
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF MILITARISING ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The Ekiti and Osun 2014 gubernatorial elections in Nigeria generated controversy despite being adjudged as free and fair. This is particularly due to the excessive deployment of armed security agents to man the polls. This paper attempts to unearth the *raison d'être*s for this action as well as investigate its consequent implication(s). Taking insights from the principles of democracy and elections and drawing inferences from observed trends during the two polls mentioned above, the discourse observes that while the need to secure the ballot might have principally motivated the State into this new practice, its repercussions such as the propensity to demoralise the police, daunt voters and overstretch the military among others are capable of truncating democracy as well as undermining the entire polity.

Keywords: Election, Militarisation, Militarisation of Election, Ekiti and Osun 2014

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Okpanachi Odiji (2016), Causes and Consequences of Militarising Elections in Nigeria. *J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 8, Number 1, Pp. 1 – 9.

INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of democratic principles under the Magna Carta of 1215 AD based on the ideals of democracy which is "Power in the hands of the people" as espoused by the Greeks over two and a half millennium ago, the British reorganized the management of human affairs in social compartments of civil, military and ecclesiastical in order to avoid clashes of interests. Each compartment has its clear functions, set of rules and regulations, codes of behaviour and operational infrastructures (Encyclopedia of Democracy, 1995:1423). To this end, civilians were entrusted with governance, military handled state defence issues and the priests mandated with religious matters. After colonising what is today known as Nigeria for half a century this tradition of administration was bequeathed on the country by the same Britons. It was not by accident therefore that the Westminster parliamentary style of governance together with her electoral system was adopted by Nigeria at independence. To this effect, the Nigeria Police Force whose conventional duty it is to maintain internal security except for situations of insurrection or war (See section 217 (c) of Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria) has policed the nation's elections since this era. This tradition was however broken after the 2011 general elections with the introduction of military as a principal electoral security agency

due perhaps to the post elections violence experienced that year. While Edo, Ondo and Anambra States gubernatorial elections were conducted with a handful armed soldiers complementing police efforts, those of Ekiti and Osun witnessed an unprecedented massive deployment of battle ready soldiers including armed and hooded Department of State Service (DSS) personnel whose activities before, during and after elections glaringly outshined that of the police. This generated criticism within so many quarters as political commentators regard the development as 'Militarisation of Elections'. While the outcome of these polls were adjudged by observers as reflecting the people's will, the need to anatomise this emerging trend with a view to unearthing what it portends to the country's fledgling democracy is imperative particularly as allegations of rights abuse levelled against these armed men were rife in post elections media reports.

This paper therefore dissects the realpolitik and repercussions of this electoral militarisation with specific focus on the 2014 Ekiti and Osun States governorship elections. Owing to the conclusion arrived at in the discourse, the paper ends with some proffered policy recommendations that are aimed at strengthening this security aspect of electoral management. But before these, it is imperative to begin with a conceptual clarification of the titular terms which are election and militarisation of elections in order to help readers understand what we mean when we mention them in this discourse.

ELECTION VERSUS MILITARISATION OF ELECTIONS

Election as implied in the introductory section of this piece is no doubt a civil activity and this position is corroborated in every authoritative definition of the term. In the Encarta Premium for instance Ginsberg (2009) describes election as the procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it and this chance to decide who will govern serves as an opportunity for the public to make choices about the policies, programs, and future directions of government action. The choice of the words 'Choice' and 'Choose' in the forgoing definition attests to the fact that election by nature is not compelling hence, eligible voters are at liberty to choose to vote or not to vote. Even when they choose to vote, they are yet at liberty to choose who to cast their vote for. It is interesting to further note here that mere casting of vote does not make a good election but until each vote is counted and the winner is declared accordingly based on the results of the polls. All these are expected to be done as mentioned earlier in an atmosphere of civility devoid of any form of violence and/or manipulation. For it to be seen as being credible, Dunnes (2006) spells out some **electoral principles** which the entire process must conform to. These are:

- Transparency - which requires that steps of the process be well advertised to the public;
- Elections must be held in compliance with national laws;
- Freedom of speech and association; including the freedom to interact and speak to voters or their influencers;

- Inclusiveness – which requires that an election be a highly decentralised operation, with massive logistical requirements involving the recruitment of tens of thousands of temporary staff, and the operation of polling places and offices; and
- The institutions responsible for the administration and security of an election must fulfil their mandates impartially, and may be constrained by the need to avoid perceptions that they are favouring a particular political competitor.

