

The Impact of Foreign Election Observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 General Elections

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<https://doi.org/10.56201/jpslr.vol.12.no10.2026.pg100.113>

Abstract

This study examined the impact of foreign election observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. The study was anchored on Democratic Theory, which emphasises political participation, electoral transparency, accountability, political equality and the credibility of electoral processes. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 84,004,084 registered voters in Nigeria, from which a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from academic publications, INEC reports, official election documents and reports of international election observation missions. Data were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages. The study found that foreign election observers contributed positively to electoral transparency, with 71.79% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that their presence enhanced transparency. The findings further revealed that 51.28% of respondents believed that reports by foreign election observers influenced post-election electoral reforms, particularly in areas such as voter registration and result transmission. The study also found that 61.54% of respondents rated the influence of foreign election observers on voter confidence as high or very high, while 56.41% believed that their presence improved electoral credibility. However, the effectiveness of foreign election observers was constrained by insecurity and electoral violence, logistical limitations, restricted access to remote areas, language and cultural barriers, political hostility, and inadequate institutional cooperation. The study concludes that foreign election observers made important contributions to electoral transparency, voter

confidence, electoral credibility and post-election reform efforts in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections, although their impact was limited by operational and institutional challenges. It recommends expanded observation coverage, greater consideration of observer recommendations by electoral institutions, and stronger public engagement by foreign election observation missions.

Keywords: *Foreign Election Observers; Electoral Transparency; Electoral Reforms and Nigeria.*

Introduction

Elections are central to democratic governance because they provide citizens with the opportunity to choose their political leaders and participate in the decision-making processes of the state. In democratic systems, elections are expected to promote popular participation, transparency, accountability, fairness, and political legitimacy. However, electoral malpractice, voter intimidation, vote-buying, violence, ballot snatching, and manipulation of results often undermine the credibility of elections. These challenges have made foreign election observation an important mechanism for promoting electoral transparency and democratic accountability (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005; Kelley, 2012).

Nigeria presents an important context for understanding the impact of foreign election observers on electoral processes. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, the country has conducted several general elections characterised by political competition, electoral reforms, and recurring challenges relating to electoral credibility. Foreign election observers have participated in these elections by monitoring electoral activities, assessing the conduct of electoral institutions, identifying irregularities, and making recommendations for improving subsequent elections. Their involvement has provided external assessments of Nigeria's electoral process and contributed to discussions on democratic consolidation (Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2012). Foreign election observation involves the monitoring and assessment of electoral activities by representatives of international organisations, diplomatic institutions, and other foreign bodies. Their activities may cover pre-election preparations, political campaigns, voter registration, election-day procedures, vote counting, and result collation. Through independent monitoring and reporting, foreign observers are expected to promote transparency, discourage electoral malpractice, strengthen voter confidence, and encourage electoral reforms. However, their effectiveness depends partly on their independence, access to polling units, geographical coverage, and cooperation from relevant institutions (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005; Kelley, 2012). Nigeria's 2015 general elections provide an important setting for examining the contributions of foreign election observers to electoral transparency and credibility. The elections attracted considerable international attention because of intense political competition, security concerns, the introduction of card reader technology, and the eventual transfer of political power from an incumbent president to an opposition candidate. Foreign observers monitored the electoral process, assessed its conduct, identified shortcomings, and made recommendations for improving electoral administration (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015). Similarly, the 2019 general elections were characterised by political competition, security challenges, logistical difficulties, and allegations of electoral irregularities. International observers assessed the conduct of the elections and highlighted areas requiring institutional and administrative improvements (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2019).

The activities of foreign election observers may also influence post-election electoral reforms, voter confidence, and electoral credibility. Their reports provide independent assessments of electoral shortcomings and recommendations concerning electoral laws, voter registration, election technology, result management, and institutional performance. Such recommendations

may contribute to improvements in subsequent elections when relevant authorities demonstrate the political will to implement them. Nevertheless, the presence of foreign observers does not automatically guarantee credible elections or prevent electoral malpractice because their primary responsibilities involve monitoring, documenting, and reporting electoral activities rather than enforcing electoral laws (Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2012).

