

Security Challenges and Electoral Malpractice in 2015, 2019, and 2023 General Elections in Cross River Southern Senatorial District, Nigeria

¹Akwauyama, Peter Tom, ²Jumudjaye, Oke Efe & ³Obi, Patience Esame

¹omobabaolowo180@gmail.com:08156248476, ²ejumudjaye@gmail.com:08108743035,

³lovelyn49@gmail.com: 08071902384

Department of Public Administration

Faculty of Management Science

University of Calabar Calabar.

DOI: 10.56201/jpaswr.v11.no6.2026.pg91.100

Abstract

The study was designed to investigate security challenges and electoral malpractice in Nigeria's general election in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State (2015 to 2023). To achieve the aims of the study, two research questions were raised, and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The literature review was reviewed based on the related variables and hypotheses formulated. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consists of two thousand five hundred and ninety-six (2596). A total sample of two hundred and sixty (260) respondents was selected for the study. The selection was done through a stratified sampling technique. The main instrument used was a research questionnaire on security challenges and electoral malpractice in Nigeria's general election in the Southern Senatorial district of Cross River State (2015 to 2023) validated by two experts in the test and measurement department, and the department of public administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Calabar. The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher. To test the hypotheses, Simple linear regression analysis was used. All the hypotheses were subjected to testing at .05 level of significance with critical values. The result of the findings revealed that vote buying as a result of security challenges, ballot box snatching and voter intimidation significantly relate to electoral malpractice in the Cross-River State 2015 to 2023 general election. In conclusion, the study revealed negative relationships between the variables under study and electoral malpractices in southern senatorial district of Cross River State from 2015 to 2023. It was recommended among others that adequate and proper training and retraining of individuals before, during and after election should be ensured to prepare them with the right and necessary skills needed to control violent election and political atmosphere for a credible process in the state to avoid vote buying in the polling unit.

Introduction

The 2015 to 2023 General Election in Nigeria marked a crucial milestone in the nation's democratic journey as citizens exercised their right to elect their leaders with support from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in conducting credible elections. However, concerns about voter suppression and electoral integrity cast a shadow over the democratic process. Nigeria has a complex history of electoral challenges, as previous elections have been marred by allegations of irregularities and voter suppression. Since independence in 1960, violence

and myriad malpractices have persistently plagued the process of electing the country's leaders (Oduola,2023). These issues erode public trust in the electoral process, undermine democratic principles, and hinder the country's progress towards a fair and inclusive society. Despite expectations for greater electoral integrity, instances of electoral malpractice persisted during the 2015 to 2023 General Elections. Electoral malpractice refers to deliberate measures and tactics deployed to hinder eligible voters from participating in the electoral process. This can take various forms, including voter intimidation, deliberately placing hurdles in the path of voter registration, inadequate access to polling stations, and the manipulation of the delineation of electoral boundaries. Of great concern during the elections were shortcomings such as the uneven distribution of polling stations, sporadic incidents of the late arrival of voting materials or of ad-hoc staff, which resulted in the late opening of polls, particularly in regions with high population density or areas traditionally supportive of certain political parties. In some instances, citizens having to travel long distances to cast their votes were deterred from participating in the electoral process, resulting in low voter turnout (Oduola,2023). Moreover, there were widespread reports of voter intimidation and violence in certain areas of Cross River State (Nsan, Egbula,& Wonah, 2023). Election is one of the most prominent features of political events in modern democracy. Although election and voting are not considered sufficient conditions for political representation, there is little doubt, however, that they are necessary conditions, germane to the entrenchment of democratic principles and practices (Olusola and Adeyemi, 2015). Indeed, given its conspicuous relevance in democratic political space, the election has been described as the 'very heart of democracy' (Heywood, 2021). Olusola and Adeyemi (2015) reported that periodic holding of elections is a sine qua non to any democracy. The word "election" has been described as a "formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour" (Gueye, 2010). Heywood (2021) opined that an election is a device for filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people called "the electorate".

