



Geopolitical Conditions and Election Security in Nigeria

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Abstract: In the sixty-two years of Nigeria's existence as an independent nation, a look at the political structure reveals that the core North, comprising North-east, North-west and North-central, has been at the helm of affairs in the presidency for forty-two years, either as military or civilian president. The southern part, made up of South-south, South-west, and South-east have shared the remaining twenty years. The balancing in the South too is greatly in favour of the South-west, followed by the South-south, at the expense of the South-east. This political reality generates tension in the polity, with various ethnic nationalities calling for secession, including the "shortchanged" South-east. It is undeniable that these political turmoils take a toll on the economy and security of the country. This paper set out to examine the geopolitical conditions in Nigeria, with emphasis on the election process, a democratic process that births the regimes, within the context of democratic liberalism. It is a given that elections have turned to violent processes through which governments in power perpetuate themselves, or coerce the voting public into giving way for the success of a choice candidate. This paper adopts secondary method of data collection and interviews. It reveals that securing election in Nigeria is not an easy exercise to achieve in some volatile states. The results of this scientific research recommend the introduction of Electoral Task Force as a panacea to election crises, to be deployed to the polling and collation centres to combat security challenges in the course of elections.

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Keywords: Democratic Liberalism; Election; Geopolitical Zones; Nigeria; Security; Violence

1. Introduction

The study is centred within the discipline of political geography. As a branch of study, political geography dwells on the relationship between geography and politics with emphasis on election security. The three principal ideas in this paper border on territory, politics and election security in the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

The concept of geopolitical zones in Nigeria was made popular during the regime of General Sanni Abacha, who oversaw the division of the country into six geopolitical zones– North-west, North-east, North-central, South-west, South-east and South-south for political and administrative purposes. Adopted by subsequent governments, this geopolitical definition has come in handy, especially in electoral processes.

In Nigeria, the Constitution does not only empower the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to “*pass series of guidelines at different occasions aimed at facilitating smooth conduct of election*” (Omorie, 2022, p. 2), but to also provide guidelines for security agents on Election Day. The reason for this incursion into the realms of security by INEC is not farfetched. Constitutionally, government is saddled with the responsibility of providing security at all times, but the voting process, especially in Nigeria has always been characterized by widespread thuggery and violence. Right from Independence, depending on the interests at stake, elections have always served as a trigger for violence by one ethnic group or the other. Instances include the “Wetie” of the South-west in the 1960’s, North-west in 2011, South-south in 2015, North-central in 2019. These eruptions manifest in the forms of complaints of lack of access to certain polling stations, ballot boxes stuffing, attacks of vehicles of electoral officers on duty, killing of electoral officers on duty, snatching of election materials and so on. The result is often the election of unpopular candidates into public offices.

For the purpose of this research, the following questions are pertinent: (1) What is the correlation between geopolitical zones and election violence in Nigeria? (2) To what extent do ethnicity and religion contribute election violence in Nigeria? (3) How does the synergy between the government, the security agents and INEC help in protecting the electoral process; and (4) What are the constitutional roles of the Nigeria Police Force in an electoral process? We are going to provide answers to these questions in the course of the research.

2. Literature Review

Here we look at relevant and related literatures on election and security and the origin of democratic liberalism. According to Doyle (2011), democratic liberalism grew through constitutional regime in the 19th century in Europe and currently it has spread to over sixty (60) countries around the world. In the words of Doyle, democratic liberalism embodies constitutional government, representative institutions, minority protections, human rights and roles for private property and civil society. More so, the basic principles of democracy are liberty, citizen participation, rule of law, equality and fundamental human rights of the people, independence of the judiciary, political tolerance, regular, free and fair election and so on. Olowu (1999, p. 16) simply defines democracy as a “*system of governance that underscores the plural nature of politics and hence gives recognition to the diversity of social forces in any political community*”.

This brings us to election – a process enabling people to choose those who would hold offices of authority for a term through use of the ballot. Hence, election not only helps in political mobilization, but also serves as an agent of political modernization as well as a tool for citizenship training and political socialization. This means the people choose their representatives who will administer the state. Election is either through open or secret ballot; an open ballot system operates where the electorate is allowed to vote openly while secret ballot makes it possible for the voter to keep his /her choice private.

What is security? Security is “*a collective measure used to secure people and properties against the menace of threat, hostile intruders and disgruntled individuals in the society.*” Security has always been associated with “*safety and survival of the state and its citizens from harm or destruction*” (Buzan, 1991) and freedom from harmful threats.