Despite their contributions, foreign election observers encounter several challenges that may limit their effectiveness during electoral processes. These include insecurity and electoral violence, inadequate logistics, restricted access to remote polling units, language and cultural barriers, political hostility, and insufficient cooperation from electoral institutions. Such challenges may affect their ability to monitor electoral activities comprehensively, document irregularities, and provide timely reports. Consequently, the effectiveness of foreign election observation depends not only on the presence of international missions but also on the political, institutional, and operational conditions within which they perform their responsibilities (Kelley, 2012). Despite the growing literature on international election observation and democratic development, limited empirical attention has been devoted specifically to examining the impact of foreign election observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections in relation to electoral transparency, post-election electoral reforms, voter confidence, electoral credibility, and the challenges confronting observation missions. Existing studies have examined international election observation and its contribution to electoral quality, but further empirical investigation is necessary to understand its contributions and limitations within the Nigerian electoral context. This study therefore examines the impact of foreign election observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections, with particular attention to their contributions to electoral transparency, their influence on post-election electoral reforms, their impact on voter confidence and electoral credibility, and the challenges encountered in carrying out their observation responsibilities.

Conceptual Clarification

Foreign Election Observers

Foreign election observers refer to individuals or representatives of international organisations, foreign governments, diplomatic institutions, and other international bodies who monitor and assess electoral processes in countries other than their own. They are usually invited or accredited to observe elections and determine the extent to which electoral activities comply with established electoral laws, democratic principles, and international standards. Their activities cover different stages of the electoral process, including voter registration, political campaigns, election preparations, voting, counting, result collation, and the announcement of results. Foreign election observers therefore provide an external assessment of the conduct and credibility of elections (Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2012).

Foreign election observation is an important aspect of democratic development because it promotes transparency, accountability, and public confidence in electoral processes. Through independent monitoring, observers can identify electoral irregularities, document violations, assess the conduct of electoral officials, and draw attention to weaknesses in electoral administration. Their presence may also discourage certain forms of electoral malpractice because political actors and electoral officials are aware that their activities are being monitored and may be reported. Kelley (2012) explains that international election observation can influence the behaviour of political actors by increasing the possibility that electoral misconduct will be exposed to domestic and international audiences.

The activities of foreign election observers generally involve monitoring pre-election, election-day, and post-election processes. During the pre-election period, they assess voter registration, political party activities, campaign conditions, electoral preparations, and the independence of electoral institutions. On election day, they observe the opening of polling units, accreditation

of voters, voting procedures, counting of ballots, and transmission or collation of results. After the elections, they may assess the resolution of electoral disputes and publish reports containing their findings and recommendations. Hyde (2011) maintains that international election observation has become an established international practice through which democratic standards are promoted and electoral conduct is subjected to external scrutiny.

Foreign election observers are different from domestic election observers in terms of their national origin and institutional representation. While domestic observers are drawn from within the country where elections are conducted, foreign observers come from outside the country and usually operate under international observation missions. Examples include observation missions organised by the European Union, African Union, Commonwealth, ECOWAS, and other international bodies. These missions may work independently or alongside local civil society organisations to obtain information about electoral activities and assess the overall conduct of elections (Bordewich et al., n.d.; Kelley, 2012).

However, foreign election observers do not have the legal authority to conduct elections, arrest electoral offenders, cancel results, or enforce electoral laws in the host country. Their major responsibility is to observe, assess, document, and report their findings impartially. They may also issue recommendations aimed at addressing identified weaknesses and improving future electoral processes. Therefore, their effectiveness depends on their independence, professionalism, access to relevant electoral locations, and the willingness of domestic institutions to consider and implement their recommendations (Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2012).

