

Election as Warfare: Militarization of Elections and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Azeez Olaniyan, PhD¹ & Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao²

Abstract

One major issue emerging from the governorship elections conducted in the Ekiti and Osun States of Nigeria is the presence of heavy security forces during their conduct. Platoons of security operatives, including military officers, were drafted to lock down the states shortly before, during and immediately after the elections with immediate consequences on peoples' rights and freedom. Members of the opposition were specifically targeted. The pertinent questions to ask then are: What accounts for this? What are the implications on democratic consolidation? This study seeks to interrogate the foregoing questions.

Keywords: Governorship Elections, Ekiti State, Osun State, Militarisation and Democratic Consolidation

Introduction

The history of post-colonial electoral engineering in Nigeria is replete with instances of militarism and violence during election times. Fair documentation of such a culture of electoral violence has been attained through a number of scholarly literatures. Campbell (2010), for example wrote on the possible implications of the jettisoning of the People's Democratic Party (PDP)'s "unwritten" zoning formula for Nigeria's peace, stability and democratic consolidation. For Osumah & Aghedo (2010); and Ekweremadu (2011), Nigeria's recurring pattern of electoral violence should be seen as a manifestation of the growing disappointments and apprehension of the electorates and the inability of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) to conduct widely accepted, free, fair, and open elections. Others have placed Nigeria's history of electoral violence within the door step of vote rigging, dodgy politics, ballot snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, "thuggery", brazen falsification of

¹ Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria

² Doctoral candidate in the Department of Politics at the University of Otago, New Zealand. His research and writings have focused on the Foreign Policy of Emerging Middle Powers, Resource Governance Discourses, and Politics of Development and Underdevelopment.

election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters over the years, [Oni et al. (2013); Bekoe, (2011); Omotola, (2010); Adigbuo, (2008)].

While to others, the seeming inability of INEC to discharge its responsibility effectively coupled with the political partisanship of the security agencies in the discharge of their duties during and after the elections has continued to threaten Nigeria's attempt towards democratic consolidation [Adigbuo, (2008); Omotola, (2010); Idowu, (2010)]. As Gueye & Hounkpe, (2010) argues, the mode of involving security forces and how they carry out their duties while participating in the electoral process in Nigeria can also be adduced as part of the fundamental causes of violence and insecurity during elections. Onapajo (2014), drawing references from a number of elections conducted in Nigeria between 2007 and 2011 argues that, in terms of influencing election outcomes, the incumbent has been more associated with violence during elections than the opposition. In all of these scholarly assessments however, there has always been a particular constant – the role of Nigeria's security forces in the ensuing violence that has greeted most of these elections.

It is therefore not surprising that over the last 7 years (2007-2014), one issue which has drawn criticism and public fury from Nigerians is the deployment of the military during elections in Nigeria. Most notable among these elections, were the governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States in 2012, in Anambra (2013), and in the Ekiti and Osun governorship elections in 2014. Rather than relying on the police to provide the security needed during the gubernatorial elections in the five states mentioned above, the Nigerian federal government deployed large detachment of soldiers and other security operatives in these states to assist and ensure peaceful conduct during the elections. In the Ekiti elections in particular, the protests reached high heavens, when prominent members of Nigeria's main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress, were denied entry into the state capital by soldiers and other security agencies in a commando-styled operation, to participate in their party's grand rally a few days before the election (Thisday, 20 June, 2014).

If the election in Ekiti State was "heavily militarised", the military/security presence in the gubernatorial elections in Osun State was massive, with a deployment of a 73,000-strong security contingent to oversee security concerns during the election (Ajayi, 2014). Consequently, this paper examines what accounts for the "militarisation" of the gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun States of Nigeria which took place on 21 June, 2014 and 9 August,

2014 respectively. Specifically, the paper interrogates the possible implication(s) of heavy deployment of security forces; particularly the military in elections in Nigeria *vis-a-vis* the country's efforts towards democratic consolidation. This is particularly necessary given that elections ought to be a civic affair and its processes should be distinguishable from preparations for war against a foreign enemy.

To achieve these, the paper has been divided into four sections with the first serving as introduction. The second section focuses on the theoretical issues related to the discourse, the third, presents an analysis of the events as they played out in both the Ekiti and Osun elections, while the fourth and concluding section offers an insight into the possible implications of the seeming recurring pattern of electoral militarisation or heavy troop deployment in Nigeria, and what needs to be done towards stemming this tide.

