

APPRAISING THE ROLE OF ELECTION OBSERVERS IN ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND PREVENTING ELECTORAL CORRUPTION IN THE NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The paper examined the extent to which election observers can prevent electoral corruption and ensure transparency in subsequent elections in Nigeria. It adopted a descriptive method and made use of data gathered through secondary sources. The paper observed that election observation is crucial to the electoral process because it enhances public confidence and contributes to the integrity of the elections and more importantly has the potential of preventing and exposing irregularities and fraud. It contended that election observation has become generally recognised globally and plays a vital role in offering accurate and transparent assessments concerning the nature of electoral processes. The findings, however, indicate that electoral corruption has featured significantly in the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria making electoral observation to have marginal effect on the conduct or outcomes of these elections. This was because most of the major electoral corruption or manipulations that occurred were perpetrated either out of sight of the observers or in their presence due to their compromised positions. Hence, there has been a converse connection between election observation and sanctity of the Fourth Republic past elections. The paper submitted that there should be adequate coverage of election processes by subsequent election observers in terms of thorough involvement in pre-electoral processes; depoliticised, impartial, professional, independent assessment of elections and recommendations; while effective post-election engagement, beaming searchlight and exposing potential election corruption spot should be their focus to improve election quality and prevent future electoral corruption.

Keywords: Election, corruption, transparency, election observation, electoral corruption

Introduction

Corruption or fraud is undermining the electoral process in both established democracies and transitional societies (Darnolf, 2013). There is hardly anywhere in the world where there is perfect election. In most African countries, and especially in Nigeria, election remains acrimonious and the contest is characterised by electoral corruption and void of needed transparency (Jinadu, 1997; Akinboye, 2005; Ogundiya & Baba, 2007; Eme et al, 2015; Udu, 2015).

The perennial skepticisms, apprehensions and rancorous situation that usually characterise elections in Nigeria have engendered interest of the international community in the elections with the presence of international observers during election periods. Election observation has become a highly regulated political instrument based on international best practices. Election observation is crucial to the electoral process because it enhances public confidence and contributes to the integrity of the elections and more importantly, has the potential of exposing irregularities and fraud. However, it appears that the role of international election observers is constrained and their impact is hardly felt in the real conduct of elections. One then wonders whether their continual presence during elections and the reports on the conduct of the elections could really prevent electoral corruption and ensure transparency.

The objective of this chapter is, therefore, to examine the impact of election observers' presence on conduct of elections in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic, as well as how their roles could enhance the transparency of subsequent elections in Nigeria.

Conceptual Overview of Electoral Corruption and Election Observation

Electoral corruption comes in varied forms such as electoral malpractice, electoral misconduct, electoral malfeasance, electoral fraud, and electoral manipulation (Birch, 2011). These terms are incidentally useful in this conceptual overview. However, electoral corruption has been conceived to be an illegal intrusion or interference with the process of an election exhibited by parties, electoral bodies, observers or voters (Myagkov, 2009). It is concealed and unlawful efforts to influence election results. Thus it is the misrepresentation or alteration of the true results of an election. Acts of corruption affect vote counts to bring about doctored election result, whether by increasing the vote share of the favoured candidate, depressing the vote share of the rival candidates, or both. However, it is not always the case that electoral corruption assures political victory (Cantu, 2013).

Electoral law varies from country to country, but purposely tilts towards achieving sanctity of elections. Hence, most electoral laws frown at the violation of general laws which could resort to rigging, assault, harassment or violence. According to Birch (2011), the distinguishing feature of this activity is that it encompasses the manipulation of electoral institutions for personal or political gain. Birch (2011) also identified three types of electoral corruption which include the manipulation of rules (the legal framework), the manipulation of voters (preference-formation and expression) and the manipulation of voting (electoral administration).

