

## Election Related Conflicts in Nigeria: The Role of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

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### Abstract

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the Electoral Management Body (EMB) established in Nigeria to deliver free, fair, and credible elections through a transparent and peaceful process. However, the origin of violence perpetrated during elections with wanton destruction of public and private property, including loss of lives all over the country, calls for an examination of the role of INEC in this regard. This study used historical method analyses to examine the role of INEC. The study found out that though INEC has, to a large extent, performed its role and also helped to deepen democracy in Nigeria since its establishment in 1998. Further studies also found that INEC's poor organizational abilities, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, etc., have been responsible for the numerous incidences of conflict in the country during elections. This paper concludes and recommends that external challenges, such as security, inadequate funding, and the desperation amongst Nigerian politicians, be moderated and curtailed with a synergy between the Legislature and Executive arms. At the same time, the judiciary plays its role well, including that INEC employs professional ethics amongst its staff with organizational and logistical efficiency and effectiveness in the electoral process. INEC's role will be overtly transparent and therefore lead to the delivery of peaceful rather than conflict-infected elections.

**Keywords:** INEC; Election; Nigeria; Conflicts.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental bedrocks of democracy anywhere in the world is the election of political leaders through the electoral process. Unfortunately, elections in most African nations, including Nigeria, are characterized by conflicts manifested in various forms. These conflicts result in assaults, arson, abductions, ballot box snatchings, even murder and assassination. These acts are perpetrated by individuals and groups with the intention of influencing the outcome of elections, with INEC being accused of having a role in these conflicts. This trend poses a threat to the peace and security of Nigeria as it equally undermines the democratization process and,

subsequently, the development of the country. Democracy is arguably one of the most widely known and acceptable forms of government, with one of its major features being periodic elections meant to bring about a smooth and peaceful change of governments. In Nigeria, INEC is responsible for this periodic exercise. Unfortunately, in most African countries, as it is in Nigeria, this exercise is often challenging, chaotic, and conflictual. The reasons for the above are not farfetched; firstly, INEC deals with a heterogeneous Nigerian state whose politics is based on competition and power struggle with desperate politicians who employ “do or die” approaches to win elections. More to the above is that political power becomes a major instrument of wealth accumulation and therefore places those politicians in a vantage position to decide, as the American political scientist Harold Lasswell would put it, the question of “who gets what, when and how” (Stohl, 2007). The large and complex geography of the country, the enormous voting population, security challenges, and many others outside the control of INEC make it difficult for INEC to perform its roles optimally. Moreover, corruption, unethical and fraudulent activities as well as partisanship of some staff of the Commission, coupled with the technical, logistical and operational weaknesses of INEC, have also been said to be responsible for election-related conflicts in the electoral process.

To overcome these challenges, however, the EMB has adopted some measures which, if applied professionally in addition to the recommendations made here, can change the narrative against the Commission as an institution that is responsible for election-related conflicts to one with credibility and integrity, delivering free, fair, transparent, and peaceful elections, thereby deepening democracy and engendering development in Nigeria as the vision and mission of INEC state

The basis of this paper is to examine the role of INEC in these conflicts on one hand, while also examining the EMB’s role in entrenching democracy and the challenges that INEC faces in this process. The paper concludes by recommending measures to mitigate and prevent these conflicts during elections, whether before, during, or after, for the country’s democratic and economic development.

### **Historical Origin and Establishment of INEC**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established in 1998 (Sule, et al., 2017). However, before INEC was established, other Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) had existed that had similar powers as INEC. The number of the EMBs before INEC to a large extent highlights Nigeria’s checkered electoral and democratic life as having been riddled with controversies, conflicts, and even military coups.

The first electoral management body was the defunct Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN). This Commission conducted the pre-independence elections of 1959. At independence, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was established; this body similarly conducted the 1964 and 1965 elections. The elections of 1964 and 1965 were so violent and controversial to the extent that they led in part to the military takeover of 1966 (Ogbeidi, 2010). In 1978, the Obasanjo military regime established the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), which conducted the controversial transition elections that ushered in Nigeria’s second republic with Alhaji Shehu Shagari as president. In 1987, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida established the National Electoral Commission (NEC) (Ebiziem, 2015). This body superintended over the longest transition to civil rule, which eventually came to an end in 1993 with the annulment of the election of that year,

leading in turn to the establishment of the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) by Gen. Sani Abacha. The Abacha Commission only conducted some sets of Local Government Council elections before his death. Upon his coming to power, Abdulsalam Abubakar established INEC.

