

FOREIGN OBSERVERS AND SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE CONDUCT OF 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Certainly, the provision of necessary security in the conduct of democratic elections is essential in achieving free, fair and credible outcome. Thus, in the build up to 2019 general elections in Nigeria, the issue of security constituted one of the major preoccupations of foreign observers. Fundamentally, foreign observers from both governmental and non-governmental organizations focus on the level of preparation for election in any given country. Indeed, foreign observers monitor the casting of votes by eligible voters and the counting of votes by the officials of the electoral body. This is particularly significant in determining whether the outcome of election is credible and acceptable or otherwise in any given country. Foreign observers serve as important watchdogs in the conduct of democratic elections in any part of the world. Their verdicts on the conduct of elections help to confer or deny legitimacy to a government. As a matter of fact, the views of foreign observers are very critical to the survival of democracy in emerging democracies like Nigeria. Methodologically, the study adopted qualitative method in both data collection and analysis. Data collected were analyzed using textual analysis of the documents. Therefore, the argument is that the concern of foreign observers on security is seen as critical in ensuring peaceful and orderly conduct of elections. Also, it can be stated that the importance attached to security by all the stakeholders during the 2019 elections led to the signing of peace accord by the presidential candidates of different political parties. However, in spite of the mechanisms put in place the study found that some pockets of electoral violence occurred in some states in Nigeria.

Keywords: foreign observers, election, security, democracy, monitor etc.

Introduction

Basically, the conduct of election is considered as one of the important means of exercising civic responsibility in a democracy. Thus, election enable citizens in a democratic setting not only to participate in political process but empowers them to make their choices among alternative political parties and/or candidates. However, for the conduct of election to meet the requirements of being free, fair and transparent, it is essential that such an exercise is conducted under a secured environment. Thus, the imperative of electoral security in democracies cannot be overemphasized. It is for this reason that Nwolise (2011: 30) argues that "elections constitute the heart of democracy, and, therefore, the best standards in democratic practice include the conduct of free, fair, peaceful, secure, and credible elections, in which the will or verdict of the people (electorate) stand supreme and inviolably sacred."

In modern times, the conduct of democratic elections in any part of the world has been attracting the attention of keen observers of international events. As a demonstration of commitment to

the deepening of democracy in the emerging democracies, some advanced democratic countries and international organizations have developed the practice of constituting team of observers to monitor the process of elections in these countries. Based on this, foreign observers from both governmental and non-governmental organizations usually focus on the level of preparation for election in any given country. Indeed, foreign observers monitor the casting of votes by the eligible voters and the counting of votes by the officials of the electoral body. This is particularly significant in determining whether the outcome of election is transparently free and fair or otherwise in any given country. Foreign observers serve as important watchdogs on the conduct of democratic elections in any part of the world. Their verdicts on the conduct of elections help to confer or deny legitimacy to a government. As a matter of fact, the views of foreign observers are very critical to the survival of democracy in emerging democracies like Nigeria.

During the preparation for the conduct of 2019 general elections in Nigeria, the issue of election security constituted one of the major concerns of foreign observers. For instance, the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) has emphasized the need for adequate security during the conduct of 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Therefore, the body organized a workshop called "Training the Trainers for Election Security Personnel for the 2019 Elections." Accordingly, the ECES Nigeria Project Director, Rudolf Ebling (2019:4) maintains that:

Conducting hitch free and credible elections requires a peaceful environment devoid of threats to lives and properties. Elections officials can only discharge their responsibilities of organizing elections including deployment and retrieval of materials in a secured environment to be able to come out and vote during election without fear or intimidation and harassment.

The statement above indicates that the provision of adequate security is central to the conduct of free and fair elections. However, in Nigeria, in order to ensure effective coordination of all security agencies on duties during election, a body called Inter Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) was established in 2010 under the auspices of INEC (Jega, 2013; Olurode and Hammanga, 2013; Okafor et. al, 2018). Over the years, in Nigeria there have been security challenges in the conduct of series of elections. In some cases, the problem stems from lack of provision of adequate security during elections. On the contrary, where the security is adequate, there have been alleged claims that the security personnel do favour some political parties, especially the incumbent, to the detriment of others. Based on this, Abati (2020:72) avers that "in past elections across Nigeria, there were complaints about security agencies and their performance. We have witnessed spectacles of policemen, soldiers, and other security agents constituting themselves into a nuisance on election day and after, acting, as it were, on orders from above, in an absolutely partisan manner." In a situation where the security personnel who are supposed to protect both the electoral officials and the voters are seen not to be neutral during elections, it is capable of portraying the country in bad image in the comity of nations. It is perhaps on this basis that the former Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations, Chief Emeka Anyaoku (2019:6) posits that "Nigerian friends and international community as a whole are watching, watching the behavior of the Federal Government and its agencies including especially the police, the army and other law enforcement instruments to see how far they respect the country's constitution, the rule of law and their inherent obligations to act impartially and fairly in playing their roles in respect of the elections."

