

Security Agents and General Elections in Nigeria: A Study of 2019 General Elections in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Free, fair and credible elections empower the electorate to hold the government accountable and to demand strong credentials and workable development agenda from prospective government official and must therefore be conducted in a secured environment. This study is on security agents and general elections in Nigeria: A study of 2019 general elections in Rivers State. The research is guided by the following research questions; what are the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State; what are the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State; what are the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State and what are the strategies to improve security activities for better electoral process in Rivers State? and the following research objectives; to examine the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State; to examine the impacts of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State; to identify the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State and to proffer strategies to improve security activities for better electoral process in Rivers State. The study used survey research design and purposive sampling techniques respectively for the study while games theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study. The study made use of both primary data gotten from distributed questionnaires, oral interview and secondary data gotten from journals, textbooks and newspapers. While the primary data were presented and analysed with the use of pie charts, bar charts and simple percentage frequency and the responses to the questionnaire items analyzed with the four-point Likert tool of analysis; the secondary data was analysed with the use of content analysis. The study amongst others found out that; the presence of security agents could lead to voter apathy, security agents can influence electoral process negatively and that during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state there was carting away of electoral materials by thug, there was militancy and cult clashes all of which lead to election violence during the elections in the state. The study therefore recommends amongst others that there is need for election education of both electorates and security officers, government needs to take idle youths off the street so they do not become political thugs, and that there should adequate budgetary provisions for the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Security, General Election, Democracy

1. Introduction

Elections form the crux of a functioning democracy, providing a crucial pathway to the establishment of authority in society. They entail a series of activities culminating in the selection of one or more individuals

to hold authoritative positions. The electoral process incorporates pre-election activities like the demarcation of constituencies, voter registration, and election campaigning, as well as post-election activities, such as voting, vote counting, declaration of results, and addressing election litigation (Anifowose, 2003). Free, fair, and credible elections are typically associated with good governance and development, providing an avenue for the people to select representatives who rule and direct their affairs (Benjamin, 2009),

Elections have become imperative in contemporary societies due to the impracticability of direct representation as was practiced in ancient Greek city-states. Today, with increased population and expanding cities, democracy has been adopted as the system of government. Elections enable citizens to select representatives who would provide them with basic amenities and other development requirements. They enhance accountability and apply pressure on those in power to govern responsibly and consider popular interests in their decisions. The significance of free, fair, and credible elections lies in their capacity to legitimize the authority of governments to implement policies while simultaneously empowering citizens to hold their governments accountable. Since 1999, elections in Nigeria have become more frequent, symbolizing an advancement towards stable democratic governance.

However, the quality of these elections is a matter of concern, with the 2003 and 2007 elections being particularly marked by dissatisfaction from candidates, voters, and observers alike (Bamgbose, 2012). The integrity of the electoral process was questioned due to instances of disenfranchisement, late arrival of election officials and materials, ballot box snatching, and allegations of collusion between election officials and politicians to alter results.

Historically, Nigeria's attempts at practicing democracy have been interrupted by military coups, with the transition to presidential democracy in 1979 being disrupted by another military coup in 1983. The third attempt at democratic governance started in 1989 but was aborted in 1993 following the annulment of the presidential election. Presently, while elections occur regularly in Nigeria, the credibility, fairness, and freedom of these elections remain debatable. The only election widely accepted to have possessed these attributes was the June 12 general election in 1992, which unfortunately, marked the end of the third republic. Another election was held in 1999, ushering in the fourth republic, but free and fair elections have remained elusive for over a decade of this nascent democratic rule (Jega and Ibeanu, 2007).

Elections are critical to a democratic process, perceived as a procedure for regulating competition for political power through competition for votes. They are the building blocks of democracy, with the electoral system playing a pivotal role in shaping the political behavior of citizens. The manner in which elections are conducted largely determines the level of political culture, political participation, and good governance in a country (Ihonvbere & Shaw, 1998).

However, in Nigeria and other developing countries, hurdles in adhering to electoral laws and ensuring transparent processes to universal suffrage persist. The need for robust security measures to prevent, contain, and control factors that trigger disorder and violence during elections is paramount. In developed countries, proactive security actions aid in preserving the integrity of elections, lives, and properties, and crucially, democracy. Election monitoring became popular after the Second World War, with the first monitored election held in 1857 in Moldavia and Wallachia by some European powers. International election monitoring emerged as a regular international activity in the late 1980s, closely related to the expansion of the third wave of democracy towards Latin America, parts of Asia, and Eastern Europe during the 1980s and early 1990s (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2009)

In Nigeria, the 2019 General Election was a critical event due to its immense political and socio-economic impact on the country's future. It constituted a constitutional exercise of the populace to determine their leader, despite challenges such as excessive spending, vote buying, and godfatherism. The role of security

agencies in ensuring effective election monitoring and outcomes is vital. In Nigeria, the Constitution mandates the government to cater for the security and welfare of Nigerians, ensuring that they freely participate in their governments. This right to participation is fundamentally exercised through voting (Ugochukwu, 2009).

However, the role of security agents in monitoring and safeguarding elections and the electoral process in Nigeria has been controversial, leading to allegations of bias and corruption. The study examines the implications of these concerns on the conduct of the 2019 general elections and management of the electoral process in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding the various ways in which electoral systems and political party dynamics can be evaluated is critical to enhancing electoral integrity and achieving more genuine representation, which are necessary when seeking to challenge the apathy, mistrust and scepticism felt by voters when democracy does not appear to adequately represent them or their interests. In a democracy, elections serve as an important mechanism and viable means that ensure orderliness in the process of leadership succession and change. It gives legitimacy and political authority to every administration. Elections play dominant roles in a democracy and these roles are hugely circumscribed in terms of portraying the popular will, inculcating political changes and actualization of regimes legitimacy. Schumpeter (1947) notes that democracy ensures that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them, this means that democracy is all about conducting elections and choosing political leaders.