General Election

A general election refers to an electoral process through which eligible citizens vote to choose individuals who will occupy public political offices for a constitutionally or legally established period. It provides an opportunity for citizens to select their preferred representatives through periodic voting and determine who exercises political authority on their behalf. General elections are important features of representative democracy because they provide citizens with the opportunity to participate in leadership selection and hold elected officials accountable. In Nigeria, general elections involve the election of political officeholders at the federal and state levels (Madueke, 2025). General elections are usually conducted at regular intervals in accordance with the constitution and electoral laws of a country. They involve competition among candidates and political parties seeking public support to occupy elective positions. Unlike primary elections, which are organised by political parties to select their candidates, general elections involve the participation of eligible voters who choose among candidates presented by different political parties. These elections provide the electorate with the opportunity to express their political preferences and determine the composition of elected government institutions (Ozor, 2011).

In Nigeria, general elections are conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and cover the election of the President, members of the National Assembly, State Governors, and members of State Houses of Assembly. They are generally conducted every four years, although particular elections may be affected by judicial decisions, constitutional provisions, or electoral circumstances. These elections are important because they determine the individuals who occupy major elective positions and influence the direction of governance, public policies, and democratic development in the country (Madueke, 2025).

General elections also provide opportunities for political participation, competition, representation, and accountability. Through voting, citizens express their preferences among competing candidates and political parties, while political actors seek electoral support through campaigns, manifestos, and other mobilisation strategies. However, the extent to which general elections fulfil these democratic purposes depends on the transparency of electoral procedures, independence of electoral institutions, security of voters, fairness of political competition, and

credibility of the results. Therefore, elections must be conducted in accordance with established electoral laws and democratic principles to command public confidence (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005). Furthermore, the credibility of general elections may be influenced by the activities of electoral stakeholders, including political parties, electoral officials, security agencies, domestic observers, foreign observers, and the electorate. Their conduct can affect the transparency, fairness, and acceptance of electoral outcomes. In this regard, foreign election observers contribute to the assessment of general elections by monitoring electoral activities, identifying irregularities, and providing independent reports on the conduct of the process. Their observations may also provide useful information for electoral reforms and the strengthening of democratic institutions (Kelley, 2012; Hyde, 2011).

Theoretical Framework: Democratic Theory

This study is anchored on Democratic Theory, which provides a framework for understanding the principles, processes, and institutions through which citizens participate in the selection of political leaders and the exercise of political authority. Democratic Theory is rooted in the works of classical and contemporary political thinkers, including Robert Dahl (1971), who explains democracy in terms of political participation, competition, inclusiveness, and the opportunity for citizens to influence government decisions. The theory emphasises that democratic governance requires free and fair elections, political equality, accountability, transparency, and respect for the choices of the electorate. From this perspective, elections are not merely procedures for selecting political leaders but important instruments through which citizens exercise their political rights and hold those in authority accountable (Dahl, 1971).

Democratic Theory further explains that the credibility of elections depends on the existence of institutions and procedures that guarantee meaningful political participation and genuine electoral competition. Elections are expected to provide equal opportunities for political parties and candidates to compete, while eligible citizens should be able to exercise their voting rights without intimidation, discrimination, or manipulation. Dahl (1989) identifies effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control over the political agenda, and inclusiveness as important principles of democratic government. These principles suggest that elections must be conducted transparently and in accordance with established democratic standards to ensure that electoral outcomes reflect the preferences of citizens.

The theory also recognises the importance of accountability and institutional oversight in democratic governance. Electoral institutions are expected to conduct elections impartially, enforce electoral regulations, and provide an environment in which political competition can take place freely. However, where electoral institutions lack independence, transparency, or administrative capacity, the credibility of elections may be undermined. In this regard, election observation serves as an additional mechanism for promoting accountability by allowing independent actors to monitor electoral activities, identify irregularities, and assess the extent to which democratic principles are observed. Elklit and Reynolds (2005) argue that electoral quality should be examined through different stages and dimensions of the electoral process rather than focusing exclusively on election-day activities.