At the coming of each EMB and at the conduct of each election, most Nigerians believed that the electoral commissions were central to the problems and conflict associated with the conduct of the elections in the country. For instance, as earlier posited, the violence of the 1964 and 1965 elections was partly due to the manner in which they were conducted. The coup of 1966 was also partly associated with these exercises. Similarly, the FEDECO-supervised elections in 1979 and 1983 were not only contentious, but also played a role in the December 1983 overthrow of Shagari's government. When INEC conducted the 1999 elections, most Nigerians perceived the Commission as having pre-arranged the process and results to make them legitimate, while the violence that characterized 2003 and 2007 was attributed in part to the massive fraud perpetrated by INEC (Agbaje & Adejumbi, 2006).

The conflict and violence that arose from the 2011 elections organized by INEC were more intense and devastating. This followed the claim by most opposition parties, especially the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), that the election was rigged in favor of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The conflict in the northern part of Nigeria left many injured, homeless, and killed, with many properties destroyed. This scenario also repeated itself in 2019. On each occasion, INEC has been accused of playing a role in triggering these conflicts.

### **INEC and its Constitutional Functions: Vision, Mission Statement, Guiding Principles and Professional Ethics.**

INEC as a Commission is made up of a Chairman and 12 National Commissioners. The Commission was established in accordance with Section 153 (f) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (McGrath & Maiye, 2010). The functions of the Commission, as established in Part I of the Third Schedule to the 1999 Constitution, are as follows:

1. To organize, conduct and supervise all elections and matters pertaining to elections into all elective offices provided in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended, or any other enactment or law.
2. Register political parties in accordance with the provisions of the relevant enactment or law.
3. Monitor the organization and operations of the political parties, including their finances.
4. Arrangement for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties and publication of a report of such examination and audit for public examination.
5. Conduct voter registration and the preparation, maintenance, and revision of the voter register for the purpose of any election.
6. Monitor political campaigns and establish rules and regulations to govern political parties.
7. Ensure that all Electoral Commissioners and Electoral Retuning Officers take and subscribe to the Oath of Office prescribed by the law.
8. delegate any power to any resident electoral commissioner.
9. carry out such other functions as may be conferred upon it by a decree or any other enactment of law.

Divide the area of the Federation or, as the case may be, the area of a state, local government or Area Council into such number of constituencies as may be presented by law for the purpose of elections to be conducted by the Commission (Agrawal, 1999).

The mission of INEC is to serve as an independent and effective Election Management Body (EMB) committed to the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. The vision of the Commission, on the other hand, is “to be one of the best Election Management Bodies (EMB) in the world and to meet the aspirations of the Nigerian people (Obijekwu, et al., 2019). In fulfilling its vision and mission statement, INEC is guided by certain principles, which are: autonomy, transparency, integrity, credibility, impartiality, dedication, equity, and excellence.

The principle of autonomy implies that INEC must be relentless in its pursuit of autonomy for effective electoral services while also being open (transparent) in all activities and in relations with stakeholders, the media, service providers and the people of Nigeria (Udoka, 2016; Arnold 2018; Mohammed, 2021). The Commission must also demonstrate a high level of moral standards and honesty in all dealings with the people of Nigeria and be credible in all actions and activities, thereby remaining an institution that people can trust while also creating a level playing field for all political actors, in order that the Commission’s integrity, credibility, and impartiality will be maintained. The staff of the Commission must be dedicated and committed to providing quality electoral services for the people of Nigeria while also demonstrating fairness and justice in dealing with all people.

Above all, it is expected that INEC officials should maintain professional ethics in the electoral process. The manner in which INEC officials discharge their duties affects the degree of confidence voters and the general public will have in the electoral process, which will ultimately lead to a peaceful or conflict-prone exercise. For instance, when officials are courteous, polite, and helpful, there is the tendency for a peaceful process; on the other hand, if they are unethical and corrupt, there is bound to be conflict. Apart from the principles enunciated above, election officials or INEC should be guided by professionalism and provide due consideration and support at all times, for example, to the elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and so on.