As a corollary from the foregoing and within the Nigerian context, electoral corruption is mostly viewed as a direct sabotage of the electoral process by individuals or groups, who are desirous of personal or group aggrandisement that electoral success guarantees. The type of electoral corruption that is common in Nigeria is illegal interference with the process of election which has eventually compromised the choice of the people via vote switching, inflation of ballot votes for the favoured candidate and vote reduction for the opposing candidates or parties (Casimir, Omeh & Ike, 2013). Specifically, techniques of electoral corruption in Nigeria include but is not limited to underage voting, mass voting by unregistered citizens (neither qualified to register nor even registered to vote), snatching of ballot boxes to be stuffed with thumb-printed votes for party candidates, intimidation at the polls using thugs or even state security personnel, scaring away of genuine registered voters from exercising their franchise at polling booths, deliberate, one-sided and improper counting of votes and media manipulation of vote count/result, announcement or publication of the wrong results and the wrong candidates as winners before the proper collation of results by the Electoral Commission (Ani, Omeh & Ike, 2013).

As for election observation, there has been controversy in the extant literature concerning the concepts of electoral observation and election monitoring. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Guidelines on Election Observation (2011:5), "an election monitoring is an integral part of the election management structure and has a role in the administration of the election." In Nigeria, only INEC and its duly authorised personnel are empowered to monitor elections. This view is also shared by Momoh (n.d) cited in Abebisi & Loremikan (2013) who averred that monitoring involves an upbeat role of the monitor, who possesses power as protected in statutory books/laws; but a monitor is not an observer because he has power in law to put political parties on the right course.

However, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (1999:3) views election observation as:

The purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process and the making of informed judgments on the conduct of such a process on the basis of the information collected by persons who are not inherently authorised to intervene in the process, and whose involvement in mediation or technical assistance activities should not be such as to jeopardise their main observation responsibilities.

In the same vein, the INEC Guidelines for Election Observation (2011:3) views election observation as:

the process whereby elections in a particular country or locality are observed against set standards by an independent and impartial body of observers with the aim of identifying whether the elections conform to accepted guarantees of democratic participation, identifying flaws and challenges, and also making recommendations on how the process can be improved in the future.

The INEC Guidelines for Election Observation (2011), further simplified election observation to include three main activities, namely: to observe processes and activities organised during elections to collate facts and observations; to interpret the facts gathered against the laws governing elections as well as basic democratic standards, in order to see whether or not the elections meet the threshold of credibility as defined by law and accepted by the international community; and to outline the findings so collated and the interpretation based on them in a document or report. Therefore, involving domestic and international observers in election processes in emerging democracies has become one of the solutions to election problems that have plagued such countries.

There are also two main types of observers, domestic and international. Domestic observers are those sponsored by civil society organisations located, formed or based in a particular country and whose activities are regulated by such country's laws. International observers are those deployed by or under the authority of intergovernmental agencies, international organisations and other non-governmental organisations not based in the country conducting elections.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on theory of institutionalism which was much dwelled upon by Martha Finnemore (1996), who is of the opinion that sociology's theory of institutionalism possesses utility relevance especially in international relations and political science. Though its similarity in substance is not doubt in relation to the English school in the context of the relationships between organisations and culture, institutionalism is dissimilar in terms of the typical international relations theories (Finnemore 1996: 328). Hence, institutionalism "provides a much richer and more detailed theoretical framework than has constructivism" (Finnemore 1996: 327). Unlike constructivists that stress the value of social structures, institutionalists explore profoundly to analyse the ensuing interactions between diverse norms in all several areas.

Finnemore (1996) emphasises that institutionalism absorbs change by admitting that states' identities and interests change subject to prevailing norms at a particular point in time and their general acceptability in the system, whether domestic or international (Finnemore 1996). This of the spread of norms as espoused by institutionalists is traceable to the circulation of ideas spreading from the West (Finnemore 1996) as Western countries try hard to dominate the system politically, economically and ideologically while the Western cultural value of individualism has pervaded the human and legal rights spheres (Finnemore 1996).

In relation to international election monitoring started in the West, especially in Britain and Americas and "became an export commodity of the new 'system of interests'" (Santa-Cruz, 2005:59). Election monitoring and observation thus signify the importance of value in the context of individuals' freedom of expression and upholding of participatory rights including strong Western ties as a pro-democracy norm (Gillis, 2013).

