

Understanding the Game, the Dynamics and Politics of International Election Observation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract: Elections in emerging democracies such as Nigeria have overtime been fraught with controversies, due to lack in tradition of impartiality and undemocratic nature of politics in that part of the world. This has made international election monitoring and observation (IEMO) imperative. Existing studies have largely focused on the external politics of IEMO to the neglect of internal factors such as high premium placed on election victory, effects of electoral related violence on IEMO outcome and the peaceful conduct of election, the interface between local and international observers' reports and their implications for democracy. This study, therefore, investigated the influence of aforementioned internal factors on IEMO outcome and democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Politics, election, international election monitoring and observation, electoral violence.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

International election monitoring and observation has become crucial especially for emerging democracies where the tradition of impartiality is seriously lacking. This is so, because deeply divided societies produce hotly contested controversial elections: the results of such elections hardly produce a consensus. Similarly, the transition from autocracy to democracy which is supervised by an autocratic regime has problems of being free, fair and free from fear [1]. the rules may be fair and in accordance with civilized democratic standards but the implementation is often covert and incumbent driven [2]. Such incumbents, therefore, need help from neutral third parties so that they can comply with their own rules due to the fact that international election monitoring and observation represents a confidence building measure that enhances trust in the system of access to power. However, the international election monitoring and observation in emerging democracies have been seriously criticized by some scholars on the basis that, this exercise has been grossly politicized by the West such that its cost for Nigeria and the rest of Africa would outweigh the benefits.

For instance, France's strategic interests led to her increment of development aid and assistance, as well as its approval of Niger Republic's 1996 elections, while other EU member states imposed sanctions and condemned the election [3]. The consequence of inconsistency of the international election observation groups was clarified by Carter Center that, host government facing difficult elections often selectively

invite observer groups they perceive as more sympathetic to their interests. Worse than this, is the instance in which inconsistent reports among different international election observation organizations generates doubts about the methods, professionalism, and creditability of international observation as a whole [4]. This according to Bjornlund et al, is due to the desire of foreign observers to protect and project the institutional agenda of their organization with the tendency to comply with the hegemonic position and interests of their countries defined in term of strategic and economic interests, with human right and democracy being tangential [5].

By the same token, international monitors and observers have been accused of double standard by giving selective intensified attention to some countries while ignoring the problems of other participating states, displaying unwillingness to take into account the relative and specific features of individual countries and frequently meddling through politicization [6]. Others have described foreign observers as biased representatives of their host government, out only to promote their country's narrow economic interests [7]. Kelley also pointed out how multiple international monitoring organizations can influence the politics of election monitoring [8]. As Cooley and Ron argued, all transnational actors are concerned about is organizational survival [9].

This study contends that, it is an insufficient argument to overplay the role of external politics of IEMO at the neglect of internal factors such as high

premium placed on election victory, effects of electoral violence on IEMO outcome and the peaceful conduct of election, the interface between local and foreign observers' reports and their overall implications on democracy in Nigeria. The study argues that more often than none, high premium placed on election victory through the 'do or die' politics has encourage electoral violence and election related violence adversely affected the international election monitoring and observation institutions in carrying out in-depth coverage of election in Nigeria.

Although, this is not an attempt to dissociate international election observers and their sponsors from the politics of international election monitoring and observation in Nigeria, it is instructive to note that, the whole essence of the international election monitoring and observation is fundamentally political in nature. This become evident: since all the international election observers can do is to deliver relevant information about the electoral component of the overall situation in accordance with international standards: thus, it is up to national governments and other concern stakeholders to draw appropriate political conclusion [10].

Given the foregoing explications, this paper investigate internal dimension to the politics of international election monitoring and observation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic with emphasis on internal factors that has influenced the conduct of election and impacted on the outcome of international election monitoring and observation and their overall implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This study therefore, posed some specific and fundamental questions: answers to these questions served as the focus of this study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study examined the politics of election monitoring in Nigeria's Fourth Republic with emphasis on salient internal factors influencing the outcome the international election observation in the country and its consequences for democratic consolidation. However, the specific objectives are;

- 1 To identify and analyze the activities of international election observers in Nigeria with reference to the UNs 2005 Code of Conduct for International Election Observers.
- 2 To identify the major internal factors that affected the outcome of international election monitoring and observation in Nigeria between the years 1999 and 2007.
- 3 To identify and explain the patterns of reactions by stakeholders towards international election observers and their reports in Nigeria's Fourth Republic 1999-2007.

