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INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF THE SECURITY AGENCIES AND ELECTORAL INSECURITY DURING NIGERIA'S 2015 AND 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract
This paper examines the critical intersection of institutional capacity within Nigeria's security agencies and challenges of electoral insecurity during the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Despite the constitutional mandate of agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Armed Forces to provide a secure environment for democratic transitions, Nigerian elections remain fraught with volatility. The research explores how systemic deficits including inadequate funding, logistical bottlenecks, insufficient personnel training, and a lack of modern intelligence-gathering infrastructure undermine the ability of the security institutions to mitigate threats of electoral insecurity in Nigeria. The study adopts a comparative approach to analyze the shifting security landscapes of both election cycles. While the 2015 election was primarily overshadowed by the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, necessitating a strategic postponement, the 2019 election witnessed a more decentralized form of insecurity characterized by political thuggery, ballot-box snatching, and allegations of state-sponsored intimidation. Findings suggest that mere "physical presence" or high-volume deployment of personnel is insufficient to guarantee security; rather, the "functional capacity" and political neutrality of these agencies are the true determinants of success. The study concludes that the militarization of the electoral space often exacerbates voter apathy and erodes public trust. It recommends deep-seated institutional reforms, enhanced inter-agency coordination through the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), and the insulation of security leadership from partisan interference to safeguard Nigeria's democratic consolidation.
Keywords: Electoral insecurity, Security agencies, Institutional capacity, Nigeria, Presidential elections

Introduction

Election is considered very crucial to democratic stability due to its capacity to provide legitimacy, enable peaceful power transfers, and foster accountability between leaders and citizens. This makes free, fair, and secure elections vital prevent democracies from the risk sliding into authoritarianism, political violence, or widespread disenfranchisement. In Nigeria, since returning to civilian rule in 1999, democratic governance has seen several improvements. For instance, regular elections take place, the party system has matured, and civil society has grown more active. However, ongoing challenges related to electoral insecurity, such as violence, intimidation, logistical failures, and partisan manipulation of

security forces, continue to erode public trust and threaten the democratic process (Omotola, 2010; Orji, 2019).

The 2015 and 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria offer instructive case studies of both progress and persistent weaknesses in electoral security. In 2015, key manifestations of electoral insecurity included violence linked to Boko Haram insurgents in the northeast, particularly in Yobe and Gombe states, which disrupted voting in some areas (Al Jazeera, 2015). Technical failures, especially the malfunctioning of biometric voter card readers, and delays in accreditation also generated tensions across the country (Al Jazeera, 2015). In Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Abia states, allegations of ballot box snatching, voter intimidation, misuse of state resources by incumbents, and result distortion during collation were reported (Ayoade, 2015).

Regarding institutional capacity and the conduct of security agencies in 2015, the police and other security services played a generally positive role in many parts of the country. Observers from the International Republican Institute (IRI) noted that security personnel were present at approximately 81% of the polling units observed. While concerns about intimidation were raised, in many cases, the police maintain order without overt interference (IRI, 2015). The military also contributed by patrolling roads, mounting checkpoints, and securing areas affected by insurgency, though its role was constrained by constitutional limits (Nigerian Observer, 2015). Nevertheless, some states experienced partisanship and under-resourcing of security agencies, which constrained their effectiveness (Ayoade, 2015).

There were key manifestations of electoral insecurity during the 2019 general elections. These included the militarisation of the electoral environment, particularly heavy deployments in states such as Rivers, which disrupted polling and collation (Vanguard, 2019). Reports documented intimidation of voters, destruction or theft of electoral materials by political thugs, and in some cases, alleged complicity or tolerance by security agents (Situation Room Nigeria, 2019). Other challenges included impersonation of security personnel and interference in collation centres (Situation Room Nigeria, 2019). The role of security agencies in 2019 was mixed. While many units of the police and unarmed security personnel showed restraint at polling units, concerns were raised about excessive deployment of soldiers around collation centres, partisan behaviour, and failures to adequately protect election officials and materials (IRI, 2019).

Comparing 2015 and 2019, similarities included persistent concerns about voter intimidation, political thuggery, and interference with collation. Both elections also suffered logistical and technical issues, such as late arrival of materials. However, notable differences exist in the scale and nature of military involvement. In 2015, security agencies were largely perceived as performing their duties without widespread allegations of partisan interference. However, by 2019, allegations of bias and complicity in electoral malpractice had become more pronounced (IRI, 2019). Additionally, inter-agency electoral security coordination, though institutionalized through bodies like the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), appeared more effective in 2015 than in 2019 (Orji, 2019).

