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ELECTION ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA; A FOCUS ON THE CHALLENGES OF THE ANAMBRA 2021 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The administration of elections in Nigeria has long been plagued by numerous challenges, with recurring issues surfacing in each electoral cycle. The Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election, which saw Professor Charles Chukwuma Soludo of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) emerge as the winner, was not exempt from such challenges. Against a backdrop of heightened security threats in Anambra State and the Southeast geopolitical zone, including the emergence of "unknown gunmen" and the declaration of sit-at-home protests by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the election faced significant hurdles. This paper examined the effect of these challenges on the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) administration of the election. Utilising a case study qualitative research design, data for the study were collected from documentary sources. The findings revealed the profound effect of insecurity on voter turnout and election logistics. IPOB's agitation for Biafra sovereignty and the violent activities of unknown gunmen created a hostile environment, resulting in historically low voter turnout and logistical delays in the distribution of election materials and staffing. Moreover, pervasive vote-buying practices undermined the integrity of the electoral process, necessitating stronger enforcement mechanisms and public awareness campaigns. Based on these findings, the study recommended collaborative efforts between the government and stakeholders to address the root causes of insecurity, enhanced security measures for election workers, and stricter enforcement of electoral laws to curb vote buying. Further studies are suggested to delve deeper into specific aspects of electoral administration and integrity in Anambra State's 2021 gubernatorial election.

Keywords: Election, Election Administration, IPOB, Security Threat and Unknown gunmen, Election Logistics

INTRODUCTION

Periodic elections are considered the hallmark of democracy. This is because, it offers citizens the opportunity to elect leaders of their choice into public office to advance their collective progress and development. This means that an election confers legitimacy on a government. The fact that elections facilitate the smooth change of government by the people explains the global admiration of democracy. Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012) and Oni, Erame, and Oladejo (2017) opined that election is the key component of every democratic society as it facilitates change from one administration to another.

Nigeria in particular, after many years of military rule successfully transited to democratic governance that birthed the present Fourth Republic in 1999. The country like other African democracies has witnessed several elections since the attainment of political independence in 1960. Seven general elections have been conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In all the past general elections of the present Fourth Republic, INEC had been confronted with some electoral challenges before, during and after the elections. The challenges include rigging, violence, bribery, corruption, excessive campaign spending, manipulation of results and unpreparedness of the electoral umpire (Sule, Azizuddin and Mat, 2017; Usman and Babayo, 2021). These challenges continue to cast doubt on the integrity of the electoral process and its outcome in the country.

Anambra State is one of the states in Nigeria with unique electoral history. Following the judgement of the Court of Appeal on March 15, 2006, that overturned the declaration of Chris Ngige as the winner of the 2003 Anambra Governorship election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on the basis of rigging, and the recognition and declaration of Peter Obi as the actual and authentic winner of the poll, Anambra State became the first State in Nigeria where Governorship election is conducted off the general election cycle (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021). The Anambra 2021 governorship election has come and gone with the candidate of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Professor Charles Chukwuma Soludo emerging the winner of the poll. Despite the successful completion of the poll by INEC, the election was not without some hitches. The governorship election came at a point Anambra state and the Southeast geopolitical zone were faced with serious security threats. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (2021), the dramatic emergence of “unknown gunmen" and the ferocity of their arsons and armed attacks in Anambra and across the South-eastern states, targeting the offices, properties and personnel of the police, the Nigerian Correctional Service and other state security institutions as well as offices and equipment belonging to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) posed a challenge to the conduct of the governorship election in the State. Also, the declaration of sit-at-home in the southeast by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), in protest against the continued incarceration of their leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu elevated the risk of conducting the election (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2021). These security concerns could have affected political parties’ campaign and the turnout of voters on the day of the election (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021). Prior to the election, there was also an armed attack at INEC state headquarters at Awka while on the election day, there were reports of absence of security personnel in some polling units particularly in Awka North Local Government Area (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021). Another security challenge witnessed in the election was the harassment of INEC ad-hoc staff and voters by armed thugs in different polling units