In the same vein, election security refers to actions or steps taken to secure the electoral process. USAID Report of 2010 on election security framework separated it into four parts, namely:

1) Physical security concerns the protection of facilities and materials, including the electoral commission headquarters and its district offices; registration and polling stations; political party offices; election observer offices; and media organizations. Facilities can also include the residences of election officials or candidates as well as hotels known to be occupied by international visitors, media or observers.

2) *Personal security focuses on electoral stakeholders, including voters, public officials, election workers, security forces, candidates, party agents, election observers and media representatives.*

3) *Information security concerns protection of computers and communication systems employed in voter registration and vote tabulation, as well as associated sensitive election materials such as voted and un-voted ballots and voter registration lists. Their theft or destruction could have a potential “showstopper” impact on the election.*

4) *Electoral events can be official in nature, such as voter registration programs or Election Day activities, but also associated events such as campaign rallies, debates, and political party and coalition meetings. (USAID, 2010, pp. 5-6).*

The above report indicates that election security takes place where there is law and order; the police force is constitutionally expected to be fair to all, and at same time, be neutral and non-partisan. The police force or security agents in playing a critical role as law enforcers in the conduct and securing of election materials and personnel in the state must be seen to be upright in executing their job in a democratic state.

3. Background to Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria

We cannot discuss the geopolitical zones in Nigeria without delving into the history of Nigerian state. The Nigerian state is more or less an administrative convenience that largely disregarded the heterogeneous cultures that were being brought together. Originally starting from with the fusion of the Lagos and Southern Protectorates together in 1906, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates was launched in 1914, paving way for the British law, way of life and administrative style in the country. Beyond convenience, scholars like Claude Ake, Eskor Toyo and Walter Rodney have also argued that it was a means to exploitation of the resources of the colony.

Jump over to post-October 1, 1960, and the hand-over of power to Nigerians. Nigeria’s independence critics, like Dr. Patrick Dele Cole, argue that leaders who took over from the colonial masters introduced tribalism in their regions; He avers, “*there are many ethnic groups which have no hope of adequate representation in the office of the governor, president or senator*” (The Guardian, August 18, 2022, p. 13).

We probe further, at the justification for the division of the Nigerian entity into geopolitical zones. For the executor, General Sanni Abacha, it was to answer the

question of imbalance in the political system. Alex Ekwueme had earlier raised it in the national conference of 1995, more out of fear of northern domination in Nigerian politics. The former Vice-President saw it as a catalyst to rotational presidency.

3.1. An Examination of the Legal Framework and Election Security in Nigeria, 1999- 2023

The current legal framework of elections and election security in Nigeria is founded on the constitution of 1999 (as altered), the Electoral Act 2022, Regulation and Guidelines for the conduct of Election, 2022 and the Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Security personnel on Electoral duty, 2020 (Omoregie, 2022:3).

An electoral act introduces provisions to promote internal democracy of political parties and at the same time provides guides for security agencies for securing personnel and materials during elections. Omoregie (2022) explains the position of the Independent National Electoral Commission in the Electoral Act on matters of election crises as stated below:

Section 24(3) grants a discretion to Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) to postpone elections where, after the elections have commenced, there is cogent and verifiable threat to peace and security of electoral officials and materials. Section 34(3) (a) and (b) requires INEC to suspend elections for more than 21 days where a nominated candidate dies after commencement of an election but before the announcement of result and declaration of the winner.

An effective investigation into election crises should start with a probe at the organization of the election and the role of the security agencies. Section 73(3) criminalizes the violation, by prescribing imposition of a fine of N10 Million or an imprisonment of at least one year upon a Presiding Officer found culpable. Be it a candidate or officer who helps the candidate to falsify election documents, the person may be fined or imprisoned or suffer both penalties if found guilty.