These variations may be explained by the higher stakes of incumbency in 2019, greater political polarization, evolving tactics by political actors (e.g., impersonation of security forces), and weaknesses in accountability mechanisms. Indicatively, he credibility of democratic transitions in Nigeria is increasingly tied to the operational efficiency and neutrality of its security apparatus. The 2015 and 2019 presidential elections serve as critical benchmarks for assessing the "institutional capacity" of agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Armed Forces. While these institutions are constitutionally mandated to provide a safe environment for the exercise of the franchise, their performance has been historically hampered by systemic deficits, including inadequate funding, insufficient personnel training, and a lack of modern logistical infrastructure. These capacity gaps often

transform the security sector from a facilitator of peace into a vulnerable component of the electoral process, susceptible to political manipulation and operational failure. In this regard, this paper is poised to interrogate the impact of Institutional Capacity of the Security Agencies on Electoral Insecurity during Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 Presidential Elections.

Conceptualising Electoral Insecurity

Electoral insecurity is a broad term that includes threats to the integrity, safety, and legitimacy of electoral processes. It covers a variety of harmful behaviours and phenomena, from organised armed attacks that prevent citizens from voting to more subtle forms of coercion, manipulation, and exclusion that weaken free choice (United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel [UNOWAS], 2017). Scholars such as Nwolise, (2007) and Ituma (2024) highlight that electoral insecurity involves not only physical violence but also structural and procedural practices (e.g., ballot-box tampering, administrative exclusion, and systemic intimidation) that create fear, lower turnout, distort results, and undermine the legitimacy of outcomes (Müller-Crepon et al., 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Electoral violence involves the use, threat, or facilitation of physical force targeting one or more stages of the electoral cycle, including campaigning, registration, voting, counting, and post-electoral processes, to influence results or intimidate participants (Höglund, 2006; UNOWAS, 2017). Such violence may be carried out by state actors (security forces), non-state armed groups (insurgents, militias), organised criminal gangs, partisan supporters, or hired "thugs." Its forms range from targeted assassinations and bombings to clashes between rival supporters and confrontations at polling stations. Notably, electoral violence can be episodic (focused on specific incidents during a single election) or structural and recurring (established patterns that recur across multiple election cycles), often linked to political exclusion, weak rule of law, and intense competition for state resources (Höglund, 2006; Andersson et al., 2022).

Voter intimidation (sometimes called voter coercion) refers to actions or threats aimed at influencing an individual's electoral choice or discouraging them from voting altogether. Intimidation can be physical (threats, assault), economic (threats of job loss), social (threats of ostracism), or legal/administrative (threats of arrest, false charges). Empirical studies show that intimidation often acts at the local level through visible armed presence, gang activity, or targeted harassment of specific ethnic, gender, or partisan groups and can significantly reduce turnout among affected communities or cause strategic vote switching (Daxecker, 2024; Enamorado et al., 2022). Because intimidation may be covert (e.g., implied threats, reputational pressure), it can be more difficult to detect and prosecute than overt violence, yet its electoral impact can be equally damaging (Müller-Crepon et al., 2021).

Ballot snatching (ballot-box theft). Ballot snatching refers to the forcible seizure, theft, or destruction of ballots or ballot boxes with the intention of preventing votes from being cast or counted, or of enabling fraudulent substitution of results (Nwolise, 2007). In contexts of weak electoral administration and poor security at polling units, organised actors may seize materials during voting or transit, attack collation centres, or tamper with sealed boxes. Ballot snatching is especially damaging because it undermines the act of voting and produces visible evidence of seizure or fraud, which fuels post-electoral crises and delegitimisation (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Nwolise, 2007).

Political thuggery is a widely used concept in studies of electoral misconduct in many developing democracies. It describes organised, often clientelist support structures in which violent or criminal actors are used by political patrons to intimidate opponents, coerce voters, disrupt rival campaigns, or physically manipulate results (Shankyula, 2011; Ituma, 2024). Political thuggery differs from spontaneous crowd violence because it is typically instrumentalised by politicians or elites: thugs are recruited, funded, trained or protected so they can act as deniable instruments of coercion. The phenomenon blurs the boundary

between crime and politics and is frequently associated with patron–client networks, youth unemployment and weak accountability institutions. In Nigeria, for example, the literature documents how politically sponsored thuggery has been a recurrent problem undermining electoral competitiveness and citizen safety (Rasak & Garba, 2017; Ituma, 2024).