in Ihiala Local Government Area (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021). This led to the cancelation of the election in the local government with a supplementary election held on Tuesday, 9th November 2021. Furthermore, there were some reports of logistical and technical challenges on the election day which manifested in the late arrival of INEC ad-hoc staff and election materials at some polling units and the widespread malfunctioning of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machine (Yusuf and Onyeji, 2021; Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021). Most importantly, the Anambra 2021 governorship election which happens to be the first election in Nigeria to witness the deployment of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) saw the new technology cause delays in the accreditation of voters particularly with its inability to authenticate fingerprints and or verify facials of voters in many polling units while in some other polling units the batteries of the machines went flat (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021). This created frustration among voters and panic in many polling units across the state. There were also reports of the inability of some INEC ad-hoc staff to operate the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021).

Within the same period, INEC was also faced with some legal challenges. This manifested in different legal tussles within political parties as a result of disagreements over primary elections and the authenticity of governorship candidates of each of the political parties (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021, Centre for Democracy and Development, 2021). The legal tussles were common among the three major political parties (All Progressives Grand Alliance, All Progressives Congress, and the Peoples Democratic Party) that took part in the election. Also, the fact that the Anambra 2021 governorship election was among the elections held in the post COVID-19 pandemic era, it was reported by observer groups that there was poor compliance with COVID-19 protocols in almost all the polling units in the state. It was equally reported that there was absence of sanitizers at the polling units, and social distancing and face mask wearing were not observed by many voters and not enforced by INEC officials (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021, Centre for Democracy and Development, 2021). Moreso, there were reports of large scale and coordinated vote buying in many polling units in the state without perpetrators arrested by security agents for the electoral offence (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021).It is within the context of the security challenges posed by IPOB's agitations and the penchant for politicians to subvert the system that this paper focuses on the challenges of INEC in the administration of the 2021 gubernatorial election in Anambra State.

ELECTION AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

At the conceptual level, there are divergent interpretations of the term "election" in the literature. These differences in scholarly explanations could be attributed to diversity in disciplinary backgrounds and operating on various levels of government notably ward, local, state, and national (Akpan, 2017).

According to Okoye (2018) in Alalibo and Kalama (2020), elections are generally seen as the most acceptable method of selecting new leaders and effecting change in liberal democratic states. The electoral process must be transparent, free, fair, and credible in order for it to be viewed as a fundamental procedure that strengthens democratic consolidation in a society. Chitlaoarpor (2015)

affirms that elections play a crucial role in democratic systems, and their absence would undermine the essence of democracy itself.

Election in the general sense of it is a public representation where the elected representatives are expected to represent the interests of their constituencies, forward their problems and pursue their entitlements (Emerson, 2012). However, every election throws up two set of groups in a society supporters and oppositions of different ideas represented by political parties and candidates.

The concept of "election administration" is used interchangeably with "election management" by scholars. Despite the difference in scholarly interpretations, election administration involves every activity of an election management body to ensure the successful conduct of any election necessary for the consolidation of democracy. Corroborating this, Ighodalo (cited in Oni, Erameh, and Oladejo, 2017) avers that the overall goal of election administration is to ensure that democracy upon which such elections are based is sustained as a mechanism for choosing the peoples' representatives at regular intervals. Ajayi (2007) indicates that election administration entails the management and proper arrangement of all actions, stages, levels, and procedures that constitute electoral process. That is, the planning, organizing, coordinating and rules formulation and implementation which facilitate the conduct of elections. Ajayi grouped the stages of electoral process into three. These stages include the pre-election stage that entails the various preparatory processes such as creation of constituencies, political party registration, screening, verification and publishing of eligible voters etc. the second stage incorporate election activities such as voting, sorting and counting of votes, declaration of winners, publishing of results etc. The third stage is the post-election stage, which involves attending to and resolving litigations that arise from elections. However, this description of election administration is limited in scope because it fails to consider other aspect of election process such as electoral policies and act implementation. The United States Election Assistance Commission (cited in Oni, Erameh, and Oladejo, 2017) defined election administration as the mechanics of how elections are run, ranging from preparations for the election, to the methods by which people cast their ballots, to how winners are declared, and the entire process overseen by an electoral body. In the same vein, Election Administration Research Centre (2005) opined that election administration involves the facilitation of voting and the management of elections at all levels. It also includes the organization of election agencies, the behaviour and characteristics of election officials, the process of conducting elections, and the implementation of election policies.