Election and security in Nigeria: some historical and theoretical issues

Elections are fundamental to democracy and it is often said that whereas it is possible to have elections without democracy, it is virtually impossible to have democracy without elections. Owing to the centrality of elections to the democratic process, emphasis has always been placed on ensuring credibility. One of the ways to making an election credible is the issue of security (Igini, 2013). Mathias Hounkpe and Alioune Gueye (2010:16-17) argue that election security constitutes a major component of the electoral process but has however, in respect of emerging democracies, been hampered by series of factors, which include faulty legal framework, poor technical management of elections, poor management of competition and opposition, poor management of electoral disputes, and past roles of security forces.

In a report compiled by IFES (2013), election security is often challenged by five types of conflicts:

1. Identity conflict, which occurs during registration process
2. Campaign conflicts, which occurs at campaign podiums
3. Balloting conflicts, which manifests on election day
4. Results conflicts, which manifests as disagreements over election outcomes
5. Representation conflicts, which occurs when elections are organised in such a way that they are nothing but zero sum (IFES, 2013).

Putting it in a better perspective is Attahiru Jega, who while arguing from an 'umpire' and practitioner perspective, identified the major impediments to election security in Nigeria as

including: “physical attacks on electoral officials and facilities, attacks on security personnel on election duties, misuse of security orderlies by politicians, especially incumbents; attacks on opponents; attacks on members of the public; violence at campaigns; intimidation of voters; snatching of election materials; kidnapping and assassination of political opponents” (Jega, 2012:2). However what Jega failed to mention, and which is very important in the context of Nigeria, is violence perpetrated by the security personnel drafted to secure elections, such as intimidation of voters, oppression and victimization of members of political parties different from that of the government at the centre, excessive show of force and connivance with politicians to perpetrate rigging.

The Nigerian experience with elections dates back to her colonial past, and since the attainment of independence, elections are increasingly becoming major security concerns over how to secure the men saddled with the conduct of the elections; materials needed for the elections as well as the voters and the candidates standing for the elections (Jega, 2012:1). In other words, the first security challenge facing electoral conduct in Nigeria is that of securing the men and materials for the election.

As Jega further noted:

In many ways election in Nigeria is akin to war. For one thing, mobilization by the election commission is massive, akin to preparations for a major war. The 2011 elections required the assemblage of close to a million poll workers, party workers, security personnel and election observers. The election entailed the acquisition of over 120,000 ballot boxes, printing of about 400 million ballot papers and managing a voter’s roll of over 73 million entries. In fact, in the registration of voters that preceded the elections, the machines used in the exercise would have formed a chain of over eighty kilometres if placed end to end and the over 400,000 staff used in the exercise out-numbered the collective strength of the entire armed forces of the West African sub-region (Jega, 2012:1).

If securing men and material is challenging, securing the voters and the candidates in Nigeria is even more daunting. With the exemption of isolated incidences, elections in post-colonial Nigeria have rarely been peaceful; they have become a matter of warfare that have resulted not only in killings, maiming and destruction, but also in the “death” of democracy itself, as recorded in 1966 and 1983 and 1993. Nigeria began its post-colonial life, with great

expectation, under a democratic order modelled after the British parliamentary system. It was expected that the potential greatness in Nigeria would be better realised under a flourishing democratic life. However, this was not to be, as the experiment collapsed like a pack of cards just five years after its construction through a bloody military putsch that not only terminated the nascent democracy but also the lives of a number of principal political actors of the time.

There is a unanimity of opinions that the collapse of the First Republic owed largely to the 1964/65 general elections conducted by the Tafawa Balewa government (Diamond, 1988, Osaghae, 1998, HRW, 2007, Malu, 2009, Onebamhoi, 2011). The elections were fraught with complaints, violence, malpractices, fraud and intimidation, which triggered wild protests, inter-communal rioting, arson and the killing of over 200 people in the western region (Anifowose, 1982, Osaghae, 1998). The total breakdown of law and order, consequent upon the elections, was to become one of the alibis for the military careerists to come on to the political stage. Eventually, series of events after the coup, led to a thirteen-year soldiers' reign in the country.