Ballot snatching and thuggery often represent the operational face of electoral violence; voter intimidation acts as the behavioural mechanism through which violence and thuggery lead to reduced participation or manipulated results. Together, they undermine public confidence in elections, strengthen incumbency advantages, increase the risk of post-electoral protests or repression, and may cause long-term democratic decline if left unaddressed (Müller-Crepon et al., 2021; UNOWAS, 2017). The literature highlights responses that combine improved security sector professionalism and neutrality, effective electoral administration, targeted prosecution of organisers (not just foot soldiers), civic education, and local protection measures because single-focused responses (e.g., merely increasing troop presence) might deter some violence but can also worsen perceptions of militarisation and state bias (Daxecker, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Theoretical Framework- State-centric institutionalism theory

The state-centric institutionalism theory emerged from the broader field of political science and international relations as a response to the growing dominance of pluralist, behavioralist, and society-centred perspectives that tended to downplay the central role of the state. Its origins can be traced to the revival of state theory in the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars such as Krasner (1978) and (Skocpol, 1979) began to reassert the state as an autonomous actor with its own institutional logic, distinct from societal forces (Skocpol, 1979). The central argument was that the state is not merely a neutral arena for aggregating societal interests. However, an institutionally embedded actor that shapes, constrains, and directs political and socio-economic outcomes.

One of the most influential contributors was Theda Skocpol, whose seminal work *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) argued that states possess organisational structures and capacities that enable them to pursue objectives independent of class or societal demands. Skocpol rejected purely society-centred explanations of political change, instead emphasising the autonomous and institutional dimensions of the state. Similarly, Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol (1985) in *Bringing the State Back In* developed a collective framework that consolidated the idea of state autonomy and institutional embeddedness. This edited volume is often regarded as the foundational text of state-centric institutionalism.

Another important contributor is Stephen Krasner (1978), whose work Defending the National Interest reinforced the state-centred perspective by showing how U.S. foreign policy cannot be fully understood through pluralist frameworks. Krasner argued that institutional structures within the state influence policy choices in ways that cannot simply be reduced to societal demands. Scholars like Atul Kohli (1986) and Evans (1995) further developed the theory by emphasising how state institutions mediate development paths. Evans, in 'Embedded Autonomy' (1995), demonstrated that successful developmental states combined institutional autonomy with societal connections. Collectively, these works laid the intellectual groundwork for state-centric institutionalism as a key theoretical approach.

State-centric institutionalism is based on three main assumptions. First, it presumes that the state is an autonomous actor, not just a neutral space where societal interests compete, but an institution with its own internal structures and goals (Skocpol, 1979; Evans, Rueschemeyer, & Skocpol, 1985). Second, the approach assumes that institutional design and bureaucratic arrangements influence political outcomes. State capacity, defined as the ability of state institutions to effectively formulate and implement policies, is seen as a key factor in explaining governance results (Evans, 1995). Third, the framework suggests that differences

in institutional strength account for variations in policy effectiveness, stability, and legitimacy across nations and historical periods (Krasner, 1978; Kohli, 1986).

The theory offers a valuable analytical lens for examining the limited institutional capacity of Nigerian security agencies and their implications for electoral insecurity, particularly during the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. In 2015, despite widespread fears of violence, the relatively improved coordination between the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies contributed to a largely credible process, with security actors able to manage tensions more effectively (Bekoe, 2011; Omotola, 2010). By contrast, the 2019 elections witnessed greater insecurity, with reports of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, and attacks on electoral officials in several states (Adeniran, 2020).

From a state-centric institutionalist perspective, these variations can be attributed to the institutional weaknesses of security agencies, such as inadequate training, limited resources, politicisation, and a lack of independence, which hindered their ability to act as impartial guarantors of electoral order. Instead of acting autonomously in defence of electoral integrity, security institutions often became tools of partisan interests, thereby undermining their assumed role as neutral state actors. The theory, therefore, explains how institutional fragility, rather than purely societal pressures, shapes patterns of electoral insecurity in Nigeria.

In otherwords, State-centric Institutionalism provides a framework to analyze how the structural design and operational capacity of state security agencies primarily the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Army directly dictated the level of electoral security. This theory posits that the state is not merely a neutral referee but an active actor whose formal rules and internal hierarchies shape political outcomes.