Elections by their very nature are confrontational and therefore require the assurance of equitable security to retain participant confidence and commitment. Consequently, security is thus integral to the electoral process. Evidence from the United Nations has shown that on a global scale, one in every fifth election experience, some measure of violence and malpractice is expected, hence making security in the electoral process imperative, especially in emerging democracies (Abubakar et al., 2016). Hounkpe and Gueye (2020) attest that the issue of election security comes up in all stages of the electoral process when the security of the post-electoral process is mismanaged, as evidenced in the post-electoral stage (Wonah, Ngaji,& Udayi,2022).

Since the return to Civil Rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, five different elections have been conducted, excluding bye-elections and local government Area elections (Abubakar et al., 2016). Out of the five general elections conducted, only the 2011 general election can be said to meet both the local and international standards, but the disturbing trend is that each general election was worse than the preceding one. The election conducted during this period was characterized by a lot of electoral malpractice. This trend shows that Nigeria is faring very badly at each passing election as nobody talks of consolidating democracy in such an environment. This is because the leaders seem to have forgotten that conducting a free and fair election is vital to the growth and development of any democratic process. Also, an average Nigerian voter is interested in immediate pecuniary or material rewards, and will easily trade off his votes when appropriately induced. This can be explained by the crippling poverty facing the people in the absence of government provision of the basic amenities required for decent living, as well as their justified distrust of political leaders. Again, since the return to democracy in 1999, elections have created a hostile and unstable

political atmosphere in Nigeria. This is seen in the intra and inter-party conflicts, election-related violence, and the devastating effect of godfatherism that has taken over the electoral processes. These, put together, have created security challenges in Nigeria. Osumah and Aghemelo (2020) contend that election-related violence that has been gripping the Nigerian State since the country's return to democracy in 1999, as well as the aftermaths of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections, have often posed great security challenges for Nigeria. Achumba, et al. (2013) reported that in such election related crises, it is estimated that over 10,000 Nigerians have lost their lives, hundreds of thousands have been displaced while properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed due to election related violence in the country, consequently, the prevailing security challenges in Nigeria have equally some link to the hostile political atmosphere in Nigeria created by election related conflicts.

One of the obstacles to free, fair, and credible electoral processes in the country has been the challenges of insecurity before, during, and after the election. This has been expressed in different ways, such as shooting during elections, the recruitment of thugs, removing or carry of papers, buying of voters, gangsterism, and hooliganism (Olurode, 2013). According to Beland (2015), some of these security challenges, as recorded in the Niger Delta region, include the killing of people, which has threatened the peaceful co-existence and social harmony. A universal feature of elections in the country is a condition where the heads waited and insisted in the polling areas to offer their vote, but the political class and their political parties had different ideologies. The heads move their vote to count and determine the winners of the election, while the political class indulges in corrupt ways to manipulate their way into elective positions. In the words of Nwolise (2019), irrespective of electoral malpractice and election irregularities that characterized election in majority cities, another factor combined to assess election mechanism in the nation, political groups who should be carrying out voter learning and gathering, totally neglect the duty to groups' organizations. Rather, agents of political groups on vote Day battle to cast the vote on state of the electorate for their groups, whereas in majority state, protection aid a specific political group that have bided more to control the voting mechanism in their in their favor.

Electoral malpractice and violence are a serious abuse and assault on the minds of the people, and these include election rigging, exclusion of party logo and aspirant name from ballot papers, intimidation of eligible voters by thugs of political opponents, disenfranchising of eligible voters in polling centers, and forceful collection of ballot boxes, results (Aniekwe & Kushie, 2021). Any attempt at the various stages of election to corrupt, influence, or determine the outcome of an election beyond what it could have been, objectively, does damage to the election, and could be tantamount to election malpractice.

In 2015, 2019, and 2023, voting in the state, some of the electoral security challenges recorded were due to the deployment of thugs. Aniekwe and Kushie (2021) attest that the recognition of the 2019 vote result, which was affected by strong mutilating and electoral violence, was because there was no additional option after about 30 years of armed control. The security personnel in Nigeria were ordered to conduct every basic role to stop any action that is capable of disrupting or affecting the peaceful conduct of the election in the country.