The role of the security agencies in Nigeria's election is specified in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Manual for Election Officials, 1999. In section 1.3.1 of the manual and INEC: Regulations and Guidelines for the conduct of Election, 2022 Part 111(104, I-VIII), security agents shall perform the following duties:

- 1) *Provide security at the polling units/polling stations and collation.*
- 2) *Take necessary measures to prevent violence or any activity that can threaten or disrupt the election.*
- 3) *Comply with any lawful directive(s) issued by, or under the authority of INEC.*
- 4) *Ensure the safety and security of all election materials by escorting and guarding such materials as appropriate.*
- 5) *Protect election officials at the polling stations/units and collation centres especially in the course of their movement from one point to the other until the process is completed.*
- 6) *Arrest, on the instruction of the presiding officer or any other INEC official, any person(s) causing disturbance, or preventing the smooth conduct of proceedings at polling stations/units as well as collation centres.*
- 7) *On the instruction of the presiding officer, stand at the end of the queue of voters.*
- 8) *Accompany the Presiding Officer to deliver the election results, ballots boxes and election materials safely to the Registration Area (RA) Ward Collation Centre.*
- 9) *Accompany Collations Officers to deliver election results to the Returning Officer and subsequently to the Resident Electoral Officer, as the case maybe, for the handover of the election materials and reports (cited in Ademola, 2017, p. 199, and INEC: Regulations and Guidelines for the conduct of Election, 2022, p. 32).*

In addition, Ademola (2017) writes that in line with electoral body guidelines, the Police Service Commission also issues its guidelines for policemen:

- 1) *Safeguarding the security of persons and property during the campaign period;*
- 2) *Preserving the safety of electoral officers before, during and after elections;*
- 3) *Providing security for candidates during the campaign and election;*
- 4) *Maintaining peaceful conduct, law and order around the polling and counting centres;*

- 5) *Providing security for electoral officials at voting and counting centres;*
- 6) *Ensuring the security of election materials at voting and counting centres and their transportation service (Ademola, 2017: 200-201).*

Ademola (2017) notes that the proviso to the subsection of the electoral act, however, limits the Commission to request for the deployment of the Nigerian Armed Forces only for the purpose of securing the distribution and delivery of election materials and protection of election officials. In election security, the Nigerian Armed Forces have a limited role to play in providing security around the polling booths.

Security agents are guided by rules and regulations, to act when asked to do so in the polling centres based on the police guideline and electoral law guideline (Dunne, 2009). Again, security agents must be known to be non-partisan, impartial, flexible, transparent and accountable. Section 215(3) of the 1999 Constitution as amended states that “the president or such other minister of government of the federation as he may authorize in that behalf may give to the Inspector General of Police such lawful directions with respect to the maintenance of peace and security of public safety and public order.” The police and other security agencies are also deployed to secure election materials, electoral officers and voters. The Vanguard newspaper of March 12, 2023, reported that the Inspector-General of Police marshaled 404,106 personnel from police and other security agencies for a smooth conduct of the February 25 and March 11, 2023, elections across all the geopolitical zones.

3.2. Military Engagement during Elections in Nigeria

Section 217(2) of the 1999 Constitution clearly outlines the duties of the military, that their primary responsibility is to defend the country from external aggression; maintaining its territorial integrity, and securing its borders from violation on land, sea, or air; suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President, “*but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly*”.

Going by the Vanguard (2022), Abia, Anambra, Bauchi, Edo, Imo, Kano, Kogi, Kwara, Osun, Oyo represent states “*in which the military has been deployed to deal with organised crime*”. According to Irabor (2022) “*the military involvement in security of almost every state in Nigeria is due to the problem of policing and a failure of intelligence services*”.

Security agencies are instrumental to the success or failure of any election in the country, and often they are accused of assisting political parties to rig elections. Bala Takaya (1992) traces the history of election malpractices in Nigeria, implicating the ruling parties as culprits in the following ways:

- 1) Using the Police, security organizations or local government to frustrate rival political parties;
- 2) Reorganizing government machinery such as the police, media, and the military to make them response to the quest of the political leadership for the purpose of patronage;
- 3) Destabilization of opposition by adopting political strategies capable of wrecking the internal structure of the other political parties;
- 4) Intimidating the opponent candidates and communities using the police to carry out organized brutality on people and selected communities.