## **METHOD**

Game Theory was applied in this study. This theory is a branch of mathematics that tries to model conflict or competition between two or more people. Except for statistics, it is mostly used in the social sciences like sociology, psychology, political science, and economics. (Cunningham et al., 2002). The game theory had its roots in 1917 but began to pick up steam with John Von Neumann in 1928 and John Nash in the 1950’s (Helbing, 1996). A win in this theory (zero-sum game) for one player is a loss for the other players. Therefore, in Nigerian politics, it has the inherent nature of a winner-take-all in any electoral contest, particularly as it is accompanied by the principle of first-past-the-post, whereby the candidate with the majority of votes is declared winner, even with the slimmest number (Sead Alihodi and Erik Asplund, 2013).

The above tends to promote conflict in the electoral process because the winner of an election to a position, especially an executive position, does not only have access to political offices, thereby perpetuating themselves, but the position enables them to “dole out state resources in a characteristic networks of patronage and corruption” (Moliki, 2021, p. 7). The above becomes

a major problem as the stakes are high, engendering stiff competition and a “do or die” contest with INEC, in most cases, being compromised, leading to conflicts in the electoral process (Oyewole & Omotola, 2022).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Role Of INEC in Election Related Conflict**

In spite of the vision and mission statement of INEC and in spite of the stated guiding principles and professional ethics that INEC/her officials should imbibe and demonstrate in the course of duty, most Nigerians believe that the Electoral Commission or its officials are corrupt and therefore lack integrity. They believe that INEC’s organizational, structural, and technical weaknesses are responsible for the myriad of electoral violence and conflict experienced in the Nigerian electoral process and political space. In this regard, reference is often made to the 1959 elections conducted by the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN), which ushered in the first post-independence civilian government in the country and the outcome, which in part was responsible for the violent western regional elections of 1964 that precipitated, in part, the military overthrow of the civilian government in 1966. Analysts also point out the aftermath of the 1979 and especially the 1983 elections, which were very controversial and subsequently led to the overthrow of that government in December, 1983 (Awopeju, 2021).

INEC as an EMB has not been without blame since its establishment and the country’s return to civilian rule in 1999. As elections of that year, 2003 and 2007, they were not only controversial, they were heavily carpeted by local and international observers as lacking in transparency, which they claim were marred with malpractices, leading to conflict in most parts of the country. However, in spite of the violence and conflict associated with the 1999–2007 elections mentioned above, the post-election crisis of 2011 was the most devastating in Nigeria under INEC. During the 2011 elections, there was a deadly outbreak of violence; for example, in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere, Human Rights Watch reported on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, 2011 that pre, during, and post-election conflict left over 800 people killed (Ezeibe, 2021). On the other hand, the Christian Association of Nigeria, reporting on the same violence, stated that “at least 170 Christians were killed in the post-election riots; hundreds more were injured; and thousands displaced. The organization also reported that more than 350 churches were burned or destroyed by Muslim rioters across ten (10) Northern states. In all these, INEC was praised for her role by monitoring and observer missions, both local and international. For instance, in 2003, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) claimed that INEC contributed to its own fair share of electoral problems in the 2003 polls. (Nyam, 2015). The group maintained that the lack of clearly designated compartments for voting or thumb printing during the 2003 elections not only undermined the secrecy of the vote and exposed the voters to the machinations of big politicians and party agents. It was posited that the Commission’s inability to make adequate arrangements for the transportation of sensitive election materials and men to the polling units and collation centers in time, partly due to poor organization and planning, led to the late arrival of materials to the polling stations, which was the result of conflict in most parts of the country during the elections of that year. The group further maintained that result sheets disappeared and reappeared in different forms at collation centers and, in connivance with corrupt party agents, INEC officials simply sold ballot papers to the highest bidder, thereby helping to rig elections through the stuffing

of ballot boxes and doctoring of result sheets. The consequence of that was violent conflict in areas with such cases.

As earlier posited, INEC's organizational, technical and structural shortcomings have also been said to have opened up new doors for conflict before, during, and after each election. Ogunsanwo, commenting on the 2003 elections, said that INEC was certainly and genuinely "not in absolute control of activities on election day. He maintained that the electoral preparation with voter registration started late (Omotola, 2010). This delay, according to him, affected the completion of the registration exercise as this was also delayed, which in turn also affected the distribution of permanent voter registration cards, thus leading to recurrent delays in the course of the elections. The above, coupled with poor organization of transportation and logistical deployment, led to most polling units being opened late on Election Day, with the consequence of conflict in such areas. Again, most sensitive materials like ballot papers are produced outside the country. These materials sometimes come with errors and mix-ups like missing pictures and logos of political parties or misspelt names of parties. Given that these materials are printed abroad, it poses a significant challenge and, in most cases, leads to serious conflict during elections because no immediate remedy can be implemented to alleviate the situation.