The last principle which charges electoral umpires and security agencies to demonstrate impartiality in discharging their duties stands out as the most important. This is said because the credibility of any election is anchored on the way and manner stakeholders ethically conduct themselves which in turn is a function of the degree of even-handedness displayed by the electoral umpire and security forces. This brings us to the debate on the aptness or ineptness of a ruling party government to massively deploy armed soldiers for the purpose of securing elections as observed in the 2014 Ekiti and Osun governorship polls. On this argument, Dunne (ibid.) posits that socio-political scenarios should dictate the electoral security policy to be adopted by those challenged to make decisions in this regard. In the Author's words:

There is no single model of elections or democracy that is universally applicable to all countries. Every election is unique – defined not only by the electoral rules, but also shaped by the social values, politics, religions, history and culture of the people. In the same way, the security of an election is unique to the circumstances in which it is conducted. The stakes of any given election are different – even if it is held periodically in the same country – due to the changing forces that shape the national interest and corresponding political agenda.

It is in consonance with this position that President Jonathan defends his intension to use soldiers during elections, saying the measure was meant to protect the people's votes from being stolen and to disallow miscreants from taking over Osun State and cause havoc.

Be that as it may, the question begging for answer at this moment is whether this act of excessive military deployment amounts to **militarisation of election** as being projected by a section of the populace. This puzzle is solved by first understanding what military itself entails. The dictionary defines it as what pertains to or involves the armed forces or warfare. Extensively, militarisation is the act of imbuing a system with military spirit (Webster's, 2004). Following this definition, militarisation of election would imply the act of conducting election as if it were a physical warfare. It also connotes the saturation of an electoral atmosphere with warlike disposition. It is noteworthy to state here that States that deploy massive armed security operatives to police elections defend their

actions as aiming at preserving national interests. This general excuse notwithstanding, it is imperative at this juncture to delve into the *raison d'état* for this development in Nigeria.

MOTIVATIONS FOR MILITARISING ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Following this study's reconnaissance to determine the major factors that account for the militarisation of recent elections in Nigeria, the reasons itemised and elucidated above could be responsible. These are: 1) violent nature of past elections; 2) past police failures; 3) the need for ballot protection; 4) Intelligence reports to and from the government; 5) Impulse to access information on the opposition; and 6) Ugly build-ups to elections. Some clarifications on each of these points would no doubt be apt. Talking about the **violent nature of past elections**, the world is a witness to the nature of Nigeria's past elections particularly in the fourth republic which is characterised by various forms of violence including attacks on political opponents, killing of electoral officials, forceful snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes, and their likes. The 2011 general elections for instance were followed by widespread violence especially in the northern part of the country. Human Rights Watch reported that not less than 800 people died from a serial violence that persisted for three days.

Following this, President Jonathan declared in a public forum that government would no longer fold its arms and watch miscreants take control of the nation's elections particularly in view of the violence that followed after he was declared in 2011. **Past police failures** to prevent the anomalies highlighted above or apprehend their perpetrators to face the law's wrath has equally been a driving factor to the deployment of troops for the purpose of providing electoral security. One observed trend over the years is the poor state of the Nigeria Police Force's readiness to combat crime when called upon to so. On election days for instance, apart from the fact that they are not numerically adequate to man strategic bits to police the entire process, they are equally ill-equipped to respond swiftly to crimes being committed just distance away from where they are stationed. Having failed to carry out its statutory duties as enunciated above, the need **to protect ballots** became a motivating factor for dragging the Armed forces into electoral security matters. It would be recalled that the first reason adduced by Jonathan's presidency for inviting the military into poll matters is in his commitment "to maintain the sanctity of the ballots" (Akinṣo, 2014).

Ugly Build-ups such as pre-election violence as witnessed during the campaign rallies towards the 2015 polls, in which the ruling party's presidential candidate was severally attacked in northern Nigeria and opposition elements assaulted in a south southern state, would rationally spur the government into deploying adequate armed security operatives to march-up with such obvious threats to democracy. Next is **Information reaching the Government** - whether intelligence or rumour, are both capable of driving the state into militarising elections. For instance prior to Ekiti and Osun 2014 polls, rumours were widespread that the All Progressive Congress (APC) had planned to import thugs and

voters from Lagos into Ekiti and Osun states to work for it during the elections. Also the DSS which in 2014 ransacked the data office of APC claimed it acted on intelligence tip off (Aired serially on Core TV News in December 2014). Finally, we must not rule out the fact that mere **impulse to access information on opposition** and their activities could lead to unwarranted use of security operatives claiming to be acting on intelligence while assisting their principals to achieve selfish objectives. The accusations of voters' card cloning and hacking into Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s data base levelled against the APC which INEC itself later debunked shows how governmental security agencies could be used to forcefully access opposition confidentialities

