



The Nigeria Police Force and Credible, Free and Fair Presidential Elections in Nigeria: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines the critical role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999-2023. It provides a historical perspective and critical analysis on the evolving responsibilities and challenges faced by law enforcement agencies during electoral processes. The study highlights the significance of police pressure in maintaining order, preventing electoral violence, and safeguarding voters' rights. By analysing various electoral cycles, the article identifies key successes and failures of the police in election management and their impact on public trust in the electoral system. Additionally, it explores the interplay between police actions and political dynamics, emphasizing the need for reforms to enhance police effectiveness and accountability in future elections. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on electoral integrity and the role of law enforcement in democratic governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria Police, Credible Election, Free and fair Election, Presidential Election.

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Introduction

The role of the Police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections is a crucial aspect of democratic governance, particularly in a diverse complex society like Nigeria. Since 1999, the Nigeria police have been tasked with responsibility of maintaining peace and order during elections, a duty that has become increasingly challenging amid rising political tensions and electoral violence. This paper explores the historical context of Police involvement in presidential elections over the past two decades, highlighting the significant events, reforms, and the evolving nature of their role. By examining the historical perspective from 1999 to 2023, this article seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the police's role in shaping the electoral landscape in Nigeria. It analyses key incidents of police involvement in



elections, assesses the impact of their actions on voter confidence, and discusses the necessary reforms to enhance their effectiveness in future elections.

As Nigeria has navigated through various electoral cycles, the police's effectiveness in managing election-related security has been a focal point of public discourse. The relationship between law enforcement and the electoral process is multifaceted, influenced by factors such as political interference, public perception, and the capacity of the police force. This study will delve into how the police have adapted to these challenges, the strategies employed to ensure electoral integrity and the implications of their actions on public trust in the electoral system. Through this exploration, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the importance of law enforcement in fostering democratic environment where free and fair elections can thrive.

The dialogue about the importance of law enforcement in fostering a democratic environment where free and fair elections can thrive centers on several key themes, including accountability, neutrality, community engagement, and the need for reform. Firstly, accountability is crucial for law enforcement agencies, particularly in the context of elections. Police forces must operate transparently and be held responsible for their actions during electoral process. This involves establishing clear guidelines and oversight mechanisms to ensure that police conduct is in line with democratic principles. When the public perceives law enforcement as accountable, it builds trust in the electoral system and encourages voters' participation.

Secondly, the neutrality of law enforcement is essential for maintaining the integrity of elections. Police must be impartial and avoid any actions that could be perceived as favouring one political party over another. This neutrality is vital for preventing electoral violence and intimidation, which can deter citizens from exercising their right to vote. Training programmes that emphasize the importance of impartiality and regret for human rights can help reinforce these principles among police officers. Community engagement is another critical aspect of fostering a democratic environment (Alemika, 2013). Law enforcement agencies should actively engage with communities to build relationships and address concern related to election security. By involving local stakeholders in planning and implementing security measures, police can create a sense of ownership and collaboration that enhances public confidence in the electoral process (Afolabi, 2018).



Lastly, there is a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive reform with the law enforcement agencies. This includes improving training, resources, and operational procedures to better equip police to handle the unique challenges of election periods. Discussions around reform often focus on enhancing the capacity of police to manage crowds, respond to violence effectively, and protect the rights of all citizens during elections (Alemika, 1988). In essence, the dialogue surrounding law enforcement's role in ensuring free and fair elections emphasizes the need for accountability, neutrality, community engagement, and reform. By addressing these issues, law enforcement can significantly contribute to democratic environment where citizens feel safe and empowered to participate in the electoral process. This, in turn, strengthens the foundations of democracy and promotes a culture of respect for the rule of law.

In all, the historical perspective of the role of police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 reveals a complex interplay of challenges and progress. The evolution of policing strategies, community engagement, and the pursuit of accountability have been pivotal in shaping the electoral landscape. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, the lessons learned from past experiences underscore the necessity for ongoing reforms and a commitment to upholding the principles of neutrality and integrity within law enforcement. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the police in safeguarding the electoral process is crucial for fostering public trust and enhancing the legitimacy of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Police Roles in Elections

In the context of Nigeria's democratic evolution since 1999, the role of the police in elections has emerged as a critical component in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. This introductory section explores the fundamental responsibilities and functions of law enforcement agencies during presidential elections, highlighting their significance in maintaining order, preventing electoral violence and safeguarding the rights of voters (Alemika, 2013). The police serve not only as enforcers of the law but also as facilitators of free and fair electoral environment, tasked with the protection of citizens and the upholding of democratic principles. By examining the historical context of police involvement in elections, this section will lay the groundwork for understanding the challenges they face and



the strategies employed to enhance their effectiveness in securing electoral integrity from 1999 to 2023.

