

Review of: "Government interference in election administration and lethal electoral irregularities in Africa: Evidence from Nigeria"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

- In response to the invitation to review this article, I have found that it worth doing a careful review, as it regards a vital topic, which is elections in countries that are new to practicing electoral democracy in Africa, Nigeria as a model. Indeed, the article is good in the theoretical aspect, but in the applied side it is not aligned with the same quality. Below are some comments:

Abstract

Extant literature is replete with fine-grained explanations of problems of electoral irregularities in developing countries, but has not acknowledged how government interference in election management results in electoral irregularities. Thus, this study uses micro-level analysis to argue that Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has not considerably asserted its independence to guarantee quality elections due to government interference in its management of Nigerian elections. The study leverages key informant interviews, available documents, and personal experience premised on in-depth descriptive statistical and content analyses. The data elicited from these methods reveals that government interference in INEC membership composition, finances, and operations considerably accounts for recurring lethal electoral irregularities and deflates public confidence in the electoral process to stunning lows in Nigeria. This interference also exposes the weakness of government-driven electoral reforms, which underscore the need for voter-driven reformation to usher in an electoral system that is best and acceptable to the majority of the voting population in Nigeria and elsewhere.

- The title of the article "Government interference in election administration and lethal electoral irregularities in Africa: Evidence from Nigeria" is not consistent with the question raised in the abstract "how government interference in election management results in electoral irregularities". Then the study reproduces the same question with an addition "government interference in Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) membership composition, finances, and operations considerably accounts for recurring lethal electoral irregularities and deflates public confidence in the electoral process to stunning lows in Nigeria".
- The data obtained through three sources (interviews, documents, and personal experience) after being processed statistically will transformed into information. This information in turn reveals that the government's interference in INEC membership composition, finances, and electoral operations accounts for recurring lethal electoral irregularities and reduces the public confidence in the electoral process to lowest levels in Nigeria.

Introduction

Between 1999 and 1999, many African countries dethroned dictatorial, military, or one-party states and embraced multiparty politics embedded in electoral democratic practice.

- The phrase "between 1999 and 1999" intended to the period between 1990 and 1999 or the decade of the nineties.

Articles 45 of the 1991 Zambian Constitution, Article 46 of the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution, and Section 158 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, respectively guaranteed the independence or autonomy of the Zambian, Ghanaian, and Nigerian EMBs.

- Article (45) of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) No. 2 of 2016, Article (43 and 46) of the amended Ghanaian Constitution of 1996, and Article (153 and 158-2) of the Nigerian Constitution. This part needs to be revised according to updated texts of the constitutions of the respective countries.

Thus, this study raises the question as to why some electoral institutions such as the EMBs and the courts have asserted their independence and recorded improvement in their election management and adjudication functions; others are yet to achieve a similar feat.

The study did not settle down in identifying the research question but it raised many different questions, without finding the answer. The introduction is supposed to address the research problem and indicate the question and/or questions that the study will attempt to address. The study raises this question: "Why did some electoral institutions, such as electoral management bodies and courts, assert their independence and recorded an improvement in the administration of elections and adjudication functions in elections; while others have not achieved a similar achievement yet?" There is no answer to it. It is logical for this question to be the main question or one of the questions that the study seeks to address as it relates to the independency of the electoral management body. The study in conclusion indicates to the loss of independence of the INEC in addition to other points.

Specifically, elections in Nigeria have not only been contentious, controversial, and contested (Mbah, Nwangwu & Ugwu, 2019), but they have also become violent, deadly, and life-taking (Angerbrandt, 2018; Ashindorbe, 2018). While some scholars argue that elections in Nigeria are highly militarized and deployment of security personnel to secure the election environment done in a fashion akin to a nation in a war situation (Mbah et al., 2020), others argue that they exude a sense of ethnoreligious dislikes expressed in hate speech that often leads to election violence (Ezeibe, 2020). To contribute to this debate, the study undertakes a micro-level analysis of Nigeria's fourth republic to shed light on a macro-level phenomenon of government interference in election administration.