The Nigerian democracy aims to ensure political stability and promote fundamental human rights. Elections in Nigeria which should have been a prelude for achieving a stabilize government accompanied with people's consent have contradicted these standards because of the diverse challenges which occur during electoral processes in Nigeria with particular reference to the role and activities of the security agents in managing electoral activities. This is a serious concern hence the stability and secured environment needed for the success of democracy have been severely jeopardized.

Elections conducted since Nigeria's independence have been played in a do or die affair and this has made the peace-loving Nigerians to be dead scared in exercising their voting rights hence the suicidal nature of the politics. Evident has shown that the rate of citizen participation in elections these days have drastically reduced due to the limited choice or lack of qualified candidates. Lacks of candidates with vision have made the electorates politically weak. Sometimes, the electorates are disenfranchised and the alienated political barons employ the use of coercion to seize power or what Ihonvbere (1989) painted in a general picture of Africa's situation as, ruler-ship became permanent, politics became cruel and harsh. More so, Adekanye (1990) notes that because of the history of electoral fraud, elections in the country have often been associated with political tension, crisis, and even violence. Actually, politics is seen as the only game in town, and it was played with deadly seriousness for the winner won everything and the loser lost everything. This quest to win election by all means has also claimed the lives of both the electorates and some popular candidates by some hoodlums who want to control the government by dubious means.

As a result, those who have the interest of Nigerians at heart have resorted to shun politics for fear of facing a sudden death in the process and this has posed a serious threat to Nigerian democracy and its consolidation. Worse still, electoral body which would have been neutral, and ensure a free and fair elections have been biased because in some cases, they are employed by some power brokers to serve as a rescue mission to some illegitimate candidates to the detriment of popular candidates and Nigerian electorates. To ensure that their unpopular candidates emerged victorious in elections, they have seen election rigging as a way out against the general wish of the popular candidates, electorates and the good of Nigerian democracy (Nwolise, 2007).

In some countries across the world, there exist strict adherence to the electoral laws and transparent processes to universal suffrage. However, following the trends on elections, there are clear indications that there are hurdles to jump over in many democracies, especially in Nigeria and other developing countries. Thus, the primacy of evolving and engaging security measures to prevent, contain and control factors that trigger disorder and violence during elections cannot be over emphasized (Nwolise, 2007). Like in developed countries, a positive security action helps in managing and achieving the much-desired success and some of levels neutrality through the security forces which includes preserving the integrity of elections, lives and properties and most importantly the democracy. Thus, the role of security forces and other agents is very important in elections and can never be over looked (Oyadiran & Olorungbemi, 2015).

Given the Nigerian environment, Oyadiran and Olorungbemi (2015) in their study notes that the dominant perspective is that free, fair and generally acceptable elections are possible only if security personnel, including the military are massively deployed because, the issue of electoral violence has become one of the recurring features of Nigeria's democratic process. What has fueled this perspective of the indispensability of security personnel in the organization of our elections is the generalized violence, which has become common; such as thuggery and flurries of electoral malpractices that have featured consistently and prominently in our elections as the hallmark. In some pessimistic quarters, violence, intimidation and electoral malpractices generally are inseparable from elections in Nigeria. Evidently, in the February 2019 general elections, as in previous elections, many armed gangs and cults offered their services to politicians to intimidate opponents and rig polls, for instance, in the 2011 polls, more than 800 people died, as post-election protests in twelve northern states while more than 100 people died during and after the 2015 polls (International Crisis Group Report 21 December 2019).

It is however open to debate, stating the fact that the Nigerian electoral ecology has been adversely marred by the security agents assigned with the role of monitoring and safeguarding elections and electoral process in general according to their constitutionally assigned expectations. During the 2019 general elections, Sanni (2020) reports that the Nigerian military and the State Security Services (SSS, also called DSS) were used for electoral malpractice and voter intimidation in 2019 general elections. The report titled "2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Nigeria" revealed that said there was evidence that the security agencies intimidated voters, election observers, and INEC officials, particularly in the southern part of the country. There was evidence military and security services intimidated voters, electoral officials, and election observers. In addition, violence in several states contributed to lower voter participation and added to the sentiment the army is a tool of the ruling party in many parts of the country, particularly in the South. More so, Adebayo (2019) reported how the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had accused the Nigerian Military and other state security institutions like the police of interference in the Rivers elections. The above and other logistical failure made INEC to suspended the electoral process in the state on Sunday and the parties, as well as observers, waited the outcome of the commission's investigation of reports of disruptions that affected voting and collation of results on Saturday. All of the allegations the military also denied.

Soibi (2019) avers that another major intrigue of the 2019 elections in Rivers State is the role of security agencies, particularly members of the Nigerian Police Force and the Military. No matter the denials from different quarters, it will only amount to calling black white, and vice versa. This is more so going by both what was seen on ground, and the evaluations of notable foreign observers who categorically stated that the involvement of security personnel in many aspects of the February 23 Presidential and National Assembly elections and the March 9 Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, particularly were not in conformity with international best practice. The above according to Soibi (2019) was unanimously expressed by the European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2019, the joint international observation mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) amongst others.