It is evident from the above literature that credible and transparent elections are impossible without an effective election administration by an election management body. Corroborating this, Ibrahim (2007) agreed that electoral commissions are vital to overall election quality perception and define the level to which political participants see the entire electoral process as legitimate, valid and binding. In the same vein, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2006) reported that political actors are likely to accept the electoral processes and outcome, when elections are effectively administered. The institute concluded that such is possible if the electoral commission has autonomy basically in terms of its structure, funding, composition and capability. Given the foregoing, it can be affirmed that the quality of an election is dependent on the quality of its administration.

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INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION AND THE CHALLENGES OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Social scientists in their study of Nigeria's electoral history continue to identify difficulties that confront the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the discharge of its constitutional responsibility and in turn, affect the quality and integrity of electoral process and outcome in the country negatively. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria upon which the present Fourth Republic is established in Section 14 recognises the establishment and composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the sole institution of the Nigerian State with the mandate of organising federating States and national elections. In addition to the constitution, there are other legal frameworks such as the Electoral Act and INEC election guidelines designed to enable the commission discharge its duties as required. In spite of these legal provisions, literatures abound on the challenges that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has faced in various elections it has conducted since the establishment.

Oni, Erameh and Oladejo (2017) are of the view that the major challenge of democratic consolidation in developing democracies such as Nigeria can be linked to election administration which is a compass for any democratic process. Oni and associates also affirmed that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria confines election administration within the purview of an independent electoral body known as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Despite the fact that the Commission had conducted several elections in Nigeria since 1999, Oni et al. citing Ayoade (2008), identifies the alarming high handedness displayed by the ruling political party in manipulating the 1999, 2003 and 2007 electoral process, leading to political killings, religious bigotry, industrial actions, insecurity and other socio-economic problems.

Security is key to the successful conduct of any election anywhere in the world. This brought about the concept of election security. Igini (2013) argue that election security is integral to the integrity of the overall conduct of elections including the electorates, electoral personnel, election materials, contestants, election monitors, observers, and other stakeholders who participate in the electoral process. In the same vein, Olurode and Haamanga (2013) are of the view that electoral security constitutes an integral element of the success of elections and represent an advance on electoral reform agenda in which the safety of the electorates is guaranteed before; during and after elections. This has given rise to the need for a critical re-engagement with electoral system in Nigeria beyond voting and being voted for in elections (Akpan, 2017).

Given the foregoing, electoral studies in Nigeria have discovered that the subject of security continue to pose a problem to elections in Nigeria. Attoh (2016) sees security which is the freedom from danger or damage whether physical or emotional as imperative in the electoral process. The author further stated that elections in Nigeria are full of acrimony and danger, making election security a major challenge to both the election umpire and the citizenry as political parties and their supporters view the electoral process as a "do or die" affair resulting in brigandage and electoral malfeasance. Making reference to the 2015 general elections, Attoh affirmed that it was characterized by pockets of violence and security breaches such as replacement of trained ad-hoc staff, connivance of security personnel with politicians and holding INEC staff hostage to corrupt the electoral process. This is despite the rigorous preparations put in place by the Independent National Electoral Commission to stem the tide of insecurity during the process.