Assumptions about actors' interests and how these interests stimulate the actors' behaviours are attributed to realism and liberalism whereby states with different interests will act differently. However, institutionalism concludes differently claiming that norms permit actors possessing contrasting interests to have very corresponding behaviour (Finnemore 1996). This idea of state behaviour is relevant to the state of affairs of international election monitoring and observation. For instance, some fraudulent governments cheat in elections to maintain power, as the case in many

African countries, especially Nigeria, yet they invite monitors and observers. Also, other states extend invitation to some monitors or observers for election purpose and refuse to invite others.

As stressed by Gillis (2013), in truism, realism and liberalism could offer an answer to certain aspects of crave for power and states' self-interest as stimulus, these theories refuse to offer explanation on why states would venture into damaging their own legitimacy jettisoning invitation to monitors or observes or by risking electoral fraud. Hence, institutionalism proposes an option of theoretical framework through emerging norms in the context of electoral integrity.

However, major drawback of this standpoint that could limit its applicability is the absence of case study analysis employed to relate the theory to world culture (Finnemore, 1996). For that reason, the utility of institutionalism about election monitoring and observation is much appreciated when utilised in combination with international relations theoretical perspectives.

Election Observation: Purposes, Risks and Benefits

The major purposes of election observation as enunciated by the African Union Election Observation Manual (2013:7) include:

safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process; promoting the openness and transparency of the process; enhancing public confidence; diffusing potential tensions; deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud; increasing political credibility; contributing to the acceptance of election results; and disseminating and strengthening international standards and electoral best practices.

However, observing election is not a straightforward exercise as it appears. At times, it becomes problematic for the observers and the observed which may eventually lead to acrimonious situations. Some reasons for election observation, whether local or international include the following. First, elections in fledgling democracies are conducted in a high-stake environment where winning an election is equal to capturing the state and controlling access to its resources. The zero-sum nature of elections and the acrimony that accompanies in these climes make it necessary for a third party to observe the elections.

Second, another reason which could emanate environmentally is the culture and values of the country concerned. The political culture that is notorious for electoral corruption and violence calls for election observation and makes election observation difficult and risky. As regards the benefits of election observation, Adebisi & Loremikan (2013) identified some benefits. First, the presence of election observers has created the atmosphere of confidence in the electorate who would have ignored voting as an exercise in futility as their votes may not count. In other words, it has been established that the presence of election observers, especially the international ones, has increased greater as well as wider political participation and thereby reduced electoral corruption. Second, election observation has been able to curb the excesses of the electoral institutions' officials. Third, sometimes, the findings of the observers, usually summarised in a formal report, have not only helped in refocusing on matters of electoral reform but have also served as evidence for the aggrieved contestants to seek redress and prove their cases before the law court or before Election Petition Tribunal. For instance, the electoral reforms embarked upon by the attempt by Nigeria's late president Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was partly due to the wanton electoral corruption that was made obvious by election observers in their 2007 general election report (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013). Fourth, as stated by Hyde and Kelley (2011), election observation has been viewed to shore up government legitimacy in the eyes of citizens and international community. Hence, international monitoring of elections has become so universal that declining foreign observers' invitation is viewed as an aberration and signals that such government has something to conceal. Finally, the task of election observation has also reduced the rate of election rigging with observers serving as "whistleblowers" and promoters of code of conduct among politicians (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013).

Historicity of Electoral Corruption and Observation

The idea of foreign monitors observing elections is not also recent. The first election accompanying international monitoring was in 1857. This was when French, British, Prussian, Russian, Austrian and Turkish representatives oversaw a plebiscite in Moldavia and Wallachia (Beigbeder, 1994, cited in Brahm, 2004). Aside other intervening factors, the post-World War II paved the way for more prospects and the practice of election observation. Aside the monitoring of elections by the United Nations (UN) in Korea and Germany, the decolonisation process accelerated it in the 1950-60s, also was the UN's "first generation" involvement in funding elections to ensure they were free and fair (Brahm, 2004) The "second generation" election monitoring missions were more far-reaching and have become more widespread with the end of the Cold War and the increasing global consensus on the importance of democracy (Brahm, 2004). In the post-Cold War period, as a number of regions, Africa in particular and post-Communist Eastern Europe, engaged in multiparty elections for the first time, election observation took a firm shape (Hyde & Kelly, 2011).