Chinwo and Ezigbo (2022) in a ThisDay newspaper report, stated how the anarchy in Rivers State during 2019 elections arising from the violent rerun of the Senatorial elections held in the state on Saturday, took a turn for the worse when some security operatives made up of soldiers and policemen in Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) uniforms stormed the Port Harcourt City Hall collation centre and tried to disrupt the declaration of results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Returning Officer for the Rivers West Senatorial District, Prof Raphael Ndubuisi Echebiri, also declared that Ideozu of the PDP had polled 107,166 votes to defeat APC's Otelemaba Amachree who scored 46,898 votes. The announcement of the results, however, did not come without drama, as some security operatives made up of soldiers and policemen in SARS uniforms stormed the Port Harcourt City Hall collation centre and tried to disrupt the process. It is against this background that this study attempts to identify the roles and implications of security agencies and their personnel in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, with particular reference to Rivers state.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State?
- ii. What are the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State?
- iii. What are the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in River's State?
- iv. What are the strategies to improve security activities for better electoral process in Rivers State?

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to identify the role of the different state and no state security agents during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state. The other objectives are:

- i. To examine the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State.
- ii. To examine the impacts of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State.
- iii. To identify the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in River's State.
- iv. To proffer strategies to improve security activities for better electoral process in Rivers State.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elections

Elections, as defined by scholars like Benjamin (2009), Nwolise (2007), and Bamgbose (2012), are integral mechanisms within a democratic society that allow for the selection of individuals to represent the populous in governmental roles. Through elections, citizens participate in the decision-making processes of their country, ultimately influencing policies, programs, and the direction of governance. This engagement also fosters accountability among elected officials due to the inherent threat of electoral defeat if they neglect popular interests (Egwu, 2007).

The relationship between democratic consolidation and the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections is universally recognized (Report of the Electoral Reform Committee, 2008). According to Okolo (2000), a

nation's electoral system shapes its citizens' political behaviors and influences the political culture and governance standards. Hence, there is a continuous need for electoral reform to ensure the emergence of suitable political leadership. Bernard (1997) posits that elections, a common mechanism in modern representative democracies, have been in use since the 17th century, filling roles in the legislature, executive, judiciary, as well as regional and local governments. This concept of electoral democracy contrasts with practices in ancient Athens, where sortation was prevalent.

Levin (2016) notes that the first recorded popular elections date back to the Ephors of Sparta in 754 BC, with Athens introducing democratic elections almost two and a half centuries later. These elections fundamentally determined leadership continuity or change and laid the groundwork for institutionalizing electoral integrity. Elections, according to Norris (2004), are crucial junctures in democracy. They signify moments of reaffirmation or change in ruling coalitions, thus embodying turning points in a nation's democratic journey. The integrity with which these elections are conducted forms a significant part of any election's overall assessment.

Democratic governance, as argued by Schumpeter (1942) and Gauba (2007), hinges on the "consent of the governed." Elections give tangible meaning to this consent, standing as an "institutional arrangement" for the competitive struggle for votes. Consequently, elections lend legitimacy to governmental authority and ensure its operations align with the will of the people (Olisa et al., 1991). In sum, elections are a critical process through which democratic societies select individuals for public office, encouraging citizen participation, accountability, and effective governance

Elections and electoral system.

Elections play a vital role in democratic societies, shaping the landscape of leadership and governance. Three primary types of electoral systems exist, each with its advantages and limitations (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2005).

Plurality or majoritarian systems, such as first-past-the-post, are often used in countries like the UK and the USA. They usually produce clear winners, but can marginalize minority representation and lead to tactical voting (Reynolds, 2011).

Semi-proportional systems, like mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) and mixed-member proportional (MMP), strike a balance between different systems. For instance, Germany's MMP system allows voters to elect a candidate in their district and vote for a national party list. However, these systems can result in proportionality issues (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2017).

Proportional systems, like the one used for South Africa's National Assembly, aim to match the vote percentage with the seat percentage, promoting inclusivity but potentially leading to a proliferation of political parties (Quinlan & Schwartz, 2017).

Overall, electoral systems should be tailored to the country's unique needs, considering factors such as diversity and the need for balance between inclusivity and accountability (Harris & Reilly, 1998). However, understanding the influence of identity in electoral politics is also crucial (Horowitz 2016; Birnir 2007).

Electoral rules significantly impact the dynamics and evolution of party systems (Gunther & Diamond, 2003). The structure of an electoral system influences the political parties' formation and their interactions, with majoritarian systems tending towards two-party systems and proportional representation systems resulting in multiple parties (Duverger, 1954).

The effects of electoral systems are more profound over time, with consolidated democracies having more stable party systems than democratizing nations (Grofman, 2008). Electoral systems also influence candidate and party behaviour, and efforts to modify these systems often aim to guide this behaviour. For instance, in

Nigeria, electoral requirements aim to encourage inter-ethnic harmony by preventing candidates from overly focusing on specific identities (Reilly, 2006). Furthermore, electoral systems impact political coalition formation, as observed in India's 2014 elections, where a broad coalition was formed before the elections (Grofman, 2008). However, unintended consequences like strategic voting can engender mistrust in the system.

Understanding the interplay between elections, party systems, and political behaviour is crucial to comprehending the electoral process and its implications, which can lead to a more meaningful democracy that promotes inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. Awareness of electoral systems' role can also safeguard against populism that threatens long-term democratic stability.