Similarly, Oni (2014) observes that elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are not only dangerous, but have succeeded in worsening electoral apathy as many Nigerians avoid the polling stands on several electoral events. He argued that since the start of the present democratic exercise in Nigeria in 1999; most of the general elections held have been conducted in a hostile environment because of the absence of aiding environments for democratic involvement which of course is the greatest hindrance to democracy and its consolidation. Aligning with this thought, Joseph (2017) in Oni, Erameh and Oladejo (2017) agree that the prebendal and predatory nature of Nigerian politics has turned electoral competition into a political combat among political leaders which can no longer be regulated by the constitutional rules of the game set by the electoral umpire.

In line with the foregoing thoughts, the crude nature of Nigeria politics which makes the work of election administration by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) more difficult is witnessed at the party level. For Oromareghake (2013), the high level of political gangsterism and the political culture of impunity and corruption that characterized party politics prior to elections in Nigeria remain a major setback to electoral administration and democratic consolidation.

Musa (2015) concisely states that politics in the context of Nigeria is not to live for it but to live from it. This is because, politicians particularly political godfathers, assume the role of political entrepreneurs who invest heavily in politics with the objective of claiming super profits and dividends in the cruel appropriation of state resources. Corroborating this, Oni, Erameh and Oladejo (2017) are of the view that political parties of the Fourth Republic that should promote democracy are themselves agents of democratic erosion and collapse. They argued that the inability of many political parties in Nigeria to operate in a democratic manner introduces tension and violence in the electoral process. Pointing out the destabilizing role of godfathers in political parties in Nigeria, they affirmed that godfathers have complete control of delegates selection, and decide who gets the party's nomination and leadership positions. This results to total disregard of the formal procedures for party elections and nomination of candidates and further create so much dissatisfaction in the political process which manifest in pre- and post-election litigations.

Furthermore, at the heart of the major challenge of INEC in election administration in Nigeria is logistics. Election logistics according to Igiebor (2021) denotes the process of planning, implementing control procedures to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in procurement, storage, distribution, transportation, and delivering of sensitive and non-sensitive election materials and conveying electoral officers to their polling centre. Similarly, Ogunade (2014) affirmed that logistics planning is essential to the electioneering process to ensure that personnel, equipment, and communications processes are made ready for the operation. These arrangements according to the author must be strategically and systematically provided for, to ensure a hitch-free voting process. Igiebor (2021) in the comparative study of 2012 and 2016 Edo State governorship elections reported that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) improved in election day logistics management compared to its performance in 2012. Despite this improvement, some lapses were still noticeable in the management of election logistics on the election day.

Mohammed (2021) affirmed that Nigeria is a model of countries that require timely preparation for the conduct of general elections considering the herculean task before any head of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) election management especially in the area of logistics procurement and deployment. The author maintained that despite huge budgetary allocation to election conduct after every four years, elections in the country continue to experience logistics issues

judging from the experiences of past elections. Making reference to the 2019 general elections, Mohammed argued that the postponement of the elections due to logistic issues is really a sign of immaturity in the management of elections.

Funding is key to the success of any election. Given this, the major challenge to election logistics which hamper INEC's administration in Nigeria is the problem of funding. According to Oni, Erameh and Oladejo (2017), funding is critical in executing every stage of electoral process from capacity building to procurement of election materials, payment of electoral officials, security and material storage. They also stated that inadequate funding has the tendency of robbing the electoral process of the desired efficiency and effectiveness thereby opening up the process for maneuvering and manipulations.

Voters' registration is a crucial aspect in the conduct of every election. This is because, it legitimizes the entire process of an election particularly the outcome. Unfortunately, the issue of voters' registration and building of voters' register has been identified as a challenge to effective election administration in Nigeria by INEC as a result of some challenges as reported in literature. The European Union (2015) reported that voters' registration exercise is usually marred by acute shortage of materials while some of those who succeed in registering their names sometimes find same missing on the voters' register during elections. Reporting on the 2015 general elections, the European Union election observation mission claimed that the process of voters' registration prior to the election was cumbersome, crowded, marred by technical and staffing issues, with very few registrants presenting any documentation proving identity and age.