Incidents of electoral corruption are neither peculiar to the African nor the Nigerian electoral process. As far back as 1927, the then Liberian President, Charles D. B. King, won the country's election with 240,000 votes in a country of 15,000 eligible registered voters in that year. The election most rigged ever was reported in the 1982 Guinness Book of Records (The Global Security, 2011). Electoral corruption has continued to manifest itself globally. For instance, in Zimbabwe, Cameroun, Kenya, Rwanda, Central African Republic (CAR), among others, the cases of electoral corruption are all the same (Straus & Taylor 2012; Hyde & Marinov, 2012). Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has continuously won re-election in his country in unprecedented number of times and these were usually marred with massive rigging and violence.

More lately, the integrity of United Kingdom (UK) elections has been called to question. Concerns have arisen over insecure postal ballots, proxy voting, and fraudulent practices involving "ethnic kinship" voting in British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, a practice thought to make these areas particularly vulnerable to electoral fraud (Buckley, 2011; Norris, 2015). Even in the United States (US), the Republican Party has raised allegations over voter fraud (impersonation) and the Democratic Party equally alleged many claims of voter suppression; all these continue to resonate in every election period (Minnite, 2010). The US Florida case of 2000 where electoral fraud was always alleged has seems to have caught on other Anglo-American democracies, generating controversies and leading to the Fair Elections Act in Canada. Reforms of the process of electoral administration to deter electoral corruption are also currently underway in Ireland (Norris, 2015).

Starting with Namibia's 1989 vote, election monitoring has since become an important aspect of a wider mandate of peacekeeping. Here, election observation remains an important aspect of a multi-dimensional global effort to aid a peace agreement and help with the rebuilding of political systems and economies (Brahm, 2004). Currently, the most active international election monitors emanate from the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), but some organisations such as the Carter Centre, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and the Organisation of American States dispatch observers to five or more elections each year (Hyde & Kelly, 2011).

Trajectories of Election Observation and Electoral Corruption in Nigeria

General elections in Nigeria have never been held without serious doubt about its credibility. Starting from 1964 to date, elections have been conducted without recourse to severe contestation and acrimonious fallouts. It is hardly contested that elections in Nigeria exhibit common traits of corruption and irregularities (Agbor, Okoro & Adams, 2011, Omilusi, 2013). Before the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections, the media and political party agents were used to observing and monitoring elections. However, the observations of the media organisations and party agents were visibly partial or not fair due to the fact some media organisations had either apparent or concealed sympathy for one or more of the parties. Similarly, the party agents were also biased by giving reports in favour of their

respective parties (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013). The June 12 Presidential election of 1993 marked the beginning of election observation in Nigeria when the observer groups appeared on the electoral scene to observe the said election. Though the idea was considered to be completely unusual then, it has since thrived to become part and parcel of the country's electoral process, not excluding the local observer groups (Banjo, 2004). That election was believed and adjudged by the 3000 accredited local and international observers to be fairest and the best in Nigeria's political history (Awopeju, 2011; Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013).

During the 27 February 1999 Presidential election between Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo and Olu Falae, former Finance Minister, close to 12,000 accredited election observers assessed the election out of when about 2,000 foreign observers were drawn from various organisations. The European Union, (EU) sent 100 observers while the Commonwealth sent a 23-member Commonwealth Observer Group (COG). Also, over 10,000 local observers were sent by different non-governmental organisations, (NGOs) (Banjo, 2004).