3.3. Geo-Political Zones Conditions That Affect Elections in Nigeria

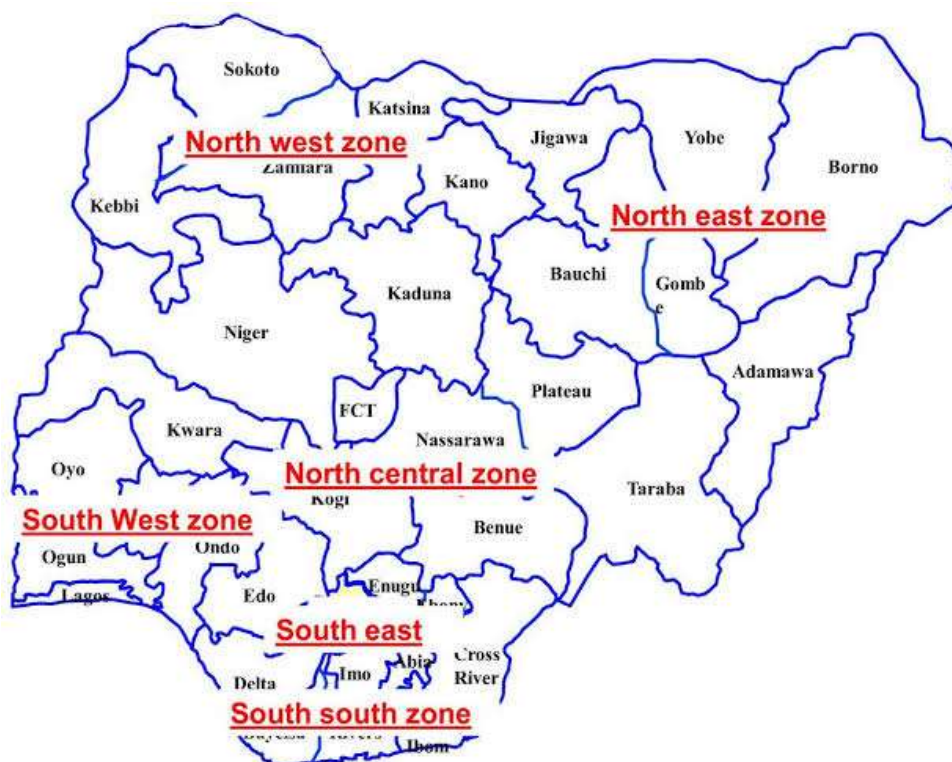
The contextual understanding of geo-political zone has its roots in political geography and our objective is to link political activity and that of geographical factors in studying election security in Nigeria. Each geopolitical zone has its own peculiarities, like militancy in the South-south, Boko Haram, bandits and herdsmen in the North-east, North-central and North-west, kidnapping in the South-west and the call for Biafra Republic in the South-east. Records also show that there is usually a spike in these activities in the various zones during elections. For example, in April 2022, in Obioge area of Enugu State, gunmen invaded polling unit in ward 2 and another polling unit at Akpugo in Nkanu West Local Government and destroyed election materials after chasing away voters, three persons were killed while some others escaped with cuts. The invaders earlier warned that the proposed 2023 General elections should not be conducted in the South-east (The Guardian, April 2022).

The role of security agents in elections has proved far below expectations. Lalude (2017, p. 114) posits that “*election has assumed a new dimension of entrenching the interests of groups and ethnic nationalities with a view to having maximum benefits*”. The security officers come in handy. In December 1964 federal elections and the October 1965 parliamentary election in the old Western Region, candidates from the Action Group accused the Police Force of conniving with the ruling party NPC to rig elections. In 1965, the election results were announced in the midst of

irregularities and the NNDP won the election amidst massive killings and destruction of lives and properties (Akinbode, 2019). This point was corroborated by the President of Arewa Youth Forum, Mr. Kazaure, who writes that tribal and religious affiliation matters more to the average northerner than party loyalty (The Guardian, May 19, 2022).

Centre for Democracy and Development Report of 2015 states that the geography of electoral conflict in Nigeria is very complex because it can build or ride on existing tensions. This has affected elections in several ways (1) verbal attacks resulting to killing, (2) fear of election not holding and (3) influencing voters' turnout negatively. Again, there are key challenges in each geo-political zone in the area of election transparency and suspicion due to fear that elections would not hold in crisis areas.

3.4. Map of Nigeria Reflecting the Six Geopolitical Zones



Source: <http://maps.nigeria.com>, accessed on October 2023

3.5. Election Security and Violence in Nigeria

Security is viewed as a state of being secured; that is, a state of freedom from apprehension (Akinade, 2009). In Nigeria, whenever elections are organized, members of the security agencies are called upon to maintain peace and order by ensuring people do not take laws into their hands. Imam (2009) writes that security agents are guided by the principles of necessity, justification, minimum forces, impartiality, good faith, and strict adherence to the rules of engagement. Iman also maintains that it is the doctrine of “jointness” that strengthens the security agents in Nigerian elections.