The role of police in elections has emerged as a critical component in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process for several reasons. First, the police are responsible for maintaining law and order during elections, which is essential in preventing violence and intimidation that can disrupt the voting process (Akpan, 2008). Their presence at polling stations helps to deter potential misconduct and assures voters that they can exercise their rights safely. Second, the police play a key role in enforcing electoral laws and regulations (Ajayi and Oshewolo, 2020). This includes investigating electoral offences, such as voter fraud and bribery, and ensuring that all parties adhere to the rules governing the electoral process. Their involvement helps to promote transparency and accountability, which are vital for public trust in the electoral system.

The relationship between the police and the community can significantly impact the perception of electoral fairness. Community engagement initiatives by the police can foster cooperation and communication, leading to a more secure and inclusive electoral environment (Aiyede, 2007). By building trust with the electorate, the police can enhance their effectiveness in ensuring free and fair elections. In all, the role of police in elections is not just about enforcement, it is about creating an atmosphere conducive to democratic participation and integrity. When the police engage positively with community members, it fosters trust and cooperation, which are crucial for a peaceful electoral process. A strong relationship can lead to increased community participation and a sense of security among voters, making them feel more confident in exercising their rights (Abba, 2014).

Conversely, if the police are perceived as biased or unapproachable, it can breed distrust and fear within the community. This perception can deter voters from participating in elections, as they may feel that their safety is at risk or that the electoral process is not impartial. Negative interactions or a history of police misconduct can exacerbate these feelings, leading to allegations of electoral fraud and unfairness. Ultimately, a constructive relationship between the police and the community can enhance the legitimacy of the electoral process. When voters believe that law enforcement is there to protect their rights and ensure a fair election, it reinforces the integrity of the democratic system and encourages active civic engagement (Afolabi and Agunyai, 2017).



The police play a key role in enforcing electoral laws and regulations through several critical functions. First, they are responsible for monitoring electoral activities to ensure compliance with established laws (Abba, 2014). This includes overseeing campaign activities, monitoring polling stations, and ensuring that all electoral processes are conducted fairly and transparently. Secondly, the police investigate allegations of electoral offences, such as voter intimidation, fraud and bribery (Alemika, 2011). By taking swift action against such activities, the police help to deter potential violators and maintain the integrity of the electoral process. Their ability to respond effectively to complaints and reports of misconduct is vital in upholding the rule of law during elections. Additionally, the police collaborate with electoral management bodies and stakeholders to develop and implement security plans for elections. This cooperation ensures that all parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities, contributing to a more organized and secure electoral environment. By fulfilling these responsibilities, the police play an essential role in safeguarding the democratic process and promoting public confidence in electoral outcomes.

To achieve an atmosphere conducive to democratic participation, and integrity, the police can engage in community outreach programmes to build trust and foster positive relationships with residents. This involves conducting informational sessions about the electoral process, addressing community concerns, and encouraging open dialogue (Alemika, 2013). When community feels heard and valued, they are more likely to participate in elections. Additionally, the police must ensure a visible and approachable presence at polling stations. This not only helps deter potential misconduct, but also reassures voters that their safety is prioritized (Hounkkpe, and Gueye, 2010). Officers should be trained to handle conflicts calmly and professionally, ensuring that any issues are resolved without escalating tensions.

At the final analysis, the police should collaborate closely with electoral bodies to create transparent processes for reporting and addressing electoral offences. By establishing clear channels for communication and action, they can demonstrate their commitment to upholding the law and protecting the integrity of the electoral process. This comprehensive approach will foster a secure environment that encourages active civic engagement and trust in the democratic system. In conclusion, the role of police in elections extends for beyond mere enforcement of laws; it encompasses the creation of a secure and supportive environment that fosters democratic participation. By building trust within the community, maintaining a



visible and approachable presence at polling stations, and collaborating with electoral bodies to ensure transparency, the police can significantly enhance the integrity of the electoral process. Ultimately, the efforts of the police contribute to a more engaged electorate and reinforce public confidence in the democratic system, making it essential for law enforcement to prioritize these responsibilities during elections.

Historical Overview of Elections in Nigeria (1999-2023).