Democratic Theory is particularly relevant to understanding the role of foreign election observers because their activities are connected to the promotion of electoral transparency, accountability, and credibility. Foreign observers monitor electoral preparations, political campaigns, voting procedures, counting, and result collation to assess whether elections comply with democratic standards. Their reports provide independent assessments of electoral conduct and may draw attention to irregularities that threaten democratic principles. Kelley (2012) explains that international election observation can influence the behaviour of political actors by exposing electoral misconduct and encouraging compliance with democratic standards. Similarly, Hyde (2011) demonstrates that international election observation has

developed into an established international practice through which governments and electoral institutions are encouraged to demonstrate their commitment to democratic elections.

The relevance of Democratic Theory to this study is particularly evident in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. Both elections involved considerable political competition and attracted international observation missions interested in assessing electoral transparency, institutional performance, voter participation, and the credibility of electoral outcomes. During the 2015 general elections, foreign observers monitored the electoral process and assessed issues relating to the conduct of INEC, the use of card reader technology, voting procedures, and the peaceful transfer of political power. Similarly, during the 2019 general elections, international observers assessed electoral preparations, security arrangements, logistical challenges, voting procedures, and result collation. These activities reflected the importance of external monitoring in evaluating the extent to which Nigeria's electoral processes conformed to democratic principles (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015, 2019).

From the perspective of Democratic Theory, the contribution of foreign election observers to electoral transparency can be understood through their responsibility to promote openness, accountability, and compliance with democratic procedures. Their presence at polling units and other electoral locations may encourage electoral officials and political actors to observe established rules because their activities are subject to independent monitoring. Furthermore, their reports may expose irregularities, provide information to the electorate, and contribute to public discussions about electoral credibility. However, the presence of observers does not automatically guarantee free and fair elections because the responsibility for conducting elections remains with domestic electoral institutions and relevant authorities.

The theory also provides an explanation of the relationship between foreign election observers and post-election electoral reforms. Democratic governance requires continuous institutional improvement to address weaknesses identified during electoral processes. Observation reports may identify shortcomings in electoral legislation, voter registration, election technology, security arrangements, result management, and the administrative capacity of electoral institutions. Such findings may provide useful information for governments, electoral management bodies, and legislative institutions when considering reforms. Nevertheless, the extent to which these recommendations produce meaningful changes depends on institutional responsiveness, political commitment, and the willingness of relevant authorities to implement necessary improvements (Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2012).

Furthermore, Democratic Theory helps explain the relationship between foreign election observation, voter confidence, and electoral credibility. Citizens are more likely to regard elections as legitimate when they believe that electoral procedures are transparent, political competition is fair, and their votes are properly counted. Foreign observers may contribute to these perceptions by providing independent assessments of the electoral process and communicating their findings to the public. However, their influence may be limited where they encounter insecurity, violence, logistical difficulties, restricted access to polling units, language barriers, political hostility, and inadequate cooperation from electoral institutions. These challenges may prevent observation missions from achieving comprehensive coverage and independently assessing all aspects of the electoral process.

The application of Democratic Theory to this study therefore establishes a relationship between foreign election observation and the principles of democratic governance. It explains why electoral transparency, accountability, voter confidence, institutional responsiveness, and electoral credibility are important indicators of democratic elections. The theory consequently provides an appropriate framework for examining the contributions of foreign election observers to Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections, particularly their influence on electoral transparency, post-election electoral reforms, voter confidence, and electoral credibility, as well as the challenges that limited their observation activities.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was considered appropriate for examining the impact of foreign election observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. The design enabled the researcher to obtain relevant information from respondents on the contributions of foreign election observers to electoral transparency, post-election electoral reforms, voter confidence, electoral credibility, and the challenges encountered during the two election periods.