In 1979, Nigeria made a second attempt at democracy when the military handed power over to President Shehu Shagari after a successful transition programme. Like the case of the first Republic, the experiment lasted only four years and the collapse owed significantly to issues around the 1983 general elections conducted by the President Shagari administration (Diamond, 1988). The election was characterised by violence engineered by the ruling National Party of Nigeria using the electoral body and the security operatives to perpetrate rigging and manipulation. Reactions to the fraud assumed violent dimensions in various parts of the country (Onebamhoi, 2011:6). Perhaps, the most violent reaction happened in Ondo State where massive destruction of property and killings followed the manipulation of election result in favour of the ruling party (Babarinsa (2003), Adele, 2012).

A few months later, the soldiers struck and the military brass hats railroaded many of the principal political gladiators onto detention centres, suspended the constitutions and all structures built around it; and by so doing, effectively put the democratic order in abeyance. In the history of post-colonial Nigeria, the most peaceful election ever conducted, on June 12 1993, was annulled by Military President Ibrahim Babangida, its organiser, just before its conclusion; and this was to lead to series of events of cataclysmic proportions that almost brought the country to her knees. A final push to the precipice was averted when a "biological coup" was put to General Sani Abacha's self-succession plan in 1998.

Once again, the country returned to a democratic order in May, 1999 but since the return, electoral conduct had not fared better in terms of violence and insecurity. Indeed, Most of the elections conducted have recorded massive violence in all the three phases - pre, during and post-elections. Although the 1999 election did not record violence, the same cannot be said of the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections. In the rundown to the 2003 general elections, President Obasanjo raised the alarm over cases of politicians raising private militias for political use (Adele, 2012). The same period witnessed instances of political assassinations such as the case of Harry Marshall and Dikibo; there were also protests and demonstrations over the preparations; the most spectacular being the November 2002 political disturbance in Kaduna that resulted in killings and destruction of property (Adele, 2012).

In terms of fraud and loss of credibility, as well as violence, the 2007 general election is in a class of its own. The election was generally regarded as fraudulent and marred with violence in various parts of the country where police stations, INEC offices and government buildings were burnt in protests (Lewis, 2003, Adele, 2012:211). Within a few weeks to the polls, there was an attempt to bomb the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) national office in Abuja through a bomb-laden petrol tanker. In 2011, the INEC office in Suleija was bombed and several poll workers were killed (Mosadomi, et al. 2011). In addition, protests over the election result resulted in the wanton killings, including the murder of nine young Nigerians on national service, who were working for INEC as an ad-hoc electoral staff (Jega, 2012).

Perhaps owing to the loss of lives after the 2011 general elections, the Nigerian government resulted to heavy deployment of security forces during elections as witnessed in Edo, Ondo, Anambra, Ekiti and Osun States. However, of all the mentioned elections, those of the last two were the highest where over a hundred thousand security forces, comprising the police, army, secret agents, civil defence corps and other paramilitary forces, were deployed. The two states were totally locked down with both human and vehicular movements restricted. For Nigeria's President; Goodluck Jonathan, the heavy deployment of security forces for the elections is considered necessary given the country's recent violent electoral history.

Jonathan had argued that:

We just finished 2011 elections and we are talking about three years ago or quite close to four years ago and we know what happened in

Bauchi where about 10 youth corpsers were slaughtered in that elections. We know what happened in Kano; properties worth millions of naira were destroyed, and some of the people have not gotten back their houses. We know what happened in Akwa Ibom where some criminals even had to sever the genitals of some men in the name of politics – demons who want to hold political office. In that kind of situation, how would a person who calls himself a labour leader come out publicly to say government should not secure people? I don't agree with them. (Cited in Otuchiekere, 2014)

Inherent in the rationalization of the Nigerian president is the notion of supreme power of the state to maintain the security of lives and property. This flows from the earlier experience of widespread destructions and killings during elections. This explains the presence of a high number of security forces, an occurrence that was witnessed for the first time in Nigeria. However, if the motive was to secure lives during elections, the activities of the security forces became a major controversy for, in what appears to be a ploy to persecute the opposition, a large number of members of All Progressive Congress (APC) were arrested and detained before the election, while leaving members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This became a major issue in the Nigerian polity as several people rose in condemnation of the trend but the president continued to maintain his position that he will continue to deploy heavy military personnel during elections, and in the process, turn elections into something of warfare.