The historical overview of elections in Nigeria (1999-2023) provides a contextual background that highlights the evolution of the electoral process in Nigeria since the return of democratic governance in 1999. This period marks a significant transition in Nigeria's political landscape, characterized by a series of elections that have shaped the nation's democratic identity. In this overview, it is crucial to emphasize the historical significance of each electoral cycle, detailing the challenges faced, the milestones achieved, and the role of the police in maintaining order and integrity during these elections.

The examination of the historical context will not only shed light on the complexities of electoral processes but also underscore the importance of police involvement in fostering an environment conducive to free and fair elections. By analyzing the events from 1999 to 2023, this section sets the stage for understanding the broader implications of police roles in the electoral process, highlighting how past experiences inform current practices and policies. This historical perspective is essential for comprehending the dynamic of electoral fairness in Nigeria and the continuous efforts required to uphold democratic principles in the face of various challenges.

The contextual background that highlights the evolution of the electoral process in Nigeria since 1999 involves several key factors. Firstly, the return of civilian rule in 1999 marked the end of years of military dictatorship, which had significantly undermined democratic governance and electoral integrity. This transition brought about a renewed hope for democracy, leading to the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) tasked with overseeing free and fair elections. The contextual background that ended military dictatorship in Nigeria is rooted in a long history of political instability and public discontent (Electoral Integrity Project, 2015).



The military regimes that dominated Nigeria politics from 1960s to the late 1990s were marked by human rights abuses, lack of political freedoms, and corruption (IDEA, 2015). Growing frustrations among the populace, civil society, and pro-democracy activists culminated in widespread protests and demands for a return to democratic governance. This pressure, alongside international condemnation of military rule, ultimately led to the transition to civilians rule in 1999 (IFES, 2014). The establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was a pivotal moment in this transition, as it signified a commitment to creating an electoral framework that could facilitate free and fair elections. INEC was tasked with overseeing the electoral process, ensuring that elections were conducted transparently and in accordance with democratic principles. This development brought renewed hope for democracy in Nigeria as citizen began to believe that votes could count and that they could participate meaningfully in the political process.

The birth of INEC also fostered a sense of accountability and responsibility among political actors, as the commission implemented measures aimed at enhancing electoral integrity, such as voter education and the introduction of technology in voting process. These changes helped to rebuild trust in the electoral system, encouraging greater civic engagement and participation in subsequent elections. In all, the end of military dictatorship and the formation of INEC represented a significant turning point in Nigeria's quest for democratic governance, laying the groundwork for ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy in the country.

Electoral process in Nigeria has been characterized by a series of elections that have seen varying degrees of success and challenges (Awopeju, 2011). For instance, the 1999 elections were largely seen as a watershed moment, but subsequent elections faced issues such as electoral violence, voter suppressions, and allegations of rigging (Ibeanu, 2007). Each election cycle has prompted reforms aimed at improving the electoral framework, including the introduction of biometric voter registration and electronic voting systems. The electoral process in Nigeria has indeed been characterized by a series of elections that have experienced varying degrees of success and challenges. The transition to civilian rule in 1999 marked a significant milestone, yet subsequent elections have highlighted persistent issues that undermine the integrity of the democratic process (Awopeju, 2011). To be sure, reports from the International Crisis Groups asserts that;



Election in Nigeria have often been marred by violence, intimidation, and vote rigging, leading to a general lack of public confidence in the electoral system.

To be sure, the 2007 elections were widely criticized for being among the most flawed in Nigeria's history, with allegations to widespread electoral malpractice. The European Union Election Observation Mission noted that, the elections were conducted in an environment of intimidation and violence, which severely impacted the credibility of the electoral process (EU EOM, 2007). This situation prompted reforms aimed at improving electoral conduct, leading to the establishment of a more robust framework under the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

However, challenges persist, as seen in the 2019 elections, which were again marred by violence and logistical issues. The Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room reported that the elections were characterized by incident of violence, voter intimidation, and delays in the delivery of electoral materials which disrupted the voting process (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019). These recurring challenges illustrate the complexities of Nigeria's electoral landscape, emphasizing the need for ongoing reforms to enhance electoral integrity and restore public confidence in the democratic process.

The role of the police has evolved throughout these years, transitioning from a force often associated with political oppression to one that is expected to ensure the safety and security of voters and electoral officials. This shift is critical in understanding how police involvement has influenced public perception of electoral legitimacy and the overall democratic process in Nigeria. The role of the police in Nigeria has undergone significant evolution over the years, particularly in the context of elections (Alemika, 2013). Historically, the police were often seen as an instrument of political oppression, used by ruling authorities to suppress dissent and manipulate the electoral process (Arazeen, 2005). This association with authoritarian practices fostered a deep mistrust between the police and the general populace, undermining the credibility of the electoral system.