Democracy

Democracy, a term highly versatile in public affairs (Bernard cited in Seely, 1995), encapsulates a government of, by, and for the people, as famously defined by Abraham Lincoln in 1864. Advocates of democracy like Dicey (1905) and Bryce (1921) emphasized its reliance on majority opinion and popular will to determine legislation and dictate the state's welfare. Democracy, in its modern form, is perceived as a system where citizens govern, either directly or through periodically elected representatives (Appadorai, 2004).

Nigeria, a democratic state since the Clifford Constitution of 1922, has witnessed an unfortunate decline in electoral participation from 1999-2011 due to political irregularities, corruption, election rigging, violence, and politics of exclusion (Anifowose and Francis, 1999). These factors, combined with weak political institutions and rampant socioeconomic inequality, have significantly discouraged political participation, affecting the very essence of democracy.

Democracy, derived from the Greek words "demos" (the people) and "kratein" (to rule), entrusts supreme authority to representatives elected by popular vote (Richard, 2009). These representatives are accountable to the electorate and can be recalled following the proper legal procedures. According to Heater (cited in Anifowose and Francis, 1999), five fundamental elements define a democratic society: equality, people's sovereignty, respect for human life, rule of law, and individual liberty. However, this definition falls short by neglecting the crucial roles of political parties and interest groups.

Diamond (1988) rectifies this deficiency by emphasizing democracy's requirement for meaningful competition among individuals and groups for governmental power, highlighting the significance of political parties and citizens' participation at civil societies' level. While the terms "democracy" and "republic" are often used interchangeably, officials in a republic act on their judgment of the country's needs and interests, whereas in a democracy, officials reflect their constituents' views, occasionally subordinating their judgment.

In sum, democracy embodies a symbiotic relationship between elections and political participation, both essential to express popular will and reconcile varying group interests. Any hindrance to this dynamic, like the challenges observed in Nigeria, jeopardizes the democratic process and its underlying principles.

Concept of Security Agents

Security encompasses protection and resistance against harm, applying to any vulnerable or valuable asset, from individuals to organizations. It's a term with varied dimensions spanning fields like psychology, public safety, military defense, and information technology (Adebakin and Raimi, 2012). Even as our focus is on electoral security, it's vital to note its importance in other domains like cybersecurity, data security, personal security, and national security.

In Nigeria, numerous security agencies help to facilitate free, fair, and credible elections. These organizations fall into several categories. The Armed Forces include the Army, Navy, and Air Force, providing substantial

manpower and logistics. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies, such as the Nigeria Police Force, State Security Services, and Defence Intelligence Agency, among others, oversee intelligence gathering, law enforcement, and maintenance of law and order. Para-police regulatory agencies like the Federal Road Safety Corp and Nigeria Custom Service manage election-related issues within their jurisdiction (Akhaine, 2014).

Abdullahi et al. (2016) highlight the significance of safeguarding people and properties for conducting free and fair elections. Therefore, these agencies work to maintain security during various stages of the electoral process, particularly in emerging democracies where conflict is common. Critical stages in Nigeria, prone to violence, encompass voter registration, party primaries, campaigns, polling, and declaration of results. Since 1999, these security agencies have been mobilized to maintain security during elections, with the police as the primary civil force responsible for election duties.

However, this increased involvement has, at times, been linked to irregularities, such as intimidation, electoral fraud, and incompetence in handling polling station issues (Igbuzor, 2010). Nonetheless, the security agencies' role in ensuring a peaceful and transparent electoral process cannot be undermined.

III. Theoretical framework

Games Theory

Elections in democratic systems are competitive battles for power, akin to strategic games where players strive to outsmart their opponents. Drawing on this analogy, the 2019 General Election in Nigeria is analyzed using Game Theory (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1971). This theory, originating from the work of Neuman and Morgenstern (1944), provides a framework for decision-making logic and techniques in political competitions.

Game Theory serves as a valuable tool for analyzing decision-making in both domestic and international politics. It underlines how players adopt varying strategies to secure their interests, with the ultimate aim of victory. The theory applies mathematical matrices to demonstrate gameplay, with prior experiences from the game's outcomes informing complex decision-making processes. Key player motivations, whether emotional, rational, or selfish, all drive towards victory.

The theory lays out five characteristics:

- a) Games involve two or more competing players.
- b) Players receive pay-offs based on their norms and preferences.
- c) Each game has a set of rules that players must follow.
- d) Players possess varied information about their opponents' strategies and movements. In the context of Nigerian politics, the electoral system operates as a zero-sum game; the winner takes all, leaving losers with nothing. Hence, elections become a fierce contest for power, sometimes leading to violence, political thuggery, money politics, hate speech, and even sabotage (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, 2019). This was evident in the 2019 General Election in Rivers state, where competition between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) turned violent, affecting the election process's preparation and outcome.

These players, notably within APC and PDP, thoroughly understand the political arena, which is why some polling booths witnessed violence, malpractices, rigging, and manipulation. Ballot boxes were reportedly hijacked in various areas due to the players' determination to win, reflecting Nigerian politics' zero-sum nature.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SETTING

This study employed a survey research design as it enables the researcher to collect large volumes of original data via questionnaires and interviews (Ogutu, 2012). The study population includes all individuals, events, or things that the researcher wishes to study. The target population for this research comprises of 14,197 employees of the Rivers state Nigerian Police Force (River's state Police Command, 2022), and the registered voting electorate of 222,026 individuals in the Okirika local government area of Rivers state (Adebayo, 2019). Sampling, according to Biereenu -Nnabugwu (2008), is selecting representative elements from the population to study. This research utilized purposive sampling technique to intentionally select representative officers from the Nigerian Police in Rivers state. The sample was drawn from three Senatorial districts of Rivers state and the registered voters in Okirika, totaling 236,223. The Taro Yarmene statistical formula was employed to determine the sample size.