During the 2015 election, the state exhibited significant capacity through the Inter-Agency coordination which centralized command to manage the high-risk environment. However, the inherent "top-down" nature of these institutions led to a heavy-handed security presence that, while preventing large-scale breakdowns, often prioritizes regime stability and the protection of state infrastructure over the individual safety of the electorate. Furthermore, applying this theory to the 2019 election highlights how institutional weaknesses, such as the lack of professional autonomy and excessive executive control, exacerbated electoral insecurity. Arguably, when the state’s formal institutions (like security agencies) are insufficiently insulated from partisan influence, their "capacity" is redirected toward maintaining and upholding the rule of law. In 2019, the deployment of security personnel was marred by reports of partisanship and "militarization," where the army’s involvement in civil duties undermined the formal mandate of the police. From an institutionalist perspective, the insecurity witnessed was a result of institutional overlap and systemic friction. Indicatively, the state's failure to maintain clear functional boundaries and merit-based professional standards led to a decline in the agencies' legitimacy, rendering them less effective at curbing the localized violence and ballot snatching that characterized the polls. While state-centric institutionalism is useful for highlighting institutional weaknesses in Nigerian security agencies, it should be complemented with political economy, security governance, and informal institutions perspectives to capture the societal, transnational, and non-state dynamics shaping electoral insecurity.

Trajectories of Electoral Insecurity in Nigeria

Electoral insecurity has long been a persistent aspect of Nigeria’s political journey, influencing both the conduct of elections and the overall legitimacy of democratic governance. From the First Republic to the current Fourth Republic, patterns of violence, manipulation, and intimidation have characterised electoral contests, underscoring the significance of political power in a rentier state and the vulnerability of democratic

institutions. During the First Republic (1960–1966), elections were marred by ethnic competition, regional domination, and violent struggles over political control. The Western Region crisis of 1964–1965, popularly known as "Operation Wetie," epitomised the violent breakdown of electoral competition, with ballot stuffing, intimidation, and killings escalating into widespread disorder. Scholars argue that this failure of electoral governance was one of the triggers of the military coup of January 1966, which terminated Nigeria's first experiment with democratic rule (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006).

The Second Republic (1979–1983) witnessed a resurgence of electoral malpractice and violence despite the return to civilian rule. The 1983 general elections were characterised by widespread rigging, ballot snatching, and thuggery, with ruling party incumbents deploying state security forces to consolidate power. The violence associated with that election delegitimised the process and justified the military coup of December 1983 (Suberu, 2007). During the aborted Third Republic, particularly the June 12, 1993, presidential election, insecurity took a different form. Although the election itself was adjudged the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history, the annulment of the results by the military regime led to violent protests, state repression, and political instability (Ibeanu, 2007). This period highlighted the vulnerability of Nigeria's democratisation process to authoritarian manipulation, rather than direct electoral violence.

The advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999 revived hopes of consolidating democracy, yet elections have consistently been undermined by violence. The 2003 elections were described as some of the most violent in Nigeria's history, with reports of killings, ballot box snatching, and intimidation across multiple states (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The 2007 general elections further entrenched this pattern, with international observers condemning the process as deeply flawed and marred by violence (Omotola, 2010). The 2011 elections, though hailed as relatively improved in credibility, witnessed post-election violence that claimed over 800 lives, particularly in northern Nigeria (Bekoe, 2011). More recently, the 2019 and 2023 elections reflected both continuity and change: while technological reforms such as smart card readers and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) were introduced to mitigate fraud, incidents of voter intimidation, clashes between rival party supporters, and targeted attacks on electoral officials persisted (Adeniran, 2020).

Across these historical epochs, electoral insecurity in Nigeria has evolved from overt ballot snatching and physical violence in the First and Second Republics to more complex forms, including cyber manipulation, targeted assassinations, and systemic intimidation in the Fourth Republic. The persistence of electoral violence highlights the high stakes of political office, the weaknesses of state institutions, and the limitations of security agencies in guaranteeing credible elections. This trajectory underscores the necessity for comprehensive reforms in electoral governance and security management if Nigeria's democracy is to attain legitimacy and stability.