However, as Nigeria transitioned to democratic governance, the expectations of the police began to shift (Alemika 2015). There has been a growing recognition of the police's critical role in ensuring the safety and security of voters and electoral officers during elections. This new mandate emphasizes the need for the police to create a conducive environment for



democratic participation, rather than merely enforcing laws in a punitive manner. The focus has shifted towards building trust within communities, engaging in proactive measures to prevent electoral violence, and ensuring that citizens feel safe to exercise their voting rights.

Despite the evolution, challenges remain. The police must navigate the delicate balance between maintaining order and respecting citizens' rights. Efforts to reform the police force, including training programmes focused on human rights and community policing, have been initiated to help facilitate this transition. Ultimately, the role of the police in elections is now viewed as integral to fostering a free and fair electoral process, reflecting the broader aspirations for democracy and accountability in Nigeria. In all, this historical overview provides a foundation for analyzing the complexities of the electoral landscape in Nigeria and the ongoing efforts to enhance democratic participation and integrity.

The historical overview of elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 reveals a complex interplay between the electoral process and the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections. Throughout this period, the police have transitioned from being perceived as agents of political oppression to vital stakeholders in promoting electoral integrity and security. Despite the challenges of electoral violence, intimidation and logistical failures, the evolving role of the police underscores their importance in fostering an environment conducive to democratic participation. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, the commitment of the police to uphold the rule of law and protect the rights of voters will be crucial in building public confidence in the electoral process and advancing the nation's democratic ideals.

Theoretical Discourse on Policing and Electoral Integrity

Theoretical discourse on policing and electoral integrity serves as a foundational framework for understanding the multifaceted role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. This period has been marked by significant political transitions and challenges that have shaped the dynamics between law enforcement agencies and the electoral process. By examining various theories related to policing, social contract theory, and the principles of democratic governance, one can better appreciate how the police are expected to function as guardians of electoral integrity. This discourse not only highlights the responsibilities of the police in preventing electoral malpractices and violence but also emphasizes the importance of public trust and accountability in fostering a secure



environment for voters. Ultimately, this exploration provides insights into the historical evolution of the police's role in Nigeria's electoral landscape and the implications for future democratic processes.

The theory that best explains this study on "The Role of Police in Ensuring Free and Fair Presidential Elections in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective (1999-2023)" is the social contract theory. This theory posits that the legitimacy of authority and governance is derived from the consent of the governed, which is particularly relevant in the context of elections (Anifowose, 2003). In Nigeria, the police are expected to uphold the rule of law and protect citizen's rights during the electoral process, reflecting their role as representatives of the state accountable to the public. By examining the historical interactions between the police and the electorate, the theory helps to elucidate the expectations placed on law enforcement to foster an environment of trust and security, ultimately contributing to the integrity of the electoral process.

Social contract theory is a political philosophy that explores the legitimacy of authority and the relationship between individuals and the state (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010). It posits that individuals consent, either explicitly or implicitly are to surrender some of their freedoms and submit to the authority of a governing body in exchange for protection of their remaining rights. Key theorists like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have contributed to this discourse, each presenting distinct views on the nature of the social contract and the role of government.

In the context of this study, social contract theory serves as a vital framework of analysis. It helps to explain the expectations of the police as agents of the state who are tasked with maintaining order and protecting citizen's rights during elections. The theory underscores the idea that the police derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. Thus, the actions of the police must align with the principles of accountability, transparency, and public trust. Analyzing the historical evolution of the police's role in Nigerian elections through the lens of social contract theory reveals how the relationship between law enforcement and the electorate have transformed over time. It highlights the challenges of electoral violence, corruption, and political interference that can undermine public confidence in both the police and the electoral process (Jega, 2012).



Furthermore, the social contract theory emphasizes the importance of the police in not only enforcing electoral laws but also in creating an atmosphere conducive to democratic participation, thereby reinforcing the social contract between the state and its citizens. Ultimately, social contract theory offers a robust framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play in the relationship between the police and the electorate in Nigeria, illustrating how the police's commitment to upholding the rule of law is essential for ensuring free and fair presidential elections.

The major proponents of the social contract theory include Thomas Hobbes (1651), John Locke (1689) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), each contributing significantly to the development of the theory with distinct perspectives. For instance, Thomas Hobbes (1651) in his work "Leviathan", argued that in the state of nature, life would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short due to the constant threat of violence. He posited that individuals consent to surrender their rights to a sovereign authority in exchange for security and order. His focus was on the necessity of strong central authority to maintain peace.