The provision of level playing grounds for all contestants guarantee peaceful conduct of elections. It was because of the importance attached to the peaceful conduct of the 2019 general elections that the National Peace Committee, under the leadership of Nigeria's former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, made the presidential candidates in the 16th February, 2019 election to sign a peace accord. The reason for this was to eschew violence and maintain security during and after the elections. The event witnessed the presence of foreign observers (Daily Trust, 14/02/2019: 1-5). Therefore, this paper interrogated foreign observers and concerns for security in 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The paper is divided into five sections with the introduction as the first. The second section focused on imperatives of security in electoral process. The third section discussed perspectives on the role of foreign observers in elections while the fourth section captured foreign observers and the conduct of elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Finally, the fifth section concluded the work.

Imperatives of Security in Electoral Process

In the modern era, the provision of adequate security is essential in the conduct of democratic elections in any given country. This is because security ensures that officials organize free and fair elections that could lead to peaceful transfer of political power from one individual to another or from one political party to another. In addition, security guarantees orderly and peaceful casting of votes by eligible voters. Based on this, Gambo (2018:177) states that "security is central to the proper management of elections." To a large extent, electoral security is a serious business that no any country can downplay in the process of strengthening democracy. It is inconceivable that elections can be organized in any democratic society without proper security arrangements. It is on this basis that the former Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Attahiru Jega (2013: xx) avers that "security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. From the provision of basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations." In the same vein, Alade (2018:277) states that:

Security is crucial in an election for the protection of the electoral staff, voters, candidates, agents, parties, civil society organizations, domestic and international observers as well as personnel of security agencies. It is also critical for the protection of electoral processes, in ensuring that voters exercise their civic duties, without fear or hindrance, increasing a level playing field for all political parties and candidates to canvass for support of the electorate and in maintaining overall integrity of the democratic and electoral process.

The above implies that all the stakeholders in the conduct of elections require security so as to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties and/or responsibilities. The success or failure of any election exercise depends largely on the conduct of the security agencies on election duties (Mohammed, 2018). In essence, it can be stated that the provision of adequate security during elections is important in achieving reliable outcomes. In practice, the conduct of election has gestation periods, namely before, during and after elections. At every stage in the conduct of election, security is critical. Based on this, Mahiri-zaja (2013: 117) identifies that security remains a constant variable throughout the electoral cycle. The cycle includes i) registration of voters, voter education; ii) campaign periods, the actual polling day and of course during counting; and iii) tallying and declaration of scores and final results. Essentially, the role of security agencies in maintaining level playing grounds for all political competitors based on rules and regulations have

the potential of ensuring that no members of one political party infringe on the rights of other members of different parties during the process of elections.

It is undeniable that security has become an important element in defending and deepening democratic system of government worldwide. It ensures that citizens participate in democratic process without hindrance and threats. Therefore, electoral security can be categorized into two, namely, physical security and cyber security. Physical security requires the presence of the personnel of security agencies to protect both individuals and electoral materials during elections. Cyber security is carried out by 'cyber navigators' who provide direct support to election information through the use of internet infrastructure. According to Praetz (2019: 187) "these navigators should adopt the mantra of Defend, Detect and Recover." The expert navigators need to perform the three functions effectively so as to prevent electoral fraud by politicians through the hacking of electoral or line platforms. In the advanced democracies, where electronic machines are used in the conduct of elections, the concern is on cyber security. However, in the case of developing countries where elections are conducted manually, the concern is more on physical security of electoral personnel and materials.