- 4 To assess the impacts of international election monitoring and observation on electoral process and democratic governance in Nigeria.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite the pervasive spread of election monitoring and observation especially in Eastern Europe and Africa since early 1990s, there has been little academic discourse on this subject [17]. International election monitoring as a system-wide phenomenon should not be restricted to the study of purely domestic politics or of foreign policy [11]. It is a transnational politics approach, one which is not limited by two disciplines of international relations and comparative politics [12].

The focus of this study is imperative due to the fact that, findings from this research will contribute to the data available for researchers to study democracy and election. This study also specifically, gives insight on the politics of international election observation by focusing on internal issue/factors and their implication for the success or failure of international election observation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This aspect of international election monitoring and observation has received little or no systematic attention in the literature.

This study primarily focused on knowledge building within the context of international election monitoring and observation, international relations, comparative politics, election administration and democracy promotion in order to contribute existing knowledge and policy formulation on election monitoring and observation, election administration and democratic good governance.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study in term of issues and time frame covered 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections. For instance, unlike the previous experiments which collapsed midway to the (First and Second Republics) or at threshold of its completion the (aborted Third Republic), the current democratic transition, at least for the first time, uninterrupted transited power to another democratically elected government [13]. In addition, there is overwhelming increase in the number of international election monitors and observers present in Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections in comparison to elections before this period.

This study also examined the roles of three international election monitoring and observation groups namely European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM), National Democratic Institute (NDI), and International Republic Institute (IRI) to assess the quality of Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections between 1999-2007. The selection of these three

organizations was based on their extensive coverage in term of election observation, impressive number of observers and monitors usually deployed, experience and professionalism of their observers and monitors, the stability of their financial background, and comprehensiveness of their reports. For instance, the EU-EOM has been involved in over thirty-five missions that have taken observers all over the world [14]. This is the reason the EU is considered the next to UN as largest participator in election monitoring [15]. The NDI has also organized more than 175 international delegations to observe election, pre-election environment and post-election development. NDI was also one of the initiators in developing the declaration of principles for international observation and code of conduct for international observers which was launched in October 2005 at the United Nations. IRI on the other hand are among the strongest organizations based in US that have gained considerable experience and expertise in election monitoring and observation since the 1980s.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Existing literature have documented the politics of international election monitoring and observation. According to Abbink and Hesselting [16], donor states may have their own realpolitik interests and thus, they may care more about their particular concern rather than long term prospect for democracy. To Odukoya [17], offering a stamp of legitimacy for elections that do not address the structural political problems in West Africa is in the long term interest of the West, because first, it help to effectively demobilize any opposition contemplating violence, and second, it secures the cooperation of the favoured ruling elite in the continued exploitation of the resources of their nations by transnational capital. In the same vein, Bjornlund *et al* [18], argued that monitors and observers have the desire to protect and project the institutional agenda of their organizations as well as the tendency to comply with the hegemonic position and interests of their countries, defined in terms of strategic and economic interests, with human rights and democracy being tangential. And these contradictory interests are often time resolved in favour of the hegemonic power at home and the strategic interests of the election monitor organizations and their donors [19].

In the same manner, international election monitoring and observation has bluntly been accused of violating its mandate by given selective intensified attention to some countries while ignoring the problems of other participating states, displaying unwillingness to take into account the relatives and specific features of individual countries and frequently muddling through politicization by excessively rely on international standards [20]. Anglin, also noted that, the presence of election observers is also erroneously believed to have a

'restraining influence on anyone tempted to break the rule: unfortunately, incumbents in West Africa exploit the election monitoring mechanism to accord respectability to elections, especially since monitors and observers poses no threat to the desire to manipulate electoral process [21]. It was further argued that, election observers have at best been mere spectators of Nigeria's rather controversial elections [22]. With respect to the reports of the monitors on the 1999 general elections in Nigeria, Darren Kew a member of the Carter Center stated the monitor's position thus: "this was not a credible election, but we could live with it if the military would". He further noted that most of the donor governments and international monitoring organizations had generally decided beforehand that they were willing to accept and indeed, preferred an Obasanjo outcome of the Abubakar transition, as long as the regime appeared to make a good faith effort towards open elections [23].