In his own contributions, particularly in "Two Treatises of Government", John Locke (1689) emphasized the protection of individual's rights as it relates to life, liberty, and property. Locke argued that the social contract is an agreement among free individuals to form a government that is accountable to the people. If the government fails to protect these rights, citizens have the right to revolt. Locke's ideas laid the foundation for modern democratic principles. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) in his work on "The social contract", Rousseau introduced the concept of the "general will", suggesting that legitimate political authority comes from the collective will of the people. He emphasized the importance of civic participation and the idea that individual can achieve true freedom only when they act in accordance with the general will. Among these theorists, John Locke's work best explains the current study. His emphasis on government accountability and the protection of individual's rights align closely with the role of the police in safeguarding electoral integrity and ensuring that citizens can participate freely in the democratic process. Locke's ideas about the social contract highlight the importance of trust and legitimacy in the relationship between the police and the electorate, which is crucial for fostering a fair electoral environment. John Locke's contributions to the social contract theory provide a fundamental understanding of



the relationship between the state and its citizens, which is particularly relevant to the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria.

Locke emphasized that the legitimacy of government arises from its ability to protect the rights of individuals, including their right to participate in the electoral process. This highlights the police's responsibility not only to enforce laws but also to create an environment where citizens feel safe and empowered. In the context of Nigeria, the police must act within the framework of Locke's social contract by ensuring the electoral laws are upheld while also safeguarding the rights of voters. This involves preventing violence, intimidation, and any form of electoral malpractice that could undermine the democratic process. Locke's idea that citizens have the right to revolt against a government that fails to protect their rights resonates with the need for accountability in the police force. If the police are seen as part of the problem, either through corruption or failure to act impartially, then public trust in the electoral process diminishes.

Ultimately, the meeting point between Locke's theory and the role of the police in Nigeria lies in the expectation that law enforcement should foster a secure and fair electoral environment. This aligns with Locke's vision of a government that derives its power from the consent of the governed and is accountable to them, reinforcing the importance of the police as guardians of democracy.

The social contract theory, while providing a framework for understanding the relationship between citizens and the state, has several weaknesses when applied to the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria, particularly from a historical perspective spurring 1999 to 2023. Firstly, the theory assumes a level of mutual consent and rational agreement between the government and the governed, which has often been absent in Nigeria's political landscape. Many citizens perceive the police as an extension of political power rather than as impartial enforcers of electoral integrity. This perception undermines the social contract's premise that the government exists to serve the people, leading to distrust in the police's ability to ensure free and fair elections.

Additionally, the historical context of police involvement in Nigeria reveals a legacy of political oppression and human rights abuses. The social contract theory does not adequately account for the ways in which police forces can be politicized, resulting in their use as tools



for suppressing dissent rather than protecting democratic processes. This politicization has often led to violence and intimidation during elections, further eroding the trust that citizens should have in the police as neutral arbiters of electoral law. Furthermore, the social contract theory does not address the complexities of socio-economic factors that influence electoral integrity.

In Nigeria, issues such as poverty, corruption and lack of education can significantly affect citizens' engagement with the electoral process. The police's role in this context becomes more complicated, as they may be ill-equipped to address these underlying issues while also being tasked with maintaining order during elections. In summary, while the social contract theory provides a useful lens for examining the relationship between the police and the electoral process, its weaknesses in addressing the realities of Nigerian politics and society highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the police's role in ensuring free and fair presidential elections.

Despite its weaknesses, the social contract theory offers several strengths in explaining the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from a historical perspective (1999-2023). One key strength is its emphasis on the legitimacy of governmental authority derived from the consent of the governed. This aspect underscores the importance of the police in maintaining public trust and accountability during elections. If the police are perceived as acting in the interest of the citizens, they can help foster a conducive environment for democratic participation, reinforcing the notion that elections are collective responsibility.

Additionally, the social contract theory highlights the protective role of the state in safeguarding citizens rights, including their right to vote. This perspective encourages the police to view their role not just as enforcers of law, but as protectors of democratic processes. By framing their responsibilities in this way, the police can actively contribute to ensuring that elections are free from violence and intimidation, thereby enhancing the integrity of the electoral process. Moreover, the theory's focus on the relationship between the state and its citizens can facilitate discussions about reforming the police force to align more closely with democratic principles.