Their presence was to observe the election based on the invitation of General Abdul Salam Abubakar, former military Head of State and Ephraim Akpata, former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Ofuoku, 1999). In spite of the conspicuous presence of the election observers during the 1999 General Elections and peaceful atmosphere, observers reported that all sorts of electoral corruption took place. Instances of electoral abuse abound which included falsification of voters registers and stuffing of ballot papers into boxes. In fact, Jimmy Carter opined that members of his observing group witnessed worrying irregularities and blatant electoral fraud (National Democratic Institute, 1999; Banjo, 2004; Awopeju, 2011). As stated in its report, the US-based Jimmy Carter Centre for Democracy which monitored the presidential election concluded that it is impossible for it judge accurately regarding the outcome of the presidential election (Abubakar, 2015).

The number of observers who witnessed the 1999 presidential election far outnumbered the observers that monitored the 1993 Presidential election. There were 12,000 foreign and local monitors who were accredited by the INEC in the 1999 election (Ofuoku, 2004 cited in Awopeju, 2011). In the same vein, the 2003 General Elections were also observed by more local and foreign observers than the previous ones. For instance, in the 2003 Presidential/Gubernatorial elections, the European Union Observers Mission (EU-EOM) deployed 118 observers throughout Nigeria, International Republican Institute (IRI) deployed 42 monitors covering 12 states, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) came with 50 observers from 12 countries in Africa, Europe and North America, while the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of 170 human rights and civil society organisations deployed 10,000 observers (Banjo, 2004). Just what occurred in the 1999 elections, the 2003 General Elections did not fare better because it had semblance of rigged elections. The various post-election reports of the international observers attested to the fact that Nigeria's 2003 elections were also marred by corruption (Carl Le Van, Pitso & Alao, 2003; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2007; Awopeju, 2011) and hence Nigeria then could not yet pass Huntington's two-turnover test where there could be two peaceful transitions of power. Nigeria's TMG submitted that "It is doubtful whether (...the) elections can be considered to be reflective of the will of the people" (HRW, 2004:11).

By many accounts, the 2007 General Elections were devoid of being "free and fair" by any international standards (Collier and Vicente, 2010). This position agrees with the assessment of three major institutional observation teams including European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EO), the Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Transition Monitoring Group. According to EU EO, the 2007 elections depicted significant evidence of fraud (Collier & Vincente, 2010) while the HRW reported inter alia that:

Rigging, violence and intimidation were so pervasive and on such naked display that they made a mockery of the electoral process...where voting did take place, many voters stayed away from the polls...By the time voting ended, the body count had surpassed 300 (Agbor et al, 2011: 96).

Therefore, the 2007 General Elections observers' reports were awash with a gloomy picture of electoral corruption. In the history of the Nigerian electoral process, the April 2007 elections appear to be the most deficient.

For the first time in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the scorecard on the 2011 General Elections was good by the reckoning election observers. According to them, the elections were free, fair devoid of fraud and other forms of malpractices. However, this position had been controverted by some analysts. According to Agbor *et al* (2011) and Awowole-Browne (2011), this could be possible in some state capitals where they concentrated their observation exercises. However, there were several cases of numerous thumb printing, ballot box stuffing, bargains by electoral and security officials and misconduct by the dominant parties. In other words, elections were heavily rigged in many towns and rural areas of Nigeria. As enunciated by Obineche (2011:41) "beneath the veneer of the clean bill of health given to the presidential election lie the allegations of monumental fraud, and irregularities perpetrated by Jonathan's PDP".

Appraising Election Observation in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The preceding section has shown that the Nigeria's past elections have generated controversies, conflicts, litigations and cynicism in spite of recent improvements. However, just as holding periodic elections has become a major feature of democracy, so also has observing the conduct of the election process and election itself become a novel undertaking in fledgling democracies and cannot be dismissed with just a wave of the hand.

As noted earlier, though the presence of international observers has generally been associated with improved election quality (Bjornlund, 2004; Beaulieu & Hyde, 2008), however, this position appears to contradict the international election observation in Nigeria since the emergence of democratic practice in the Fourth Republic. As stated by Hartlyn and McCoy (2006 cited in Cantu, 2009) and supported by Hyde (2011), electoral manipulation or corruption often appears out of sight of observers, or perpetrated in their presence. That is why international election observation (IEO) is being more and more criticised for not adding much to the integrity and transparency of elections. This has been the case with Nigeria where there has been a disconnect between election observation and sanctity of elections.