The study population comprised 84,004,084 registered voters across the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), as recorded by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the 2019 general elections. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined. The study adopted a stratified sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of the population.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the selected respondents. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information relevant to the study's objectives. Secondary data were obtained from textbooks, academic journals, published articles, INEC reports, official election documents, reports of international election observation missions, and other relevant publications.

Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, particularly frequency counts and simple percentages. The results were presented in tables and interpreted to provide a clear understanding of respondents' views on the impact of foreign election observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections.

Results and Findings

Table 1.1: Respondents' Views on the Impact of Foreign Election Observers on Electoral Transparency in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 General Elections

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	100	25.64
Agree	180	46.15
Neutral	80	20.51
Disagree	20	5.13
Strongly Disagree	10	2.56
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

A notable 71.79% of people agree or strongly agree that the presence of observers has boosted transparency. The 2025 field survey revealed that their involvement helped deter malpractice in urban polling units, especially in the South West and North Central regions, which in turn increased public trust. However, rural respondents from the North East and North West, making up 20.51% who felt neutral and 7.69% who disagreed, pointed out that logistical challenges limited visibility. This indicates that expanding coverage could improve perceptions of transparency across all areas.

In an interview with the second interviewee on March 5, 2025, she emphasized that foreign observers in 2015 played a crucial role in enhancing transparency and public trust. However, she noted that by the 2019 elections, their effectiveness had waned due to restricted access, operational delays, and a lack of cooperation from institutions. Her insights shed light on how

foreign observation missions adapt to varying political climates. She firmly believes that the presence of observers in 2015 reassured voters and civil society groups about the electoral process's credibility. She explained that their timely deployment, organized reporting, and engagement with the media helped ease tensions and deter electoral fraud. This highlights the vital role observers play in fostering confidence in politically unstable environments. Yet, her frustration is evident when she discusses the challenges faced in 2019. She recounted how observer missions encountered bureaucratic hurdles, late accreditation, and sometimes intentional barriers to accessing collation centers. This points to a more hostile political climate towards foreign oversight. According to her, the reduced effectiveness of observers in 2019 wasn't due to incompetence but rather a result of deliberate obstruction by state actors, which undermined the watchdog function of these missions.

Her critique also highlights the lack of responsiveness from Nigerian institutions. She pointed out that many of the recommendations made after the 2015 elections were mostly ignored, which hindered observers' ability to push for meaningful electoral reforms. This shows that simply observing isn't enough; there has to be genuine political will behind it. Her viewpoint brings a crucial international angle to the conversation: foreign observers rely on cooperation, transparency, and local legitimacy to do their jobs well. Without these elements, their credibility and effectiveness take a hit.

Table 1.2: Respondents' Views on the Influence of Foreign Election Observers' Reports on Post-Election Electoral Reforms in Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	200	51.28
No	90	23.08
Not sure	100	25.64
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

A little over half of the respondents (51.28%) think that reports from observers played a key role in driving electoral reforms. Meanwhile, 25.64% are on the fence about it, and 23.08% don't agree at all. The field survey conducted in 2025 pointed out that certain recommendations, like enhancing voter registration and improving how results are transmitted, had a significant impact on INEC's reforms after 2019, especially in the South South and South East regions. However, the uncertainty seen more frequently in the North East suggests that there's a lack of public awareness regarding the outcomes of these reforms. This highlights the need for better communication about the effects of observer reports across all regions.

Table 1.3: Respondents' Views on the Influence of Foreign Election Observers on Voter Confidence in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 General Elections

Influence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high	90	23.08
High	150	38.46
Moderate	100	25.64
Low	40	10.26
None	10	2.56
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

61.54% of those surveyed believe that the influence of observers on voter confidence is either high or very high. Meanwhile, 25.64% see it as moderate, and 12.82% consider it low or nonexistent. The 2025 field survey highlighted that in urban areas of the South West and North Central, the presence of observers helped reassure voters, especially since their activities were more noticeable there. On the other hand, rural respondents from the North East and North West pointed out that the limited presence of observers might be a factor, indicating that enhancing rural coverage could potentially elevate voter confidence throughout all regions.