Also, Oni et. al. (2017) points out another major lacuna in the electoral law on election petitions. They argued that election petitions challenging irregularities in election conduct can only be filed by political candidates and political parties. This denies concerned citizens and the civil society groups who might have witnessed an election irregularity the right to approach the courts to seek redress that can enhance the credibility of the electoral process.

Finally, some scholars have equally identified the role citizens play in creating election administration challenges for INEC. Ojo (2006) argue that vote-buying reached their pinnacles in the elections that ushered in the fourth republic in 1999 and the civilian-civilian transition elections of subsequent years such that it has successfully progressed steadily from open and shameless to outrageous. This according to Oni, Erameh and Oladejo, (2017) is because of citizens apathetic attitude towards the political process due to widespread poverty, illiteracy and distrust of government; and political parties and candidates have shown by their conduct during political campaigns, that good party manifestoes and integrity of candidates jostling for public offices are no longer sufficient to guarantee electoral success; thus, the resort to vote-buying. Regrettably, the electorates too have obviously demonstrated cynical electoral behavior by the readiness to sell their votes to the highest bidder (Ojo, 2006). This compromises the electoral process as efforts by INEC to improve the integrity and reliability of elections will have limited effect (Omotola 2006; Ojo 2006).

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA (IPOB), UNKNOWN GUNMEN AND THE 2021 ANAMBRA STATE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

The issue of Biafra and the ongoing agitations for secession by the Indigenous People of Biafra in Nigeria's southeast region have been a contentious topic for years. According to Ofoeze (2009), unresolved issues that contributed to the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970 continue to fuel discontent among the people of the southeast. They feel neglected by the federal government, particularly in terms of poor governance, marginalization, and socio-economic neglect. This has led to the formation of sectarian groups and protests, some of which have turned violent.

The 2021 Anambra governorship election came at a time when the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria was experiencing serious unrest. The agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the forceful response of the Nigerian government towards the agitation through the Nigerian military launch of "Operation Python Dance" in the Southeast made the environment very hostile. According to the Security and Business Risk Management (SBM) Intelligence (2021), IPOB's activity shifted towards violence after 2020, following the re-arrest of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu by the Nigerian government in July 2021. This further complicated the security situation in the South-East. The IPOB leader was first arrested by the Federal Government of Nigeria on October 14, 2015, on an 11-count charge, which included terrorism, treasonable felony, managing an unlawful society, publication of defamatory matter, illegal possession of firearms, and improper importation of goods, among others. (Ejekwonyilo, 2021). On April 25, 2017, he was granted bail on health grounds (Ufuoma, 2021). Again, in September 2017, the Nigerian military invaded the IPOB leader's house in his hometown Afara-Ukwu in Umuahia, Abia State, and on September 20, 2017, the Nigerian government secured a court order to officially classify IPOB as a terrorist group and enforce its proscription (Ejekwonyilo, 2021; Ufuoma, 2021). In the midst of all these, Mr Nnamdi Kalu left without official permission, thereby failing to appear in court for the continuation of his trial. This led Justice Binta Nyako of the Federal High Court, Abuja to revoke his bail and issue a bench warrant for his arrest on March 28, 2019 (Ejekwonyilo, 2021).

