RE-EVALUATING THE NEXUS BETWEEN SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS, ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS, AND THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA: AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ELECTION SECURITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the actions of the Nigerian police and their involvement in election management, with specific focus on the 2023 general election and its impact on the nation security. The research employed a survey design, selected for its descriptive nature. This design was chosen to facilitate the researcher in drawing general conclusions from a diverse range of information sources, including online materials, textbooks,

newspapers and firsthand field observations. Additionally, insights and commentary from legal, security and political experts proved to be valuable assets that enriched the content of this study. The study recognized the constitutional authority granted to the police and ot her security agencies to address various forms of criminality, including electoral misconduct and violations. The findings revealed that electoral fraud is deeply ingrained in the system and poses a significant threat to the socio-economic well-being of the nation, directly impacting national security; and notably, elections in Nigeria have consistently been marred by repression, hostility and Intimidation, with the police and other security agencies, such as the military, civil defense, immigration personnel, often implicated in election rigging on behalf of the ruling party. These actions, which flagrantly disregard the law, including regulations governing conduct, inevitably foster an atmosphere of mistrust, anger, and resentment. In light of these findings, the study put forward some practical recommendations include among others: emphasis should be placed on the need for security operations to align with established election rules and regulations; that the leadership of security organizations should regularly organize seminars and workshops to educate their personnel about electoral laws, with a clear warning that violators would face severe legal consequences. Additionally, the study stressed the importance of continuous training and retraining of personnel in terms of professional ethics, skills and values relevant to the proper conduct of elections; and further proposed that victims of security agency misconduct should be adequately compensated, aiming to prevent the development of resentment that could potentially evolve into a threat to national security. In conclusion, these recommendations, when implemented, will enrich the existing body of literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of this research area.

Key wards: *Election, Police, Electoral Process, Security Agencies, Rigging, National Security, Ballot box Snatching.*

Introduction

The Nigeria Police Force (NPFC) serves as the primary law enforcement agency in Nigeria, as stipulated in section 214 of the 1999 Nigeria constitution, as amended. The force maintains personnel deployed across all thirty-six (36) states of the nation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Oversight and coordination of the NPF fall under the purview of the Inspector General of Police, in accordance with section 215 (2) of the 1999 constitution and section 6 of the Police Act 1990. This structure operates based on the regimental framework of the force, following a chain of command delineated by ranks. Its core responsibilities encompass the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, maintenance of law and order, and safeguarding of lives and property (Nigerian Police Force, 2021).Regrettably, the NPF, much like in various other national concerns, has demonstrated a significant failure in executing its duties. One glaring instance is its deliberate compromise of security to facilitate and support electoral misconduct during each electoral cycle in Nigeria.

Asuquo (2019) contends that the Nigeria Police have faced criticism for their perceived lack of impartiality and instances of political interference in the electoral process. This phenomenon, known as partisan policing, involves law enforcement agencies showing favouritism towards specific political parties or candidates, thereby undermining the credibility and fairness of elections. Such actions not only diminish public trust in the police but also perpetuate a sense of injustice among citizens.

Similarly, a study by the Ebert Foundation highlights the substantial impact of the Nigeria Police Force's (NPF) handling of elections on public perception and trust in the electoral process. The report indicates that only 26% of Nigerians express confidence in the police during elections, primarily citing concerns related to impartiality, corruption and incompetence. Such a low level of public trust has the potential to undermine the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and can contribute to social unrest, thereby endangering national security .It is undeniable that during the past eight years of former President Muhammadu Buhari's and the current administration, the NPF has developed a tarnished reputation, often being described as repressive, brutal, hostile, unfriendly and corrupt, similar to police forces in countries like Kenya, where 92 percent of civilians view them as operating lawlessly. Burma, Iraq, Somolia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Russia, Pakistan, Haiti and Mexico, where it is observed that this police force makes the victims pay for criminal investigation, extort money from civilians, participate in kidnapping, inflicting violent on civilians as protecting civilians is not considered as their responsibilities or duties (world population review, 2023).

In the same line of thought, Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have documented numerous instances of human rights abuses by the Nigerian police, including extra-judicial killings, physical assault, electoral box theft, illegal detention and unlawful arrests (Campell, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020, Human Right Watch, 2020). Copiously observed by Adejumo, etal (2022), is the wit with which the police personnel subject Nigerians to inhuman treatment during elections. In fact citizens, who hold different political views are unabashedly beaten, humiliated and drag to police cells. Police instead of maintaining neutrality and defend democracy, and the constitution of Nigeria, police are seen to be bias, act as poodles to the government and party in government. Sufficient evidence suggests that the police was untowardly used by politicians to manipulate and aid electoral fraud. Corroborating this assertion, Human Rights Watch posits that, the rascality displayed and brutality meted to Nigerians by police personnel during elections, with citizens who hold differing political views, is unconceivable. Instead, the police are often seen as partisan and aligned with the government and ruling party, which affirms that politicians have used the Nigerian police to manipulate and facilitate electoral fraud, even in the presence of international observers (This day Nigerian News, 2023). This according to Ojo (2018), can incense unending political instability and impact national security negatively.

