

## **Securing The Electoral Process And Democratic Stability In Nigeria: The Role Of The Nigeria Police Under Muhammadu Buhari's Administration (2015-2020)**

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### **Abstract**

Elections and electoral process occupy significant position in democratic governance but these processes have been marred by various electoral irregularities due to lapses in the security of electoral process thereby threatening democratic stability in Nigeria. This paper examined securing the electoral process and democratic stability in Nigeria with a review of the role of the Nigeria Police Force under Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015-2020). It adopted descriptive method and gathered data through the use of secondary source of data and also used the structural functionalism theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The paper argued that the effective performance of the police force, among others, is a necessary ingredient of securing the electoral process with a view to attaining democratic stability. The paper further contended that the challenges confronting the Nigeria Police Force constitute a stumbling block to its effective performance. This situation, the paper argued, encouraged the politicians, who want to win at all costs to influence the police in order to realize their vested interest. The paper therefore, recommended that for the Nigeria police Force to be more active in the discharge of their duties in securing the electoral process, the government should improve the personal emolument and working conditions of the police personnel; the police should be provided modern sophisticated equipment in terms of logistics and communication gadgets to promote the efficiency of its operations; continuous training and re-training exercises should be organized for the police officers to acquaint them with current security techniques and knowledge required to succeed in the electoral duties.

**Keywords: Democratic stability; Electoral process; Nigeria Police Force; Securing and Security**

## Introduction

Worldwide, election, which constitutes an important element of democratic governance, remains the mechanism and process through which the consent of the electorate is sought in regards to choosing elected representatives or leaders (Boix & Stokes, 2003; Olutola, 2019). However, in many African countries, with particular reference to Nigeria, the conduct of elections by its nature is confrontational and therefore, requires the assurance of equitable security to guarantee participants' confidence and commitment (Attoh, 2016). Hence, security is integral to the success of the electoral process. Evidence from the United Nations report has shown that on a global scale, one in every five elections experiences some measure of violence (USAID, 2013) and this makes security of the electoral process an imperative, especially in emerging democracies.

In Nigeria, the conduct of elections over time has been marred by act of lawlessness, impunity, killings, assassination and wanton destruction of lives and properties (Afolabi, 2018) and thus resulting in increasing voters' apathy and disenchantment with the conduct of elections in Nigeria, thereby putting into questioning, the preparation and efficiency of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to organize and conduct credible elections (Afolabi 2014). Also, electoral irregularities such as stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes; rigging of votes, multiple and underage voting; unauthorized and false declaration of results, political thuggery and brigandage, intimidation and harassment of voters among other abuses are witnessed in the conduct of elections in Nigeria and this often breed electoral violence (Oni, Chidozie & Agbude 2013). In addition, the electioneering campaigns, party rallies, conduct of party primaries and even party meetings often degenerate into chaos thus bringing to the fore the need to secure the electoral process if democracy is to be sustained.

Therefore, the persistent incidents of electoral violence and insecurity that usually characterize the conduct of elections in Nigeria have brought to the fore the call for reconsideration of security during elections, implying securing elections to make it credible, free, fair and violent-free (Afolabi, 2017). It has also led to increasing deployment of different kinds of security personnel for the conduct of elections for all levels of governmental posts. Thus, the security of elections comes up at all stages of the electoral process that is, the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral phases (Hounkpe & Gueye, 2010).

The deployment of security personnel is based on the imperative to conduct violent-free and credible elections in Nigeria. This often implies the provision of adequate security for the movement of electoral materials, deployment of staff, the manning of the polling booths, protection of voters at the polling booths, the safety of the candidates, the party agents and even the media that cover the election, movement of cast ballots to collation centres and the collation of results (Afolabi, 2018). Invariably, adequate security enhances the free movement of staff, voters, candidates, observers and other stakeholders thus ensuring the credibility of the process, which is critical to the democratic survival in Nigeria.

However, while several security organisations are often engaged during elections and in the electoral process, the Nigeria Police, as the primary internal state agency, charged with the maintenance of law and order, is empowered by the Police Act to play a prominent role in the democratic system since election security involves policing, which could be said to be within the purview of the Nigeria Police Force. Besides the Nigeria Police Force, other stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the media, monitoring/observer groups, the political parties, Civil Society Organisations, among others, have equally contributed to s 84-97 the electoral process. Still security crises of different dimensions and serious magnitude persist within the electoral landscape. Why is this so? Why is the Police Force not effective and efficient in securing the electoral process? What then can we do to confront this menace? Against this background, this paper examined securing the electoral process to enhance democratic stability in Nigeria focusing on the role of the Nigeria Police under Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015-2020).