The Role of Security Agencies in Election Management

Security agencies occupy a central position in ensuring the credibility and stability of democratic elections. Their mandate is derived from the state's monopoly on legitimate use of force, which underscores their responsibility to prevent acts of intimidation, violence, or interference that could compromise the free expression of voters' will (Bonner, 2020). In democratic theory, these agencies are expected to act as impartial guarantors of public order, upholding the rule of law and equal protection during electoral processes. This normative expectation requires neutrality, whereby security actors enforce laws and safeguard citizens without favouring any political party or candidate (Garnett, 2022). In practice, security agencies play multifaceted roles that extend beyond physical protection on election day. They are tasked with maintaining order during campaigns and rallies, ensuring safety at polling stations, and deterring acts of violence or voter suppression (Bonner, 2020). Their visibility

often functions as a deterrent against electoral malpractice, but excessive securitisation risks creating an atmosphere of fear that may discourage voter turnout. Additionally, security institutions provide critical logistical support to election management bodies (EMBs), such as safeguarding electoral materials, protecting staff, and ensuring the secure transmission of results. Effective collaboration between EMBs and security agencies is essential for building public trust in electoral integrity (Cable, 2023).

Intelligence gathering and threat assessment constitute another vital area of their involvement. Modern elections face not only physical threats but also non-kinetic challenges such as cyber intrusions, disinformation campaigns, and potential foreign interference (Palmer, 2024). Intelligence services must therefore adapt to emerging electoral vulnerabilities, identifying risks before they escalate into crises. In this respect, their role extends to securing voter registration databases, election technologies, and communication systems, which are increasingly central to the credibility of democratic processes (Jafar et al., 2022).

The involvement of security agencies, however, is not without risks. When such institutions are politicised or captured by ruling elites, their actions may undermine electoral legitimacy and democratic consolidation. Evidence suggests that partisan deployment of security forces often reduces public confidence, suppresses voter participation, and intensifies post-election grievances (Bonner, 2020; Garnett, 2022). Also, disproportionate security presence, especially the use of heavily armed units, has been found to discourage vulnerable populations from voting, thereby subverting democratic inclusivity (Bonner, 2020). These risks highlight the delicate balance between ensuring security and preserving the openness of the democratic space.

Institutional Capacity and State Failure in Ensuring Election Security in Nigeria

Institutional capacity lies at the heart of the state's ability to guarantee internal order, enforce electoral laws, and safeguard the integrity of democratic processes. In the Nigerian context, poor institutional capacity within security agencies has consistently shaped the nature and extent of electoral insecurity, particularly during the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Institutional capacity is broadly defined as the ability of state institutions to formulate, implement, and enforce laws and policies effectively, maintain internal stability, and uphold the rule of law (Lambach, Johais, & Bayer, 2015). It encompasses both formal structures such as legal frameworks, organisational hierarchies, and oversight mechanisms and informal practices that determine how institutions actually function in real political settings (Domorenok, 2021).

When security institutions lose coherence, competence, and accountability, institutional decay sets in. This decay manifests in several forms, including partisan capture of the security apparatus, decline in professional expertise, weakened command structures, and the erosion of public trust (Lambach et al., 2015; Domorenok, 2021). In electoral settings, these weaknesses directly translate into compromised neutrality of the police and military, selective law enforcement, and failures to prevent or respond to electoral violence symptoms of partial state failure within the security domain. The concept of state failure, when applied to Nigeria’s electoral security environment, should not be viewed as a total collapse, but rather as a progressive erosion of the state’s monopoly over legitimate violence and its capacity to guarantee citizens’ rights during elections. Lambach et al. (2015) describe state failure as a process that unfolds when multiple institutional capacities, such as rule-making, enforcement, coordination, and coercive control, decline simultaneously. In Nigeria, the repeated inability of security agencies to enforce electoral laws impartially and protect voters without bias exemplifies such institutional decline.

During the 2015 elections, despite notable improvements in coordination between security forces and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), reports of

selective enforcement and pockets of violence revealed structural fragilities. By 2019, these weaknesses had become more visible, as allegations of excessive force, collusion with political actors, and the militarization of polling environments had undermined public confidence in the neutrality of state institutions. Four interrelated mechanisms help explain how poor institutional capacity in security agencies contributes to electoral insecurity in Nigeria.

1. **Politicization and Capture:** The pervasive politicization of the police and military transforms security agencies into instruments of political manipulation. Operational priorities are often dictated by ruling elites rather than professional codes of conduct, eroding institutional integrity (Jackson, 2018; O'Shea, 2022).
2. **Resource and Skill Erosion:** Chronic underfunding, inadequate training, and decaying infrastructure weaken the operational readiness of security personnel, making them reactive rather than preventive in managing electoral crises (Schroeder, 2014; Lambach et al., 2015).
3. **Coordination Failures:** Fragmentation among security agencies, such as poor intelligence sharing between the police, Department of State Services (DSS), and military, creates operational confusion during elections (Jackson, 2018). These lapses were evident in both 2015 and 2019, leading to delayed responses and uneven deployment of security personnel.
4. **Legitimacy Deficits:** As security agencies fail to act impartially, citizen confidence declines, encouraging non-state actors and political thugs to fill the vacuum, thereby escalating electoral violence (O'Shea, 2022; Schroeder, 2014).