In agreement with the above arguments, Ruben Abati, a political analyst with Arise News Nigeria, contends that electoral theft, falsification of election results, voter intimidation, and suppression consistently occur because the police force plays a leading role in orchestrating these actions. Omonobi (2020) and Falt-Broton (2020) have expressed concerns about the disillusionment of Nigerians, particularly the youth, who have suffered from police misconduct and the negative consequences of transactional politics on their socio-economic well-being. Louis (2023) explicitly states that the police's failures in this regard have emboldened political thuggery and election violence, which poses significant obstacles to Nigeria's democratic development. In another dimension, Bussari (2020) acknowledges that the Nigerian state is gradually limiting civic space to protect the interests of the ruling class. This is achieved by bolstering the repressive powers of state institutions such as the police and the military, which often violate human rights, disenfranchise citizens, and commit crimes against humanity. The state, in its pursuit of maintaining power, uses legal and regulatory mechanisms to legitimize voter suppression, somewhat resembling the approach of Chinese police with limited oversight, granting them extensive authority to carry out government desires, even if it leads to errors and lawlessness, resulting in numerous human rights violations (Victoria, 2020). It is crucial to emphasize the mutual dependence between the police and the people. Crimes should be diligently investigated and reported, and the police's operations should demonstrate the highest level of integrity rather than hindering the progress of democracy.

Nigeria 2023 Election in Focus

Political parties and elections hold a significant role in the evaluation of politics in developing nations such as Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and others. Among political scholars, the presence of free and fair elections on a regular basis is considered a fundamental requirement for democracy (Hazama, 2006, Diamond, 1999). In Nigeria, colloquially, there are common expressions for what elections should represent, like *"fair competition in politics," "no shifting of election rules," and "no magomago (zero tolerance to manipulation)."* Unfortunately, these ideals often remain unattainable in practice. Elections and politics in Nigeria, for example, are marked by the deceitful actions and behavior of unscrupulous individuals who view elections as a "do-or-die" endeavour and are willing to resort to violence to secure victory. What's even more concerning is the active involvement of the police in such criminal activities; like ballot box theft, intimidation of opposition, vote-buying, and other election-related fraud. This behavior stands in stark contrast to the primary purpose of the police, which is to combat criminal elements, conduct covert operations, and respond to various forms of crime. Regrettably, the police have been implicated in widespread electoral crimes (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project - ACLED, 2021).Adduced further, Asuquo (2019), surmised that the apparent ineffectiveness of the Nigerian police is due to crass in knowledge with the legal framework governing election conduct. This deficiency, coupled with inadequate

training, in conflict resolution, has been posited as a contributing factor to the improper application and execution of the law.

Expressing deep solicitude over the police's conduct, former Vice President of Nigeria, Prof. Osinbajo, remarked that the 2023 general elections posed a significant challenge, particularly due to the public's mistrust of the police's ability to maintain public order and ensure the election's fairness. This is because of their perceived inclination to manipulate election outcomes in favour of the ruling party. Louis (2023) emphasizes that the police have the authority and responsibility to apprehend electoral offenders, regardless of their affiliations, to serve as a deterrent for future elections. The police and other security agencies must fulfill their roles effectively to prevent electoral violence from becoming a tool for political manipulation. For instance, Auwal Musa Rafsanjani, the chairman of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), of Nigeria in 2023 general election, called for the prosecution of all arrested electoral offenders in the recently concluded 2023 general elections. TMG's post-election analysis maintained that investigators should apprehend those who have not yet been arrested, as well as the sponsors of the individuals who caused chaos during the elections. The security agencies that collaborated with political thugs should also face legal consequences. Louis (2023) further points out that states where the police facilitated electoral fraud should also be held accountable. Evidence strongly suggests that some of the most egregious electoral fraud occurred in Lagos and River State, Nigeria. For example, in Lagos State, the police were seen ignoring threats and attacks by ruling party agents against voters, instead choosing to arrest the victims. This demonstrates how police's questionable activities were also in River state during the 2023 gubernatorial election.

It's important to acknowledge that unhindered political participation is a crucial indicator of the democratic quality of elections and a key criterion for defining democratic citizenship (Louis, 2023). However, the 2023 election, as reported, witnessed police interference in some states like Cross River, Enugu, Abia State, and Kaduna State, where police personnel actively obstructed voters from choosing their preferred candidates. This does not align with the principles oif healthy democratic governance. For instance, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) accused the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and INEC for electoral fraud and impunity in Nigerian elections. They concluded that the actions of the police, judiciary, and INEC contribute to electoral offenses and pose a serious threat to the nation's democracy. Tallior (2019) expressed dismay over the misconduct of police officers during a rerun election in River State. The police were allegedly responsible for widespread violence; include loss of lives, even among the police themselves. The election was marred by irregularities, and some results from these areas were validated by INEC, casting a shadow on the democratic process. Ambhad (2023) observed that during Nigerian elections, politicians often corrupt police officers by offering them substantial sums of money, making them willing participants in various electoral crimes. This underscores the need for responsive and effective measures to protect all participants in the electoral process and prevent human rights violations.