Perspectives on the Role of Foreign Observers in Elections

Undoubtedly, the collapse of the communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and some Eastern European countries in the early 1990s, led to the Third Wave of democratization across the world. With this development, some Western advanced democratic countries, international institutions and/or organizations like the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU) embarked on democracy promotion in Africa and other countries. One of the areas in which these countries and international bodies support democracy in emerging democratic countries is through the sending of international election observation missions to monitor the process of the conduct of elections. It is on this basis that Kelly (2010: 166) states that "international election-monitoring missions are often mounted by democracy-promotion organizations."

To avoid clash of interests between the foreign observers and host country during elections, certain international principles are laid down and which need to be adhered to. In 2005, the UN established the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (DPIEO) and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers. These include respecting the sovereignty and international human rights, respect the laws of the country and the authority of electoral bodies, respect the integrity of the international election observation mission, maintain strict political impartiality at all times, provide appropriate identification, maintain accuracy of observations and professionalism in drawing conclusions, refrain from making comments to the public or the media before the mission speaks, cooperate with other election observers and maintain proper personal behavior (Uche and Mbabiorgu, 2018: 307). Significantly, the role of election observers is to make reports about the conduct of election based on what transpire on the fields fairly. Accordingly, Kohnert (2004: 2) maintains that "observer missions are supposed to make informed judgements on the conduct of a process, on the basis of information collected by independent persons, who are not inherently authorized to intervene in the process. International election observation is based on the principles of full coverage, impartiality, transparency and professionalism."

Over the years, the inability of emerging democratic countries in Africa and other countries to overcome some problems associated with the conduct of elections, such as fraud, rigging, falsification of results, and violence have necessitated the presence of outsiders to render assistance to them. The rationale behind such assistance is to deepen and strengthen democratic

ideals. The involvement of foreign observers in the conduct of elections is seen as a means of maintaining certain recognized standards in the process of choosing representatives of people in democratic countries across the world. Based on this, Kelly (2012: 207) maintains that:

A variety of international actors engage extensively in domestic elections. As the regional organizations have adopted standards on elections, they have also created agencies to oversee and promote these standards. The United Nations has also intensified electoral assistance of various kinds, and nongovernmental organizations have sprung up everywhere to promote good elections. Several national development agencies, such as USAID, have also developed election units. In addition, international aid donors and international financial institutions sometimes get involved with elections.

The idea of sending foreign observers to monitor the conduct of elections in any democratic country has been useful in helping the local electoral body to assert its independence in the conduct of elections. It also helps to check the influence of incumbent political party from interfering in the whole electoral process. Above all, it helps to confer legitimacy to the government that comes to power through free and fair elections. To this extent, the issue of election observation has become an important instrument of international relations in the international system. This is because in the post-cold war era, the reports of election observers on the conduct of credible election by a country serves as the yardstick by which advanced democratic countries as well as international institutions relates with its officials. It is perhaps on this basis that Kohnert (2004: 2) argues that:

In general, election observation is informed by two distinct but closely linked major objectives: Firstly, the interest of foreign policy to back good governance in developing countries by recognizing legitimate elections and governments. In what is to follow, this will be called (for the sake of argument) the “diplomatic objective.” Secondly, election observation is meant to assist the process of democratization and the development of a human rights culture. This will be called the “aid objective.” Both components share the ultimate aim of any development co-operation, i.e. to make itself redundant by entrenching innovations (like democracy) deep within each nation through capacity-building.

Significantly, the reports of foreign observers on elections serve as the basis on which members of the international community perceive and relate with the government of any given democratic country. It is on this basis that some dominant Western countries and institutions usually commend and accord recognition to the outcome of credible elections. Conversely, the Western countries are usually quick in condemning the outcome of fraudulent elections in any country. Thus, the practice of sending foreign observers on election missions is serving the purpose of spreading and strengthening democratic values in developing countries (Amaechi, 2019).

However, much as the work of foreign observers has received commendations and gain acceptance around the world, it has not been totally exonerated from criticisms and attacks from certain circles. In the first place, experience has shown that where different observation missions

monitor elections in a country they sometimes make contradictory reports. Based on this, Kelly (2010: 159) argues that “in most cases where outside monitors observe elections, more than one organization will send an observer mission. Yet different monitoring organizations do not always reach the same conclusions about a given election, as a few examples illustrate. Cambodia’s 1998 elections exemplify a situation in which different monitoring organizations disagree.”