EKITI AND OSUN 2014 GOVERNORSHIP POLLS IN RETROSPECT

Before delving into what transpired during the Ekiti and Osun elections, it is noteworthy to start by acknowledging that prior to this duo, three other governorship polls were conducted in Edo, Ondo and Anambra after the 2011 post election violence and one common feature of these polls is the use of the Military to complement Police efforts. What actually differentiates Ekiti/Osun from Edo/ Ondo/ Anambra is the dramatic mobilisation of excess Soldiers; Police, DSS and members of Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corp (NSCDC). While the number and activities of security operatives during Edo, Ondo and Anambra elections were not really showy, the Ekiti and Osun experience was a different ball-game as narrated below.

For the Ekiti governorship poll which held on Saturday June 21, 2014, the Federal Government fortified the entire state with security operatives following the tension that mounted in the build-up to the election. Reports had it that close to 40, 000 security operatives with weapons such as AK-47 rifles and anti-bomb detectors were by 20th June already deployed. They flamboyantly displayed their arms which were pointed at passersby as they drove around Ekiti towns (Ateba, 2014). Among these security operatives were soldiers numbering about 12,000 and together with Police they mounted check-points at almost every 100 metres from each entry point to the state using these platforms to stop and frisk motorists, passengers and pedestrians alike. Those who refused to comply or were slow to heed their orders were punished (Ateba, *ibid.*). Blood-hound dogs were equally noticed sniffing for any likely breach of peace. Some visitors coming into Ekiti through Efon Alaaye-Ekiti, one of the entry points into the State on its border with Osun who reportedly encountered at least eleven checkpoints before getting to Ado the state capital (Odemwingie, *ibid.*). It should be recalled also that a week before all these started, the then Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mohammed Abubakar, deployed three helicopters for surveillance in all three senatorial districts of Ekiti with one Assistant Inspector General (AIG) of Police and four Commissioners of Police (CP) equally relocated for effective coordination of security operations. The Former IGP confessed that the number of troops, armoured tanks and helicopters deployed was the highest ever in a

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state, saying it was part of the resolve of the police to do anything humanly possible to provide security for election materials and INEC officials.

With all these, it was not surprising when accusations of rights abuse and intentional intimidations made headlines later in the news. For instance armed policemen and soldiers reportedly rounded-up Governor Fayemi's aides, including APC chieftains, in their country homes purposely to destabilise the party's plan to mobilise voters on Election Day and to instil fear in the minds of APC supporters and prevent them from coming out to vote. It was equally widely reported that while Peoples Democratic Party members such as the Minister of State for Defence, Musiliu Obanikoro, Minister of Police affairs, Chief Jelili Adeshiyan, Chris Uba and Dayo Adeyeye stormed the state during the election to ensure their candidate's victory (Salaudeen, 2014), national leaders of the opposition APC such State Governors Rotimi Amaechi and Adams Oshomhole of Rivers and Edo respectively were barred by armed soldiers from entering Ekiti State (Odemwingie, *ibid*).

While what transpired above expectedly attracted the eagle-eye of critics who posited consequently that the election was militarised, its extremely unapologetic replication in Osun's case was perhaps the scenario that actually induced observers into conceptualising the trend as Militarisation of Elections in Nigeria. Here it was widely reported that well over 70,000 security operatives which comprise 15,000 soldiers, 30,000 policemen, 8,000 operatives of the Department of State Service, and 20,000 NSCDC officers were deployed in the state just for the governorship election. Added to these are one hundred specially trained dogs fifteen of which arrived from the United States, where they were trained to detect Improvised Explosive Devices (Odemwingie, 2014). From about 18:00 Hours on eve of the election and while the polls lasted, people were prevented from entering or leaving the state to transact any business. Movement within the state were as well restricted. Reports had it that of the 8,000 DSS operatives, at least 5,000 had moved into Osogbo the state capital a week before the election. In a show of strength, the operatives most of whom were hooded and masked shot sporadically into the air as they move round the state. The fear of clamp down on the opposition started playing out with the arrest of a chieftain of the APC, Hon Wale Oke. He was said to be arrested by Special Forces from Abuja who stormed his Ilare-Ijesha country home and led by Local PDP leaders to his Osogbo residence where he was eventually picked up and hounded into detention. Released later though, the public are still in dark on why he was arrested and detained. Many high profile APC members including its national spokesman Lai Mohammed were according to news unnecessarily traumatised on the eve of, and during, the election. Other members of the party numbering about 600 were reportedly involved in one form of security "brutality" or the other. They included State Attorney General, Wale Afolabi; Agriculture and Food Security Commissioner, Wale Adedoyin; and that of Tourism, Sikiru Aiyedun. Serving state and federal legislators were not spared as the Regent of Iloko, High Chief Ogunsanya was equally harassed. The overall effect was voter intimidation, which led about 46 per cent of eligible voters to stay away from the election.