It's worth noting that police involvement in electoral fraud is not unique to Nigeria; it is a widespread problem in many countries, particularly in Africa. The National Crime Research Center notes that election crimes and offenses are increasingly common in global electoral processes, leading to socio-economic and political challenges. Therefore, proper planning and organization are essential to ensure free, fair, and credible elections, which are fundamental for a country's development. Ambhad (2023) laments that while many countries are successfully reforming their politics and governance systems to achieve democratic standards, Nigeria continues to grapple with bungled elections characterized by chaos and crime, often facilitated by police misconduct-this is a hindrance to overall development.He contends that apart from police interference, the entrenched corruption among politicians is another significant factor in electoral fraud in Africa. These politicians often lack accountability, transparency, and responsibility. For example, during the 2017 Kenya general elections, the Kenyan police were accused of violence against political dissenters, even children, who opposed the ruling government.

Tasper (2012) points out that to avoid violence resulting from a "winner-takes-all" scenario, the benefits of winning elections and the disadvantages of losing them should be reduced. While free and fair elections are essential for strengthening democracy, Santolan (2013) warns against the politicization of elections, as it can jeopardize a country's socio-economic trajectory and national security. This has been evident in various countries, including the Philippines, where the involvement of military and police personnel in organized crime and election malpractice led to mass protests and regime changes in some instances. African communities and citizens have suffered the brunt of police brutality in their daily lives, and this becomes even worse during and after flawed elections. Protests and expressions of discontent are often met with violence and repression, preventing the installation of a genuinely preferred candidate. As Ralph (2020) aptly states, African police, beholden to "powerful criminal politicians," resort to extreme measures, including violence, to ensure the victory of their favoured candidates.

2023 Generation in focus

The Nigeria general elections took place on February 25th and March 18th, 2023, to elect various officials, including the President, Senators, and Members of the House of Representatives, Governors, and State House of Assembly Members. In the lead-up to the elections, political parties conducted their respective primaries to select candidates for these offices. Out of the eighteen presidential candidates, only four—namely, the All Progressive Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), and the New Nigerian People Party (NNPP), demonstrated a strong commitment to the electoral process during their campaigns. The remaining fourteen candidates inexplicably faded into obscurity during the

election season. It is noteworthy that the Nigerian political landscape had traditionally been dominated by just two parties i.e. the People's Democratic Party, the opposition, and the All Progressive Congress, the ruling party. Over the years, these two parties had faced little competition, with power seemingly alternating between them. The emergence of the Labour Party and the New Nigerian People's Party introduced a fresh and alternative ideological shift to the political arena, championed notably by Peter Obi of the Labour Party and driven by the youths. This new wave of political engagement was a response to the corrupt and gerontocratic political establishment, which often viewed politics as a high-stakes, win-at-all-costs endeavor, and even involving killing opposition. As Abia (2023) succintly noted, the Labour Party candidates brought about a transformation in the political landscape, challenging the previously monetized and fraudulent electoral system, often supported by the compromised behavior of security agencies. The *"No Shi Shi" mantra*, which translates to not giving money in exchange for votes, resonated with honest Nigerians, particularly the youths who had suffered from the actions of self-serving politicians that looted public funds.

It is essential to emphasize that, like in other civilized countries; elections in Nigeria are governed by a set of rules and regulations defined in the 2022 Nigeria Electoral Act. Some of the key provisions include:

- Prohibiting multiple voting
- Banning the dissemination of false election results
- Ensuring that no one obstructs another person's right to vote
- Prohibiting the revelation of information on another person's ballot paper
- Preventing the possession of another person's voter cards
- Discouraging disorderly behavior at polling units
- Forbidding the shouting of political slogans at polling units
- Restricting the carrying of arms or dangerous weapons at polling units
- Prohibiting the use of sirens at polling units
- Preventing the snatching or destruction of ballot boxes or card readers
- Banning public meetings during election hours
- Restricting the wearing or carrying of badges or posters of political parties
- Prohibiting the infliction or threat of injury on any person at a polling unit.

Additionally, according to the Electoral Act of 2020, election results should be transmitted in real-time after counting .Unfortunately, all these legal provisions were openly violated, not only by the electoral body but also by security agencies, particularly the police. To underscore the extent of election irregularities in Nigeria, Wale (2014) reported that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) identified the Nigerian Police Force, the judiciary, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as responsible for electoral fraud and impropriety in the conduct of elections. In its investigation of election petitions filed at various election tribunals across Nigeria, the NHRC found that the judiciary, police, and INEC were complicit in promoting electoral offenses. Evidence revealed instances of unlawful substitution of candidates by political parties and INEC, inflated numbers of ballots

cast, forged election returns, voter and election official intimidation at polling centers, and various irregularities in places like Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, River State, and Enugu States, among others.