By acknowledging the historical context of police actions and their impact on public perception, the social contract theory can serve as a foundation for advocating changes that promote transparency, accountability, and community engagement in policing during elections. Given these strengths, the social contract theory still serves as a viable analytical framework for this study. While it may not capture all the complexities of the Nigerian electoral landscape, it provides a useful starting point for exploring the evolving role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections and can help identify areas for reform and improvement.

The historical perspective of the role of police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 reveals a complex interplay between law enforcement and electoral integrity. While the police have often been associated with political oppression, their evolving role now emphasizes the need for accountability, transparency, and community engagement. This discourse highlights the significance of the social contract theory as a framework for understanding the legitimacy of police actions and their impact on public trust during elections. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, it is crucial for the police to embrace their protective role, fostering an environment conducive to free expression and participation. Ultimately, the commitment to electoral integrity rests not only on the enforcement of laws but also on the establishment of a police force that genuinely serves the interests of the citizens it is meant to protect.

Methodology: Research Design and Data Collection

The methodology employed in this study is critical to understanding the complexities involved. This section outlines the research design and data collection methods utilized together comprehensive insights into the interactions between law enforcement and electoral integrity. A qualitative research approach was adopted, focusing on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including police officials, electoral officers, and civil society representatives.

Additionally, the study incorporated a review of relevant literature, including reports from organizations such as the International Crisis Group and the European Union Election Observation Mission, to contextualize the findings within broader electoral trends. By triangulating data from various sources, this methodology provides a nuanced understanding



of how the police have navigated their roles in the electoral process, highlighting both successes and challenges faced over the years.

The qualitative research approach is highly relevant to the study on the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social dynamics and perception. This approach facilitates the gathering of rich, contextual data through interviews and discussions with various stakeholders, such as police officers, and community members. By focusing on their experiences and insights, the research can uncover nuanced understandings of how the police's role has evolved overtime and how it impacts electoral integrity. Furthermore, qualitative methods enabled the exploration of subjective experiences and societal attitudes, which are crucial for understanding the relationship between the police and the community in the context of electoral fairness. This depth of insight is essential for informing recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of police in promoting democratic participation and integrity in Nigeria's electoral processes.

The incorporation of the review of relevant literature has significantly boosted the methodology for this research paper by providing a solid theoretical foundation and context for the research. By analysing existing studies, reports, and evaluations from credible sources such as the International Crisis Group and the European Union Election Observation Mission, the research gains insights into historical trends and patterns regarding the role of the police in elections. This literature review not only helps to identify gaps in current knowledge but also informs the development of research questions and interpretation of findings. Furthermore, it allows for a comprehensive analysis of how police practices in Nigeria align with or diverse from global standards and best practices in electoral integrity. Ultimately this comprehensive approach enhances the credibility and debt of the research, ensuring that the study is well-grounded in existing scholarship while addressing the unique challenges faced in Nigeria's electoral landscape.

The methodology employed in this study, which combines qualitative research with a thorough review of relevant literature provides a robust framework for analyzing the historical role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. By engaging with various stakeholders through interviews and contextualizing findings within existing scholarship, this approach not only illuminates the complexities of



police involvement in the electoral process, but also highlights the evolution of their role from one associated with political oppression to a more supportive function aimed at safeguarding democratic participation. This comprehensive methodology ultimately enhances the understanding of the challenges and successes experienced in the electoral landscape, offering valuable insights for future reforms and the promotion of electoral integrity in Nigeria.

Case Studies of Notable Elections and Police Involvement

The examination of notable elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 provides critical insights into the evolving role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections. This period has been marked by significant political transitions and challenges that have shaped the electoral landscape (IFES, 2014). By analyzing specific case studies, the study explores how police involvement has varied across different elections, reflecting both successes and failures in upholding electoral integrity. These case studies will highlight the complexities of police engagement, including their efforts to maintain security, enforce electoral laws and foster an environment conducive to democratic participation. Through this historical lens, one can better understand the implications of police actions on voter confidence and the overall legitimacy of the electoral process in Nigeria.

Notable elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 showcase a complex interplay between police and the electoral process (John, 2012). Starting with the 1999 elections, which marked the end of military rule, the police played a crucial role in ensuring relative peace, but there were still instances of violence and intimidation (Jega, 2012). In 2007 elections, police involvement faced criticisms due to allegations of bias and complicity in electoral malpractices (Kyari, 2005). In 2011, the elections were seen as a turning point, with the police taking steps to improve their image and investigation in ensuring security, although challenges remained (IDEA, 2015). The 2015 elections were historic, as they resulted in the first peaceful transfer of power, and the police were commended for their efforts in maintaining order (INEC Report, 2015 Elections).