Incidences of corruption and fraud have also been levelled against INEC officials, most of which have led to conflict. For instance, during the 2015 General Election, 202 staff of INEC were indicted for having been accused of benefitting from N23 billion in bribery allegedly facilitated by the former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Alison Maduekwe, ahead of the election. These infractions by the staff took place in 14 states across the nation, some of which were Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Delta, and Gombe states. Taiwo-Hassan Adebayo: Premium Times, March 2, 2017 (Sule, et al. 2017). In Rivers State, twenty-nine (29) staff were indicted for their roles in the bloody legislative rerun elections on December 10, 2016, while the entire body of Electoral Officers; twenty-three (23) of them were indicted in one way or another and were transferred out of the state, including all directing staff at the head office, for being responsible for the deadly electoral violence witnessed in the state in 2015 (Sule, et al. 2017).

Another instance of corruption and fraud by INEC officials was after the 2019 General Election when Mr. Hassan Sidi Aliyu, the Administrative Secretary of the Zamfara State Office of INEC, the Head of Department, Operations (HOD Ops), Mr. Hussain Jafar, Mr. Abdullahi Yusuf Abubakar, the Accountant, as well as Mr. Abdulmunin Usman were arrested by the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) after a petition by the Presiding Officers for alleged conspiracy, breach of trust and criminal diversion of Ad-hoc Staff allowance to the tune of eighty-four million, six hundred and ninety-se The consequences of actions of this nature are better imagined than said. Instances abound when tribunals set to adjudicate on the conduct of some elections have established that INEC officials were partisan or engaged in electoral fraud that precipitated some of these conflicts. The cases of Prof. Peter Ogban of the University of Calabar and Prof. Ignatius Uduk of the University of Uyo readily come to mind. Ogban, who served as a Returning Officer in the 2019 General Elections in Akwa-Ibom North Senatorial District, was sentenced to three (3) years in prison for election fraud. The court found Prof. Ogban guilty of fraudulent manipulation of election results in two local government areas—Oruk Anam and Etim Ekpo—and the publishing and announcing of false results (Ogbu, 2021). On the other hand, Ignatious Uduk of the Department of Physical and Health Education, University of Uyo, on the other hand, was charged and remanded in custody in Uyo for unlawful generation of election

results in favour of a particular party in the Essien Udim State Constituency election in 2019. He was also accused of lying on oath.

Diezani Alison-Maduekwe's role in the 2015 General Elections needs further mention. As Petroleum Minister in Goodluck Jonathan's government, she was reported to have bribed INEC officials with the sum of about N30 million in order to compromise the election that year. Unfortunately, her party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), still lost the elections to the All Progressive Party (APC) (Oji, et al., 2014). The point of interest here is the kind of conflict or violence that would have erupted if APC lost the election that the party believed they had won. The above confirms that most INEC staff, both permanent and ad-hoc, lack integrity to conduct credible elections that are adjudged free, fair, and peaceful through a transparent process. The consequences of cases like the ones cited above could be very disastrous, with the implication of precipitating conflict.

### **Other Factors Precipitating Election Related Conflict in The Nigerian Electoral Process**

Apart from INEC playing a role in election-related conflicts as seen in the proceeding discussion, there are also factors external to INEC that precipitate some of these conflicts. The electoral process and, to a larger extent, the political system are made up of so many stakeholders that INEC must collaborate with and also get their support in the electoral process if INEC has to be effective and efficient in the performance of its roles. Some of these key stakeholders include political parties, security agencies, the media, and civil society organizations, etc. Unfortunately, INEC does not have control over these actors, yet the activities of some of these key stakeholders impede and serve as a challenge to the functions of INEC with the result of election relations conflict.