An illustrative cases that lay-bare the incompetence and criminality demonstrated by INEC occurred in Anambra State during the 2007 elections. In this instance, only 2,089 voters were registered, but INEC declared a staggering 7,226 votes. Unfortunately, such cases continue to plague our political landscape and electoral processes, reaching a climax during the 2023 general election when virtually every established law was blatantly and fundamentally disregarded by politicians and the state's security apparatus .For instance, the 2022 Electoral Act Section 201 stipulates the mandatory use of Bimodal Voters Accreditation (BVAS) for all election processes, encompassing voting, counting, verifying, and real-time result uploading to a portal, visible worldwide, akin to the practices in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. However, as expected with the "Nigerian INEC," they faltered and displayed the most egregious and morally bankrupt behavior witnessed in the history of Nigeria's democracy.

Amnesty International (2023) contends that "INEC tacitly endorsed chicanery" and further asserts that, in more accountable political environments, INEC should have displayed some remorse for the immense problems it caused and the public funds wasted on organizing an election that was flawed from the outset. Expressing her disappointment over the flawed 2023 election, Chimamanda Adichie wrote a letter to the President of the United States, Joe Biden, stating, in part:

> *"The election will be rigged because elections have always been rigged. The question is, how severely? Sometimes, voting felt like an inconsequential gesture as pre-determined winners were announced. A law was passed last year, the 2022 Electoral Act, which changed everything. It provided legal backing for electronic voter accreditation and the electronic transmission of results, a process overseen by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Professor Mahmood Yakubu, the Commission's Chair, assured Nigerians that votes would be counted in the presence of voters, recorded on a result sheet, and that a photo of the signed sheet would be immediately uploaded to a secure server. When rumors circulated suggesting that the commission might not keep its word, Yakubu (Commission chairman) firmly refuted them. In a speech at Chatham House in London, he reiterated that results would be available as soon as polling-unit results were finalized on Election Day. Nigerians lauded him. If results were uploaded right after voting, the ruling party, APC, which has been in power since 2015, would have no opportunity for manipulation. Technology was supposed to redeem Nigerian democracy. Results would no longer be manipulated. Elections would finally capture the true voice of the people. Trust and hope were born. "By the evening of February 25, 2023, that trust had evaporated. Election workers*

arrived late or without essential materials. Reports of violence and even a shooting at a polling unit emerged, alongside political operatives stealing. Some law enforcement officers appeared to collude in intimidating voters. In Lagos, a policeman stood idly by as an APC spokesman threatened members of a particular ethnic group he believed would vote for the opposition. Most egregiously, the electoral commission reneged on its promise to Nigerians. Presidential results were not uploaded in real time. Understandably, voters reacted with suspicion and frustration, with videos from polling stations showing voters demanding immediate result uploads. Some voters insisted they would not leave until INEC staff uploaded the presidential results. The election had not only been rigged but conducted in such a shoddy and disgraceful manner that it insulted the intelligence of Nigerians. It is, therefore, surprising to see the U.S. State Department congratulating Tinubu on March 1st. American intelligence surely cannot be so inept. With a little investigation, they would realize what is blatantly evident to me and many others: the process was imperiled not by technical deficiencies but by deliberate manipulation." (Chimamanda Adichie, 2023)".

Reports on the 2023 Nigeria general elections have highlighted the deplorable conduct, particularly the numerous electoral crimes believed to have been committed by the police and military. According to Anthonia (2023), the 2023 general elections may have earned the title of the most controversial in Nigeria's history. Some aggrieved candidates have filed petitions with the appropriate tribunals, objecting to non-compliance with the constitution and the Electoral Act of 2022, as well as citing corrupt practices, including violence, voter profiling, and intimidation. The Nigerian legal framework recognizes the importance of citizens' full participation in the electoral process, emphasizing the need for free, fair and credible elections. When these rights are denied or constrained, it can lead to chaos and anarchy. For instance, Section 50 (1) of the Electoral Act of 2022 specifies that voting in elections shall be by open secret ballot. This means that while voting should occur in public, voters are expected to cast their ballots privately. It is a violation of the principle of the secrecy of the ballot for anyone to reveal whom they voted for. Shockingly, the then seating President (Muhammadu Buhari) openly displayed his ballot paper after thumb printing, showing Nigerians and the world who he voted for, which is a clear breach of the Electoral Act. Surprisingly, no one has held him accountable for this, despite the law stating that such an action carries a maximum fine of one hundred thousand naira (N100, 000) or a three-month imprisonment. Anthonia further noted that, anyone who attempts to influence others by revealing their votes commits an additional offense.