The data generated from this study was presented in tabular frequency, pie and bar charts, and analyzed using simple percentages and descriptive statistical techniques. The four-point Likert scale (SA=4; A=3; D=2; SD=1) was used to analyze the questionnaire responses and draw conclusions. The demographic data generated from the respondents were represented in the form of tabular frequency, pie, and bar charts which were then further statistically analyzed with the simple percentage means. Additionally, the responses from each questionnaire item were analyzed using the four-point Likert scale and the resulting scores used to draw a conclusion about the study. This data was used to assess the views of the respondents on issues pertaining to the 2019 general elections in River state and the role of security agencies during the electoral process. Through this method of presentation and analysis, the researchers were able to gain meaningful insights into this subject matter and make important conclusions.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The researcher distributed a total of four hundred and thirty (430) questionnaires with twenty (20) items each to the sampled respondents in NPF Port Harcourt and some sampled electorates in Okirika Local Government Area. Out of the four hundred thirty (430) administered questionnaires, only four hundred (400) copies were retrieved without error and used for the study.

Analysis of Interview Questions

Interview was adopted as one of the instruments for gathering information from the respondents. This interview questions helped to provide useful information which was of great importance to this study. From the conducted interview it was gathered that during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state, the Nigerian police force were allegedly complacent in the execution of their duties in some parts of Rivers state and security agents can influence electoral process negatively. The responses from the interview conducted and answers gotten are presented below:

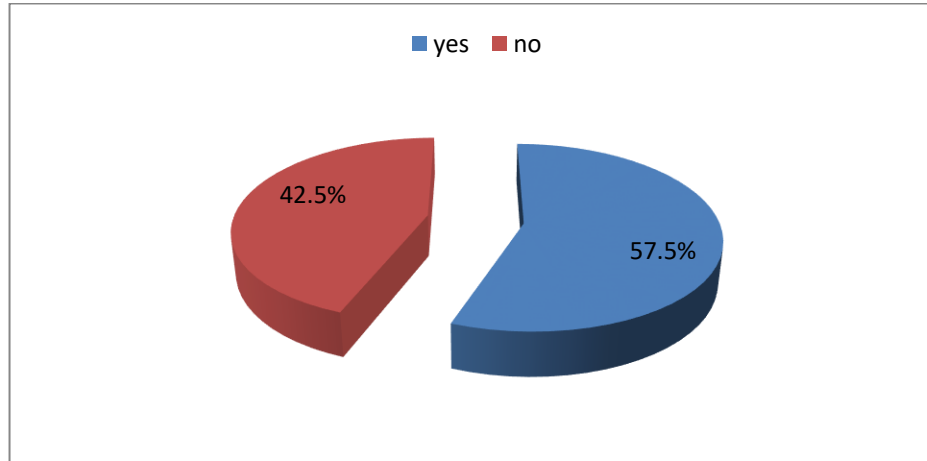
Interview question 1: Where you part of the 2019 general elections?

Table 5.1: Responses on the level of participants of the 2019 general election.

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	230	57.5
No	170	42.5
	400	100

Source: Field work, 2022

Figure 4.1: Graphical representation of participant of the 2019 general elections



Data above reveals the percentage and number of participants during the 2019 general elections. The study captured two hundred and thirty respondents which makes us 57.5% of the sampled respondents who took part in the 2019 general elections in Rivers state while the remaining one hundred and seventy did not take part in the 2019 general elections which make up the lesser 42.5% of the sampled respondents. What this means is that the study was able to capture a larger population of respondents who has knowledge of the subject matter and therefore took part of the 2019 general elections in Rivers state.

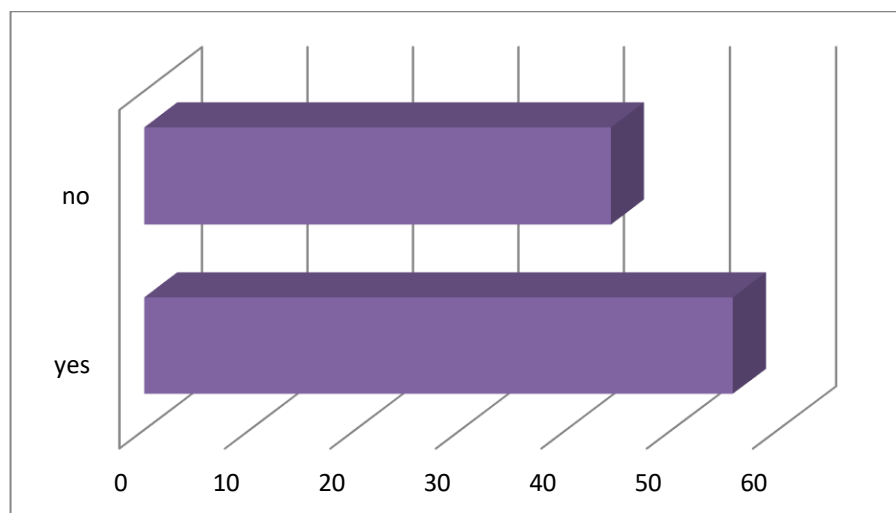
Interview question 2: Did you witness any security agency or their personnel influence or intimidate voters during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state?

Table 5.2: Responses on the respondents who witnessed voter intimidation during the 2019 general election.