The political parties, for instance, hardly respect their own regulations governing party conventions, congresses, and primary elections. Most politicians are so desperate to win elections that they do not respect their internal rules, leading to little or no internal democracy. This more often than not produces parallel executives and candidates and leads to intra-party crisis. With an ineffective internal mechanism for redress, the result is a plethora of litigation over intra-party elections and nominations or outright violence. Where there is litigation, they serve as unnecessary distractions to INEC and impede the electoral process with numerous cases arising from political disputes. During the run-off to the 2019 elections, for instance, INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu claimed that the Commission "has been sued or joined in over 640 court cases arising from the nomination of candidates". He further maintained that there were "40 different court orders against the Commission on whether to add or drop candidates" days to the 2019 elections (Oyewole & Omotola, 2022). In other cases, clashes between party supporters during primaries, election campaign periods, voting days and after the declaration of election results have induced electoral violence in Nigeria. These intra and inter-party crises have not only impacted negatively on the electoral process but have also precipitated conflicts.

Moliki (2019) posits that "one notable inter-party crisis in Nigeria was that of the pre and post election clashes between Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the Northern States of Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba, and South-South state of Akwa-Ibom, in the aftermath of the 2011 presidential election" (Moliki, 2021, pp. 101-114). Commenting further on Akwa-Ibom state, Adesote and Abimbola (2014) maintained that pre-electoral violence in Akwa-Ibom state, which occurred on March 22,

2011 according to official police report confirmed that two supporters of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Etop Nicholas Idiong (a trader) and Daniel Udo Akpan (a commercial motor-cyclist), were brutally murdered in Ikot-Ekpenne. The official Gazette of Government of Akwa-Ibom state also cited by Adesote and Abimbola (2014), reported that several other properties were also lost to the violence. The report reveals that apart from INEC playing a role in election-related conflicts as seen in the proceeding discussion, there are also factors external to INEC that precipitate some of these conflicts. The electoral process and, to a larger extent, the political system are made up of so many stakeholders that INEC must collaborate with and also get their support in the electoral process if INEC has to be effective and efficient in the performance of its roles. Some of these key stakeholders include political parties, security agencies, the media, and civil society organizations, etc. Unfortunately, INEC does not have control over these actors, yet the activities of some of these key stakeholders impede and serve as a challenge to the functions of INEC with the result of election relations conflict.

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Two hundred brand of new Peugeot 307 cars, 500 brand new tricycles, the Goodluck/Sambo campaign office which was burnt down by the rampaging mob; Fortune International High School owned by Senator Aloisius Etok which was razed down with school children in session and



over 200 Toyota Hiace buses belonging to the PDP and Goodluck campaign organization, and nine Hilux Jeeps belonging to the government of Akwa-Ibom state which were either completely destroyed or vandalized (Adesote & Abimbola, 2014, p. 146).

The situation was no different in most parts of the country during the 2015 and 2019 elections. In Lagos and Rivers State for instance, there were records of inter-party clashes between All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2015 General Elections. Most crises that bedeviled party primaries and general elections were the consequences of imposition of candidates. The above is because politicians in Nigeria, have over the years become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power, more reckless and greedy in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them (Omilusi, 2019). The implication of the above is that politics becomes a "do or die" affair with politicians going to any length at achieving their desired political goals, hence intra and inter party conflicts become the norm with the consequence on the electoral process and the larger society.

Corollary to the above is the immense political pressure the judiciary may be exposed to. The implication is rising politicization and corruption, epitomized by the issuance of contradictory court announcements on same or similar electoral matters. Not too long ago, the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN); Tanko Muhammed, had to summon the Chief Judges of six states of Rivers, Kebbi, Cross River, Anambra, Jigawa and Kano over recent wave of conflicting orders issued from their courts, especially courts of coordinate jurisdiction. The CJN was reported to be "embarrassed" by the development as the judiciary seems to have joined the fray of political crisis rocking some political parties in the county by indiscriminately granting orders and counter-orders as requested by different warring sides. During the run up to the Anambra November 6, 2021 Gubernatorial elections for instance, questionable orders were issued with little regard for principles of territorial jurisdiction, caution expected of a judge in the handling of expert hearing, and the need for a court to stay clear of a matter whose subject matter was already pending before a court of coordinate jurisdiction. Ameh reporting on a similar case maintained that in just one week in August 2021 three courts in different states issued counter orders about the office of the National Chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (Odusote, 2021).

The above prompted the Nigerian Bar Association's president, Mr. Olumide Akpata to issue a statement to the effect that, these developments in our courts are antithetical to the actualization of the just society and independent judiciary that we all aspire to (Odusote, 2021). Akpata further condemned the indulgence by some "judicial officers of politicians who go round the country shopping for judgments and who thereby bring the judiciary to public ridicule", warning that NBA would no longer stand idly by while "Nigeria's hard-earned democracy is threatened by venal acts of a few". And indeed these acts have not only threatened our hard-earned democracy as seen till date with the case of Imo State but there have been increasing erosion of the professional, ethical and autonomous foundations of the judiciary necessary for INEC to perform her role.