There were verified reports of voter intimidation and harassment during the 2023 general election. A voter named Jennifer Efidi was physically assaulted and injured in the face, nearly losing her eyesight. Nonetheless, she returned to her polling unit with her face bandaged to cast her vote. This act is punishable with a fine of five hundred thousand naira (N500, 000) or up to two years of imprisonment, as stipulated in Section 128 of the Electoral Act. This election

(2023) saw both the ruling All Progressive Congress Party and the main opposition People's Democratic Party engage in law violations. Widespread financial inducements, bribery, and corruption occurred, with the alarming fact that the police and military supported and protected the electoral offenders. Collaborating this, Premium Times reported that the Inspector General of the Nigerian Police promised to bring all culprits to justice and disclosed the establishment of a panel to investigate all the election-related incidents, including alleged misconduct by officers and the murder of officers. Some suspects were arrested, with some confessing to being hired by the House of Representatives members-elect in Asari-Toru/Akuku-Toru Federal constituency. Incidents like these characterized the 2023 general elections, raising concerns about the consequences when electoral law violators are not held accountable but rather rewarded with political positions.

Given the widespread rigging and voter suppression, the public's outcry over the election's outcome was inevitable. For example, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) campaign in Enugu State disagreed with the Independent Election Commission (INEC) on its decision to suspend the announcement of final results, arguing that INEC was overreaching itself since it had no legal authority to suspend the declaration of collated results, as specified in Section 64 (8) of the Electoral Act 2022.Similarly, in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, voters witnessed a well-orchestrated rigging scheme and violence favouring the ruling party (PDP). During the collation and announcement of results, agents from other political parties refused to sign the result sheet because it did not reflect the will of the electorate. According to Thisdaylive (2023), reports from party agents, voters, and independent observers, corroborated by credible intelligence, indicated that the conduct of the election was a charade that deceived the electorate, who had genuinely hoped to elect the right leaders. This scenario was experienced across all 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, in Nigeria. Most distressing was the deployment of hired thugs by politicians, with the support of the police, military, and other paramilitary organizations, to kill, intimidate, and drive away voters who held different political preferences. For example, in Akwa Ibom State, Mr. Abraham Bassey was killed by a team of police officers from the Government House in Uyo, led by Senior Police Officer Danjuma Saleh, for choosing to vote for an opposition party. It was also reported that the Governor personally carried a firearm, emboldening his party supporters to commit serious electoral crimes, including stealing electoral materials and results from polling units to inflate figures in favour of the ruling party.

According to Okon (2023), fake result sheets were used in contrast to the originals pre-signed by the President-Elect. Personnel from the regulatory body, known as the Commissioner, were involved in collating results in numerous polling units across the country. Additionally, agents of the ruling party were openly observed offering people ten thousand naira (N10,000) in exchange for their votes. In Akwa Ibom State, PDP agents reportedly disbursed approximately

N1.3 million per polling unit across the 4,353 units in the state and $5,000 to each ward across the 329 wards in the state as part of their strategy to buy votes. What is particularly concerning is that all these misconducts occurred while security agencies either stood idly by or, in some cases, actively participated in the fraudulent activities. However, according to George (2023), the police did arrest around 26 individuals engaged in violence during the election. These individuals were found in possession of locally made pistols, cutlasses, knives, and suspected wraps of Indian hemp. Unfortunately, due to pressure from the ruling party, they have since been released, and impunity continues to prevail. This electoral malpractice reached its peak during the supplementary election in Adamawa State on April 16, 2023. The Resident Electoral Commissioner, who is not the legally designated returning officer, improperly declared the candidate with the lowest number of votes as the winner. The returning officer is typically appointed by INEC, often a university professor, and is constitutionally mandated to announce election results in Nigeria. In this case, a different individual engaged in this illegality, with the support of the police and other security agencies. It appears that electoral laws were set aside, and the infractors have not faced prosecution. This paints a grim picture of the 2023 general election in Nigeria, where more than 90% of the electoral results are currently under dispute in the courts.

National Security, Security Agencies and Election Misconduct

National security can be defined as the protection against infringement, encroachment, and the preservation of the status and integrity of a nation, often upheld through constitutional guaranteed mandate (Dictionary.findlaw.com .accessed 10-10-23). It encompasses the defense of a sovereign state, including its citizens, economy, and institution and is considered a constitutional duty of the government. National security involves both military and non-military dimensions, such as economic, energy, food, cyber, and counterterrorism security. According to Mark (2021), national security risks encompass not only the actions of other nation-states but also those of violent non-state actors like drug cartels and multinational corporations. To address national security concerns, governments employ political, economic, military, and diplomatic measures. Governments worldwide are increasingly organizing their security policies into a national security strategy, appointing national security advisers, and briefing the president on matters related to national security and strategic interests. Non-military actions, such as undemocratic election processes, bigotry, and ethnic profiling, as witnessed in the recent 2023 Nigerian general election, can pose serious national security threats. Many security experts, including Barry Buzan, Ole Warver, Jaap de Wilde, and Celestin Bassey, avers that national security depends on political stability, as a country's political environment's stability lends credibility to election outcomes for disaffected groups.