The Security Sector Reform (SSR) framework provides a useful lens for understanding these institutional weaknesses. SSR aims to strengthen the effectiveness, accountability, and governance of security institutions to ensure that they serve democratic objectives rather than partisan interests (Jackson, 2011; Schroeder, 2014). However, in Nigeria, most reform initiatives have been superficially focused on new equipment or ad hoc training rather than transforming the institutional culture, accountability structures, and recruitment systems that sustain professional conduct (Jackson, 2018). Consequently, reforms have not significantly reduced the cycle of electoral insecurity. In 2015, inter-agency coordination under the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) and the relative autonomy granted to INEC yielded moderate improvements in security management. Nonetheless, partisan influences and capacity gaps persisted, especially in volatile regions. By contrast, the 2019 elections exposed deeper institutional decay security agencies were accused of partisanship, selective deployment, and human rights violations, reflecting the failure of SSR to instill professional neutrality and accountability.

Ultimately, poor institutional capacity within Nigeria's security sector reflects a broader crisis of state functionality. When the state's coercive institutions become politicized, under-resourced, and unaccountable, electoral insecurity becomes inevitable. The Nigerian case underscores Lambach et al.'s (2015) argument that state failure is not a sudden collapse but a cumulative process of institutional weakening. Without sustained reforms that target political incentives, organisational routines, and accountability mechanisms, security agencies will continue to oscillate between fragile capacity and politicized dysfunction, perpetuating cycles of electoral insecurity and undermining democratic consolidation.

Comparative Analysis of the 2015 and 2019 Presidential Elections

The 2015 election occurred against a fraught security backdrop. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East dominated the security agenda and constrained movement and campaigning in affected areas (Chatham House, 2015). Public confidence in electoral management was higher in 2015 than in some prior elections because INEC had taken visible steps to strengthen logistics and transparency (including voter education and better transparency

measures), and because many observers judged the process generally credible (EU EOM, 2015). Nevertheless, concerns about partisan manipulation, vote-buying and localised violence remained widespread, and trust in the state's ability to guarantee safety at some polling places was uneven (Situation Room, 2016).

Security agencies were heavily involved in election preparations and deployment. The INEC and security organs sought to coordinate through formal structures, such as the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) and INEC's own security units, to protect personnel and materials (Situation Room, 2016). Where coordination worked well, joint planning, intelligence-led deployments, and localized liaison with electoral officials combined with a security presence helped deter large-scale disruptions and facilitated voting in many places (European Parliament Observer Statement, 2015). Instances of professional conduct included escorting sensitive materials, providing protection in volatile localities, and cooperating with observers in some states (EU EOM, 2015). Key manifestations of insecurity. Electoral insecurity in 2015 was heterogeneous. In many southern and central states, political thuggery, ballot-box snatching, and localized clashes between rival supporters remained problems (Olurode, 2015). Some of the case of electoral insecurity are captured in the table `1 below:

Table 1: Cases of electoral insecurity in Nigeria in 2015

State/Region	Cases of Ballot Box Snatching	Key Manifestations of Insecurity
Rivers (South-South)	Several in Port Harcourt and Gokana	Clashes between party supporters and voter intimidation
Akwa Ibom (South-South)	Reported in Uyo and Ikot Ekpene	Disruption of voting and destruction of materials.
Delta (South-South)	About 10 cases in Ughelli and Warri	Armed groups seized ballot boxes and attacked officials
Lagos (South-West)	Few in Oshodi-Isolo and Mushin	Street clashes and ballot box theft.
Ogun (South-West)	Some in Sagamu and Ijebu-Ode	Thuggery and minor clashes among rival youths.
Benue (North-Central)	Reported in Gboko and Katsina-Ala	Violence between party loyalists and voter intimidation
Plateau (North-Central)	Incidents in Jos North and Langtang	Youth unrest and sporadic shootings.
Kogi (North-Central)	Several in Dekina and Okene	Thugs attacked polling units and disrupted voting.
Anambra (South-East)	Few in Onitsha and Nnewi	Scattered disruptions and ballot snatching.
Oyo (South-West)	Limited in Ibadan North-East	Street fights and destruction of materials.