Given the above observation by Kew, the credibility of international election monitoring and observation as genuine source of legitimizing the outcome of election is seriously in question. Unfortunately, the impact of the verdict of international election monitors and observers usually influenced the policies of the big power towards the country holding election rather than the government that conducted the election.

Consequently, there is no doubt that international election monitoring and observation verdicts have been grossly politicized, and as such becoming an instrument of power politics at international level as most literature explained. However, this study contends that, there is internal dimension to the politics of international election monitoring and observation. This is so, because the interaction among the incumbent government, opposition parties, INEC, electorates, security, media, civil society groups and other stakeholders and their attitudes toward election and democratic values could either boost or marred the quality of election, the leverage of international election observation and democratic consolidation at large in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

For The purpose of clarity and analytical discourse, public choice theory was used as a framework of analysis in this study. To Sapru [24], the public choice theory has its base in the rational choice theory, and it is oriented towards the understanding of public choice that involved politics and bureaucracy. It also involves the application of economics to political science: the theory of state, voting rules, voter behavior, party politics, and the bureaucracy among others [25]. The origins of this theory according to Parsons, may be discerned in the work of Gordon Tullock, Anthony

Downns and William Niskanen [26]: Their intents of the public choice theory of policy formulation are to reject any such traditional idea of policy as the search for the public welfare. The implication of that to this study is that, the stakeholders involved in the conduct and observation of election in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, particularly, the government, opposition parties, election management body (INEC), electorates and the international election observers and their donor states, are often guided by private concerns in their interactions and reactions to the detriment of the prospect of international observation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

In the opinion of Shughart and Razzolini, public choice like economic model of rational behavior on which it rests, assumes that people are guided chiefly by their own self-interests and, more important, that the motivations of people in the political process are no different from those of people in the steak, housing, or car market [27]. The application of Shughart and Razzolini's argument implies that, even when elections cannot be said to be free and fair as in the case of 2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria, government and INEC officials regularly invoke reasons why such election are still good enough: they repeated criticized international observers for being too political and sympathetic toward the interest of opposition parties for the interest of their organizations and their donor states. On the other hand, when observers' verdict on election is less or not critical, the oppositions responded by discarding the neutrality of international observers and they consistently criticized observers for being too political and practicing favouritism in order to secure the cooperation of the favour ruling elites to continue the exploitation of the resources by transnational actors.

The interpretation of public choice theory in Nigerian context implies that the incumbent government in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are more likely to invited international observers only to secure the international community's stamp of approval for the election as a means of boosting their internal legitimacy and gaining external recognition, since the invitation of foreign observers does not necessarily posed serious threat to rigging intent. In the same vein, given that there is widespread of poverty among the masses that constituted majority in Nigeria, "voters vote their pocketbook," supporting candidates and ballot propositions that offer immediate relieve in terms monetary and material items against considerations for other critical issues that are germane for good governance; bureaucrats as the case may be INEC and security Officials also strive to advance their careers and justify their expended budget, by defending the credibility of the elections even when such election are widely criticized by foreign and local observers for alleged irregularities; on the hand, politicians seek

election or re-election to office at the expense of electorates wishes and aspirations. Thus, the simple transfer of rational actor model of economic theory to electoral issues has really captured the interaction between the ruling governments; oppositions, INEC, security, electorates and other key election stakeholders; international monitors and observers also seek to project and protect their institutional agenda and hegemonic interests of their sponsors or home countries when necessary. The foregoing analysis produced more useful explanation to the politics of international election monitoring and observations and its implication for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

More recently, public choice scholars have adopted a "congressional dominance" model of bureaucracy. In that model according to Shughart, government bureaus are not free to pursue their own agendas. On the contrary, agency policy preferences mirror those of the members of key legislative committee that oversee particular areas of public policy [28]. This explain why the size, structure and level of involvement in election monitoring has been determine by actors different from the observation and monitoring institutions, therefore make it more possible for their report to be influenced by sponsors or other foreign interests. For instance, the general rule of engagement for EU involvement in election monitoring is that the European Parliament and its members, reserves the right to determine the size, composition and level of involvement it will sponsor. This suggests high level of economic model of rational behavior by the EU, which could make EU-EOM mission more susceptible to power politics.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork was carried out in the course of this study; the fieldwork was divided into different aspects. The public choice theory was employed; survey and exploratory designs were utilized. Random sampling was used to select one state each from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria (Edo state representing South-south, Enugu state representing Southeast, Kaduna state representing Northwest, Kwara state representing North-central, Oyo state representing Southwest and Taraba state representing Northeast) using historical antecedents and one local government area was purposively selected from each of the senatorial districts. Using convenience sampling method, semi structured questionnaire was administered on 1,200 eligible voters (100 from urban, 50 from semi urban and 50 from rural LGAs) in each of the selected states to elicit information on socio-demographic characteristics, voters' perception of election related violence and implication of high premium placed on election victory on the outcome of international election monitoring and observation (IEMO) and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Twenty Key Informant Interviews were