As Celestine and Maurice (2019) rightly observed, unstable and contentious politics can lead to political crises. When a state unilaterally imposes a government through election rigging and other manipulations, it exposes the country's security vulnerability or capability. In such situations, disenfranchised groups often express their grievances and may inadvertently reveal

security vulnerabilities in their pursuit of justice or redress. The 2019 U.S. election, for instance, demonstrated how Donald Trump's actions made it easier for other nations, such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, to exploit weaknesses in United States national security. In matters related to security, Nwagbara (2019) argued that when people do not have the freedom, peace, and security to fully participate in the political governance of their respective countries, they may seek help from other nations to revolt against their home country. This external assistance can compromise the security of the seeker's country. The Arab Spring political upheavals in countries like Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and others threatened their national security. For example, Syria became a testing ground for various global powers, including Russia, the United States, and Turkey, to experiment with new military equipment and tactics at the expense of the Syrian citizens. Similarly, Iraq experienced a breakdown in national security, with the United States taking the lead and local warlords governing certain regions despotically. The same can be said for Libya, Somalia, Mali and more, where security agencies' meddling in politics has led to significant national security threats. Ayuk et al. (2020) suggested that people may share or sell security intelligence to other groups or countries, especially when seeking assistance to assert their political and resource-related rights.

National security remains a central component of Nigeria's existence and development. Nwagbara (2019) maintained that national security warrants a comprehensive and thorough analysis employing various approaches to achieve and maintain it. Nigeria's security situation remains challenging due to unnecessary and corrupt interferences by security agencies in politics and election matters. During each election cycle, the will of the people is suppressed, leading to the victory of unpopular candidates. This indirectly affects other socio-economic and territorial security factors, with immeasurable consequences. To put it differently, when security agencies are subtly implicated in election rigging, voter intimidation, and suppression, it leads to citizens' disillusionment and poses a direct national security risk. In such cases, people's behaviors and actions reflect a lack of trust in the security agencies. Those who are dissatisfied may refrain from volunteering intelligence or information to the authorities, impacting the relationship between the security sector and citizens.

The primary purpose of governments worldwide is the security and welfare of their citizens. National security can be threatened by both external and internal challenges. As noted by Abayomi (2019), the post-Cold War era brought a shift in international politics, leading to a new focus on managing internal security threats in addition to preventing external aggression. Nations employ their national powers, sometimes in collaboration with friendly nations and organizations, to prevent crime, maintain law and order, and establish institutions like the police and other security agencies responsible for enforcing law and order in society .In Nigeria, the police serve as the primary law enforcement agency tasked with preventing crime and addressing internal security threats. Other security agencies may be called upon when the

level of threat exceeds the police's capabilities. Various issues threaten Nigeria's internal security, including ethno-communal and religious clashes, armed banditry, cultism, and security agencies' involvement in election rigging and other forms of oppression against the people.

For example, in the 1980s, the United Kingdom faced ethno-religious and political conflicts involving the Irish Republic Army (IRA), which fought for a Catholic Ireland and threatened the UK's internal security. The British Armed Forces, including the special Air service, were deployed to tackle the IRA, bringing relative peace to the UK. Similarly, in 2015, the Ghana Armed Forces underwent special training to respond to threats like terrorism, piracy, illicit drug trade, which had the potential to destabilize the country. In Nigeria, various internal security challenges have emerged, including the farmer-herder conflict, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, ritual killings, pipeline vandalism, and political violence. While some have been addressed to some extent, the involvement of security agencies in election rigging, violence, and the endorsement of corrupt conduct by politicians remains a significant concern. This constitutes Nigeria's greatest internal security challenge at present. National Security Adviser Rtd. General Muguno decried the security agencies' ignoble roles in Nigerian elections and emphasized the need for professionalism and neutrality to ensure free and fair elections.

A former Governor (Nyesom Wike) of Rivers State, Nigeria, also lamented that the police, instead of performing their duties, openly collude with political thugs to subvert the democratic process. European Union Election observers echoed these concerns, stating that the insecurity and bloodshed could be minimized if security agencies, especially the police, remain neutral and act as agents of the law. Similarly, Ann (2021) reported that politicians in Nigeria are becoming less accountable to the electorate due to the alleged involvement of security officers in election rigging. He suggested that if politicians knew that soldiers and police officers would not be engaged to rig elections for them, they would be more responsive to the electorate, as their votes would carry weight. In essence, elections in Nigeria are no longer determined by performance but by connections to security agencies. Security organizations should refrain from involving their officers in politics, focus on protecting Nigerians, combating bandits and insurgency, and avoid handling ballot boxes during elections. As mandated by constitutional provisions, security agencies play a critical role in preventing crime and violence in all forms and adhering to this approach can minimize, alleviate and eradicate national security threats.