Given the foregoing, the Nigeria government sought ways to re-arrest the IPOB leader, citing his abscondment of trial and the persistent instigation of his followers towards violence against the Nigerian state in the South-East from outside the country that resulted in the loss of lives and property of civilians, military, para-military, police forces and destruction of civil institutions and symbols of authorities (Ndujihe, Okoli, Umoru, Nnochiri, Agbo, et al., 2021). On June 27, 2021, the Nigerian government through the Attorney General of Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, in a press conference with the Department of State Security confirmed to the press the re-arrest of Mr Nnamdi Kanu and repatriation to Nigeria, through international collaborative efforts with security agencies(Ejekwonyilo, 2021; Oyero, 2021). However, how the IPOB leader was arrested and where were not disclosed to the Nigerian public by the Minister. This left the public to speculate, generating heated debates about the legality of such arrest and repatriation (Ndujihe et al. 2021; Reuters, 2021).

The re-arrest of Nnamdi Kanu by the Nigerian government sparked another wave of tension in the Southeast as the leadership of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) declared a sit-at-home protest which they announced to take effect from Monday, August 9, 2021. According to the group, Southeast will be on lockdown each Monday of every week from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, until their leader, whom

they claim was illegally abducted and detained by the federal government of Nigeria is released (Ejekwonyilo, 2021; Nwafor, 2021). At this time, the Anambra gubernatorial election was just four months away and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was already making preparations for it. However, before the July sit-at-home declaration which became regular, IPOB allegedly gave sit-at-home orders periodically to the people living in the entire South East as far back as May 2021 (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021a). While some residents of Southeast geopolitical zone obeyed the orders willingly, others obeyed it out of fear of being attacked by unknown gunmen who go about enforcing the orders (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021a).

Amidst the violent attacks on political parties and political personalities in Anambra State, a few months to the November 6, 2021 governorship in the state, particularly in September, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) on Saturday, October 23, 2021, through its Media and Publicity Secretary, Emma Powerful, announced a declaration of a one-week sit-at-home protest across the Southeast states starting from November 5, the eve of the governorship election in Anambra State, to November 10, excluding Sunday, November 7 (Olokor, Okafor, Nnachi, George & Nnachi, 2021; Abe, 2021). IPOB asserted that the protest will proceed as scheduled if their leader Nnamdi Kanu who is in the custody of the Department of State Security (DSS) is not released by the Federal Government of Nigeria before November 4. This same threat by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) contributed to the low voter turnout rate of 22 per cent out of over 1.5 million registered voters for the 2017 Anambra governorship election (Kimpact Development Initiative, 2021).

The destruction and chaos caused by unknown gunmen further complicated the issue as their connection with the IPOB and its militant arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) remain unclear, considering that the separatist group IPOB have on different occasions denied involvement in the carnage of the unknown gunmen (Kimpact Development Initiative, 2021). On October 21, 2020, unknown armed men attacked the Nnewi North Local Government Area office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during the EndSARSprotest, burning and vandalising it (INEC, 2022, Nwangwu, 2023). Again, on Sunday, May 23, 2021, unknown gunmen attacked and set ablaze the stores of the Anambra State headquarters office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at Awka (INEC, 2022, Ajibola, 2021). The attack on the INEC office by the unknown gunmen happened after they attempted to attack the Police 'B' Divisional office close to the INEC office but were repelled by the operatives on duty.

The security threat posed by unknown gunmen to the management of the 2021 Anambra governorship was evident in the attacks on political personalities and their supporters in the state which affected public campaigns by political parties. This further heated the already tense political environment. On March 31, 2021, unknown gunmen attacked former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, Prof Chukwuma Soludo, who declared his intention to run for the office of the governor of Anambra State on the platform of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in his hometown of Isuofia in Aguata Local Government Area, during an interactive session with Isuofia youths. Although Soludo escaped unharmed, three policemen providing security were shot dead at the event. Additionally, Anambra State Commissioner for Public Utilities, Mr Emeka Ezenwanne, was abducted by the gunmen during the attack (Eleke, 2021a). On July 31, 2021,

unidentified gunmen targeted and killed Mr. Cosmas Eze, the APC acting Assistant Secretary in Oba, IdemiliSouth LGA. They also took possession of the APC-branded Sienna vehicle he was driving (Elek, 2021). Again, on 18 September 2021, the Labour Party (LP) governorship candidate for the November 6, 2021, Anambra governorship election, Obiora Agbasimalo, was abducted by unknown gunmen at Lilu, a community in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, while on a campaign tour to Azhia, another community in the council area. Up till this moment, his whereabouts are not yet known (Ugwu, 2021). Earlier that same year, another governorship aspirant of the Labour Party in Anambra State, Nnamdi Nnoruka was kidnapped by unknown gunmen and after he regained his freedom, abandoned his governorship ambition (Njoku, 2021).

