to be proactive in forestalling any outbreak of election-related violence. Several factors cause people to resort to electoral violence. These include Human rights abuses, unstable political environment, impunity of government officials and security agents, electoral officials, lack of faith in the electoral process, fear of rigging, electoral irregularities, provocation, intimidation, unfair management of the electoral process, hatred/hate speech, weakness of the security forces and lack of respect for the rule of law among others

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article explores the role of both local and international monitoring/observer groups in Nigeria general elections to meet the creditability standard in the conduct and outcome of an election. The paper opined that to ensure free and fair, credible, transparent, acceptable and violent

free election in Nigeria the monitoring and observer groups both within and outside the country should increase their work in the area of the orientation of the voters, and those seeking political offices that election is not about do or die game but for peaceful transition of power. The monitoring and observer groups can assure meditative role were necessary especially, when the election led to crises of great proportion. The integrity of the election in Nigeria would be better ensured with the activities of these monitoring and observer groups. In spite of Nigerian electoral system and its inconsistencies, political structure, as well as perceived manipulation of the elections and other shortcomings, the increasing demand for both local and international election observers and monitoring, is an indication and recognition of the supportive and affirmative supportive role these observers play in the quest for a credible election in Nigeria. The way perpetrators of electoral violence go scot-free is embarrassing as perpetrators are punished so should the sponsors of such horrendous acts be brought to book. This situation where only direct perpetrators are arrested and later released without even mentioning their sponsors does not and cannot support violent-free elections. Ordinarily, the law empowers INEC to arrest and prosecute electoral offenders. On a serious note, INEC is technically handicapped to do the job and that is the reason no serious conviction has been done in this direction. Most INEC staff are too busy with the demands of their office than the arrest and prosecution of electoral offenders. There is a need for an institutional framework charged with the sole responsibility of such prosecutions as established in some other countries. It comes in the form of Independent Electoral offenses Tribunal with impeccable law officers. If not for any other thing, the fear of being paraded and the embarrassments that come with such appearances also serve as deterrents (Okafor, 2015). Electoral offenses Commission: To strengthen the state's capacity to punish electoral criminals. Such a commission should be made to dispense justice faster than the conventional courts, without necessarily sacrificing the principles of justice and fair play. Any elected office holder found guilty must not only be barred from future elections, he must go to jail for the offense,

including the colluding electoral and security officials (Durotoye, 2015). It is important to stress in conclusion, that Nigerian politicians should learn from the bold and noble statesmanship characteristic displayed by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, when he accepted defeat before counting was even concluded, such attitude will promote credible elections. The country's electoral system, the political elite and the citizens must respect the principle of rule of law. Government must invest heavily in violence prevention measures, and should not leave it to NGOs and the development partners only. Electoral violence should be criminalized because presently it is considered a sport, entertainment and the perpetrator are treated with kid gloves and protected by the political elite (Warisu, 2015). There should be apprehension, prosecution and punishment for perpetrators of electoral violence, as would allow politicians and the citizen in general to get the impression that violence is part of the electoral and political process. The expansion of political and civic education to shape consciousness and improve awareness. Enlightenment campaigns must be intensified to educate the people on the dangers of violence and discourage them from such (Okafor, 2015). The message of violence free elections should be carried to places of worship and schools. NGOs, CBOs and all civic and religious organizations and traditional institutions should be involved in this campaign. Actions by the police and other security services, all controlled by the federal government, also aggravate tensions around the polls and undermine the credibility of their outcomes, hence, the need for a review of the role of the security agencies. The role of electoral of partnerships and cooperation of agencies is highly needed at this point of Nigeria's democratic practice. The militarization of elections deters people from the electoral process, thus a need for a review of the role of security bodies. Security agencies, police, SSS, Armed Forces, Judiciary ensure impartiality in the discharge of their responsibilities. And weapons availability and cheapness of small and light weapons also give the youth the courage to engage in violent political activities and intimidation while simultaneously, instill fear in the people, who most necessitate the call for

security agencies to step in. Government and its agencies should ensure strict access to small and light weapons, and the issue of youth unemployment should be vigorously addressed. To run issue-based campaigns at national, state and local government levels, stakeholders should pledge to refrain from campaigns that will involve religious incitement, ethnic or tribal profiling. The national peace committee made up of respected diplomats and women, traditional and religious leaders should be supported. All institutions of government including INEC and security agencies must act and be seen to act with impartiality and to forcefully and publicly speak out against provocative utterances and oppose all acts of electoral violence whether perpetrated by our supporters and/or opponents (Warisu, 2015; Okafor, 2015). The important thing to do, therefore, is to build confidence in our electoral process through proper education, sensitization of the citizenry and essentially, through stakeholder workshop on electoral matter.

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