## **Electoral Process**

Election as a concept, just like others in political science lacks an acceptable universal definition but was blessed with plethora definitions from various scholars. For Jinadu (2004), election encapsulates the mediating institutional and psychological process and anchors for citizens, as adults in an organised and routinised manner to express their choice among those who seek public political office. Herreros (2006) perceives election as a way of selecting 'good types' of politicians who would pursue the common good instead of their factional interests.

Dickerson (cited in Idowu, 2010) defined election as a post-mortem of the record of those in office, whose performance may have little to do with promises made when they were last elected. Ighodalo, (2012) opined that elections are means of selecting representative of the people indifferent public positions within the polity. He further added that elections are critical aspects for democratic governance of modern political societies and are considered as apparatus for political choice, mobilisation and accountability. However, elections have meaning for most people only in a democratic context because they lead to the choice of decision makers by the majority of the citizens (Jibrin, 2009).

On the other hand, Oduote (2014) posited that electoral process is the pillar of democracy because it gives effect to the right to govern by consent. Idowu, (2010) refers to electoral process as all the pre- and post-election activities without which an election is either impossible or meaningless. The process, therefore, relates to the entire cycle ranging from registration of political parties, voter's registration, electioneering campaigns, party rallies, provision of voter education, conduct of election, resolution of election disputes in tribunals and courts of competent jurisdiction, swearing of election winners, among others (Rosenje & Moliki, 2008; Elekwa, 2008 cited in Ajagba, Gbervie & Agbu, 2020). It thus refers to all the pre- and post-election activities without which an election is meaningless. The electoral cycle is therefore, divided into pre-electoral process, election period and post-electoral phase (Houkpe & Gueye, 2010).

The pre-electoral stage stretches from the actual preparation for conducting forthcoming elections to the end of electioneering campaign. It is the preparatory phase initially devised for the execution of the task necessary for the conduct of elections. It includes among others sensitisation of the citizens, electioneering campaign, compilation and updating of voters' register, training of electoral officials among others. The voting phase depicts the stage at which elections are conducted which may last few days, weeks or months. This phase includes the electorate voting for the candidates of their choice, collation of results and declaration of results. The post-election stage involves activities that occurs after the declaration of results and could include disputes, violence, litigation and swearing in of winners (Houkpe & Gueye, 2010; Afolabi 2018).

Therefore, in the context of this paper, electoral process is defined as all sorts of activities that are pertinent to the conduct of elections in Nigeria, which covers all activities during the pre-election such as voters' registration, party primaries, electoral campaigns, party rallies to the actual conduct of the election as well as the post-election stage that encompasses the collation of votes, announcement of election results and the resolution of election matters in the tribunals and/or the courts as provided by constitutional provisions and the 2010 Electoral Act as amended.

## **Electoral Security**

Electoral security has been given diverse explanations. Electoral security is all about securing the all-inclusive integrity of the electoral process, especially when the conduct of elections is increasingly seen as a key component of peace-building process and a foundation of dynamic social interaction. Hence, electoral security addresses protection from the physical, psychological and structural threats against the electorate and the citizenry at large,

without undue consideration for party affiliation, ethnic sentiment, historical antecedent, religious schism, or any other form of social differences (Olusola & Adeyemi, 2015).

Fisher (2002 cited in Albert, (2007) defines electoral security as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, pool workers, media, and observers; electoral information such as vote results, registration data, and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and counting centres; and electoral events such as campaign rallies against death, damage, or destruction. Albert (2007) has aptly noted, the bodies expected to perform this task include security agencies, political parties, INEC, judicial officials, the media, electoral observers and the academia, among others. This implies that electoral security has both coercive and non-coercive dimensions, spanning across the three stages of election process, namely; pre-election period, Election Day and post-election period.

Electoral security system is the whole gamut of security architecture involving election management institutions and processes, electoral legal instruments, security forces and civil society electoral monitoring bodies which are brought together to ensure credibility in the electoral security governance (Yoroms, 2015). Thus, securing the electoral process, which is the heart of this paper denotes the act of protecting and ensuring adequate security for all election-related personnel, materials and equipment involved in the conduct of elections.