4. Methodology

The study adopts both secondary sources of information gathering and interview method. The information was derived mainly from textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers and data retrieval techniques. For the interview, fifty random responders were approached with an aim to ascertain the peculiarities of election violence in relation to effect of geo-political zones in Nigeria. We also went ahead to interview twenty experienced security officers who have variously participated in election exercises across the country, with an aim to gain an insight on the dynamics of strategies and tactics to protect people and properties during election.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Record on Election and Violence from April 1999 to March 2023

| S/N | Year of Election | Parties involved in Presidential Elections | Votes won | Nature of Violence | Sources |
|-----|------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 1999 | 1. People’s Democratic Party 2. Alliance for Democracy 3. All People’s Party | 18,738,154 11,110,287 (AD-APP) | Some people were killed. | Vanguard, April 23, 2011 |
| 2 | 2003 | 1. People’s Democratic Party 2. All Nigeria People’s Party 3. Eighteen other political parties | 24,456,140 12,710,022 2,214,329 | Some people were killed. | Vanguard, April 23, 2011 |

| | | | | | |
|---|------|---|--|--|--|
| 3 | 2007 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People’s Democratic Party 2. All Nigeria People’s Party 3. Action Progress 4. Twenty-two other political parties | <p>24,638,065</p> <p>6,605,299</p> <p>2,637,848</p> <p>2,516,747</p> | <p>It was poorly organized and massively rigged; characterized by violence during which 20 people were killed.</p> | <p>International Crisis Group in 2007 (Ayam, 2015)</p> |
| 4 | 2011 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People’s Democratic Party 2. Congress for Progressive Change 3. All Nigeria People’s Party 4. Seventeen other political parties | <p>22,495,187</p> <p>12,214,853</p> <p>917,012</p> <p>2,582,926</p> | <p>The North pushed for the continuation of the zoning system which did not work. In 2011, Jonathan of PDP won the election. The outcome of the election caused widespread killings and over one thousand Christians in the North were killed.</p> | <p>www.csmonitor.com>world). The Guardian, April 20, 2011</p> |
| 5 | 2015 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Progressive Congress 2. People Democratic Party 3. African People’s Alliance 4. Eleven other political parties | <p>15,124,921</p> <p>12,853,162</p> <p>53,537</p> <p>565,954</p> | <p>In the North-east the Boko Haram extremists attacked polling stations and destroyed election materials, killed at least 41 people including a legislator and scared hundreds of</p> | <p>Vanguard, 2015</p> |

| | | | | | |
|---|------|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | people from polling stations in three states. | |
| 6 | 2019 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Progressives Congress 2. People Democratic Party 3. People’s Coalition Party 4. Thirty-four other political parties | <p>15,191,847</p> <p>11,262,978</p> <p>110,196</p> <p>759,562</p> | <p>PDP later rejected the court ruling, describing it as “provocative, barefaced subversion of justice and direct assault on the integrity of our nation’s justice system”. INEC reported at least 42 attacks on its facilities since the last polls in 2019.</p> | <p>BBC News, December 14, 2019 (Guardian, 2022)</p> |
| 7 | 2023 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People’s Democratic Party 2. Labour Party 3. Allied People’s Movement 4. New Nigeria People’s Party 5. All Progressives Congress 6. People’s Redemption Party 7. African Action Congress 8. Social Democratic Party 9. African Democratic Congress. 10. National Rescue Movement 11. Zenith Labour Party | <p>6,984,520</p> <p>6,101,533</p> <p>NIL</p> <p>1,496,667</p> <p>8,790,726</p> <p>Nil</p> <p>Nil</p> <p>Nil</p> <p>Nil</p> <p>Nil</p> <p>Nil</p> <p>Nil</p> | <p>Reports come up to 109 deaths from January to April 2023, and voters turnout in the South-east was low.</p> | <p>Premium Time, March, 2023; The Guardian, March, 2023</p> |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| | | 12. Accord Party | Nil | | |
| | | 13. Action Alliance | Nil | | |
| | | 14. Young Progressive Party | Nil | | |
| | | 15. Boot Party | Nil | | |
| | | Total votes | 23,377,466 | | |
| | | Registered voters | 93,469,008 | | |

Following the objectives of this paper, some critical questions were structured for the respondents approached. One of the questions borders on the relevance of ethnicity and religion in election crises across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The answers from thirty respondents could be summed up, that ethnicity and religion play a sensitive role because people feel that making their choice of candidate based on ethnic background and religion will guarantee them protection especially in the northern part of Nigeria; this contrasts with the situation in the southern part where literacy rate is relatively high.