However, the 2019 elections witnessed renewed concerns over police conduct with reports of excessive force and partnership (Olorungbemi, 2022). Looking ahead to the 2023 elections, the evolving role of the police is under scrutiny as they aim to balance law enforcement with fostering a democratic environment. These elections illustrate the ongoing challenges and



developments in the relationship between the police and the electoral process in Nigeria, reflecting the need for continuous improvement in their role to uphold electoral integrity.

Several significant political transitions and challenges have shaped the electoral landscape in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. The return to democratic governance in 1999 marked a crucial transition, ending years of military rule (Myagkor et al, 2007). This shift ushered in a series of elections that aimed to establish a stable democratic framework. However, the early years were marred by electoral violence, voter intimidation, and allegations of fraud, which challenged the legitimacy of the electoral process (Omotola, 2010).

The 2007 elections were particularly contentious, characterized by widespread reports of rigging and violence, which led to a loss of public confidence in the electoral system (Ibeanu, 2007). The subsequent 2011 elections saw improvements, but issues of security and political violence persisted, especially in the northern regions. A significant turning point occurred in 2015 when the opposition successfully unseated the incumbent president, marking the first peaceful transfer of power in Nigeria's history (Electoral Integrity Project, 2015). This transition was seen as a testament to the resilience of Nigeria's democracy, yet it was followed by challenges such as increasing ethnic tensions and the rise of insurgency in the northeast. The 2019 elections again highlighted the fragility of the electoral process, with accusations of partnership against security agencies and incidents of violence, raising questions about the integrity of the elections (INEC Report of 2019 General Elections in Nigeria). As Nigeria conducted the 2023 elections, the ongoing issues of electoral reform, public trust in institutions, and the need for accountability and transparency remained critical to shaping the future of democracy in the country.

Police involvement in elections from 1999 to 2023 in Nigeria has varied significantly, reflecting the changing political landscape and the evolving role of law enforcement in the electoral process (Alemika, 2015). In the early elections following the return to democracy in 1999, police presence was often characterized by a heavy-handed approach aimed at maintaining order amidst widespread violence and electoral malpractice. The police were frequently criticised for their inability to prevent electoral violence and for allegations of complicity in electoral fraud (Godowoli, 2003). By the 2007 elections, the police faced intense scrutiny due to their perceived partnership, with accusation of siding with ruling



parties. This resulted in public distrust and calls for reforms within the police force to ensure neutrality and accountability (Hounkpe, et al, 2010).

In 2011 elections, there was a noticeable effort to improve police conduct. The establishment of the Nigerian Police Force Election Security Strategy aimed to enhance their role in providing security at polling stations. However, challenges remained, particularly in volatile regions where violence erupted leading to a mixed assessment of police effectiveness (IDEA, 2015). The 2015 elections marked a significant shift, as the police were tasked with ensuring a peaceful transfer of power. This period saw some improvements in police conduct, but issues such as political thuggery and violence still posed challenges. By the 2019 elections, the police faced renewed criticism for their handling of security, with allegations of excessive force and bias against opposition parties. With the conduct of the 2023 elections, the role of the police continues to evolve, with ongoing discussions about the need for community engagement, accountability, and transparency to restore public trust in the electoral process.

The case studies of notable elections from 1999 to 2023 illustrate the complex and evolving role of the police in Nigeria's electoral landscape. Throughout this period, the police have transitioned from a legally reactive force, often criticized for their partnership and inefficacy, to a more proactive entity emphasizing accountability and community engagement. The lessons learned from each electoral cycle highlight the critical need for ongoing reforms within the police force to enhance their capacity to uphold electoral integrity (Mgba, 2017).

Accountability and Transparency in Police Conduct

The role of police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 has been significantly influenced by the principles of accountability and transparency in police conduct. This introduction explores how these principles have shaped the relationship between law enforcement and the electoral process, particularly in a country grappling with a history of electoral malpractices and violence. As the police have been tasked with maintaining order and security during elections, their actions have often come under scrutiny, raising questions about their impartiality and effectiveness (Mohammed, 2007). By examining key moments in Nigeria's electoral history, this section highlights the importance of establishing robust mechanisms for accountability and transparency in the police force. Such mechanisms are essential not only for restoring public trust but also for ensuring that



the police fulfil their critical role in safeguarding the democratic process and upholding the integrity of elections.