- In the context of the elections in Nigeria, two very important issues were mentioned, namely the militarization of the elections and hate speech, but without linking them to electoral irregularities. The two topics can be dealt as factors in connection with government interference with electoral violations in terms of finding the causal relationship between them, in order to deepen the study and its comprehensiveness, or addressing as a research question.

Government usually interferes in election administration to increase its chances of winning to remain in power and, most times, this leads to electoral irregularities that become violent, bloody, and lethal.

- The saying "government interferes in the administration of elections" is a vague argument because it is the political parties in power that interfere in the management of the electoral process in order to remain in power. And through the phrase "government's interference most times leads to electoral irregularities that become violent, bloody, and lethal" it is understood that the author has reached to address the research problem in advance. This eliminates the need to conduct the study and go through the hardship of analysis and research.

Theoretical understanding of illiberal democracy

The study adopts illiberal democracy as a framework of analysis to explain how government interference in election administration undermines the democratic process in developing African countries, using Nigeria as a frame of reference.

- It is preferable to put this paragraph in introduction of the study, although it is expressed in another way in the introduction.

Again, illiberal democracy, as opposed to liberal democracy, which protects individual rights and limits government operations, hampers democratic values on fundamental human rights (Plattner, 2019).

- This paragraph needs to be revised because it is ambiguous and contradictory in standings of meaning.

Conceptual understanding of electoral irregularities and voter participation

Electoral irregularities, as a concept, have always been a thorn in the flesh of credible management of elections. They represent flawed or manipulated elections that deflate voter participation.

- Here, it is necessary to refer to other factors that lead to decrease in voter participation in the elections and tendency weaken voter turnout in the elections. The electoral irregularities and manipulation are not the solely reasons for lessen voter participation in the elections.

Methodology

The study adopted key informant interviews, available documents, and personal experience as active participants in Nigerian elections since 1999.

- The authors did well by using the data triangulation in which enhances the reliability of the research, as interviews, documents, and personal experience (participant observation) were used as sources for collecting data and then analyzing, reaching scientific information and conclusions in the study.

For convenience, flexibility, and freedom from bias, we adopted purposive and random sampling techniques. Accordingly, the 12 states were purposefully selected and they comprised two from each of the six geopolitical

zones in Nigeria. Three respondents were randomly selected from each state from the population of informed voters, party candidates, key INEC staff, election observers, and media groups. This amounted to a total of 36 anticipated interviews.

- The study does not address the study population and its size, and does not indicate the method (or formula) for sampling, however only referred to the purposive random sampling. In fact, the study was based on taking a non-proportionate stratified random sampling. Purposive sampling or judgmental sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, in which the researcher chooses the units to be sampled based on his current knowledge. Probability sampling involves random selection in which guarantees each element of the population has an equal chance for being represented. The most representative method for such a study is stratified random sampling, which includes dividing the study population into groups and then taking a simple random sample from each group: informed voters, party candidates, key INEC staff, election observers, and media groups. Likewise, the study did not specify the type of interviews, whether they were structured or unstructured.

The data were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics and content analysis. While descriptive statistics were employed to summarize and present primary and national election death and participation data, content analysis was embellished with personal experience to analyze secondary data. All statistical computations are done with web-based Social Science Statistics software. The descriptive statistical tools adopted include charts and simple percentages. While we made efforts to use the mean to centrally measure the average differences in the data, the level of deviation was standardized, and the difference between the mean and median was determined with the skewness analysis. The study is expressed in categorical variables in which chi-square is used for association analysis to ascertain the suppressing effects of lethal election violence on voter participation.

- This sentence "content analysis was embellished with personal experience to analyze secondary data" is ambiguous in meaning. It is known that content analysis is used to analyze and interpret secondary data (documents, researches, books, etc.) and is far from "personal experience" which may be subjective. And saying that chi-square was used for correlation analysis to ascertain the suppressing effects of lethal election violence on voter participation, the relationship between "the suppressing effect of election violence on voter participation" and the study topic was not clarified, it is assumed that there was a question that the study attempts to answer in this regard, as well as linking it with government intervention in managing the elections, which leads to electoral irregularities and election violence, which in turn leads to a reduction in voter turnout. The study did not show the relationship of "correlation analysis to ascertain the suppressing effects of lethal electoral violence on voter participation" with the title of the study.
- It is known that the chi-square test is a statistical tool used to check if two categorical variables are related or independent. It helps researchers to understand whether the observed data differs significantly from the expected data. By comparing the two sets of data, the researchers can draw conclusions about whether the variables have a meaningful association. The chi-square test is a measure of significant association rather than a measure of the strength of the association or the effect.