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF MILITARISING ELECTIONS

To start with demerits of the practice of imbuing elections with a military spirit, it is important to first acknowledge that this is an **expensive venture** when perceived financially. In a country where there have been complaints from so many quarters concerning the cost of running state affairs, deploying over 70,000 soldiers to assist civil policing authorities such as the Nigeria police Force, DSS and civil defence corps will further increase the cost of conducting elections by a very wide margin. To secure elections governance military men called to carry out special electoral security duties are paid special allowances and order for their services. Soldiers deployed for such special duties will no doubt be paid special allowances for such special operations in addition to the cost of maintaining their operational equipments. This trend **overstretches the Military**. With a war against insurgency already being fought, deploying a huge number of military resources for election in a State of about 2.5 million citizens is tantamount to overstretching the military particularly when understood from the argument that as at the time of this deployment, the terrorist fighting Nigeria in the North-east were advancing swiftly on the country. It is not surprising for instance that the period of this military deployment for electoral purpose coincides with the time Boko haram made some of its best advances in which it took over such places as Baga, Gwoza, Michika, Mubi, and Madagali.

As a practice, militarisation equally **accords ambience of crisis to Elections** particularly as soldiers are traditionally known for warfare. Moreover with security operatives pointing guns at passersby as observed in Ekiti and shooting sporadically into the air in addition to being hooded as demonstrated in Osun, citizens will no doubt be left bewildered as to whether the state is prosecuting a war or conducting an election. This kind of atmosphere **exposes citizens to rights abuse**. The cases of Ekiti and Osun depicted above reveal how deploying an overwhelming number of soldiers who are not specifically trained on the art of maintaining civil law and order could mishandle the situation to trample on the rights of citizens. As a follow up, it **daunts voters and opposition** supporters. They are most especially intimidated by a scenario of flamboyant display of military might in an electoral environment. During the elections under focus, many eligible voters decided to stay indoors to avoid being affected by stray gunshots. Finally, this development **demoralises the Police**, now perceived as not capable of living up to their traditional responsibility of maintaining internal security. The culture of constantly capitalising on Nigeria Police Force's inability to maintain internal order instead of overhauling it is no doubt responsible for its continuous deterioration.

Grave as the shortfalls highlighted above may sound we must be careful not to allow them blindfold us from attesting to the benefits of deploying security forces in all nooks and crannies for the safety of polls. For instance, the two revisited elections were **free from violent crisis** both during and after the exercise. This of course is due largely to the

intimidating number of armed security operatives. **Electoral rigging were not as rife** as was the case in 2003 and 2007 general elections. In other words, such activities as ballot box snatching and stuffing, falsification of results and declaration of a defeated candidate as winner of polls were not experienced during these polls. This feat again is due to what seems like the omnipresence of armed security operatives enabled by the deployment of military to complement police's efforts.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Having exploited Nigeria's recent electoral history and explored the Ekiti and Osun 2014 polls' experiences, this probe into the cause of state deployment of massive security forces to police elections revealed that violent nature of past elections; ugly build-ups to polls, past police failures, and the consequent need to protect the ballot are some of the major reasons for this act. Others are Intelligence reports including rumours reaching the state as well as ruling party's impulse to access information on the opposition. Though the paper observes that militarisation of election using state-owned security forces could ensure violent free polls and minimise electoral rigging, it however comes with certain costs that poses threat to both democracy and the polity at large. These shortcomings of electoral militarisation are its propensity to demoralise the nation's Police force, daunts voters as well as opposition supporters as it makes election look like a warring exercise. While it overstretches the army who may even be paid special duties stipends, it exposes the citizens to rights abuse as they are at the mercy of armed soldiers who are in unfamiliar terrain. Our recommendation therefore is that the Police force and other civil security agencies should be trained and well-equipped with both combat and communication gadgets to position them well for the challenges of professionally securing their country's electoral exercises. This is admonished because it is the one-sidedness in the show of force against members of the APC in Osun for instance that heightened the criticisms of what became known as 'militarisation of election'. Equally, it is suggested that the state carry out extensive political and voter education to enlighten the populace on the actual role armed security officials are mandated to perform on campaign and election scenes.

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Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016.

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