Furthermore, protection personnel are entrusted with the power to ensure the safety and security of electoral materials by controlling the materials adequately at every location where they will be applied. They also provide protection to polling units and collation centers. However, the electoral process in Nigeria is characterized by malpractices, which are usually carried out by Political thugs, and in most cases, aided by security forces. Based on these premises, the researchers intend

to assess security challenges and electoral malpractices in Nigeria 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections using the Southern Senatorial district of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Election has not only become an instrument for the demise of authoritarianism or a transition to democracy, but the credibility of the electoral process has equally become the instrument to determine the respect and acceptance of independent regimes. Therefore, a plausible vote is the universal recognition of its act as free by the individual and the foreign bodies. To guarantee the credibility of any election, the electoral umpire must, as a matter of necessity, prioritize electoral security and know the distinct stages of the voting mechanism, and therefore arrange the required plan to protect every stage. For voting in a country, the voting cycle can be grouped into three stages such as the pre-voting stage, the voting day, and the post-voting stage (Abubakar et al., 2016). However, in Nigeria, most security breaches happen during the post-election phases. Furthermore, electoral processes in Nigeria have faced the occurrence of killings and snatching of documents, elimination of vote outcomes, destruction of documents, and the pressure of elections in the homes of politicians whose thugs pressure voters to perform to their will, despite proof of the offer of proper protection during the election. Thus, electoral malpractices and election-related insecurity weaken democratic governance by reducing public trust, discouraging participation, and producing unaccountable leadership. Despite reforms such as biometric voter registers, legal reforms, and INEC changes, electoral malpractice persisted between 2015 and 2023, often intersecting with localized insecurity (insurgency, banditry, secessionist violence) to disenfranchise voters and distort outcomes. The problem of insecurity, challenges, and electoral malpractices in Nigeria keeps persisting. It is against this backdrop that the researchers intend to investigate the relationship between security challenges and electoral malpractices in Nigeria's 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections using the Southern Senatorial district of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to examine security challenges and electoral malpractice in Nigeria's general elections in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, from 2015 to 2023. Specifically, the study seeks to find out whether:

1. Vote buying as a result of security challenges influences electoral malpractice in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election.
2. Ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security deployment influence electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following questions

1. How does vote buying as a result of security challenges influence electoral malpractice in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election?
2. How do ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security deployment influence electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election?

Statement of hypotheses

The following research hypotheses was formulated to guide the study;

1. Vote buying as a result of security challenges has no significant relationship with electoral

malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election

2. Ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security deployment have no significant relationship with electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was the survey design. The population of this study consists of two thousand five hundred and ninety-six (2596) personnel from the Nigeria Police Command, Calabar, Cross River State, the NSCDS, the Department of SSS, Calabar, Cross River State, and Officers of the 23 Brigade, Calabar, in the Southern senatorial district of Cross River State. The research design adopted for this study was an Ex-post facto design. The sampling method used in selecting the sample for this study was the stratified sampling technique, which was used to select two hundred and sixty (260) respondents from the five (5) different groups in the study area. The questionnaire was the main instrument used by the researcher to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was arranged into ten items divided into Part A and Part B. Part A is basically to extract demographic information, while Part B measures the variables under study. The questionnaires were structured in a four-point Likert Scale.

Results

Hypothesis one

Vote buying as a result of security challenges has no significant relationship with electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election.

The independent variable in this hypothesis was the vote buying as a result of security challenges, while the dependent variable was the electoral malpractices. Simple regression analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis was presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Simple linear regression result of the prediction of vote buying as a result of security challenges and electoral malpractices.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R. Square	Std error of the estimate	
1	.978(a)	.957	.956	.48086	
Model	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	1331.127	1	1331.127	5756.725*	.001(b)
Residual	59.657	258	.231		
Total	1390.785	259			
Variables	Unstandardized regression weight B	Standardized regression weight	Beta weight	t	p-value
(Constant)	.457	.215		2.126	.034
Vote buying	.975	.013	.978	75.873	.001

* Significant at $p < .05$

The analysis result in Table 1 showed that $R = .957$, which implies that a strong positive relationship exists between the vote buying as a result of security challenges and electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election. The prediction of the vote buying as a result of security challenges produced an adjusted R^2 of .957. This indicates that the vote buying as a result of security challenges accounts for 95.7% of the determinant of electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Elections. This finding is a critical indication that the vote buying as a result of security challenges was relatively moderate in the area of the study. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table was $F = 5756.725^*$ and the sig. value of .001 (or $p < .05$) at the degree of freedom (df) 1 and 258. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected and its alternative upheld. This result implies that the vote buying as a result of security challenges significantly predicts electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Elections.