The security aparati in the country is outside the control of INEC yet INEC operates within the structure and processes of this state security structure which it has no control. INEC depends and relies on the security services to provide a safe environment for the deployment of men and materials whenever the Commission is conducting an election. This has caused substantial

problems to INEC such as postponement of elections with grave implications. For instance when in 2015, INEC had to postpone the presidential election of that year, it was on the instance of the security. The election had to be moved from 14<sup>th</sup> of February, 2015 to March 28, 2015 and April 11, 2015 for gubernatorial elections based on security advice. And as the Chairman of INEC, posited,

it has become pertinent for it (INEC) to seriously consider the security advisory presented to it by the security and intelligence services; I would like to reiterate here that INEC is an Election Management Body (EMB) and not a security agency. It relies on security services to provide a safe environment for personnel, voters, election observers and election materials to conduct elections wherever it deploys. Where the security services strongly advise, it would be unconscionable of the Commission to deploy personnel and call voters out in such situation (Yacob-Haliso & Adesiyani, 2020, p. 63).

On the other hand, security agents have been known to have been contracted to harass, arrest, forcefully disperse, shoot, wound, or even kill people. The case in Rivers state in 2019 is quite fresh in the mind. The effect of this is manifest conflict in the electoral process.

The vast Nigerian geographical land mass, with its complexity in terrain, poses a problem in the distribution of electoral materials. To distribute election materials, officials have to traverse through mountains, creeks, forest belts, etc. besides dealing with the huge voting population, which is spread over 176, 845 polling units in the country, as at the last count, making Nigeria one of the biggest democracies in the world. The number of political parties INEC has to deal with due to multi-party democracy is a challenge. The voting population in the 2019 election was 84, 004, 084, but only 35% of this number voted (Okoye et al., 2020). Considering the above, it becomes even more cumbersome for the security services and their commands to deploy personnel to all the 176,844 polling units nationwide for security purposes with the result of conflict where there is any little challenge in the process. The problem of poor funding or delay in the release of funds for electoral activities has a detrimental effect on INEC's role. As a result, some officials may require logistical assistance from local and state governments or individuals within the constituency; while this is not necessarily a bad thing, it can sometimes lead to INEC officials being compromised or blackmailed by opposition with the false belief that they were partisan on its own, can lead to conflict.

Aside from the factors analyzed in the preceding chapters, a cardinal one that also precipitates conflict is the political nature of Nigerian politics, including the desperation with which Nigerian politicians approach elections as a do or die affair, struggling to win elections at all cost (Onuoha, 2011). In their desperation to win elections, politicians recruit thugs and equip them with all manner of dangerous weapons, especially as most of them do not believe in gaining power through submission to the electorate, which is a big challenge, not only to INEC but to the country's democratic process, stability, and sustainability.

The corollary to the above is the friction and tension between legislative and executive relations, which also impedes the activities of INEC. For instance, in 2021, the president withheld the Electoral Bill 2021, transmitted to him on the 19th of November, 2021. This was the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) time the president withheld assent, having done so on four (4) occasions in 2018 during the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The reworked and transmitted back to the president on January 25, 2022 will be the

sixth (6th), and the fact that the president has not assented to date is a serious and most potent impediment to the successful conduct of the upcoming 2023 elections due to the lingering debacle between the two arms of government. Fortunately, as this paper was being put together, news reports had it that the president had assented to the much awaited Bill on Friday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022. With this “belated” assent, INEC was forced to hold an emergency meeting of the Commission in which the Commission re-considered the timelines for her 2023 activities with new dates for the presidential and gubernatorial elections. In the words of the chairman of the Commission, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, “the Commission could not release the detailed timetable and schedule of activities for the General Election, as it normally would because of the pending enactment of the Electoral Act, 2022,” but at the signing of the bill, INEC “has decided to adjust the dates of the 2023 General Elections to ensure compliance with the provisions of the new law.” Accordingly, the presidential and National Assembly elections will now be held on Saturday February 25, 2023, while the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections will be held two weeks later on Saturday March 11, 2023. The foregoing is a clear manifestation of factors external to INEC that can trigger conflict before, during, or after an exercise as they impede the Commission from performing its roles efficiently.