Sources: European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM). (2015)., Human Rights Watch. (2015)., Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)., Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). (2015)., National Democratic Institute (NDI) & International Republican Institute (IRI). (2015).

In the North-East the military's counter-insurgency role overlapped with electoral tasks: special arrangements and heavy military presence were necessary in areas where Boko Haram still operated, which helped open some polling sites but also risked conflating

counter-insurgency and electoral roles (Chatham House, 2015). Overall, while there were localized incidents of violence and malpractice, international observer missions judged the 2015 presidential poll substantially improved compared with earlier cycles (EU EOM, 2015).

The 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria

The 2019 election unfolded in a more politicized context. INEC had new leadership and introduced additional logistical measures, but the run-up to polling was marked by heightened political tension, aggressive campaigning, and worrying signs of possible manipulation. The sudden, highly controversial postponement of the presidential vote announced by INEC five hours before polls were due to open and rescheduled for two days later amplified distrust among the electorate and observers and became a focal point for accusations about logistics, preparedness, and possible manipulation (Axios, 2019; EEAS/EU EOM, 2019). Public trust was lower in many quarters after the postponement, particularly among voters who had traveled to vote or had made plans around the original date (EEAS, 2019). Security agencies were again central to election day operations, but their conduct and the character of deployment drew sharper scrutiny in 2019. Observers and civil society documented more frequent and credible allegations of partisan behaviour or complicity by some security personnel, including selective interventions that appeared to favour particular actors, and a broader perception of militarisation of polling environments in some states (EEAS/EU EOM, 2019; Verjee et al., 2018). Coordination structures like ICCES existed, but reports indicated gaps in consistent and impartial command and control. In some localities, policing was effective and professional, while in others, security responses were slow, uneven, or allegedly partisan (Situation Room, 2019). The heavy use of armed forces in certain areas generated debate about whether military presence deterred violence or intimidated voters and election workers (Militarisation studies; ResearchGate analysis, 2019). Like in 2015, the 2019, the catalogue of problems included documented incidents of intimidation, ballot-box snatching, disruption to result collation, and selective enforcement (EEAS, 2019). There were numerous credible reports that some security personnel failed to intervene promptly when violence occurred or were perceived to have assisted partisan actors a pattern that raised questions about both training and political neutrality (EEAS/EU EOM, 2019; Verjee et al., 2018). The postponement itself had security consequences: crowded, stressful re-deployments and opportunities for manipulation as observers and stakeholders scrambled to adapt (Axios, 2019).

Table 2: Selected States, Cases of Ballot Box Snatching, and Manifestations of Electoral Insecurity in 2019

State/Region	Cases of Ballot Box Snatching	Key Manifestations of Insecurity
Kano (North-West	Widespread in Nasarawa and Dala LGAs	Street violence, destruction of materials, and security personnel accused of partisanship.
Rivers (South-South)	Widespread in Port Harcourt, Khana, and Abonnema	Armed attacks on polling units, disruption of collation, and allegations of security complicity.
Akwa Ibom (South-South)	Several in Uyo and Oron	Intimidation of voters, destruction of materials, and interference by political thugs.
Delta (South-South)	Multiple in Ughelli and Warri	Ballot snatching and obstruction of result transmission.
Lagos (South-West)	Isolated in Okota and Surulere	Party thugs disrupted voting and intimidated voters; reports of selective police response.
Ogun (South-West)	Few in Abeokuta	Violence between rival party groups; sporadic

	and Sagamu	ballot box theft.
Benue (North-Central)	Cases in Gboko and Otukpo	Youth clashes and seizure of ballot boxes; delayed intervention by security forces.
Plateau (North-Central)	Some in Jos North and Barkin Ladi	Disruption of voting and destruction of result sheets.
Kogi (North-Central)	Several in Okene and Lokoja	Armed thugs disrupted polling; voters and observers attacked.
Anambra (South-East)	Few in Onitsha and Awka	Ballot box snatching and intimidation by rival party supporters.

Sources: European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM). (2019). Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2019). National Democratic Institute (NDI) & International Republican Institute (IRI). (2019)

Comparative Findings and Discussion

Between 2015 and 2019, several continuities remained evident. First, the involvement of security agencies, police, military (where legally deployed), and intelligence agencies continued to be crucial for conducting elections; in both cycles, these actors were responsible for protecting INEC personnel and materials, as well as maintaining public order. Second, coordination mechanisms such as ICCES and INEC's security committees continued to serve as the official structure for joint planning; however, the effectiveness of implementation varied greatly across states and localities in both years. Third, political thuggery, localized ballot-snatching, and intimidation remained common forms of electoral insecurity.