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	223	55.75
No	177	44.25
	400	100

Source: Field work, 2022

Figure 4: 2 Graphical representation of voter intimidation



Responses from respondents as stated above depicts that about two hundred and twenty-three frequencies of the respondents representing 55.75% of the population stated that they witnessed different security agents intimidating voters and as well influencing voters voting pattern while the remaining one hundred and seventy-seven frequency representing 44.25% of the population did not witness voter intimidation. Data further depicts that a larger population witnessed security agents influencing the 2019 general elections.

Interview question 3: In what ways did the security agents influence the 2019 general elections in Rivers state?

Table 5.3: Responses on how security agencies influence elections

s/n	Responses
1	Through sporadic shooting of guns
2	Working in synergy with some non-state actors to cart way ballot box
3	Intimidation of voters

Source: Field work, 2022

Responses from sampled respondents reveal that our sampled population have an understanding of the security issues that occurred during the elections and therefore were able to identify the way through which security agents influenced the 2019 general elections in Rivers state. The respondents stated that electorates scamper for safety during sporadic shootings and that the security agents in most cases are seen working with the non-state actors so as to help them win elections.

Interview question 4: What are the security challenges witnessed during the 2019 general elections in River state?

Table 4.4: Responses on security challenges during the 2019 general elections Rivers state.

s/n	Responses
1	Political kidnapping
2	Political thuggery and protest
3	Cult clashes and supremacy war

Source: Field work, 2022

The interviewed respondents stated that the 2019 general elections witnessed divers' security challenges ranging from political kidnapping, political thuggery and cult clashes. The above data further proved the position of most scholars who stated that the 2019 general elections to a large extent was marred by security challenges.

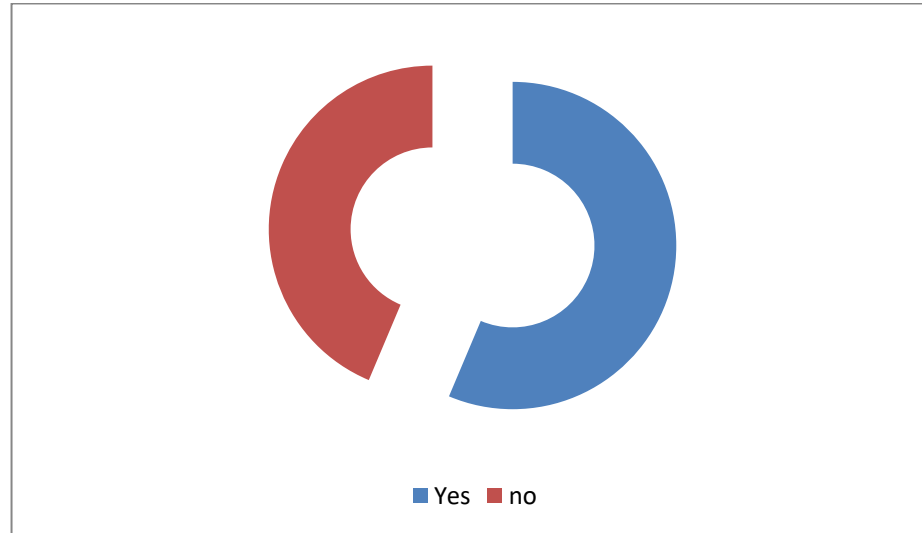
Interview question 5: Did you witness vote buying during the 2019 general elections?

Table 5.5: Responses on how security agencies influence elections

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	225	56.5
No	175	43.75
	400	100

Source: Field study, 2022

Figure4.3: Graphical representation of the level of vote buying in the 2019 general elections



Arising from the interviewed respondents, data depicts that about 222 frequencies of the sampled respondents making 56.5% stated that the 2019 general elections witnessed different political parties buying votes from the electorates in different forms and patterns. This further posed a challenge for our electoral process.

5.2. Questionnaire Analysis

Table 4.6: Questionnaire distribution and response rate

Total Number of administered questionnaires	Number of questionnaires not returned	Questionnaires retrieved with error	Questionnaires retrieved without error and used for the study	Total number of questionnaires not returned & questionnaires with error
430	18	12	400	30

Source: Field work, 2022

The questionnaire distributed was divided into sections A and B. Section A consist of the socio-demographic data of respondents while section B covers the research questions and items based on the research objectives. The demographic data are presented in percentages, frequency tables and bar charts below.

Table 4.6 above indicates that a total of four hundred and thirty (430) copies of questionnaires were administered to the sampled respondents in the Nigerian Police Force and the electorates who reside in Okirika Local Government Area. However, the researcher was able to retrieve only four hundred copies of the questionnaires while eighteen (18) copies of the questionnaires were not returned and voided while a total of twelve (12) questionnaires were voided and not used for the study. Upon the above, the study therefore made use of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires as the sample size (n) to achieve the purpose and objectives of the study.

Responses to Research Questions and Questionnaire Analysis

Research question one: What are the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State? To answer research question one, the researcher raised five questionnaire items so as to elicit responses from the respondents on the subject matter and they are presented below:

Table 4. 11: Descriptive statistics on the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State?