From the statement above, it can be stated that in some cases election observers do share different views on the conduct of election in a particular country. A situation where some foreign observer missions will commend and approve an election and other groups will condemn and disapprove it is not portraying the sense of consensus and professionalism of the election observers. Also, contradictory views of foreign observers create confusion to the larger members of the international community because they will be uncertain as to which reports to accept and adopt. Thus, Dorman (2006: 169) opines that:

These divergent interpretations are explained, in part, by the developing, yet still ad hoc nature of election observing. Despite their remarkable influence and power over decisions by donors and perceptions of African states and leaders, election observers have no clear standards or guidelines. Election observing, as an ad hoc innovation which has taken flight in the post-cold war period, is in constant state of flux. Important questions need to be asked about what exactly observers observe and how. The motives of election observers, often described as ‘electoral tourists,’ are increasingly called into question.

Furthermore, as a result of political necessity, in some cases foreign observers do compromise their positions and accept the outcome of flawed election results in some countries. It is for this reason that Kelly (2010: 165) avers that “monitoring organizations are also influenced by the political importance of the election-holding state. In the mid-to late 1990s, for example, the OSCE and the European Parliament were hesitant to criticize Russian elections.” This implies that foreign observers, especially from advanced Western nations always make certain calculated consideration on the need to keep some countries within the fold of democracies even if their elections were poorly organized. To this extent, they still prefer a government that is formed on the basis of flawed election than an autocratic or unconstitutional regime.

Another factor that foreign election observer missions do consider in reporting is the necessity to maintain political order and stability in the host country. In order to promote political stability as well as the desire not to hurt the feelings of political leaders in some emerging democratic countries, some foreign observers usually have the tendency of not criticizing electoral malpractices of incumbents. In other words, sometimes foreign observers tend to overlook the use of power of incumbency to gain advantage in winning elections in some developing countries. It is perhaps on this basis that Uche and Mbabiorgu (2018: 307) argue that:

Despite the wide acceptance and commendation of election monitoring, politicians still find ways of cheating and circumventing the system. For instance, when political victors, control not only government policies but also windfalls in job opportunities for their supporters, it is even harder to get incumbents to adopt recommendations that may lessen their chance of keeping power.

In the run up to the 2019 elections in Nigeria some individuals representing different political interests were not comfortable with the comments of some Western countries about the political development in the country. For instance, the EU, UK, and USA criticized the action of Nigerian government under President Muhammadu Buhari on the suspension and subsequent removal of Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Walter Onnoghen on the 25th January 2019. Some Western countries and institutions perceived that the action was likely to affect the credibility of the general elections slated for February 2019 (Lakemfa, 2019). Based on this, the Kaduna state governor, Malam Nasir El-Rufaí (2019:4) responded to the statements of foreign countries and foreign observers toward the 2019 elections as amounting to interference in Nigeria's internal affairs. He therefore, warned that "non-interference in the affairs of other countries is a basic principle of international law. Threatening to intervene in another country implies the use of force. Those who are basing their electoral calculations on foreign intervention need to be discouraged. Only the lawful votes of the Nigerian people should make or unmake governments." The statement further reads that "those that are calling for anyone to come and intervene, they would go back in body bags."

The above implies that the members of the ruling party in Nigeria would not tolerate any criticism that would affect the fortune of the party during the 2019 elections. Similarly, a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Protect Nigeria, decried foreign interference in Nigeria's electoral process. The Secretary of the group, Abdulwahab Ekehide (2019:13) maintains that "we expect the diplomatic missions and their agents among the electoral monitors, to observe diplomatic ethics and decorum. The Nigeria nation is greater than selfish interest of any person or group of persons." In a related development, before the September 2020 governorship election in Edo State, the governments of United States and United Kingdom (Britain) warned that they would impose a visa ban on Nigerian politicians that rig and manipulate the result. The threat did not go down well with the Nigerian government as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused the two countries of interfering in Nigeria's sovereignty (Kolawole, 2020:72).

On a general note, it can be stated that in spite of the different challenges encounter by foreign observers in the course of exercising their duties, they still play significant role in helping to improve the quality of electoral process particularly in developing countries. This is essentially because after every election, they normally offer some far reaching recommendations to the electoral bodies on ways to improve future elections.