### **Democratic Stability**

Democracy as a concept connotes different meanings to different people and therefore, scholars, political analysts, democrats and critics have sought to define it based on their understanding of the concept. Democracy was defined as peoples' government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people (Danjibo, 2012). It is also defined as a system in which people are governed through their representatives; election remains the most appropriate widespread mechanism for selecting their representatives who will be responsible for governing on behalf and for the people (Ilounkpe & Gueye, 2010).

Democracy viewed as a political system that enables people to freely choose an effective, honest, transparent and accountable government which aimed at protecting and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the individuals, instill social justice and foster economic and social development (Ahmadu & Lawan, 2013). Therefore, democracy emphasized the participation of the people either directly or indirectly in the policy making process of government, an important element which could lead to the realization of development (Akinyemi, 2017).

On the other hand, democratic stability is the process by which democracy is so well established and legitimized that it cannot be subverted or destroyed (Obi cited in Olusola & Adeyemi, 2015). Oluwole (2014) described democratic stability as an identifiable phase in the transition from authoritarian rule to civil rule and by extension, democratic systems that are germane and fundamental to the establishment and entrenchment of a stable, institutional and enduring democracy.

Ogundiya (2013) explained that democratic stability ensures regime maintenance thereby regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game. Also, democratic stability is conceived as involving the development of mutually reinforcing structural, institutional, political, constitutional and procedural arrangements that promote the sustenance of democratic culture and values such that the interests of members of that society are protected and their needs met without undue consideration for group affiliation or ideological cleavage (Olusola & Adeyemi, 2015).

From the explication above, democratic stability is perceived as the process of entrenching and deepening democratic culture in Nigeria. It also encompasses ensuring

peaceful conduct of elections that promotes political stability and enhances the sustainability of democratic precepts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Structural functionalism was adopted as the theoretical underpinning for this study. The proponents of this theory, who contributed to the development of the theory, include Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell, among others. This theory, by its nature, is a consensus theory because it views society as being built on equilibrium, order, interrelation, and balance among many parts as a means of maintaining smooth functioning of the whole. The theory sees the society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability (Andersen & Taylor, 2006). Talcott Parsons one of the prominent American advocates of functionalism identified how various institutions must work together for the smooth operations of the society as a whole (Brym & Lie, 2010).

The theory avers that the different parts of society constitute organs that work towards the proper functioning of the body as a whole and this central concern of structural functionalism was apparently to ensure stability and internal cohesion needed by the societies (Urry, 2000). Therefore, the theory postulates that various body parts of a society must show a high level of integration (Ritzer, 1998). Structural functionalism has thus contributed to the understanding of how different parts of societal structures fit together and how each part contributes to the stability of the whole society (Brym & Lie, 2010).

However, in spite of the strength which structural functionalism exhibits, it also has some negative effects, which make institutions dysfunctional. Institutions are dysfunctional if they are not fulfilling the purpose for which they were founded or do not fulfill the needs of the people. They are dysfunctional if they cause havoc or chaos in the society by failing to bring order and stability in the society (Olutola, 2019).

In application to this study, structural-functionalism theory is adopted to explain issues surrounding security agent, especially the Nigeria Police Force towards ensuring elections security in the general elections in Nigeria since 2015 to 2020. In line with the major assumption of structural functionalism, the paper stresses that the participation of security agents like the Nigeria Police Force in the electoral process cannot be gainsaid, as the success of such election depends largely on the ability of security agents to create a safe and secure environment where people can participate in electoral processes without fear, intimidation, and pressure before, during and after elections. In sum, the theory, on the one hand, stresses the fact that availability of security agents that are impartial and willing to perform their constitutionally defined roles will go a long way in achieving credible elections. On the other hand, however, the absence of impartial security agents would no doubt compromise the integrity of electoral processes and quality of elections.

### **Overview of Electoral Process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Since 1960 independence in Nigeria, the electoral process has been bedeviled by a culture of electoral malpractices and violence. Likewise, since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the superintending Election Management Body has conducted six elections viz 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections (Ajagba, Gberevbie & Agbu, 2020). The mission of INEC is to serve as an independent and effective electoral management body committed to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections for sustainable democracy in Nigeria (INEC, 2014).