Hypothesis two

Ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security deployment have no significant relationship with electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election. The independent variable in this hypothesis was the Ballot box snatching, while the dependent variable was the electoral malpractices. Simple regression analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis was presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Simple linear regression result of the prediction of the ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security and electoral malpractices.

Model	R	R. square	Adjusted R. Square	Std error of the estimate	
1	.527(a)	.278	.275	1.97297	
Model	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	386.495	1	386.495	99.290*	.001(b)
Residual	1004.290	258	3.893		
Total	1390.785	259			
Variables	Unstandardized regression weight B	Standardized regression weight	Beta weight	t	p-value
(Constant)	9.316	.740		12.583	.001
Ballot box snatching and voter intimidation	.457	.046	.527	9.964	.001

* Significant at $p < .05$

The analysis result in Table 2 showed that $R = .275$, which implies that a strong positive relationship exists between the ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security and electoral malpractices. The prediction of the ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security on the electoral malpractices produced an adjusted R^2 of .275. This indicates that the ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security account for 27.5% of the determinants

of electoral malpractices in the study area. This finding was a critical indication that the electoral malpractices were relatively moderate in the area of the study. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table was $F = 99.290^*$ and the sig. value of .001 (or $p < .05$) at the degree of freedom (df) 1 and 258. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected and its alternative upheld. The implication of this result is that the ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security significantly predict electoral malpractices.

Discussion of findings

Vote buying as a result of security challenges

The result of hypothesis one reveals that vote buying as a result of security challenges has a significant relationship with electoral malpractices in the CRS 2015-2023 General Election. The findings of this study are in line with Mwakannma (2021) who opined that the consequence of each political race mirror the accessibility of the security staff sent for political race. He went further to state that decisions in Nigeria are taken as a sink or swim undertaking where government officials need to overlook every single appointive rule just to win races and by and large, where there is no satisfactory security work force to turn away anomalies and acts of neglect, believability and adequacy of such political race is constantly lost.

As indicated by David and Baley (2021), for a state to direct sound and worthy political race, sufficient security must be set up, they contended that the powerful execution of discretionary bodies relies upon the quantities of security staff conveyed for that political decision. They further fight that, political lack of bias of security powers and serene surveying condition is an assurance for nature of administration rendered by constituent authorities, security ought to be sent so that voters ought not fear mischief to turn out and make their choice for up-and-comer and ideological group of their decision yet in most time the case is not quite the same as the desire for voters and discretionary bodies charge for political race obligation.

Ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security deployment

The result of hypothesis two reveals that the ballot box snatching and voter intimidation as a result of security significantly predict electoral malpractices. In the expressions of Khong (2021), security sending is faced with a great deal of difficulties, going from calculated which envelops transportation, compensation, and welfare, and that security staff conveys for political decision organization are by and large observed as a gathering time of sorts, or a chance to make riches. Khong (2021) presumed that for a savagery-free and solid political decision to be accomplished, security official sent should at untouched never be given a chance to go into an antagonistic mood and cause the political race in such territory fizzled or upset.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the data collected, analysed, and the findings derived, the following conclusions were made that vote buying as a result of security challenges, ballot box snatching and voter intimidation and result manipulation significantly relate to electoral malpractice in the Cross River State 2015 to 2023 general election. However, from the findings of this study, it therefore revealed that elections malpractices recorded in the period between 2015 to 2023 in southern senatorial district of Cross River State were characterized solely due to insufficient security personnel, inadequate training of protection individual previous, on and after vote, as well as poor and unsophisticated security gadgets, which if considered and address, will improve our electoral processes and gives confidence to the public.

5.3 Recommendation

From the observations of the research, the following recommendations were made in order to improve our electoral processes:

1. Adequate and proper training and retraining of individuals before, during, and after the election should be ensured to prepare them with the right and necessary skills needed to control a violent election and political atmosphere for a credible process in the state to avoid vote buying in the polling unit.
2. Government requires to adequately activate the security bodies so that they cannot be offered or manipulated by desperate politicians who use them as equipment or puppets to rig elections. Also, deployment of security officers for election-related activities should always be done in a timely manner by security personnel authorities to avoid ballot box snatching and voter intimidation.