Important differences between the two elections also stand out. The 2015 poll, despite operating under the severe constraint of Boko Haram in the North-East, benefited from stronger international and domestic confidence in INEC's logistical management and a perception of comparatively greater impartiality by many security actors; observers characterised the vote as substantially improved compared with previous cycles, perceptions of impartiality had weakened: the last-minute postponement, more visible allegations of partisan security behaviour, and a sense of greater militarization in some areas heightened public distrust. The scale and diffusion of allegations of complicity by security personnel, particularly accusations that elements within security services failed to protect voters or actively sided with particular actors, were more prominent in 2019 than in 2015 (EEAS, 2019). Institutional capacity as a causal factor. The comparative record points strongly to institutional capacity deficits within security agencies as a principal causal factor shaping observed patterns of electoral insecurity. Four interlinked capacity weaknesses recur across the evidence:

1**. Training and professionalism**. In 2015 and 2019, observer reports and civil society monitoring identified gaps in election-specific policing training, such as crowd management, impartial protection of polling sites, and rules of engagement suited to electoral settings (Attoh, 2015; EEAS, 2019). When personnel lacked such training, responses to violence were inconsistent or inappropriate.

2. **Resources and logistics**. Inadequate resourcing, from poor communication to insufficient mobility, constrains timely responses in many localities. Shortfalls in logistics amplified the harms of the 2019 postponement and complicated the secure deployment of materials and personnel (Situation Room, 2016; EEAS, 2019).

3. **Command structure and inter-agency coordination**. Formal coordination mechanisms (ICCES, INEC security committees) existed, but weak horizontal and vertical coordination unclear command lines between police, military (when deployed), and intelligence produced uneven performance. This fragmentation helped create opportunities for local politicization and conflicting operational priorities (Attoh, 2015; Situation Room, 2019).

3. **Political neutrality and institutional independence**. Perhaps most consequential, politicization and weak institutional safeguards against partisan capture undermined public trust. Allegations that some security actors acted in partisan ways in 2019, whether through selective enforcement, acquiescence to thuggery, or heavy-handed deployments that favored particular outcomes, point to institutional vulnerabilities in neutrality and accountability (EEAS, 2019; Verjee et al., 2018). These capacity deficits help explain why the presence of security forces did not uniformly translate into safer elections. Institutional weaknesses transformed security deployments into mixed outcomes: in some contexts, they protected voting and the collation of results; in others, they became part of the problem by failing to deter malpractice or by undermining impartiality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study analyzed patterns of electoral insecurity during Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 presidential elections, with particular attention to persistent issues such as violence, ballot-box snatching, voter intimidation, and the politicization of security agencies. The findings indicate that electoral insecurity in 2015 was largely localized, manifesting in incidents of political thuggery, ballot-box theft, and clashes between rival party supporters in several southern and central states. While the national transfer of power proceeded relatively peacefully, isolated but significant security failures undermined voter confidence in certain areas.

In contrast, the 2019 elections exhibited a broader and more systemic pattern of insecurity, encompassing widespread voter intimidation, disruption of result collation, and selective enforcement of electoral regulations. Credible reports suggested that, in numerous instances, security personnel either failed to respond promptly or were perceived as facilitating partisan interests, further eroding public trust in the electoral process. The study's findings demonstrate that, despite improvements in institutional reforms and inter-agency coordination between 2015 and 2019, the persistence of violence and manipulation highlights deep-seated structural weaknesses within Nigeria's electoral security framework.

Consequently, the study argues that electoral insecurity in Nigeria is not merely a consequence of institutional deficiencies but reflects entrenched political interests, the instrumentalization of violence, and a lack of accountability in the conduct of security agencies during elections.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen security sector performance and promote credible elections:

1. **Strengthen Police Independence and Professionalism:** Insulate the police from political influence during elections to ensure neutrality and impartiality.
2. **Enhance Election Security Training:** Provide periodic, specialized training on crowd control, human rights, and inter-agency coordination to improve operational efficiency.
3. **Enforce the Code of Conduct:** Ensure strict adherence to security personnel guidelines, with monitoring teams empowered to document and report misconduct.
4. **Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish independent review and disciplinary mechanisms, such as a joint electoral accountability panel, to investigate and prosecute electoral misconduct by security agents.

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