Foreign Observers and the Conduct of Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Since the return to democratic system of government in 1999 in Nigeria, the conduct of series of transitional elections have been witnessing the participation of foreign election observation missions from different countries and international organizations. In Nigeria just like elsewhere around the world, the foreign observers normally secure the mandate to participate in monitoring elections from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) after accreditation. During the accreditation exercises, INEC normally issues out certain guidelines to the election observers in conformity with international best practices. In the 1999 general elections in Nigeria, the foreign observers' reports showed that the elections were not completely free and fair as there were some cases of falsification of results in some parts of the country (Brunner and Strout, 1999). Even though there were certain flaws in the conduct of 1999 elections, the outcome were accepted by both local and international observers as a means of making the military to relinquish political power to the civilians. According to Kohnert (2004:3) "while not at all being free and fair, the presidential election is a good example of a borderline case, where professional standards of

election observation (as defined above) were violated by the strong bias of diplomatic final pronouncements by national and international observer missions.” Therefore, through compromises, the politicians were made to accept and use the 1999 elections as the basis to improve on the subsequent future elections in Nigeria.

The 2003 general elections in Nigeria were marked by huge irregularities and malpractices. The fact that the 2003 transition election at the presidential level was contested by the seating President Olusegun Obasanjo and other candidates, the power of incumbency was said to be used to manipulate the outcome to favour the ruling party. Similarly, at the levels of National Assembly and State Governorship Elections some malpractices were recorded. Based on this, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU, 2003: 7) reported that “2003 elections failed to meet the hopes and expectations of Nigerian people and fall short of basic international standard.” Consequently, there were cases of electoral violence across the country during the time. Similarly, the 2007 general elections did not fare better. Both at presidential and governorship levels the elections were rigged in favour of the ruling party. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) from the United States reported that the 2007 elections failed the Nigerian people because of irregularities (NDI, 2007). In addition, other foreign observer missions like the EU Observer Mission condemned the 2007 election as one of the worst they had seen around the world (Essien, 2018). Apart from the fact that the outcome of the elections generated political violence, it also witnessed high rate of litigations as many candidates that were defeated challenged the results at different election petition tribunals. It is for this reason that Lawan (2018: 8-9) maintains that “in fact, election observers and monitoring groups, both domestic and international were unanimous about the shameful conduct of the 2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria.”

When President Umaru Musa Yar’adua was sworn into office he acknowledged the flaws in the 2007 general elections that brought him to power. In his inaugural speech, he promised to do something about it by reforming the electoral system in the country. President Yar’adua immediately established the Electoral Reform Committee, under the leadership of former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Lawal Uwais. The Committee made some far reaching recommendations on how to improve the conduct of elections in Nigeria and submitted its reports to the government. President Goodluck Jonathan who succeeded President Yar’adua after his death, decided to implement the reports of the Justice Uwais Committee. Thereafter, he appointed Professor Attahiru Jega as INEC Chairman. The INEC carried out fresh registration of voters. It also introduced measures to reduce the tendency of voting by proxy by ensuring that only accredited voters cast their votes. In addition, the counting and announcement of results were done at every polling unit across the nation to ensure openness in the process. The EU Observer Mission, the Commonwealth Observer Group and others attributed the success of the 2011 general elections to the transparency and level of preparation of INEC (Amaechi, 2019). Significantly, the 2011 general elections were conducted under a relatively free and fair atmosphere because the manipulation of results was drastically curtailed. It is for this reason that Essien (2018:173) maintains that:

Unlike the 2007 elections, the April 2011 general elections was adjudged by many observers as the most credible election in the series of elections organized since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999. Terence McCulley, U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, commended the National Assembly election as the first-ever ‘credible, transparent, free and fair general election’ in Nigeria, and declared that it provided ‘a historic

opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate its democracy and further expand its voice on the world stage’.

The manner in which INEC was able to organize the 2011 general elections brought about improvement in the electoral process in Nigeria as there were fewer cases of fraud and irregularities (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2014). Even as the 2011 general elections in Nigeria were seen by many individuals both from within and without as credible, the outcome still generated violence in some parts of the country, particularly some northern states. The reason for the violence was that the supporters of the main opposition candidate of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), General Muhammadu Buhari claimed that he was rigged out in the presidential election. During the preparation for the 2015 general elections, INEC introduced technical innovations in the conduct of elections at different levels. The electoral body printed and distributed Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) to eligible registered voters. It also introduced the use of Smart Card Readers (SCRs) in the elections. To a large extent, the various initiatives by INEC contributed to the success of the 2015 general elections (Danjuma, 2018). Indeed, both domestic and foreign observers adjudged the elections as free and fair. For instance, according to Torres (2019: 5) “Nigeria’s 2015 general elections were the most free, fair and peaceful elections since the transition to democracy in 1999, and resulted in the first democratic transfer of power from the incumbent to an opposition political party in the country’s history.”