Thomas Hobbes had long held a pessimistic view of human nature by arguing that man is by nature not only controlled by greed and avarice, but can be controlled by superior power of force (Olurode, 2013). As a counterpoise to the violent inclination of human beings, Hobbes had conceptualized an all powerful garrison state. To him, an absolute state is the price to be paid for moving away from the lawlessness of the state of nature. In that sense, the state holds all the rights to ensure the protection of the people by all means. In order to prevent recourse to anarchy and break down of law and order, the state is justified to employ high tactics (Olaniyan, 2007). To a large extent, the Nigerian government's resort to excessive militarization of election can be said to derive from the Hobbesian tradition. Elections in Nigeria are likened to warfare, where casualties are recorded. In order to prevent this cycle of bloodletting, the state resorted to employing maximum force. But such became problematic because of several issues. What are these issues and how do they play out? This is the objective which the next intends to achieve.

Towards understanding the troop deployment process in Ekiti and Osun States

As argued by Akinnaso, particularly when situated within the confines of electoral politics in Nigeria, the term militarisation, has come to acquire an extended cultural meaning, consisting of three semantic components: (1) the deployment of security forces, consisting of military, police, the Department of State Service, and other security operatives; (2) the deployment occurs during an election; and (3) the election takes place in an opposition state (Akinnaso, 2014). In both the Ekiti and Osun elections, all of these characteristics were constant features during and after the elections with both the proponents and opponents of the heavy troop deployment competing for space in Nigeria's political circles.

Some political observers argued that the militarisation of the Ekiti election was indeed necessary, considering the cases of violence that characterised the pre-election campaigns by the three main political parties; the People's Democratic Party, (PDP), the All Progressives Congress (APC), and the Labour Party (LP), which participated in the election. However, others have maintained that such a deployment was a deliberate attempt by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) led federal government to intimidate the incumbent governor, Kayode Fayemi and the All Progressive Congress (APC), with a view to paving the way for the emergence of the PDP candidate, Mr Ayodele Fayose (Akinnaso, 2014).

Proponents of the deployment of troops for the elections, premise their argument on the fact that the Ekiti election, for the first time in a long while, was devoid of violence. Except for a few incidents, which saw the arrest of some APC leaders, the election was adjudged to be peaceful. As the PDP's National Publicity Secretary, Olisa Metuh argued:

“The primary responsibility of President Goodluck Jonathan is to protect the lives and property of all Nigerians; hence the deployment of security men to the state was to ensure this, in the interest of all. He further stated that the President had by the action, proven that he was committed to free, fair and credible elections across the country; and that the deployment of soldiers to states for election was not new since Edo, Ondo and Anambra where governorship elections had been held earlier. In all these state elections, PDP lost; meanwhile, the governor of Edo had cried out to the public that soldiers had invaded the state to rig the election for the PDP. But at the end of the day, the election appeared free and fair to him and PDP lost while he won. He came out on national television to commend the President, saying he is a statesman” (Metuh in *Leadership*, 21 June, 2014).

Lending credence to Metuh's position, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a civil society group which regularly monitors the conduct of elections in Nigeria also justified the deployment of soldiers for elections in the country including the Ekiti election citing past experiences where politicians take elections as an act of war, as a case in point (Okpi, 2014). The group's chairman, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, argued that the soldiers' deployment was not new and that the success recorded by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Ekiti may not have been possible if they were not on ground to ensure security. In the US and other places, elections might not result to insecurity, but in Nigeria elections have become war, even the campaigns look "warlike," (Zikirullahi, cited in Okpi, 2014).

From the point of view of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria's electoral umpire, the heavy troop deployment was necessary to provide security to officials of the commission and the voters. The commission through its Chairman, Attahiru Jega, noted that:

The military performs what we describe as peripheral outer cordon. It is the mobile police that handle internal movement in terms of movements in the towns but away from polling unit. And it is unarmed policemen that you have on an average of three per polling units, and that is exactly what happened in Ekiti (Jega, cited in Olusanmi, 2014).

However, for Nigeria's federal government, the pocket of violent clashes witnessed before the Ekiti elections was enough reason to warrant the deployment of about 12,000 troops including, soldiers, men of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, State Security Service (NSCDC), and police officers to keep the peace during the polling (Okpi, 2014). As attested to by Nigeria's former Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mohammed Abubakar, the Police authorities had deployed three helicopters for surveillance in the three senatorial districts in the state with one Assistant Inspector General of Police and four commissioners of Police for effective coordination of security operations, as early as one week to the election (Okpi, 2014).