IMPACT OF THE THREAT OF IPOB AND UNKNOWN GUNMEN ON VOTER'S REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

Irrespective of the security threats in Anambra State as the November governorship election was approaching, INEC adopting an online pre-registration method and decentralising the physical registration to the ward level saw the number of registered voters increase. A total of 77, 475 valid registrations were captured; therefore, increasing the number of registered voters in the State to 2,525,471 (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021a).

Table 1: Number of wards, polling units and registered voters by LGA for Anambra 2021 governorship election

S/N	LGA	No. of RAs/Wards	No. of PUs	No. of Registered Voters
1	Aguata	20	342	144,764
2	Ayamelum	11	191	87,051
3	Anambra East	15	241	98,474
4	Anambra West	10	164	62,637
5	Anaocha	19	320	109,860
6	Awka North	14	150	72,036
7	Awka South	20	390	188,736
8	Dunukofia	14	165	74,882
9	Ekwusigo	12	193	85,594
10	Idemili North	12	467	222,441
11	Idemili South	12	243	113,598
12	Ihiala	20	323	148,407
13	Njikoka	18	231	103,721
14	Nnewi North	10	218	154,286
15	Nnewi South	20	297	92,411
16	Ogbaru	16	383	174,299
17	Onitsha North	15	313	159,292
18	Onitsha South	17	321	161,578

19	Orumba North	18	253	93,620
20	Orumba South	18	208	75,121
21	Oyi	15	207	102,663
TOTAL	**326**	**5,720**	**2,525,471**	

Source: Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2021b)

This is evidence that the insecurity threats by IPOB and unknown gunmen did not have any significant impact on INEC's management of the preparation process for the 2021 governorship election in Anambra State, especially in the area of voter registration.

However, voter's turnout was very poor. According to INEC, out of 2,466,638 registered voters in Anambra State, 253,388 were accredited for the election, and the total valid votes cast amounted to 249,631, with 8,108 votes rejected (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021b; Yusuf & Onyeji, 2021). This means only 10 per cent of the registered voters in the state voted during the election. In essence, only one out of every ten registered voters across the state's 21 local government areas, comprising 326 wards and 5,720 polling units, participated in the election held on Saturday and Tuesday (Yusuf & Onyeji, 2021).

Table 2: Voter Turnout in Anambra Governorship Election from 2010-2021

Year	Registered Voters	Voter Turnout	Turnout (%)	Percentage
2010	1,840,000	302,000	16%	
2013	1,770,127	465,891	25%	
2017	2,064,134	448,711	21%	
2021	2,466,638	249,631	10%	

Source: Yusuf and Onyeji (2022)

With a 10 per cent voter turnout rate recorded during the 2021 governorship election, it is evident that voter turnout has consistently been on the decline in the state. This underscores a significant challenge in fostering active participation in the democratic process in Anambra State.

SECURITY THREATS OF IPOB AND UNKNOWN GUNMEN AND THE LOGISTICS ARRANGEMENT OF INEC IN THE 2021 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN ANAMBRA STATE

Adequate logistics arrangement determines the success of an election. However, elections in Nigeria have always been characterised by logistics challenges. The 2021 Anambra State governorship election did not fall short of this challenge.