The electoral process in developed nations have been elevated to an art where even such issues like voter education, voter perception of the candidates at election, Logos of Political parties and those of candidates during elections and the power to recall elected officials are issues considered serious and given due attention within the electoral process

(Arnon, 2008; Dutsch, 2012; Marland, 2013). But Nigeria has for long been in constant search for effective electoral processes, as an integral part of its transition to democracy (Jega, 2015). A long history of badly or poorly conducted elections has created profound skepticism amongst ordinary Nigerians about the utility of electoral democracy (Jega, 2015).

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed the conduct of about six (6) general elections which have been deeply enmeshed in varying degree of violence before, during and after the elections (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). Though, the 1999 elections had minimal record of violence largely because the military supervised the electoral process that birthed the fourth republic (Isah, 2019). However, right from the 2003 general elections to the 2019 general elections, even with the Edo and Ondo gubernatorial elections held in 2020 were characterized by manipulation, rigging, thuggery, the assassination of perceived political opponents and ballot snatching, among others electoral irregularities witnessed within the country (Olowojolu, Rasak, Ake, Ogundele & Afolayan, 2019).

### **Historical Background of Nigeria Police Force**

The word Police is derived from the Greek word 'Polis' means "that part of non-ecclesiastical administration having to do with the safety, health and order of the State. The Greek *politeria*, meant the art of governing and regulating the welfare, security needs and order of the city-state in the interest of the public (NPF 2017). Historically, the police force began as a regulatory body in Greece and it was supposed to improve life in the Greek cities, but only during the Roman Empire the police force administration was improved and turned into a real system that was used as a model for maintaining peace and order (Wikipedia, 2019).

Also, it is worthy to note that police work did not start as a paid profession; rather it started as a noble, incorruptible profession with considerable responsibility and distinction (Idowu, 2013). The then British authority took as a model a police force administration fashioned by the Roman Empire, and used it as a regulatory body during the British colonial administration in Nigeria (Iheriohanma, Opara & Raimi, 2020).

However, the origin of police in Nigeria predates the colonial rule because before the commencement of colonial rule in Nigeria, various ethnic nationalities had different policing arrangements for the maintenance of law and order (Innocent, 1997; Iheriohanma et al, 2020). The history of Nigeria Police Force can arguably be said to begin in April 1861 when the Consul in Lagos established a Consular Guard with permission from London and comprising of thirty (30) men (Tamuno, 1970; Adegoke, 2014).

In 1863, the Consular Guard transformed to become The Guard. It underwent changes and became regularized in 1879 through an ordinance by becoming the Constabulary for the Colony of Lagos. Same year in 1879, a 1,200-member armed paramilitary Hausa Constabulary was formed. A similar force was established in Calabar, in 1894 and it was called the Niger Coast Constabulary under the newly proclaimed Niger Coast Protectorate. In the North, the Royal Niger Company set up the Royal Niger Company Constabulary in 1888. All the different Constabularies were later merged to become the Nigeria Police Force (Soriola, 2019).

However, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) as presently known owes much of its heritage to the British Constabulary of the colonial administration. The Police Force went through three different stages before it became a profession. The first stage involved designated individual (locals) acting as communal enforcement agents and were responsible for maintaining law and order. The second stage coincided with the emergence of Justices of the Peace (JP) with the dual function of providing law and order in the society and justice bar. The third stage is the present era, where professionals are employed and paid for law and order maintenance (Hewitt, cited in NPF, 2017). The Police forms part of the executive in a democratic set up and is often referred to as 'civil authority.' The policing functions of the police consists of guaranteeing law, order and peace (Afolabi, 2018b; NPF, 2017).

Within the purview of these functions, the Nigeria Police Force is empowered to participate in the electoral process. Against this background therefore, police performance as the civil authority, saddled with the responsibility of maintaining law and order before, during and after the elections could be measured and evaluated (Afolabi 2013; Alemika 2003).

### **Nigeria Police and the Electoral Process (2015-2020)**

In Nigeria, the electoral process usually gives rise to a series of violence and insecurity that threatened peace and development. Therefore, the need to secure the environment during the electoral process is an important component in the conduct of free, transparent and fair elections. This realisation necessitates the deployment of Nigeria Police Force personnel for election activities because ensuring safety of the electoral process requires a quiet, safety and tranquil environment to enable the citizens to take part in elections without fear or intimidation before, during and after voting (Omotola, 2010).