S/N	What are the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State ?.	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
1	Presence of security agents could lead to voter apathy	189 (756)	111 (333)	41 (82)	59 (59)	400 (1230)	3.0	Accepted
2	Security agents can influence electoral process negatively	127 (508)	192 (576)	21 (42)	60 (60)	400 (1186)	2.96	Accepted
3	They help in protecting electoral materials and officers	167 (666)	184 (552)	28 (56)	21 (21)	400 (1297)	3.24	Accepted
4	Intimidation of voters	178 (712)	188 (564)	12 (24)	22 (22)	400 (1324)	3.31	Accepted
5	Security agents have no impact on the electoral process	59 (236)	78 (234)	197 (394)	66 (66)	400 (930)	2.3	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2022

Table 4.11 above depicts respondent's responses to the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State. The table above shows that respondents agreed on research questionnaire items' numbers 1-4 with each mean frequencies of 3.0 for item 1, 2.96 for item 2 which has Security agents can influence electoral process negatively, 3.24 for item 3, 3.31 for item 4 but rejected questionnaire item 5 which has 2.3 as its frequency level and thus is below the 2.50 criterion mean standard mathematically. This statistical analysis further proves that the presence of security agents could lead to voter apathy and they can as well manipulate the voting pattern.

Research question two: What are the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State? To answer research question two, the researcher raised five questionnaire items so as to elicit responses from the respondents on the subject matter and they are presented below:

Table 4. 12: Descriptive statistics on the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State?

S/N	What are the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State?	SA	A	D		SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
6	Carting away of electoral materials	189 (756)	111 (333)	29 (8)		71 (71)	400 (1218)	3.0	Accepted
7	Kidnapping/killing of political opponents	147 (588)	123 (367)	39 (78)		91 (91)	400 (1124)	2.81	Accepted
8	Electoral violence	108 (432)	189 (567)	45 (90)		58 (58)	400 (1147)	2.86	Accepted
9	Supremacy war/clash between rival parties	159 (636)	178 (534)	25 (50)		38 (38)	400 (1258)	3.14	Accepted
10	Killing of security agents	173 (692)	151 (453)	29 (58)		47 (47)	400 (1250)	3.12	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2022

Table 4.12 above depicts respondent's responses to the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State. The table above shows that respondents agreed on research questionnaire items' numbers 6-10 with all frequencies going above the 2.50 criterion mean standard. While item six has a frequency level of 3.0, item 7 has 2.81, item 8 has 2.86, item 9 with supremacy war and cult clashes between rival political parties and their thugs got a mean frequency of 3.14 which further proves that indeed cult clash and political fighting's affects democratic growth. More so, item 10 received a mean frequency of 3.12 which is above the criterion mean standard of 2.50 and therefore stands accepted.

Research question three: What are the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in River's State? To answer research questions three, the researcher raised five questionnaire items from 11-15 so as to elicit responses from the respondents on the subject matter and they are presented below:

Table 4. 13: Descriptive statistics on the security challenges faced by security agents during the 2019 general elections.

S/N	What are the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in River's State?	SA	A	D		SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
11	Killings and political kidnap	176 (704)	189 (567)	21 (42)		14 (14)	400 (1327)	3.31	Accepted
12	Political protest	132 (528)	184 (552)	26 (52)		58 (58)	400 (1190)	2.97	Accepted
13	Political assassination and maiming	187 (748)	176 (528)	25 (50)		12 (12)	400 (1338)	3.34	Accepted
14	Cult and militancy clashes	191 (764)	154 (462)	19 (38)		36 (36)	400 (1300)	3.25	Accepted
15	Verbal war by politicians	198 (792)	171 (513)	25 (50)		6 (6)	400 (1361)	3.40	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2022

Data from table 4.13 above depicts respondent's responses to the security challenges faced during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state. Statistical analysis proves that respondents agreed on research questionnaire items' numbers 11-15 with each mean frequencies of 3.31, for item 11, 2.97 for item 12 which has political protest as its category of security challenge that occurred in 2019. More so, respondents agreed to item 13 with a mean frequency of 3.34, meaning that respondents witnessed cult and militancy clashes during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state while item 14 received a mean score of 3.25 and item 15 which has verbal war by politicians received mean frequency of 3.40. The above responses, shows the different level of security challenge that occurred during the 2019 general elections.

Research question four: What are the strategies to improve security for better electoral process in Rivers State? To answer research questions four, the researcher raised five questionnaire items from 16-20 so as to elicit responses from the respondents on the subject matter and they are presented below:

Table 4. 14: Descriptive statistics on the possible strategies to improve security during electoral process in Rivers state.

S/N	What are the strategies to improve security for better electoral process in Rivers State?	SA	A	D		SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
16	Public advocacy and sensitization of both citizens and members of the police	144 (576)	189 (567)	31 (62)		36 (36)	400 (1241)	3.10	Accepted
17	Training and development of officers of the different security agencies	187 (748)	165 (495)	12 (24)		36 (36)	400 (1303)	3.25	Accepted
18	Electoral education	129 (516)	198 (594)	29 (58)		44 (44)	400 (1212)	3.0	Accepted
19	Adequate security funding and management	182 (728)	131 (393)	51 (102)		36 (36)	400 (1259)	3.14	Accepted
20	National Security should be placed above parochial interest	159 (636)	149 (447)	28 (56)		69 (69)	400 (1208)	3.02	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2022

Responses gotten from research questionnaire item 16-20 depicts that respondents have the understanding of elections and insecurity witnessed during general elections in Rivers state; hence their ability to proffer possible solutions to the incessant security challenges. With a mean frequency of 3.10, respondents accepted that public advocacy of both the duties of the security agents and the rights of the electorates could go a long way to help our electoral system. More so, respondents accepted items 17-20 with all frequencies going above the criterion mean of 2.5. With item having a mean score of 3.25, respondents agree that training and development of officers of the different security agencies and that electoral education could go a long way to help us get our electoral system and security apparatus right.