conducted with purposively selected members of civil society groups represented by the former Chairman of Transition Monitoring Group, three (3) media practitioners, four (4) senior police officers and one executive member each from leading political parties between the period of 1999 and 2007: Peoples Democratic Party, Alliance for Democracy and Action Congress, All Nigeria Peoples Party, All Progressives Grand Alliance, and Labour Party. One member each from International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute and European Union-Election Observation Mission, and four (4) state public relation officers of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were interviewed. Reports of IEMO on the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections, extant literature, INEC publications and media reports provided secondary data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were content analyzed.

FINDINGS

The finding of this study cut across some of the key internal factors that have impacted on the peaceful conduct of election, leverage and outcome of international election monitoring and observation (IEOM) and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Activities of International Election Monitors and Observers

Thus, the study affirmed that the activities of international observers has provoked responses from both incumbent government and INEC to the allegation of election irregularities observed by IEOM during the 2007 election: a process which forced late President Umaru Musa Yar adua to acknowledged irregularities in the election that brought him to power and thereafter embarked on electoral reforms. That process also served as practical ways of restraining future attempt on election rigging. However, the attitudes and reports of foreign election observers were less sympathetic in the 2003 and 2007 elections where their sponsors were not strategically involved, than in the 1999 elections which were partially facilitated by sponsors.

Electoral violence and Security Issues

Consequently, the finding confirmed that, controversial nature of security situation in Nigeria has encourage election related violence which has also hindered the activities of international election monitors and observers in some parts of Nigeria: international observers in some cases have to returned to their respective hotels before all votes were counted, collated and result announced due to concern for their safety. This finding was supported by the remarks made by Margaret Tutwiler of the International Republican Institute (IRI) [29], and Lindsay Robinson of National Democratic Institute (NDI) [30]. In general, there were pervasive trends of election related violence in 1999,

2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria, particularly, in the pre-election, election and post-election periods. There was a consensus with the level of election related violence reported by NDI, IRI and EU-EOM on 2003 and 2007 general elections. This ugly trend extends to 2011 general elections in which INEC's state office was bombed in Suleja, Niger state: where 16 people including INEC staff were killed. The study also found out that, more than 800 people were killed in the Northern states, including members of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) following the presidential election.

The above situation has impacted negatively on the quality of election and international election observation exercise in Nigeria. This is so, because monitoring of vote counts as part of an overall election observation effort can boost confidence of voters suspicious of possible fraud, permit results to be projected more quickly than the official results, and allow for the identification of actual winners and the consequent exposure of any attempted manipulation [31].

Communication between Nigeria Police and International Election Observers

This study revealed that, there was communication gap between international election Monitoring and observation (IEMIO) institutions and the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) particularly, the police at state and divisional levels. Specifically, police at divisional level lack required knowledge of the activities of international election monitors and observers in Nigeria. Therefore, it becomes difficult for police at this level to compliment the efforts of IEMO in ensuring in-depth coverage of election observation across Nigeria. This study confirmed that the communication gap between the international election observers and the police at divisional level also contributed to security challenges facing by international election monitors and observers in Nigeria.

Impacts of International Observers on Election and Democracy in Nigeria

This study revealed that, international observers' have impacted positively in three major ways on election and democracy in Nigeria. Firstly, the 2011 and 2015 general elections were breakaway from the trend of previous poor elections in Nigeria since 1999; this is partly due to the implementations of some of the recommendations made by international observers after each previous election in Nigeria. Secondly, the international election observers' advice and technical support in the aftermath of 2007 and 2015 elections in Nigeria, has also helped the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to improve on their level of professionalism and enhanced their performance in particularly, in 2015 general elections. Lastly,

international election observation' activities among other factors has encourage increased voters' turnout in the last 2011 presidential election compare to the turnout of voters in 2003 and 2007 presidential election.