Results

This condition arises from life-taking electoral irregularities that have consistently defined Nigerian elections and resulted in voter disinterest between 1998-9 and 20233.

- Nigerian elections were held on February 25 and March 11, 2023. The paragraph needs to be checked in writing years (1998, 2023) and standardize its writing style.

Results for membership composition of Independent National Electoral Commission

The management of national (residential and National Assembly) and sub-national (governorship, state assembly, and FCT area council) elections in Nigeria has exposed how INEC's poor staff and leadership recruitments are reflected in poor election preparation and postponement.

- In this section, the authors did not explain how recruitments of unqualified employees (permanent and temporary), dysfunctional preparation, and postponement of the election process lead to electoral irregularities, because the study originally came to explain how the government's interference in the election management leads to electoral irregularities. The study also did not show the correlation between them and the results of the elections rather dealt with their financial effects on the electoral commission and the national economy and the huge loss resulting in the suspension of economic activities and immobility. The paragraph also needs editing.

Results for Independent National Electoral Commission's finances

From 1999 to 2018, the INEC received ₦450 billion as election expenditures from Nigeria's Federal Government.⁵ The amount allocated for elections steadily increased from ₦1.5 billion in 1999 to ₦305 billion in 2023, which amounted to ₦931.5 billion between 1999 and 2023 (see Table 3 for specific details). Figure 2 shows how the government delays releasing election funds to INEC. YIAGA Africa (2020a) observes that the cost of conducting elections in Nigeria was very exorbitant compared to an average of 35 percent turnout in the 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections, in which INEC wasted billions of Naira on producing a large number of unused ballots.

- Despite the huge electoral expenses, the study did not show any electoral irregularities. The study did not show the relationship between delaying the release of election funds to the INEC and the electoral process irregularities. The waste of huge amounts of funds by the INEC on the production of a large number of unused cards reflects negatively on the mismanagement of the INEC itself, and the study also did not show the role of the government in waste, and the extent to which the waste is related to the electoral irregularities. The reason for this may be attributed to the INEC misestimation, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and this requires finding a correlation between this and the government's interference. The reason for the production of a large number of unused ballots may also be attributed to the absence of opinion polls to estimate the number of expected participants in the Nigerian elections.

Results of the Independent National Electoral Commission's operations

The devices, which were introduced to curb electoral malpractice that usually triggered violence, did not

fundamentally address the concern. Thus, technology-embedded elections held between 2015 and 2023 also had features of irregularities, violence, and deaths.

- This means that there are other factors that may cause the continuity of electoral irregularities and the bloody and lethal nature of the Nigerian elections, for instance political instability, the demographics of society, the multicultural environment, deteriorating economic conditions, etc. In other words, the reason does not lie only in the technological and non-technological devices and tools are used in electoral operations. Electoral tools, which are mainly used to facilitate the election process and reduce electoral irregularities, and this requires the researchers to examine other factors that restrict or reduce electoral irregularities.
- In this section, the study did not deal with the electoral processes, but dealt with what was associated with the Nigerian elections in terms of loss of life, displacement of people and destruction of property. In this context, the study talked about insecurity, violence, political thugs, disruption of voting, setting fire to electoral materials, and election-related violence that followed irregularities, but the study did not show electoral irregularities that occurred due to government interference and its role in the electoral process. In general, the concept of the electoral process refers to a set of stages for preparing elections and managing their implementation, where the electoral process includes three types of interim procedures, which are represented in the preliminary procedures (availability of the legal system- the constitution, laws, and regulations, electoral administration, consistencies, voter registration), simultaneous procedures (nominating candidates, electoral campaign and propaganda, voting), and post-election procedures (counting and sorting of votes, announcing election results, examining and resolving complaints and electoral disputes).