The role of the police in the electoral process cuts across the three major stages of the electoral process (the pre-electoral stage, polling stage and post electoral stage). During the pre-electoral stage of the electoral process, the police forces are required both to perform static functions and dynamic functions and constitute stand-by forces that can be deployed if needed. They provide security for voters' registration centres, electoral officers in charge of the voters' registration exercise, registration materials, ensure that no security lapses prevent voters from registering or disturb the registration of voters, ensure the security of key stakeholders in the process and also provide security during activities of political parties and personal security of candidates as well as that of conventions, meetings and all activities relating to the electioneering campaigns (Afolabi, 2014).

On the polling, which is the electoral stage, the police at this stage ensure the security of election staff, materials, vote centres and offices and collation centres. They could also take personal custody of election materials a day or two before the elections and without fear of election materials being snatched by hoodlums or election officials being abducted (Afolabi, 2018). They also ensure the security of representatives of the political parties and the electorate as well as pay special attention to the security of the sensitive sites. They secure the conduct of the election so as to prevent electoral violence and irregularities (Hounkpe & Gueye, 2010). Also, the electoral process does not end with voting at the poll because violence and insecurity do mar the post-electoral stage also. At this stage, the police secure the results in collation process and the declaration of provisional results. Their presence is equally vital during the entire period of processing election disputes, declaration of final results and handing-over (Afolabi, 2018).

Specifically in 2015 and 2019 general elections as well as some governorship elections in some States in Nigeria, the police personnel, as an arm of the security agencies was deployed to secure the voters, people at political rallies and electioneering campaigns, conventions, election materials, electoral staff, observers, party agents, and other stakeholders before and on the days of elections and after the elections. The police personnel thus contributed enormously to ensure that there is quietness and lawful atmosphere during electioneering campaigns of all parties and candidates, safety around polling and collation centres, as well as the guarantee of security of election materials during transportation, at the voting centres, during registration of voters, and during elections, which consist part of the constitutional responsibilities of security agents during these elections in Nigeria (Olutola, 2019).

However, despite the considerable performance of the police in electoral matters as explicated above, it has been argued that the power of incumbency of political office holders like the President or governor tends to manipulate the police to his advantage in order to achieve his goals. The implication is that the president or governor uses State resources to

contest elections and after winning, uses State resources to defend his/her mandate (Afolabi, 2018).

For instance, but despite the remarkable positive feats attributed to the police during 2015 elections in many parts of the country, certain loopholes, irregularities and misconducts were also traced to a segment of police before, during, and after the elections (Olutola, 2019). Such example is the report of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) as regard March 29th 2015 elections, which indicated that there were record of cases of intimidation and harassment of voters by overzealous police officers in Sokoto state during presidential and National Assembly elections. Also, CDD reported that voters were equally stopped by the same security agents from taking photos and recording the voting processes in the same state (*Premium Times*, 2015, 29 July cited in Olutola, 2019).

In like manner, the 2016 Edo elections, the 2016 Rivers re-run election and the 2018 gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun were some of the elections that created the ugly picture of the police for their alleged role in undermining the sanctity of the polls, as it was recorded in the 2016 rerun election in Rivers State. Following the publicity and condemnations that trailed the Rivers rerun election, INEC set up an administrative inquiry to probe what transpired where the police and other security outfits were seen to have compromised their neutrality and to have intentionally perverted the electoral process (Ndujihe, 2017). Also, there were reports of voters' intimidation and violence around the 2019 elections at both the federal and state levels, in which armed men hired by candidates and political parties and the security forces including the national police perpetuated violence (Human Right Watch, 2019).

Nevertheless, this act should not be a barrier to the police in performing its constitutional duties of securing the electoral process promptly as prescribed by the law. Rather, institutional mechanisms should be instituted to insulate the police personnel from political influences while appropriate sanctions should be applied to check the abuses of police personnel who tend to breach the law by manipulating the process with a view to achieving the vested interest of their pay masters. Though there is no disagreement as regards the significance of the police role in securing the electoral process, police deployment in the electoral process should not be politicized. Rather, it must be carefully handled in order to avoid jeopardizing the electoral process which they are supposed to secure (Akpan 2008; Afolabi, 2018).