While confirming what we argue as the heavy militarisation of the Ekiti gubernatorial elections in Ekiti State, the police chief, admitted that the number of troops, armoured tanks and helicopters deployed in Ekiti were the highest ever to be deployed in any state in Nigeria for electioneering purposes, attributing the deployment to the resolve of the police to do anything humanly possible to provide security for election materials and personnel of INEC (Abubakar,

cited in Okpi, 2014). Like a war zone, the troops took their positions. Almost every 100 metres from the entry point of the state, police officers and soldiers mounted various check points, with blood-hound dogs sniffing for any likely breach of peace by supporters of the various political parties (Akinmaso, 2014).

What seemed to have bothered political observers about the military invasion in Ekiti was the incident that transpired 48 hours before the elections. Rivers State governor, Rotimi Amaechi, and his Edo and Kano State counterparts, Adams Oshiomhole and Rabiun Kwankwaso were denied entry into Ekiti State to attend the last APC mega rally by military personnel purportedly acting on the order of the Presidency (Akinmaso 2014). Other leaders of the party, including the Imo State governor, Rochas Okorocha, and the former governor of Lagos State, Bola Tinubu, were also barred from taking off at the Akure airport after the rally, leaving them with the option of travelling by road (Akinmaso, 2014).

The siege by the military on Ekiti was so severe that moving from a 5-minute walking distance to the other was virtually impossible due to the heavy security lock down in the state on the day of the election. As Odigie-Oyegun, the national chairman of Nigeria's main opposition party noted,

It is unfortunate that under the guise of providing security, Ekiti State has been turned into a war zone. It has been over-run by armed security personnel with the intention of intimidating the opposition and the voters as well. Our electoral laws are clear that every polling unit should have one unarmed policeman and the military should have no role in the election. But in Ekiti, armed police and military personnel have been deployed in their numbers and the question we are asking is whose purpose are they going to serve? (Odigie-Oyegun cited in Obogo, 2014).

Commenting further on the siege which Nigeria's security forces laid on the prominent members of the opposition in the build up to the Ekiti elections, a Governor (Adams Oshiomole) elected under the platform of the opposition party (APC), argued that the decision by Nigeria's security agencies to prevent him and other senior members of his party from attending the political rally was instigated by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). He expressed his frustration thus:

I have the right to go to any part of Nigeria and if you can stop a Governor, you treat him as a miscreant, it's not about me, it's about the

office, then you reduce the country to something close to a ‘Banana Republic’. These things happen all the time, that’s why I always argue that we need strong institutions rather than strong personalities (Oshiomole, cited in *The Sun*, 22 June, 2014).

Lending their voices to the perceived militarisation of the Ekiti elections, civil society groups, under the aegis of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) also condemned the conduct of the law enforcement agent in a press conference addressed by the Chairman of the Ado-Ekiti branch of NBA, Joseph Adewunmi, and the chairman of the Ekiti State chapter of NUJ, Laolu Omosilade (Okoro, 2014). They argued that “the heavy presence of security personnel in the elections could provide an avenue for the rigging of the election even if the electorates are scared of coming out to vote, there will be surplus voting cards which unscrupulous politicians can use to the detriment of one another and more importantly, the credibility of the election,” (Okoro, 2014).

Other observers described the events which played out in Ekiti not only “as an apparent rule of force in a democracy, but a reckless display of raw power, a condemnable intimidation of civility and a flagrant abuse of fundamental rights of the expected voters.” (Agoro cited in Okoro, 2014). **Agoro further noted that there were** unusual movement of hundreds of thickly equipped vehicles and police helicopter ceaselessly flying over the skyline of Ekiti, for a simple election in a state controlled by a political party different from that at the centre is akin to casting votes under the barrels of guns an unexpected evil development in a democracy” (Agoro cited in Okoro, 2014). The views, as expressed above are indeed consistent with the submissions of a Civil Society group—“Say No Campaign” (SNC) on the Ekiti 2014 Governorship elections.