Table 1.4: Respondents' Views on the Impact of Foreign Election Observers on Electoral Credibility in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 General Elections

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	220	56.41
No	80	20.51
Not sure	90	23.08
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

A significant 56.41% of people think that the credibility of Nigeria's elections has gotten better thanks to observers. Meanwhile, 23.08% are on the fence about it, and 20.51% don't agree. The 2025 field survey revealed that urban folks in the South West and South South regions feel that observers have played a key role in boosting transparency. On the flip side, rural respondents in the North East, who often express uncertainty or disagreement, pointed out ongoing problems like vote-buying and the limited presence of observers. This suggests that if there were more engagement and a focus on tackling these systemic issues, it could really help improve how credibility is viewed across all regions.

Objectives four: Challenges Faced by Foreign Observers

Table 4. 1: Challenges Faced by Foreign Observers

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Insecurity and violence	250	64.10
Logistical limitations	200	51.28
Access restrictions to remote areas	180	46.15
Language and cultural barriers	100	25.64
Political hostility	80	20.51
Other	10	2.56
Total Responses	820	N/A

Sources Field Survey 2025

Insecurity and violence (64.10%) and logistical challenges (51.28%) topped the list of issues faced, with access restrictions to remote areas (46.15%) following closely behind. The 2025 field survey pointed out that violence, especially in the North East, severely hampered the mobility of observers. Logistical hurdles, like inadequate transportation in the North West and South East, made it tough to reach rural areas. Language and cultural barriers (25.64%) were less of a concern thanks to collaborations with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), indicating that better security and infrastructure could really boost the effectiveness of observers across all regions. In an interview with the fourth participant on March 9, 2025, he shared that foreign observers provided him with a sense of protection and legitimacy back in 2015. However, by 2019, their presence felt almost meaningless as violence and electoral fraud unfolded without any deterrent or timely condemnation. His insights offer a grassroots perspective on how voters perceive foreign election observation, highlighting the psychological aspect of it. When he mentioned that observers gave him a sense of “protection and legitimacy” in 2015, it really emphasizes the symbolic importance of having international eyes on the process. In a place like Nigeria, where trust in local institutions is shaky, the visibility of foreign observers can help boost voter confidence and encourage participation by signaling that there’s external accountability.

Yet, his experience in 2019 paints a different picture. He described witnessing voter intimidation and ballot box snatching, even with observers present, which left him feeling powerless. His remark, “they didn’t stop anything,” reflects a common misunderstanding among voters: that observers have the power to intervene in real-time to halt electoral violence. While that’s not part of their role, the lack of immediate action or condemnation can lead to a perception that they are ineffective.

His idea that observers should “report in real time” and speak up more during the voting process highlights a call for more active and responsive observation methods. It also points to the importance of educating the public about what foreign observation missions do, their limitations, and how they operate. His insights show that the public’s trust in observers depends not just on their presence but also on how visible their actions are and how quickly they respond to any electoral misconduct.

Table 4. 2: Unrestricted Access to Polling Units

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	150	38.46
No	120	30.77
Not sure	120	30.77
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

When it comes to unrestricted access, opinions are quite divided. About 38.46% of people think that observers had complete access, while 30.77% disagree, and another 30.77% are on the fence. The 2025 field survey highlighted that urban polling units in the South West and North Central regions were generally more accessible. In contrast, rural units in the North East and North West struggled with restrictions, mainly due to insecurity and inadequate infrastructure. By establishing clearer access protocols and enhancing logistics, we could achieve better coverage across all areas.