### **Challenges to Nigeria Police Effective Performance in Nigeria's Electoral Process**

Several factors account for the ineffectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force in securing the electoral process in Nigeria. Firstly, Nigeria as a country is blessed with larger population but has lower security personnel to maintain law and order in the society. It was observed that the acute shortage of men has reduced the police to crime-fighters to the detriment of the diversification of police functions, especially during the electoral process (Barnabas, 2013). Nigeria is under policed to the extent that it could not meet the one policeman to 400 citizens' ratio recommended by the UN. Also, the Nigeria Police Force lacks adequate equipment such as scientific laboratory, office accommodations, logistics and communications gadgets, specialized and sophisticated work tools like modern crime monitoring, intelligence gathering and surveillance appliances for the tracking down of criminals and their hideouts, among others, which hinders their effectiveness in securing the electoral process and thus brought set back to the democratic stability in Nigeria (Jibrin, 2018; Alozie, 2019).

Poor police remuneration and poor conditions of service remained one of the major drives for some unprofessional conduct often witnessed among the rank and file of the Nigeria police (Odekunle, 2004). The reward system in the Police force is nothing to write home about. For example, prior the 100% salary increase by late President Umaru Yar'Adua's administration, the average take home pay of a Police Constable was ₦10,000.00



which was composed of ₦5,000.00 as salary, lodging, ₦2,000.00 and others, ₦3,000.00 (Barnabas, 2013).

Also, within the same period, a Corporal earned about ₦13, 000.00 and after the increase earned between, ₦27,000.00 and ₦28,000.00. Similarly, a Sergeant earned ₦15, 000.00 and with the increase, went home with about ₦31, 000.00. With the salary review, Inspector's salary rose up to ₦55, 000.00; Assistant Superintendent of Police earned between ₦80, 000.00 to ₦85, 000.00 while Deputy Superintendent of Police and Superintendent of Police salaries rose up to be between ₦90,000.00 and ₦100,000.00 respectively (Barnabas, 2013). Poor remuneration and conditions of service in the Police Force has for long continued to promote low morale among members of the Police Force, which in addition contributed to their indulgence in unethical conduct or behaviour in the discharge of their duties even in the electoral process (Adegoke, 2014; Alozie, 2019).

Political interference and influence constituted other factor hindering the Nigeria Police's effectiveness in securing the electoral process. Though measures to ensure police political neutrality in all her operations are put in place, the fact remains that the power of incumbency reigns supreme in Nigeria thus making an average police man to see himself as an appendage of powerful political/economic elites (Bawa, 2013). Therefore, where a powerful politician and political party who wields political power to hire and fire directly or indirectly, begins to control and direct the operations of the executive arm of the government, there is the tendency that political neutrality of the police will be lost and this will greatly affect the effective performance of the police force within the electoral process (Osawe, 2015).

Also, widespread of corruption among the members of the Nigeria police has greatly soiled the image of the police. The issue of police corruption is an undeniable fact with several evidence of their involvement in unethical conducts in the discharged of their duties on a daily basis and this even transcends to misconducts in the electoral processes in Nigeria (Olurotimi, 2012).

Poverty, greed and craze for wealth have been accused as factors generating misconduct, amongst the police in Nigeria (Iheriohanma & Emenyonu, 2018; Adeleke, 2013). The increasing rate of poverty, under-development, inequity, exclusionism, uneven growth, economic recession, primitive wealth accumulation on the part of preponderant poor Nigerians, and the flagrant and extravagant display of affluence amongst our elected and appointed political office holders and political financiers have increasingly restructured the psyche and thought of the poorly socialized police officers to dabble into adapting unethical societal means of realising goals and attaining success. Hence, they involve themselves in primitive accumulation of wealth by engaging in unethical conduct during the electoral process (Iheriohanma et al, 2020). The foregoing exposition has therefore, constrained the psychological disposition of the police personnel to act contrary to the provisions of the constitution and the Electoral Act thereby impacting negatively on the electoral process.

### **Nigeria Police, Electoral Process and Democratic Stability in Nigeria**

Election process encompasses the different activities involved in the conduct of elections which entails activities before, during and after the conduct of elections and also covers the election management bodies and extant rules and regulations that guide the electoral process (Ajayi, 2007). Though the legal instruments for election in Nigeria such as the 1999 Constitution, the 2006 Electoral Act, the Electoral Act, 2010 Amendment, and the Electoral Amendment Act, 2015 entrusted the task of conducting elections to the INEC, provisions in some of these legal instruments particularly the Electoral Act (Amendment), 2015 equally confer critical role on security agencies in the electoral process (Tobi & Oikhala, 2018).