The group in its preliminary report on the elections condemned the heavy deployment of troops in the election by pointing out that:

the over-whelming militarisation of politics, engenders a consequent politicization of the military, that may lead to a situation where a politicized military strikes and cashes in on a general crisis partly created and partly reinforced by the militarization of politics and civic life, and truncates the democratic experiment (SNC, cited in *Daily Trust*, 3 September, 2014).

Similarly, in the 9 August, 2014 Governorship election in Osun State, the scenario was not particularly different, except that the number of troops deployed to provide security in the

elections doubled the 36,000 strong security personnel deployed for the elections. A total number of 73,000 men comprising of the army, police, and Civil Defence operatives were said to have been deployed for the election in the state (PM News, 11 August, 2014). The National Leader of the opposition APC, Bola Tinubu, described what happened in Osun this way:

The massing of the military and over sixty thousand security men to intimidate and harass a peaceful people is the sign of an unsecured government and party. It is a pre-condition to manipulate and perpetrate electoral fraud. Under any democracy, there can be no moral or political justification for the security armada against our party leaders and followers in Osun. The implications for our democracy foretells of dire consequences (Tinubu cited in PM News, 11 August, 2014).

Speaking from a legal and constitutional perspective, others have argued that that it is illegal for the government to employ the use of the armed forces to maintain law and order during elections. Relying on Sections 215 and 217 of the Constitution, they noted though that the President of the country has the powers to deploy armed forces, but that such powers are only applicable to the suppression of insurrection, including insurgency and aiding the police to restore order when it has broken down (Falana, cited in PM News, 11 August, 2014). It is imperative to mention that the effects of the militarisation of the elections in both Ekiti and Osun States were believed to have been mostly felt by members of Nigeria's main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress.

As argued by Lai Mohammed, the party's National Publicity Secretary, the Osun 2014 gubernatorial election represents "a total hijack of the process and direct violation of the rights of the people. Osun State has been turned into a theatre of war. An on-going state-sponsored political terror against the Osun people and the entire people of Nigeria has been unleashed by an elected President against his own people, against his own country, in an unprecedented act of political desperation" (Mohammed cited in PM News, 11 August, 2014). Other chieftains of the opposition party, including the State Governor, Rauf Aregbesola, similarly complained that in the course of the elections, "the State (Osun) was unduly militarized in an unprecedented manner through criminal intimidation and psychological assault on our people.

This election witnessed an abuse of our security agencies and amounted to a corruption of their professional ethics and integrity" (Aregbesola cited in Chukwu, 2014). In the Osun State, Aregbesola argues that:

The security agencies were unprofessionally utilized in Osun State to harass, intimidate and oppress the people whose taxes are used to pay their salaries and provide their arms. Hundreds of leaders, supporters, sympathisers and agents of our party were arrested and detained. Also, hundreds of other innocent citizens, including women and the aged, were harassed, brutalized and traumatized. In spite of this condemnable repression and abuse of human rights, the unflagging spirit of our people triumphed (Aregbesola, cited in Chukwu, 2014)

When one situates what took place in both the Ekiti and Osun Governorship elections within the confines of Nigeria's 1999 constitution, some observers have faulted the decision by Nigeria's Federal government; particularly the Presidency, to deploy soldiers for the maintenance of law and order during elections is without any constitutional resonance. Premising their argument on Sections 215 and 217 of Nigeria's 1999 constitution, they argue that President is only empowered by law to deploy armed forces on such duties when they border on internal security are limited to the suppression of insurrection, including insurgency and aiding the police to restore order when it has broken down (Falana cited in Onanuga, 2014).

Falana argued further that "with the figure of 36,790 armed soldiers, police, state security service and civil defence personnel deployed for the Ekiti election not less than one million armed troops will be required for the 2015 election" (Falana cited in Onanuga, 2014). However, the courts have consistently enjoined the Federal Government to desist from involving the armed forces in the conduct of elections. That court reiterated its views in the case of *Buhari v Obasanjo* (2005) 1 WRN 1 at 2000 when Abdullah PCA observed that in spite of the non-tolerant nature and behaviour of our political class in this country, we should by all means try to keep armed personnel of whatever status or nature from being part and parcel of our election process. The civilian authorities should be left to conduct and carry out fully the electoral processes at all levels" (Falana cited in Onanuga, 2014).