However, it was also noted that, the presence of international election observers has not effectively deter the tendency to rig election and manipulate electoral process by politicians in Nigeria. This finding is in consonant with Carothers' submission that, foreign observers can neither force profoundly polarized political factions to cooperate with one another. Neither can they encourage power sharing in a winner takes all presidential system, where competition for power is a zero-sum game and state power is concentrated, unchecked and provides easy access to economic power as well [32]. The observers cannot counter the deeply anti-democratic instincts of strongman intent on holding on to power [33].

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Respondents' age was 28.6±5.8 years, 67.2% were males and 37.2% had tertiary education. About 64.0% of the respondents claimed that the high premium placed on election victory negatively affected international election monitoring and observation (IEMO) exercise. Election related violence were reported by 62.0% and 36.3% in the South and North respectively to have had negative effects on IEMO's ability for in-depth coverage of election between the period of 1999 and 2007. High premium placed on election victory were reported by 31.8% in the South-south, 21.1% in Southeast and 15.0% in Northeast respectively to have had negative effects on the peaceful conduct of elections. Sixty eight percent of the respondents from the Southwest perceived that IEMO enhanced voters' confidence to cast their votes with little fear of intimidation. Voters' turn-out in the presidential elections increased by 38.8% from 1999 to 2003 and 11.5% from 2007 to 2011. In addition, the attitudes and reports of international election monitors and observers were less sympathetic in the 2003 and 2007 elections where their sponsors were not strategically involved, than in the 1999 election which were partially facilitated by sponsors.

CONCLUSION

High premium placed on election victory, the interface between local and international observers' reports and election related violence among others have adversely impacted on democratic election and ability of international election monitoring and observation institutions in carrying out in-depth coverage of election in Nigeria. Therefore, the use of international election monitors and observers to enhance free and fair election should be strengthened through adequate provision of security to further deepen democracy.

Given the findings above, the conventional wisdom deduced is that, the international election observers need to focus more attention on how to protect and promote the core values of democracy in Nigeria, this is important, because observing and reporting irregularities during election alone does not automatically foster good governance and democratic consolidation. Therefore, for international election monitoring and observation to be successful in Nigeria, democracy promoters must support government efforts in strengthen security in the whole process of electoral cycle, minimize corruption and reducing poverty, encourage administrative and electoral reforms among others otherwise, the success recorded by international election monitoring and observation in Nigeria may be short lived.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In light of the above findings, the following recommendations were made: It was established that electoral related violence has pervaded election and post election periods in Nigeria, thus, this has created big challenges to the smooth conduct of election and it has also hindered the international observers in many cases from observing the vote count, collation and announcement of election results, the aspect which is generally considered as very important means to boost the confidence of electorates in the outcome of election. Thus, there is need for Nigerian government to urgently and sincerely address the root cause of electoral related violence in particular and the issue of insecurity in general. First, the government should embark on electoral reform to ensure justice and fairness in the process and conduct of election. Secondly, the lingering nefarious activities of Boko-Haram sect particularly, in the Northeast of Nigeria should be sincerely addressed and its snowballing effects on other part of the country should be prevented. These suggestions could help to create a favourable political atmosphere which will reduce electoral related.
2. It is imperative for Western democracy promoters to start backing up their words with serious actions: that any incumbent in Africa that is guilty of election frauds should be made to serve certain punishment such as; isolation from international forums, severity in trade relations and Western democracy promoters must openly demonstrate unflinching support for the oppositions in such situation. This is important, due to the fact that it is not common particularly, in Nigeria that the opposition would have the capacity to rigged the incumbent out of power.
3. This study recommended as a policy consideration for international election observation institutions to establish cordial network relationships with the police, particularly, at the state and divisional

levels. This is very necessary given that police at state and divisional level are closer to the electorates and polling units: which implies that they are very instrumental to the successful conduct of election and observation of election. This kind of relationship between the police and international election observers will help mitigate against the fear of insecurity usually expressed by international election observers during the vote count, collation and announcement of election result in Nigeria.

4. In sum, this work did not foreclose the possibility of getting more useful information and suggestions on how to address the politics of international election monitoring and observation whether in Nigeria or elsewhere from the future research of this nature.

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