In essence, electoral observation has had marginal effect on conduct or outcome of elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Hyde (2011:162), in two innovative natural experiments, concludes that "even for the best-intentioned observers, evaluating election quality remains a serious challenge, particularly when pseudo-democrats work to manipulate elections subtly, without attracting observer criticism." Similarly, Lyngue-Mangueira (2012) argued that extension or expansion of IEO missions will not enable them to detect and deter electoral irregularities. Certainly, electoral corruption that manifested in the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 General Elections exposed the inadequacies of election observation in the Nigeria's fledgling democracy. It is an unassailable fact that the presence of the observers could not indeed prevent the most electoral manipulations that occurred in those periods.

Based on the field reports of some scholars such as Kew (1999), Obi (2008), who had on different occasions witnessed different elections in Nigeria, opined that some observers were not objective in their assessments. A number of them have shown partisanship, partiality and non-independence in their conduct. As argued by Jason (1991), "neither the objectivity nor the independence of IEO organisations ought to be assumed; they, too, have an agenda" (Lyngue-Mangueira, 2012, p.6). Jason's postulation was aptly demonstrated in the 2011 general elections in that despite the presence of some observers in the election, they failed to raise red alarm when a number of states in the South-South geo-political zone recorded between 95%-100% voters' turnout on Election Day with most voters voting for a single political party (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013). Campbell (2015) also noted that in the 2011 presidential election, ballot box stuffing remained and Nigerian civil organisations (election observers) witnessed electoral fraud at the collation centres, but they largely played down for unknown reasons. Many Nigerian political parties similarly accused the

INEC of aiding and abetting rigging in the 2011 elections (Awofadeji, 2011). No wonder Lyng-Manguera (2012) argued that "...while training might teach election observers how to act impartially, it will not ensure that election observers in fact act impartially when deployed" (p.5).

Kew (1999) in a study of the 1999 elections in Nigeria also submitted that most IEO missions "had generally decided beforehand that they were willing to accept, and indeed preferred an Obasanjo outcome to the Abubakar transition" (p. 33). In the same vein, Obi (2008) concluded that "although most election observer missions are driven by a desire to promote free and fair elections as the driver of democracy in Africa, in reality they must contend with powerful national, political and diplomatic vested interests." Therefore, he maintained that their assessments "are subordinated to the hegemonic, strategic and economic calculations of the dominant political elites and post-Cold War powers rather expediently" (p. 82).

Also, as espoused by Hyde and Kelley (2011), due to poor or delayed funding, many missions are too understaffed to cover the substantial part of election terrain. Truly, the failure of most election observers to adequately cover the entire scope of the Nigerian national constituencies while monitoring elections has cast doubt over the credibility of their reports. In the most Nigeria's Fourth Republic's elections, election observation was undertaken in the cities while the rural areas where much of electoral corruption was usually perpetrated were largely left unobserved. When the report of such incomplete observation was made public, the electorate who witnessed and understood the depth of election corruption in their domains usually got confused and allegations of complicity against the observers were usually levied. No wonder that "a number of post-election statements made by international observers appeared questionable and even misleading" (Shkolnikov, 2009, p. 7).

What the foregoing reveals, with the benefit of hindsight, about elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is that "most times elections are won and lost before Election Day" (INEC Guidelines on Election Observation, 2011, p.5), whereas the attention of election observers is not adequately focused on this period. Many electoral malpractices such as the appointment of electoral officers some of whom are loyal to parties in power; misconducts during registration of voters exercise in the form of falsifying registration documents and voters cards; inflating names of voters in areas thought to be parties' stronghold, while under-registering in opponents constituencies; multiple registration; disqualification of opposition candidates; denial of freedom of movement and threat to life of opponent and in some extreme cases assassination or outright imprisonment (Kia, 2013) and the unfair use of government resources by the party in power are capable of determining the results of elections before or after the election day.