Security forces, election militarization and democratic consolidation in Nigeria

We can begin an analysis of the scenario described in the foregoing from the motive of the Nigerian government in the massive troop deployment saga. This can be analysed from two angles of motivations. The apparent reason offered by the presidency is to secure lives and property; and in the process, ensure transparent elections. Scholars have agreed that the basic essence of the state is securing life and property of the citizens and one of the ways to achieve

this is the usage of security forces, acting on behalf of the government, to prevent the breakdown of law and order. The Hobessian conceptualization argues for the maximum use of state power to secure the lives of the people and their property. In a democracy, elections represent the acceptable platform for the emergence of political leaders. In that wise, it behoves on the state to ensure credibility of the process. One of the ways to achieve this is the protection of the men that will conduct the election, the materials to be used, the voters, the voting environment and the political gladiators (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010, Jega, 2013, Olurode, 2013).

This is where the security forces come in as the only recognised state institution empowered to ensure security before, during and after elections. In essence therefore, securing election is a fundamental duty of the security forces, on behalf of the state. In this wise, massive deployment of security forces to secure election, as witnessed in the two states under study, is in order and highly essential. But the hidden motive of the heavy deployment points to desperate desire to influence the outcomes of the election through intimidation, coercion, oppression and suppression of members of the opposition parties. During the two elections, members of the opposition were singled out for arrest and detention. Not a single member of President's party was molested.

In Osun State, a dimension to the militarization was added with the appearance of hooded security operatives whose identity became difficult to know. Most of the arrests were done by the masked operatives. This was corroborated by the report compiled by the Civil Society Group that,

There were reports of unexplained arrests and detention of some politicians. Some observers witnessed the arrest of voters by two masked security operatives who yanked these voters off the lines. There were reports by some observers that armed and hooded security officials were seen at the polling units standing in close proximity to the voting stations in contravention of electoral regulations (cited in *Sahara Reporters*, 2014).

The major problem in the two case studies is therefore not in the overt reason for such an excessive deployment of troops, but rather in the covert underpinning motives of the deployment. In other words, there could be militarization to ensure safety and there could be militarization to intimate opposition. In the case of the states under study, the case seems to be the latter as evident in the selective harassment of members of the opposition parties. A situation where security forces are deployed to intimidate the opposition in order to secure a

victory for the President's party leads does not bode well for democracy. This was agreed to by the Civil society group when they aver that "this culture of hooded gunmen ostensibly acting in the capacity of legitimate state operatives is thoroughly condemned and has no place in nurturing a democracy in which the citizens are not terrorized by agents of State" (cited in *Sahara Reporters*, 2014). Democracy thrives in the presence of vibrant opposition. Any threat to the existence of opposition is therefore a threat to democratic sustenance.

Conclusion

We argue that going by the various views expressed on the issue, and much as we desire to have a reasonably solid democracy devoid of any dictatorial incursion, Nigeria is still too far from this position. Added to this is the fact, most Nigerians, particularly the political class are yet exemplify the kind of democratic credentials which allows for what we prefer to call "politics based on principles and non-violence". Given this foregoing, it may be difficult for Nigeria to have a completely demilitarised election as it happens in other popular democracies, attempts must however be made by the Nigerian government and more importantly, the country's electoral body (INEC) to limit the role of the military to situations which cannot be brought under control by the Police and other para-military agencies, and not the outright involvement as we saw in our two case studies.

It is imperative that the country's politicians and its citizens should hasten up and change their attitude and perception towards politics and governance, so that the democracy can mature fast, such that the military can be restricted to performing their constitutional duties. It is submitted that the deployment of the armed forces for the maintenance of law and order during elections as argued espoused above cannot be legally justified in view of Section 215(3) of the Constitution which has vested the police with the exclusive power to maintain and secure public safety and public order in the country.

Therefore, and as argued by Falana, "going by the combined effect of Sections 215 and 217 of the Constitution, it is abundantly clear that the power of the President to deploy the armed forces for internal security is limited to (a) the suppression of insurrection including insurgency and (b) aiding the police to restore order when it has broken down. To that extent, it is illegal and ultra vires on the part of the President to deploy the armed forces to maintain law and order during elections" (Falana cited in Onanuga, 2014). We therefore recommend that the government should consider strengthening the capacity of its police units to enable it discharge

its constitutional role of ensuring internal security in the country, particularly during the conduct of elections, which are largely civic by nature and orientation.

This paper appeared in *International Affairs Forum*, Volume 6, Issue 1 (2015)

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