Security Agencies Operations and Citizens Safety

Lately, Nigeria's security agencies, primarily exemplified by the police force, appear to have lost their genuine commitment to citizens' safety. The typical slogan that has been associated with the police, "police is your friend," has now derogatorily transformed into "police is not your friend and, in fact, your worst enemy." This shift is not unwarranted, considering the series of atrocities committed against Nigerians from all walks of life. For instance, on Thursday, the 15th of October, 2020, Google Africa made a public statement on its Twitter handle,

condemning the reprehensible, oppressive and brutal actions of Nigeria's security forces against its citizens. According to Lawal and Olanrewaju (2020), one glaring example of such crude, oppressive, and brutal actions by the police and military was the ENDSARS Protest, which began as a response to the tragic death of a young man due to police brutality. Despite the peaceful nature of the protest, the national government responded by deploying riot police and the military, who began shooting at the protesters. Tragically, there were reported casualties, with people killed and many others wounded. On a particular day, The New York Times, October 7, 2020, confirmed that two individuals were fatally shot. Furthermore, an investigation by Amnesty International on October 7, 2020, revealed that the Nigerian army and police had killed at least 12 peaceful protesters at two different locations in Lagos, Nigeria.

Olowolagba (2019), unequivocally states that Nigerians often find themselves at the receiving end of unprofessional conduct by the police. Daily, Nigerians face suppression, intimidation, harassment, and imprisonment at the hands of the police, who seem to act at the behest of the government of the day. In fact, those Nigeri ans who dare to speak out against bad governance and injustice may find them persecuted, imprisoned, or even killed. In democratic societies, the police are tasked with maintaining law and order, protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens. In carrying out these duties, police officers are granted a wide range of discretionary powers on behalf of the state. However, if these powers are exercised unlawfully, they can significantly infringe upon fundamental rights and make redress challenging. In Nigeria, it often appears that the police and the military operate with impunity, posing a significant challenge to public trust in the security architecture, particularly concerning police-military-civilian relations (Samson, 2019). As Flowers (2001) posited, citizen security is undoubtedly a critical aspect of a democratic society, and the behaviors of security agencies should be conceived as being:

> The social situation in which all person are free to enjoy their fundamental rights and public institution have sufficient capacity against a backdrop of the rule of law, to guarantee the exercise of those rights and respond efficiently when they are violated. Thus, the citizenry is the principal focus of the state's protection. Summing up, citizens security becomes a necessary albeit not sufficient – condition of human security that in the end is the ultimate guarantee of human development. Therefore, institutional interventions to prevent and control violence and crime (citizen security policies) can be regarded as an indirect but nonetheless significant opportunity. First, to buttress sustainable economic development, secured, to strengthen democratic governance and the observance of human rights.

Shalonda and Flint (2021) observed that the social contract is one of the most influential concepts in the study of ethics and politics as theorized by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, provides a useful framework for understanding the unique relationship between the police and society. Their proposition suggests that in order to escape from the "state of nature" which is

marked by anarchy constant fear and insecurity, societies established a social contract whereby individual agreed, to voluntary surrender certain rights and freedom to a higher authority, which in turn guarantees safety and security for all. This need for establishing an enforcement mechanism can be said to constitute the conceptual foundation of policing. However, giving up these certain rights by individuals in Nigeria for exchange for security by the security agencies (police) has raised serious questions; How can Nigerians ensure that the police use force to provide security and order for all, but at the same time prevent the police from succumbing to the temptation to use powers illegitimately.

As stated by Eniola (2023), Nigerian police represent everything that violated the social contract that rather acted on the negative, suggesting that the people are not protected but humiliated by the suppose mechanism meant to provide safety for them. He further reported an incident where a policeman was seen assaulting a lady in Lagos State, for the simple reason that, the Lady was recording him, which is not a crime. Coming amidst serious criticism from the National Human Rights Commission and other bodies, about police brutality and general untowardness against her citizens, the government to atone for the sins of the police offered a symbolic disbursement of compensation to various victims whose rights were breached – and a breakdown of details showed that, out of 74 victims who were compensated, 25 were extra judicial killing. Others include 4 victims of enforced disappearance, 25 victims of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, 16 victims of illegal arrest and prolonged detention and 4 people for confiscation of property. Incidences like these, are seen and experienced by citizens all over Nigeria, implying that, Nigeria police and other security agencies are anti-citizens and their loyalty is not to defending of the constitution, but to serve individuals in government.

Methodology

The research employed a survey design, selected for its descriptive nature. This design was chosen to facilitate the researcher in drawing general conclusions from a diverse range of information sources, including online materials, textbooks, newspapers and firsthand field observations. Additionally, insights and commentary from legal, security and political experts will prove to be valuable assets and galvanized the content of study.

Theoretical Framework

Social Conflict theory

Social conflict theory is a macro-level perspective within sociology that perceives society as a battleground of inequality, giving rise to conflict and social transformation. Central to this viewpoint is the idea that society is organized in a manner that favours minority of elites at the expense of the majority. According to proponents of social conflict theory, it revolves around the dynamics between dominant and powerful groups versus minority groups. Karl Marx, often regarded as the progenitor of social conflict theory, argued that the state functions as a tool of the influential and powerful factions, such as politicians and the "moneyed elites" (Abayomi, 1919). Government institutions, including the police department, are products of political

processes that mirror the interests of the powerful segments of society. Celestine (2019), asserts that the misconduct of the police serves to uphold the existing state of inequality and aids the powerful in exploiting the less privileged masses.