The importance of the police and the personnel other security agencies to the electoral process in Nigeria has been credited to convergence factors and most prominently, the

environment of electoral malpractices within the country (Afolabi, 2018). Election mismanagement often stimulates and promotes tribal, ethnic and religious tensions and divides, as well as avoidable violence with attendant loss of human lives and legitimacy of election winners. This tends to create a vicious cycle of instability and insecurity in the electoral process/cycle as today's losers become desperate and plan not to lose next time and thus security agencies are indispensable to credible and fair elections in Nigeria (Hounkpe & Gueye 2010; Afolabi 2011).

It is instructive to note that the conventional role of the police is to maintain peace and order in the society for people to have a sense of safety and order, for people to go about their lawful businesses and other meaningful engagements for progress in all spheres of human endeavour (Alemika, 2013). Hence, Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended, recognizes the Nigeria Police Force as the lead agency for internal security in the country (CFRN, 1999). However, apart from the statutory functions of the Nigeria Police, there are specific functions which the law expected the Nigeria Police Force to perform primarily in the electoral process as contained in the legal instruments for the conduct of elections in Nigeria because the electoral process in Nigeria is often characterized and even disrupted by conflicts and controversies (Tobi & Oikhala, 2018).

However, it is worthy to note that the deployment of the police personnel to secure the electoral process is perhaps a double-edged sword which can be used in promoting electoral stability by ensuring safety, orderliness and the protection of voters and election materials in the voting process on one hand, and in reinforcing electoral malfeasance on the other hand denoted by the use of these security personnel to intimidate the opposition and rig elections (Afolabi, 2018).

It is worthy to note that the absence of adequate election security over the years has compromised the democratic qualities of elections in Nigeria. The police and other security agents have been accused of not being independent, competent, and have consistently failed to discharge their responsibilities professionally with due recourse to the rule of law particularly respect for the fundamental human rights of the electorate. However, there is a notable departure from the previous experiences, which was noticeable in the conduct of the police and other security agents during the 2015 and 2019 elections, even though there are still rooms for more improvement for the police so as to enable them secure the electoral process effectively and by so doing, contribute to democratic stability in Nigeria (Olutola, 2019).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The paper examined securing the electoral process to enhance democratic stability in Nigeria by reviewing the role of the Nigeria Police under Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015-2020). The paper started with the conceptual review of electoral process, electoral security, democratic stability as well as the overview of electoral process and police force in Nigeria respectively. The paper x-rayed the role of police in securing the electoral process, most especially in Nigeria where the conduct of elections over the years have been marred with incidents of electoral violence and irregularities. The paper further argues that inadequate police personnel, corruption, poor police remuneration and condition of service, lack adequate equipment and ammunition, lack of adequate and appropriate training, incumbency power, political interference and influence, among others inhibited the Nigeria's police in adequately securing the electoral process. The paper concludes that Nigeria's police occupy a significant pivot in securing the electoral processes in Nigeria but at the same the police must be adequately monitored in order to prevent them from becoming an instrument for sabotaging the electoral process in the hands politicians instead of securing it and as well as to promote democratic stability.

Therefore, in order for the Nigeria's Police Force to adequately secure the electoral process and ensures democratic stability, the following recommendations was made:

- (i) Efforts should be made by the state to improve the working conditions of the Police Force personnel through improved salary packages, functional pension scheme, decent accommodation and sundry allowances as well as adequate compensation to the families of those who died while in active service.
- (ii) Efforts should be made at continuous training and re-training of the police officers to acquaint them with the current security techniques and knowledge to improve their efforts in securing the electoral process and promoting democratic stability.
- (iii) Efforts should be made at properly equipping the police with modern and sophisticated equipment such as logistics and communication gadgets required to effectively and efficiently combat crime and secure the electoral process.
- (iv) The police should be given a substantial autonomy and independence as well as adequate funding by government to curb corruption and prevent unhealthy political influence and control.
- (v) Measures should be put in place to restrain incumbent governments, politicians, political parties and other election stakeholders against influencing the police to their advantage during electoral process.
- (vi) Government and other related stakeholders should make efforts towards changing the public perception of the police through drastic structural and institutional reformation of the Nigeria police with a view to assisting it earn a more positive image in the society.

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