Thus, it has been observed that though election-day scrutiny has increased dramatically in the Nigeria's past elections, some desperate politicians with the connivance of electoral officials have perfected strategies by moving their fraudulent efforts to pre and post-election periods (Ojo, Adewunmi & Oluwole, 2013; Onapajo, 2015). This was visible during the Nigeria's 2007 General Elections where voter cards and registers were manipulated. This could have been curbed with the regular presence of observer groups. In some cases, they arrived too late in most electoral occasions or were too understaffed due to poor or delayed funding. A similar situation occurred after the votes were cast, as observers and donors often shift their focus too quickly to elections elsewhere. This could be probable reason for post-election violence in some parts of the Northern Nigeria in the 2011 presidential election and elsewhere.

It has also been established by different scholars that the prevalence and persistence of corruption in a particular country has the corrosive and contagious effect (Smith, 2008; Moyosore, 2015; Adeola, 2015). Perhaps, the widespread of corruption in Nigeria could have possibly influenced some of the observers to come up with bias or subjective findings and conclusions which in most cases favoured the incumbent government. Hence, there had been growing concerns that election observers in the Nigeria's past elections might have been predisposed to bribery and corruption due to the corruption ridden environment they found themselves. For instance, it was discovered that "some

groups are covertly sponsored by the state authority and as such take brief from the state” in the Nigeria’s 2011 General Election (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013).

The 2015 General Election Observation: Towards Preventing Corruption in Nigeria’s Future Elections

The Nigerian General Elections of 2015 was the 5th quadrennial election held since the termination of military rule in 1999 and it was the most expensive election on the African continent (Ross, 2015). The election marked the first time an incumbent president would be defeated in election in Nigeria. In spite of some pockets of incidents and logistical challenges, the election observer missions (EOM) who were brought from the African Union (AU), Commonwealth of Nations, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union (EU) led by Amos Sawyer, Bakili Muluzi, John Kuffuor and Santiago Fisas observed and reported that the elections were generally peaceful, transparent, free and met regional principles of democratic elections (Orji, 2015). In its report, for example, the European Union Electoral Observation Mission (EU EOM) concluded that: “Election day overall passed peacefully with appropriate performance by security agencies and EU EOM observers saw no evidence of systematic manipulations” (EU EOM, 2015: 1). Also, the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) noted that despite the organisational and technical deficiencies, the conduct of the Presidential and National Assembly Elections were generally non-violent and to that extent transparent” (COG, 2015). The United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon even congratulated Nigerian citizens and the government for holding a peaceful and orderly election (Ki-Moon, 2015). This has also manifested in the least cases of recorded electoral disputes after the 2015 elections unlike the 2003 elections where a total of 560 election petition cases were filed, 1250 in 2007 and 400 in 2011 (Ndujihe & Kumolu, 2015). Thus, regardless of the observed flaws, the 2015 presidential election has been historic given the acknowledgement of defeat by the incumbent President and was an improvement on past elections in the country as noted by the most domestic and international election observers.

However, as stated in the preceding section, past elections in Nigeria were predisposed to fraud and manipulation which often occurred in spite of the election observers’ presence. The 2015 General Elections is not an exception. The elections were still bedevilled with “...some pockets of irregularities evidenced in late arrival or non-availability of electoral materials, falsification of election results in some areas, failure of the card reader machines and collusion with politicians and security personnel to subvert the process” (Udu, 2015:96). This lends credence to Zaggi’s (2015:18) observation when he stated that:

Some of the noticeable faults of the presidential elections, as observed on the day of the election at the polling units monitored, include: late arrival of electoral materials; malfunctioning of card readers; insufficient and, in some cases, none availability of electoral materials; overcrowding in polling units, and voting throughout the night which exposed the voters to high risk. Those many faults according to findings have ended up disenfranchising many voters in many parts of the country.