In alignment with Karl Marx's perspective, it was discovered that, in conjunction with rational choice logic, the minority threat perspective (a branch of social theory) sheds light on the significance of external political influence on the allocation of police resources. Similarly, based on the analysis of formal complaints, Nwagbara (2019) contended that those who are economically marginalized and politically powerless in society are more likely to lodge complaints of police misconduct and face more severe instances of misconduct compared to individuals with greater power and resources. For instance, Nwagbara (2019) argued that in the analysis of conflict hypotheses, the police were more inclined to employ deadly force in highly unequal states, particularly when dealing with economically disadvantaged masses, especially in minority communities.
The influence of majority-minority conflicts appears to impact the dynamics of police-public interactions in real-life situations. In the case of Nigeria, the police often act at the behest of politicians, forcefully imposing their "will" over the masses. This implies that police misconduct against the powerless populace, along with the lack of accountability, may be seen as an inevitable consequence of the powerful political class influence on the police and other security agencies. In fact, there is a prevalent assumption that subordinate groups are composed of transgressors and should therefore be controlled, which is a common occurrence in the daily life of Nigerians (Nwagbara, 2019). Essentially, Nigerian politicians disproportionately benefit from established social and economic arrangements, leading them to utilize the state's coercive force for election rigging.

From this perspective, police misconduct and violence during elections, involving violations of citizens' rights, can be viewed as a means for privileged societal elites to suppress and control any opposition. This, in turn, can incite counter reactions from the citizens. The belief that certain forms of domination are legitimate and too powerful to be challenged can itself serve as a source of power for the dominant group, such as politicians. Studies on police violence during elections and other contexts in countries like Jamaica, India, and Brazil have indicated that extrajudicial killings, brutality, and oppression by the police are tolerated as necessary forms of coercive social control, even in the presence of claims of being liberal democratic states (Bussari, 2020). Little or no effort is made to curb the use of deadly force by the police, as it is often tacitly approved by the elites and the powerful.

The theory holds significant implications for the study. The escalating and unmitigated election fraud underscores the fact that police operations and behaviour receive support from the influential and corrupt political elites in Nigeria, who often go unpunished for their misconduct.

However, despite the compelling arguments presented by the social conflict theory, it has certain limitations. The theory does not offer a comprehensive explanation for the widespread issue of police brutality. This is because proponents of this macro-sociological theory generally agree that it is the external influence of the elite political class that shapes and dictates individual police officers' conduct in their daily interactions with civilians. While this theory may capture overarching patterns related to police involvement in election-related crimes and mistreatment of voters, it fails to explain why specific police officers engage in such behaviors at particular times and locations while others do not. Furthermore, understanding the problem of police misconduct requires an examination of the cognitive, behavioral, and situational contexts that inform these actions or inactions. It may be overly simplistic to attribute these issues solely to the powerful political elites who call the shots.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of the Nigerian Police in election management and the preservation of national security during electoral processes is essential for upholding democratic principles and maintaining public order. Regrettably, as highlighted in the preceding discussion, it is evident that security agencies, particularly the police, have performed poorly in fulfilling their constitutional responsibilities. The culmination of the security forces' unruly behavior was particularly evident during the 2023 general election, where their compromise, complicity, and partisanship became conspicuous. Citizens were subjected to brutality, harassment, and even attacks by individuals supported by the security apparatus, wielding cudgels, machetes, and firearms. In all of these incidents, the security agencies displayed a clear bias against Nigerian citizens, who constitute the majority, acting unprofessionally in support of politicians. It is worth noting that some dedicated officers fulfilled their duties admirably, upholding the legal requirements of their responsibilities. Consequently, areas where such officers operated saw the maintenance of security and the alleviation of accompanying threats.

The compromises within the security agencies, as some have rightly argued, can be attributed to the failure to conduct psychological assessments and retraining of the personnel, inadequate improvement and adjustment of their wages, and the absence of decent welfare packages. Despite these challenges, the Nigerian security forces have, on occasion, effectively addressed national security threats and restored law and order. Therefore, the following recommendations are put forward: Security operations models should align with the established election rules and regulations. Security organizations should regularly organize seminars and workshops to educate their personnel about the intricacies of electoral laws. Significant emphasis should be placed on continuous training and retraining of personnel regarding professional ethics, skills, and values. Adequate compensation should be provided to victims of security agency misconduct to prevent resentment that could potentially lead to national security threats. Complaints and issues related to injustices against citizens must be thoroughly investigated, and if guilt is established, appropriate punishment should be administered. Security agency personnel accompanying politicians in election rigging, voter intimidation, and subversion

should face immediate dismissal. These recommendations aim to address the systemic issues within the security agencies and pave the way for a more professional, impartial, and effective role in ensuring security during electoral processes and upholding democratic principles.

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