Similarly, statistics in Table 6 show voter participation expressed in voter turnout in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023, which suggests a serious consistent decline from 2003. This decline is linked to the consistent manifestation of irregularities in all elections organized by INEC. These irregularities deflated public confidence in INEC management of Nigerian elections.

- The correlation between the continuous decline in voter turnout in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023 and irregularities in the elections and their impact on reducing the confidence of the voting public in the management of the INEC is an ambiguous claim. The elections 2003 showed the highest voter turnout (69.08%) and the deaths toll was 100, compared to the elections 2015 the voter turnout was (43.65%) and the death toll was 106. This denies the hypothesis of relationship between the low voter turnout rate and the electoral violence and its bloodshed. Therefore, the difference between the turnout rate and the number of victims was very close, with our appreciation of the victims. Indeed, low voter turnout is a serious phenomenon, so it requires examining other serious factors, for instance, failure to fulfill electoral promises, disruption to realizing sustainable development, failure to attaining national unity in Nigeria, etc.

Descriptive statics

The statistics in Tables 5 and 6 are cross-tabulated to ascertain if the two categorical variables (government interference as a form of electoral irregularities that leads to lethal violent elections and voter participation) are related.

- It is advisable to reformulate the correlation between the two categorical variables and write it in the form of an affirmative or negative hypothesis in the study. The methodology may depend on the research problem, research questions, and the research hypothesis, and the statistical treatment changes according to determining the type of relationship between the variables of the study. Basically, the study seeks to find a correlation between two categorical variables, which are government intervention and voter participation, while the study found the suppressive effect of violent, lethal elections on voter participation.

These results show the suppressing effect of the lethal violent election on voter participation (i.e., a positive relationship) within the period under consideration. The statistics are further presented in Figures 3 and 4 for a better graphic explanation.

- Indeed, there is a fundamental difference between what the study was looked for and what it has concluded.

Discussion

Interference in INEC Membership Composition and Control of INEC Personnel in Nigeria

Nigeria operates a highly centralized federal system in which the president appropriates and wields enormous executive powers over the entire affairs of the Federation. The president exercises these powers by appointing government officials and determining their remunerations. In so doing and because institutions in Nigeria are relatively weak to check the excesses of some strong Nigerian politicians, the president appoints and also influences how INEC principal officers discharge their statutory election functions.

- Returning to the membership composition of the INEC, the Nigerian President has authority in Section 5 of the Constitution (CFRN) 1999 to exercise the executive powers of the Federation, which comprises the appointment of 13 key officers of the INEC in consultation with the Council of State and subject to approval by the Nigerian Senate. Here, the following question may arise why the Council of State and the Senate did not exercise their constitutional powers regarding the appointment of INEC staffs?

Politics bothers on who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1936), and political behaviour within the context of politics is about the authoritative allocation of values for society or the distribution of rewards in wealth, power, and status that the system may provide (Easton, 1953). The federal executive branch of the Nigerian government determines who gets what, when, and how, and authoritatively allocates values in terms of who makes the list of the membership composition of the board of the commission. In other words, INEC is a statutory electoral body duly established by the highest law (the Constitution) in Nigeria, but the same law has placed some limitations on its ability to function independently to provide a level playing ground for all Nigerians to participate in the electoral process.

- This paragraph requests to be revised, and the paradox in the Nigerian constitution should be clarified by evidence.

Conclusion

The conclusions confirmed the clarification of government interference in the composition of the IEC membership, financing, and processes that lead to electoral irregularities in Nigeria, as well as the denial of the independence of the Independent National Electoral Commission by the government, and the distinction between institutional independence and operational independence as determined by the government. These findings underscore the need for voter-driven electoral reforms since government-determined ones have not addressed the fundamental problems with the electoral system in Nigeria.

- In the conclusion of this study, it becomes clear that the research problem is the absence of independency of the INEC in Nigeria, as the study is supposed to indicate to the research problem in the introduction to the study clearly, and to raise the main question or questions of the study about the topic and settle down on it. Since objectivity is one of the distinguishing features of scientific research, the results should be objective and come through data analysis and interpretation, and not based on the ideas and personal judgment. Furthermore, the need to re-check spelling, punctuation, and editing words, phrases, and dates. It is praiseworthy for this article that it raises questions worthy to be the topic of future theoretical researches.