Firstly, principles of accountability and transparency have prompted reforms within the police force aimed at reducing corruption and partnership which have historically undermined electoral integrity (Alemika, 2011). Increased accountability mechanisms, such as independent oversight bodies and public reporting systems, have been established to monitor police conduct during elections, thereby fostering a culture of responsibility among officers. Moreover, transparency in police operations has led to greater public awareness and engagement in the electoral process (Arazeen, 2005). By making police actions more visible, citizens are empowered to hold law enforcement accountable for any misconduct or bias, which helps to build trust between the police and the communities they serve. This trust is crucial for effective policing, especially in high-stakes environments like elections, where public confidence in the electoral process can influence voter turnout and overall legitimacy.

The emphasis on accountability and transparency has encouraged collaboration between the police, civil society organizations and other stakeholders in the electoral process (Omotola, 2010). Such partnerships enhance the effectiveness of policing during elections by ensuring that the police are not only seen as enforcers of the law, but also as partners in promoting democratic values. In all, these principles have played a vital role in shaping a more effective and responsible police force that is better equipped to uphold the integrity of presidential elections in Nigeria.

The establishment of robust mechanisms for accountability and transparency within the police force has been crucial in shaping a more effective and responsible police force in Nigeria, particularly in the context of upholding the integrity of presidential elections (Alemika, 2015). These mechanisms, such as independent oversight committees, public reporting systems, and community feedback channels, have fostered an environment where police actions are subject to scrutiny. This scrutiny not only deters misconduct, but also encourages officers to act in accordance with democratic principles.

Moreover, these mechanisms have enhanced the community. By promoting transparency, the police can build trust with citizens, who are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement during elections. This cooperation is essential for maintaining peace and order, as it



encourages community members to report irregularities or violence, thus coding the police in their efforts to ensure a fair electoral process (Olorungbemi, 2022). Additionally, accountability measure have lead to improved training and professional standards within the police force (Afolabi, 2018). Officers are now more aware of their responsibilities and the consequences of their actions, which contributes to a culture of professionalism and respect for human rights. As a result, the police are better equipped to manage electoral challenges effectively, ensuring that the electoral process is not only safe but also perceived as legitimate by the public. In all, these mechanisms are fundamental to creating a police force that can uphold the integrity of presidential elections in Nigeria.

The principles of accountability and transparency have been instrumental in transforming the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections from 1999 to 2023. These principles have not only enhanced integrity of police conduct but have also fostered a culture of responsibility and trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. As the police continue to evolve in response to societal expectations and democratic ideals, the ongoing commitment to these principles will be crucial in addressing the challenges of electoral integrity. Ultimately, a police force that prioritizes accountability and transparency is better positioned to uphold the democratic process, ensuring that elections are conducted fairly and impartially, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of Nigeria's electoral system.

Conclusion: The Future of Policing and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria.

The conclusion of this study on the historical perspective of the role of police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 serves as a critical reflection on the evolving landscape of policing and electoral integrity. As the study assesses the progress made and the challenges faced, it becomes evident that the future of policing in Nigeria is intricately linked to the principles of accountability, transparency, and community engagement. These elements are not only essential for restoring public trust but also for enhancing the effectiveness of the police in their electoral duties. By examining the lessons learned from past experiences, this conclusion aims to provide insights into the necessary reforms and strategies appreciated can empower the police to play a more constructive role in safeguarding the democratic process in Nigeria.

The conclusion highlights several key insights into the necessary reforms and strategies approaches that can empower the police in Nigeria. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of



establishing robust accountability mechanisms that ensure police conduct is subject to scrutiny. This can help build trust between the police and the community, encouraging cooperation during elections. Secondly, the conclusion suggests that enhancing training elections. Secondly, the conclusion suggests that enhancing training and professional standards for police officers is crucial. By equipping them with the knowledge and the skills needed to manage electoral process effectively, the police can respond more adeptly to challenges that arise during elections.

Additionally, the conclusion advocates for the integration of community engagement strategies into policing practices. By involving citizens in the electoral process and encouraging their participation in reporting irregularities, the police can create a more inclusive environment that supports democratic values. In all, these insights point to a future where reforming police practices, fostering transparency, and engaging with the community are pivotal in ensuring that the police effectively safeguard the democratic process in Nigeria.

The historical perspective on the role of the police in ensuring free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 reveals a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities. Throughout this period, the police have faced scrutiny over their conduct, often highlighting the need for reforms aimed at enhancing accountability and transparency. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, it is imperative that the police evolve to meet the expectations of the electorate. By prioritizing community engagement and fostering trust, the police can transform their role into one that upholds electoral integrity but also strengthens the overall democratic process. This evolution is crucial for building a more resilient and participatory democracy in Nigeria, where every election reflects the true will of the people.



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