Table 4. 3: Government Restrictions on Observers

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	100	25.64
No	170	43.59
Not sure	120	30.77
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

It turns out that a significant portion of people, about 43.59%, believe there were no government restrictions in place. On the other hand, 25.64% think there were indeed some restrictions, while 30.77% are still on the fence about it. According to the 2025 field survey, urban folks in the South South and South West felt there were fewer restrictions, whereas rural respondents from the North East pointed to security-related obstacles. If the government were more transparent and cooperative, it could help lessen the perception of restrictions and improve the effectiveness of observers across all regions.

Table 4. 4: Coordination Between INEC and Foreign Observers

Coordination	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	50	12.82
Good	150	38.46
Fair	120	30.77
Poor	60	15.38
Very Poor	10	2.56
Total	390	100

Sources Field Survey 2025

A little over half of the respondents, specifically 51.28%, rated the coordination of INEC observers as good or excellent. On the flip side, 15.38% felt it was poor, and 2.56% rated it as very poor. The 2025 field survey highlighted that urban areas in the South West and North Central regions experienced effective coordination, thanks to INEC's logistical support. However, rural areas in the North East and North West struggled with communication issues stemming from inadequate infrastructure. This points to the need for better training for INEC and more engagement with rural communities to enhance coordination across all regions.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of foreign election observers on Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. Specifically, it assessed their contributions to electoral transparency, their influence on post-election electoral reforms, their impact on voter confidence and electoral credibility, and the challenges they encountered in the discharge of their responsibilities.

The study concludes that foreign election observers made important contributions to improving electoral transparency in Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. Findings from the field survey revealed that 71.79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the presence of foreign observers enhanced electoral transparency. Their activities helped promote public awareness, discourage electoral malpractice and strengthen confidence in the electoral process. However, the effectiveness of their activities was affected by inadequate coverage, particularly in some rural communities where insecurity and logistical difficulties limited their visibility and access. The study further concludes that reports issued by foreign election observers contributed to discussions and efforts towards electoral reforms in Nigeria. The findings revealed that 51.28% of respondents believed that observer reports influenced post-election electoral reforms. Such reports provided assessments of electoral weaknesses and recommendations for improving voter registration, result transmission and other aspects of electoral administration. Nevertheless, the level of public awareness regarding the influence of these reports remained limited, as reflected in the proportion of respondents who were uncertain about their contributions. The study also establishes that foreign election observers contributed positively to voter confidence and the perceived credibility of elections. A combined 61.54% of respondents rated their influence on voter confidence as high or very high, while 56.41% believed that their presence improved electoral credibility. This suggests that international observation can strengthen public confidence by providing independent assessments of electoral activities. However, the findings also indicate that the presence of observers alone cannot guarantee credible elections, particularly where vote-buying, intimidation, electoral irregularities and institutional weaknesses persist.

Finally, the study concludes that foreign election observers encountered several challenges that affected the effectiveness of their activities. Insecurity and electoral violence, logistical limitations, restricted access to remote areas, language and cultural barriers, and political hostility were identified as major challenges. Respondents also expressed mixed views regarding observers' access to polling units, government restrictions and coordination between INEC and foreign observation missions. These findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of foreign election observation depends not only on the presence of international observers but also on adequate logistical support, institutional cooperation, security and unrestricted access to relevant electoral locations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Foreign election observation missions should expand their monitoring coverage to include

both urban and rural polling units across the country. This will help ensure that electoral activities are adequately observed and that irregularities are properly documented, irrespective of geographical location.

2. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other relevant electoral institutions should give serious consideration to recommendations contained in foreign election observation reports. There should be deliberate efforts to address identified weaknesses in electoral administration, voter registration, result transmission and other aspects of the electoral process.

3. Foreign election observers should strengthen public engagement and provide timely, clear and accessible information about their activities and findings. This will help voters understand the importance of election observation and build confidence in the electoral process.

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