VI. Discussion of Findings

What are the activities of state and non-state security actors during 2019 general elections in Rivers State? This section is discussed based on the data derived from table 4.11 above, as containing respondents' responses to research questionnaire items' number 1-5. On questionnaire item 1, respondents accepted the fact that the presence of security agents could influence elections with a mean score of 3.0. This further reveals the reason why some voters feel threatened to come out and vote during elections; this is because they fear about their safety.

More so, findings shows that no doubt the security agents help in protecting and securing election materials, but their presence still causes tension and hence they security agents can influence electoral process negatively as seen in questionnaire item number 2 which received a 2.96 mean score which is also above the 2.5 criterion mean standard. Okolo (2002) avers that sometimes, security men are used to intimidate both electorates and the opposition parties during elections. This phenomenon is becoming rampant in recent days in Nigeria, as most times the ruling party is accused of using the security apparatus of the state for their political benefit.

What are the effects of the activities of state and non-state security actors on 2019 general elections in Rivers State? This section is discussed based on the data derived from table 4.12 above, as containing respondents' responses to research questionnaire items' number 6-10. Responses to questionnaire items as contained in research question two depicts that carting away of electoral materials has a mean score of 3.0 as contained in item 6. This prove that, the above is one of the activities which are carried by both state and non-state actors during electioneering period. Fabiyi (2019) reported how in course of the 2019 general elections in River's state, the People's Democratic Party has decried the alleged use of security operatives and specifically the Nigerian Police by the All-Progressives Congress to provide cover for their thugs to unleash violence, disrupt

polling processes and foist fake results on the electorates. More so, data depicts that killing and kidnapping of political opponents is occurs during elections as stated in item number 7 which has 2.81 as its mean frequency. Hounkpe (2010) avers that security officers and members of different cult groups are recorded to have perpetuated election violence in a bid t execute the biddings of their political masters all of which leads to insecurity and election tension.

More so, item number 10 which has killing of police officers received a mean score of 3.12. Meaning that in some cases police officers are killed during the electioneering process especially when there is clash of interest between them and other nonstate actors. It further shows that our electoral cleansing.

What are the security challenges faced by the security agencies during the 2019 general elections in River's State? This section is discussed based on the data derived from table 4.13 above, as containing respondents' responses to research questionnaire items' number 11-15. As part of their response to questionnaire items as contained in table 4.13, responses shows that killings and political kidnap, political assassination and cult and militancy clashes are all part of the security challenges faced during the 2019 general elections. As seen in questionnaire items 12 with a mean score of 2.97, item 13 with a mean frequency of 3.3, item 14 with a mean score of 3.25 and item 15 with a mean score of 3.40. The result from our study proves that no doubt the 2019 general elections in Rivers state has come and gone but our study reveals that the elections was marred by different security challenges. According to a Thisday Report (2019), the 2019 general elections in Rivers state witnessed high rate of violence which affected the smooth success of the election while John (2019) further reported how members of state security agents disrupted the voting process when the stormed Buguma town and arrested their Monarch all of which led to protest and violence.

What are the strategies to improve security for better electoral process in Rivers State? This section is discussed based on the data derived from table 4.14 above, as containing respondents' responses to research questionnaire items' number 16-20. As part of their response to questionnaire items as contained in table 4.13, responses shows that respondents believe that national security architecture can be improved to serve the nation better especially during the general elections. This is with regards to our findings in item number 16 which has a mean score of 3.10 and states that public advocacy and sensitization of both citizens and members of the police and other security agencies can help improve security process during future elections in the country. More so, as a strategy to further improve security mechanisms, response and findings from item number 17 with mean score of 3.25 shows that training and development of officers of the different security agencies can heel them work efficiently and smartly. Wilson and Asiegbu (2020) avers that training and development is a strategic tool which every organisation whether private or public can adopt in a bid to improve the skill and knowhow of their employees. Hence, training of our security officers on better policing strategies will do better to them. More so, respondents responses as seen in item number 18 and 19 with mean frequencies of 3.0 and 3.14 respectively, both prove that voter education and electoral education will help improve our electioneering process and thus should be looked into.

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

Our study is on security agents and general elections in Nigeria: a study of 2019 general elections in Rivers State. The study focused on examining the activities of both state and non state actors during the 2019 general elections in Rivers state and as well identifying how citizens react to police violation during elections. Election is one of the democratic principles which every nation must adopt, hence it therefore becomes apt for Nigeria to adopt the globally acceptable standard in the conduct of their elections. As many nations battle with security agents and non-state actos interference in their elections, Nigeria is not left out hence the need for us to adopt best standards in the conduct of our elections. The choice of the topic and the variables for this research is based on the critical roles of these variables in determining the role of our

security agents and non-state actors in the conduct of elections in Nigeria. Conclusively, it is our resolve that when the recommendations as contained in this study are implemented it will help get our electoral process.

This study made some recommendations based on its findings which include

- i. The government should and other public advocacy groups should embark on massive election education campaign. There is need to educate members of the police force about their constitutional duties and also the electorates about their rights to vote and protect their vote.
- ii. Members of the police and other security agencies should be sent on seminars, conferences and security training so as to help develop them to work better and effectively. Training affords organisations the opportunity to develop their work force for better performance.
- iii. There is need for adequate budgetary provisions for the conduct of elections in Nigeria. This funds will be used to empower electoral officers and as well train casual workers who will also help ensure the smooth running elections.
- iv. The government should provide employment for youths. The reason why most Nigerian youths engage in electoral violence and thuggery is because they are idle and have nothing to do. When they are engaged, many youths wouldn't allow themselves to be used for electoral violence.

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