Despite the early deployment of election materials to Local Government Offices and Registration Area Centres (RACs) by INEC for easy deployment to polling units on the election day, reports from election observers showed that there was late arrival of election materials and INEC officials to many polling units across the state on the election day (CLEEN Foundation, 2021; Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021b; YiagaAfrica, 2021). According to reports from Yiaga Africa (2021), at 7:30 am, only 17% of polling units had polling officials present, and by 9:30 am, only 27 per cent had

started accreditation and voting. The situation improved slightly by 10:30 am, with 48 per cent of polling units engaged in the electoral process, and by noon, this increased to 78 per cent. Despite this progress, 21 per cent of polling units remained unopened by noon, particularly in Anambra South Senatorial District (23.5%), Anambra Central (17%), and Anambra North Senatorial districts (13%) (YiagaAfrica, 2021).



Fig 1: Voters waiting for the arrival of INEC staff and materials on election day

In addition to the late arrival of election staff and materials, and the late commencement of polls at various polling units across the state, which were attributed to the security threats posed by IPOB and unknown gunmen to the governorship election, the malfunction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) devices as another logistics problem. The digital device which was INEC's digital innovation to curb irregularities in Nigeria's election, was used for voter authentication and accreditation of voters on election day. The technical issues associated with the use of the BVAS varied across polling units in the State, according to observer groups. In some polling units, the digital device failed to authenticate fingerprints and or verify facials of voters while in some other polling units, the batteries of the machines went off (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2021b).

Given the above findings, it is evident that apart from the technical hitches encountered with the use of BVAS, the logistics lapses which led to the late opening and commencement of polls across polling units during the 2021 governorship election in Anambra State, the postponement and conduct of supplementary election in Ihiala Local Government Area by the Independent National Electoral

Commission (INEC) are as a result of the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and unknown gunmen in the state.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study on the administration of the 2021 Anambra State gubernatorial election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) sheds light on the profound effect of the security threat of IPOB and unknown gunmen on both voter turnout and logistical arrangements by the commission. The pervasive atmosphere of fear and violence significantly deterred voters from participating, resulting in a historic low turnout of registered voters. Moreover, logistical challenges faced by INEC, including delays in the distribution of election materials and shortages of trained personnel, further underscored the disruptive influence of insecurity on the electoral process. These findings highlight the urgent need for concerted efforts to address security concerns and enhance the resilience of electoral logistics to safeguard the integrity and inclusivity of future elections in Anambra State and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. Considering the threat the secession agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) pose to the stability of Nigeria, particularly political stability, there is a need for the Nigerian government to collaborate with relevant stakeholders in the Southeast geopolitical zone to address the root causes of the agitation for Biafra sovereignty by engaging in constructive dialogue and offering meaningful concessions where possible. Additionally, given the violent activities of unknown gunmen in the Southeast geopolitical zone, there should be a concerted effort to enhance security measures in the zone, particularly in Anambra State, by improving intelligence gathering and increasing law enforcement presence to mitigate the threat of violence during elections to improve voter turnout.

2. INEC should collaborate with security agencies to provide adequate protection for election workers involved in election logistics. In addition, INEC should develop contingency plans to mitigate the effects of security disruptions, such as pre-positioning election materials in secure locations ahead of time. Furthermore, efforts should be made to recruit and train sufficient ad hoc personnel well in advance to prevent staffing shortages and ensure the smooth conduct of future elections. These initiatives if implemented will address the logistics lapses that confront the smooth conduct of elections by the electoral umpire, INEC.

3. Given the widespread vote buying in the 2021 governorship election in Anambra State and its prevalence in the country every election season, it is imperative for Nigerian authorities to implement stronger enforcement mechanisms. To address this issue effectively, immediate actions should include enhancing monitoring efforts by election observers and civil society organizations, as well as increasing penalties for perpetrators to deter future occurrences. Furthermore, targeted educational campaigns should be launched to raise awareness among voters about the detrimental effects of vote buying on democratic integrity and encourage them to report instances of electoral misconduct.

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