References

- Abubakar, M., Grace, O., Ayodeje, A. A., Aremu, F. A., Aluko, O.1., Emmanuel, A., Osita, A., Hakeem, O., Moses, T. A., Chris, O. & Oni, E. O.(2016). Nigeria General Elections: From Reforms to Transformation. *Journal of African Elections*, 15(2), 13-176
- Achumba, I., Ighomereho, O. & Akpor-Robaro, M. (2023). Security challenges in Nigeria and the implications for business activities and sustainable development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 4. [Online] Available: <http://vwww.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/.../4262> (July 6, 2024).
- Adetula, V. A. O. (2017). "The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the 2003 Elections: An Evaluation". In: Albert, O.I; Marco, D & Adetula, V (eds) (2017) *Perspectives on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria*. Abuja IDASA-NIGERIA.
- Adeyemi, J. A. & Olusola, M. O. j. (2015). Electoral Security and Its Implications for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, 3 (9), 5-13
- Agajelu, A. C., & Alazor, C. A. (2024). The Dynamics of Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria: An Analysis of the 2023 Presidential Election. *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities (NJAH)*, 4(3). nigerianjournalsonline.org
- Aniekwe, C & Kushie, J. (2021). Electoral Violence Situational Analysis: Identifying Hot Spots in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria. *National Association for Peaceful Elections in Nigeria (NAPEN) Abuja*. Ppl-4
- Beland, D. (2005). The political construction of collective insecurity: from moral panic to blame avoidance and organized irresponsibility. *Center for European Studies Working Paper Series 126*. [Online] Available: http://www.ces.berkeley.edu/publications/working_papers/2005/Beland_2005.pdf
- Election Security in Nigeria: Matters Arising Fredrich Ebert -Stifing (FES). Abuja December 12.
- Fischer, J. (2022). Electoral Conflict and Violence IFES, Washington, D.C. Pp 22-24
- Hassan, A. (2023). Security Challenges in Kenyan Elections in Olurode L (ed)
- Hey wood. A. 1997. *Politics*. London. Macmillan Press Ltd. <http://www.nigeriamuse.com>
- Hounkpe, M. & Gueye, A.B. (2020). The Role of Security Forces in the Electoral Process: the case of six West African countries. Abuja, Fredrich Ebert Stiftung. <http://theaebf.com/Vol5no2Fall2007Oladeji.pdf> (April 22, 2014) <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/> (July 6, 2014).
- Human Rights Watch. (2024). Nigeria's 2023 Elections: The Unacknowledged Violence, Human Rights Watch, New York. Pp 12-16
- Igini, M. (2023). Election Security in Theory and Practice: Perspective of a Resident Commissioner. In Olurode, L. (ed). *Election Security in Nigeria: Matters Arising*. Abuja, Fredrich Ebert Stiftung. Pp 27-30
- Khong, Y. (2021). Human Security: A Shotgun Approach to Alleviating Human Misery. *Global Governance*, 7 (3), 231-236
- Nachanuya, S., & Joseph, O. (2024). Digital Forensic: The Solution to Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria. *BW Academic Journal*. BW Journal
- Nwolise, O. B. (2017). Electoral Violence and Nigeria's 2007 Elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 6 (2), 155-79.
- Olurode, L. (2023). Election Security in Nigeria: Matters Arising. Abuja, Fredrich Ebert Stiftung. *Nigeria Journal of Politics and Law*, 4 (2), 128-138.

- Olusola, M. O. & Adeyemi, J. A. (2015).Electoral Security and Its Implications for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 3 (9), 5-14
- Nsan, N. N, Egbula, E. O & Wonah, F.A (2023).Administrators’ politics of delegation responsibilities and academic staff job satisfaction in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Evaluation*.9 (5) 55-63
- Wonah, F. A; Ngaji,M.I;& Udayi,E.A.(2022) Indicators’ of academic staff job satisfaction as a correlate of repositioning educational management for sustainability in the post-COVID-19 era in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Evaluation*, 8 (1) 32-39.