Much as the foreign observers commended the conduct of 2015 general elections as free, fair and highly competitive, they still offered some recommendations to the INEC on how to improve future elections in Nigeria. According to Ojo (2018: 202) the European Union Election Observation Mission proposed 30 recommendations for INEC. Some of the recommendations amongst others included that the incidence of electoral violence should be avoided, INEC should overcome systemic weaknesses, the separation of accreditation from voting should be avoided because on 28th March, 2015, over 2.3 million people who were accredited in the morning (7.3 per cent) did not wait to cast their ballot in the afternoon. In addition, INEC independence should be further developed through the appointment and removal of Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) etc. Before the conduct of 2019 general elections in Nigeria, there were expressions of apprehension both from within and outside the country that the challenges of insecurity could constitute an obstacle to the polls. The major flash points of security challenges have been the North East (Boko Haram conflict), the Middle Belt (farmers-herders conflict), the Niger Delta (youth militia conflict), South East (Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra and/or Indigenous People of Biafra) and some other parts of the country. Couple with the inherent security challenges in the body politic, there was also the possibility of eruption of violence during and after the polls due to the nature of electoral context in Nigeria’s political history. It is for this reason that Verjee et al (2018: 3) maintain that “important shifts in Nigeria’s political and security context have occurred since the 2015 elections, presenting both evolving and new, risks to the 2019 elections.” At the international level, some countries in the advanced democracies expressed concerns on the need to eschew violence during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. To this extent, many foreign commentators on political events in Nigeria focused their attention on the critical role of INEC and security agencies in ensuring peaceful conduct of the elections. It has been considered in certain circles, that due to the strategic position of Nigeria in Africa, a successful conduct of the sixth round of yet another transitional election during the 2019 in the country would serve as a yardstick for other smaller African countries to organize peaceful polls. Based on this, Torres (2018/2019: 6) avers that “given Nigeria’s political and economic importance within Africa and the world, it is critically important that its upcoming elections serve as a democratic example.

During the past year, the US Mission has urged key political actors to refrain from violence and to offer voters a clear vision coupled with detailed policies to move the state forward.”

According to the time-table released by INEC, the 2019 general elections were slated to hold on 16th February, 2019 for presidential and national assembly elections and 2nd March, 2019 for gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly. Incidentally, the dates were later shifted by INEC to 23rd February, 2019 and 9th March, 2019 respectively due to logistical problem (Daily Trust, 30/01/2019: 30). The postponement generated mixed reactions from individuals both from within and outside Nigeria. On one hand, some politicians, especially from the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) felt that the INEC needed to make adequate preparation before conducting credible elections. On the other hand, some opposition politicians saw the shift as an attempt by the INEC to rig the elections in favour of the ruling party. In particular, the leading opposition party, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) kicked against the INEC for announcing the postponement just a day before the commencement of presidential and national assembly elections. Similarly, the various foreign observation missions that had arrived in the country expressed concerns over the postponement. They therefore called on the INEC to quickly remedy the logistical problem. Also, they appealed to Nigerian citizens to remain calm and maintain peace even as the elections were postponed. Based on this, the heads of various missions representing UN, ECOWAS, AU, Commonwealth, Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (ISDA), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) jointly issued a statement thus: “we, the Heads of the international election observation missions and the United Nations present in Nigeria, have taken note of the decision of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to postpone the 2019 general elections due to logistical and operational challenges.” In addition, the statement further reads that “we urge INEC to use this time to finalize all preparations and ensure that the new elections dates are strictly adhered to” (Nwachukwu, 2019:1).

In a swift reaction, the Nigeria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Geoffrey Onyeama, held an interactive session with the heads of diplomatic missions and international organizations in the country and assured the international community that the general elections would be conducted in a peaceful free and fair atmosphere on the new dates announced by the INEC. The Minister therefore, said that the postponement was caused by logistical reasons and not by any government interference. In addition to this, Onyeama emphasized the hope that foreign governments would contribute towards ensuring peaceful elections in Nigeria without interfering in the electoral process (Daily Trust, 22/02/2019: 8).