Thus the “extensive under-collection of the PVCs; incomplete distribution of the card reader; no publication of the final list of polling units; incompetent recruitment of staff; inadequate training of staff and poor accreditation of election observers” (EU EOM, 2015: 5) undermined credibility of the elections. Some significant cases concerning under-age voting (in the northern part) and inflated figures were noticed in the Niger Delta states (Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, and Delta states) (EU EOM, 2015). There were some cases of ballot snatching in connivance with security personnel in a number of states (TMG, 2015). It was also reported that high incidence of violence manifested some states. The most notable were Rivers, Edo, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Abia and the North East where the Boko Haram insurgents murdered forty-one people on the Election Day and prevented many people from voting (*Associated Press*, 2015).

Many of those incidents that took place could have been brought under control if the election observation had moved beyond passive observation during election periods as stipulated generally by guidelines for election observation and reiterated by the INEC. For emphasis, this is one of the problematic areas in election observation and should be seriously addressed. Preferably, aside monitors, observers should also be fully mobilised and allowed to be actively involved in pre and post-election period processes.

Consequently, election observation should be undertaken beyond the overwhelming presence of the observer groups during election period and take to the utmost level of effective involvement during pre and post-election periods. This is because, as noted earlier on, some corrupt politicians in conjunction with some fraudulent electoral officials are now targeting these periods. This is also true of Nigeria's 2015 presidential election where the pre-election issues of the card reader machines, accusation of the voter cards cloning levied against the Action Congress of Nigeria (APC) by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the alleged manipulation of election results in the Northern part of Nigeria in favour of the current Muhammadu Buhari (Aziken, Umoru & Ochayi, 2015; Usigbe, 2015; Odunsi, 2015). These recurring issues have continued to rear their ugly head in the subsequent 2015 legislative run-off and bye-elections and the recent gubernatorial elections in Kogi and Baysa States.

The point being raised here is that given the worldwide experience of the election observer groups, especially the internationally recognised and acclaimed ones, though, focus is now gradually being shifted to pre-election issues, as demonstrated by NDI and IRI delegates in the five-day pre-2015 election mission in Nigeria, more efforts should be geared towards this direction to assist in overcoming the aforementioned pre and post-election challenges in subsequent elections in Nigeria. Aside this, the INEC should be more flexible regarding the involvement of the observers in monitoring future elections. A situation whereby riot acts are read to electoral observers not to overstep their bounds and that they are just merely to "observe" and not to "monitor" the polls as stressed by the former INEC Chairman Prof Jega should be discouraged in order not to send wrong signals to electorates and international community (Jega, 2015). The statement would have been misconstrued if it was to be made by another controversial INEC Chairman like former INEC Chairman, Prof. Maurice Iwu.

Concluding Remarks

The paper examined the impact of election observers' presence on conduct of elections in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic, as well as how their roles could enhance the transparency of subsequent elections in Nigeria. It contended that observation is not an end in itself. It is only one of the available mechanisms to effectually promote electoral integrity. That electoral corruption is mostly seen in Nigeria as a direct sabotage of the electoral process by individuals, groups, and politicians who are greedy for personal enrichment that electoral success in Nigeria. While not questioning the logic of election observation which is crucial to the electoral process, it however submitted that election observers' efforts to expose irregularities and ensure transparency in the past elections, and more importantly the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria have not only been symbolic but marginal, given the recurrent occurrences of substantial electoral corruption which appears to be the trademark of major political parties. Therefore, observers usually "run the risk of being accused of mounting election observation for political considerations rather than for impartially assessing an election against international standards" (Kaczorowski, 2011, p. 87). In this context, seeing them by major political parties in the host country to possess necessary ability to curb electoral corruption and eschew connivance remain a daunting task.

Thus, election observation should preferably concentrate on the whole electoral processes. Hence, major emphasis on election observation should be laid on the extensive involvement in pre-election build-up while post-election reports should be based on thorough participation and informed positions and objectivity aside the Election Day observation to bridge the gap between electoral corruption and election observation in Nigeria. Hence, adequate coverage of election processes,

depoliticised, impartial, professional, independent assessment of elections and recommendations, effective post-election engagement, beaming searchlight and exposing potential election corruption spots and sustained political will on the part of domestic authorities and stakeholders should be the focus of future election observations in Nigeria.

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