Another question is which of the geopolitical zones in Nigeria has the highest rate of voters' turnout in the fourth republic, and the place of election violence in determining this. Nigeria voters' turnout gallop is within 40 and 55 percent, meaning it the lowest in Africa. "The reason is not farfetched: people register but fail to come out to cast their votes due to fear of being attacked or killed by political thugs. Comparatively, top ten (10) countries with the highest voters' turnout in Africa in their most recent elections from 2017-2019 are Rwanda, 98.2 percent; Equatorial Guinea, 92.7 percent; Angola, 90.4 percent; Seychelles, 90.1 percent; Guinea Bissau, 89.3 percent; Zimbabwe, 86.8 percent; Sierra Leone, 84.2 percent; Kenya, 79.5 percent; Liberia, 75.2 percent; and Burundi, 73.4 percent" (Ojetunde, 2019).

Is zoning an issue to be reckoned with in Nigerian election? Twenty-eight respondents say zoning is another condition that affects election security in Nigeria.

In 2015, President G. E. Jonathan failed to win in the North and South-west because of zoning disagreement in People Democratic Party. To twenty respondents, political party zoning system is viewed along that line by citing section 41 of Nigeria Constitution and the Federal Character principle to support zoning. From this argument of zoning, Zwingina (2022) voices out that South-south, South-west, and North-west geopolitical zones have had shots at the presidency, while North-east has only produced a prime minister during the parliamentary system in the First Republic; and the South-east zone only had a ceremonial president in the First Republic. The North-central has not produced a civil president in Nigeria.

Question four is based on security. How does the synergy between the security agents help in protecting voters, election materials, electoral offices and electoral officers during election? And why is election security lopsided in Nigeria? Twenty of those interviewed on the question on synergy among the security agents responded that synergy still needs to be strengthened in the area of logistics and cooperation among the security agents. For the purpose of synergy and proper coordination of election between the security agencies, Inter Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) was established in October 2010 for the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria, with a common platform responsible for the coordination of security matters (Jega, 2011). The ICCES, in 2011, developed a framework for effective election security in Nigeria and this has passed through three election cycles: 2011, 2015 and 2019. In June 2022, the ICCES approved the document to harmonize the code of conduct and rule of engagement for all members of security agencies during election deployment. Section 2.0 of the document mandates security officers in elections duties to:

- (1) Ensure the safety and securing of all persons and properties that will be involved, before, during and after the voting exercise without bias;
- (2) Strict enforcement of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, the criminal/penal code as well as electoral law;
- (3) Traffic and crowd management at venue of political parties' convention/congress, campaign/rallies and other activities relating to the election Inter-Agency Consultative Committee (ICCES, 2022, p. 6).

The synergy among the security agents is for improvement in the tactical and strategic command. One of the security officers interviewed says that the strategic deployment in one area is different from the other and it is done that way to assess the level of threat to election.

6. Conclusion

The geo-political zones in Nigeria came about as a result of a military government pronouncement under the reign of General Sanni Abacha. Subsequent military rulers adopted this administrative convenience, and it has henceforth been utilized in distilling the functions of the government to the grassroots.

Beyond the convenience above, the partitioning into geopolitical zones has once again brought to the fore the entrenched Achilles' heels of the country which stems from its diverse ethnic cleavages. Realizing a form of homogeneity in this latter contraption called geopolitical zones; the political players stir the emotions of the population in pursuit of their warped ambitions. This is easily captured in election periods when we witness the grievances of each of these zones morphing into escalated violence, be it as Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen/farmers clashes, kidnapping, or secession calls. A second issue brought up in the body of the essay is the idea of rotational presidency and federal character principle, all proving unworkable solutions to the inequality that has characterized Nigeria from inception.

In order to contain the recurring violence that characterize elections in Nigeria, the Constitution has gone ahead to empower INEC to conscript the help of the security forces. This is with a belief that their presence would foster discipline at elections venues. In order to understand how security agencies play a major role in elections, we have to distinguish between security of election and electoral security. Gani (2017) have argued that security of election is an effort put up by the security agencies to defend the interest of those who put them as garrison of elections. Gani stressed that security of election is a trademark in a one-party state where security agencies are employed to handle the security of the election materials and to ensure that what the state decides is what counts and not really what the people decide at the polls. The bulk of the essay goes on to explore how even this has been thwarted, as the security apparatuses end up aiding and abetting election rigging across the geopolitical zones.

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