When the presidential and national assembly elections were held as scheduled, the Head of ECOWAS Election Observer Mission, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf issued a preliminary statement pending the announcement of results by INEC. Accordingly, “the ECOWAS Observation Mission considers the electoral process was largely peaceful and transparent as voters were able to cast their votes freely.” However, the statement further urged INEC to take steps to address the many shortcomings, including deficiency in operation capacity and systems that were observed during the elections (Daily Trust, 25th/02/2019: 3).

Moreover, the joint foreign election observers drawn from the AU, EU, the Commonwealth of Nations, National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) issued out a joint reports at a press conference. The Head of AU Election Observation Mission to Nigeria and former Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn read the statement thus: “despite the challenges, election day operations were administered in a

manner that allowed the free expression of peoples' will. The closing and counting procedures were adhered to in over 80 percent of the voting points observed" (Daily Trust, 26th/02/2019: 3). However, it can be said that the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections were conducted in a relatively orderly manner but in the case of Governorship and State Houses of Assembly, in some states they failed to conform with international standards as there were breaches of security. For example, it was reported that INEC announced the suspension of the governorship and House of Assembly elections in Rivers State as a result of violence in a substantial number of polling units and collation centres in the state (The Nation, 11th/03/2019: 4). The action taken by the INEC generated reaction from the PDP, in which the political party spokesman Kola Ologbondiyan (The Nation, 11th/03/2019:6) states that "the PDP alerts that this is premeditated plan by the APC led Federal Government to use the instrument of INEC and security agencies to truncate the wishes of the Rivers people as already delivered at the polling units."

Similarly, in some states where supplementary (inconclusive) elections were held, it was alleged that the power of incumbency was used to suppress the opposition candidates. For instance, in Kano State, the incumbent Governor Abdullahi Ganduje of the All Progressive Congress (APC), was trailing with big margin the opposition candidate of Peoples Democratic Party, Abba Kabir Yusuf during the first round of election held on 9th March, 2019. But in the supplementary election held in 28 out of 44 local governments of the state on 23rd March, 2019, INEC declared the APC candidate as the winner. During the supplementary election, APC candidate won by scoring 45,876 votes as against the PDP candidate who scored 10, 239 votes. The overall results showed that Governor Ganduje scored 1,033,695 votes to defeat his opponent, Abba Yusuf who scored 1,024,713 votes. Some political observers and commentators faulted the results that produced this outcome. It was claimed in certain circles that the security personnel connived with the incumbent government to intimidate the opposition. For example, Ibrahim (2019:48) notes that "the polling units were flooded by thugs who eventually took over the electoral process and produced the outcome. Unlike in the presidential and first round of the gubernatorial elections, voters were simply not allowed to exercise their franchise freely in the supplementary election." The incidences of violence, fraud and intimidation of voters at polling centres would not have been possible if there was adequate security provisioning. Similarly, in the case of Sokoto state, Governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal of the PDP alleged that the main opposition party in the state, the APC used the federal government machinery against his candidature during the 2019 elections (Daily Sun, 2019:42).

Conclusion

This study focused on foreign observers and the concern with electoral security during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. In essence, the provision of adequate security is considered to be one of the important yardsticks for measuring free, fair and credible elections in any democratic country. Therefore, it can be argued that the sensitization and awareness created by some foreign observation missions on the need to make adequate provision of security during the 2019 elections in Nigeria is a right step towards the right direction of improving the quality of elections in the country. Also, it can be added that the practice of sending foreign observers to monitor the process of elections in other countries is one of the good things that happen to emerging democratic countries like Nigeria. This is because the presence of foreign observers normally sends the signal to managers of elections and even the politicians that outsiders are watching them. Hence, there is the likelihood for electoral management bodies not to compromise by allowing politicians to engage in fraud and malpractices during elections.

However, it is imperative for foreign observers to have the full knowledge of events surrounding the conduct of elections in the host country so as to be able to present observed facts. Based on this, foreign observers are supposed to detach themselves from the biases or preconceived notion of powerful political interests of outsiders or their home governments. This will help in making a critical analysis about the outcome of elections. Finally, to ensure full coverage of a large country like Nigeria, there is the imperative need for foreign observation missions to work in cooperation and collaboration with domestic election monitoring groups and/or civil society organizations. The reports of domestic elections monitoring groups could be utilized by foreign observers in drafting comprehensive reports about the outcome of elections. This will assist in engendering and generating objective reports devoid of contradictions.

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