Aside from the factors above, rigging of elections, hate campaigns, abuse of political power, as well as alienation, marginalization, and political exclusion are also responsible for election related conflicts. Maslow (1954) posits that unemployment and poverty can also trigger election-related conflict. On the other hand, in the Nigerian case, has also made reference to the political economy of oil as being a factor, while Galtung (1969) posits that the ineffectiveness of security forces and the culture of impunity, as well as weak governance, penalties, and corruption can provoke election-related violence.

When such conflicts are provoked, they manifest in various forms, such as political assassinations, thuggery, arson, murder and killings, election-related ethno-religious crises, ballot box snatching, and violence-prone campaigns, as well as armed conflict between opposition groups and political parties, and, as in other cases, military coups and even war.

## **Discussion**

### **Measures and Innovations Introduced by INEC to Engender Transparent and Peaceful Elections**

Aside from the internal factors within the Commission which have been analyzed as having a role in election-related conflicts in Nigeria, we have equally established that there are external factors outside the control of INEC which have been responsible for the conflicts in the Nigerian electoral process. The question at this point is, what has INEC done to meet these challenges of curbing or forestalling election-related violence in the country? It is interesting to note that INEC has taken concrete steps, especially since 2010, to attempt to arrest this ugly trend in the electoral process. These efforts and steps are directed toward the personnel of the Commission in terms of training, imbibing core values and professional ethics, organizational, logistical, and technical operations. Equally important have been the efforts geared towards seamless co-operation between relevant key stakeholders and civil society organizations, both local and international.

In specific terms, INEC’s emphasis on core values, guiding principles, and professional ethics for its staff is to cause the Commission’s personnel to remain neutral, transparent, and with integrity to deliver free, fair and credible elections that will remain peaceful and devoid of conflict.

To insulate INEC staff from shenanigans in the electoral process, university lecturers have been used by INEC as collation and returning officers. Besides, INEC staff are regularly trained. The Electoral Institute, established in the six geopolitical zones, is a case in this direction. The ad-hoc staff of the Commission are equally fully trained and, with the establishment of Registration Area Centers (RACs), refresher training is conducted here on the eve (night) of an election, even though the main purpose of RAC centers is for men and materials to be camped closer to polling units (PUs) for quicker deployment on election day to prevent delay and late arrival of materials to polling stations.

To mitigate risk and conflict, INEC, in collaboration with the security agencies, has established the inter-agency consultative committee on election security, intending to contain the broader insecurity in the country, which may have implications for the electoral process. The committee, amongst other duties, is to develop locally focused plans for providing security before, during, and after elections. It is also meant to assess existing security threats across the country that have implications for elections and produce a red, amber, and green electoral security map for the country, which will be regularly updated. INEC is also meant to evaluate the performance of security agencies on election duties and recommend improvements and sanctions where necessary. INEC has also moved away from poor or lack of planning and engaging in fire brigade arrangements during elections to strategic planning, involving strategic programmes of action through efficient and effective election project plans. The above has enabled INEC to improve the quality of election service delivery through election project plans which set its goals and targets with the Principal Business Areas (PBAs) associated with Election Day Logistics; Election Staff Management; Election Day Training; Political Parties, and Candidates Management; Continuous Voter Registration; Voter Education and Publicity; Complaints and Disputes Management; and Election Day Support (Adesina, 2012).

INEC, like any other EMB, believes that the panacea for election rigging is the electronic voting system, whose components include an electronic voter register, voter accreditation and authentication, electronic balloting, and electronic transmission of results. For this reason, INEC has been at the forefront of the call for the adoption of these devices because, as the Chairman (Prof. Mahmood Yakubu) maintained, “the Commission remained convinced that the deployment of technology in elections safeguards the integrity of the process more than the best manual process”. The deployment of these devices, especially during the off-season Anambra Gubernatorial elections held on the 6th of November, 2021, is evidence of a smooth, transparent, and peaceful election as widely acclaimed by most stakeholders and observers. The signing by the president of the Electoral Bill 2022 on the 25th of February, which legitimizes the use of these devices, represents a significant boost to INEC in her efforts to perform her roles more creditably, fairly, transparently, and peacefully with little or no conflict.

Again, INEC in contemporary times has requested candidates from different political parties to sign peace accords in order to mitigate election-related conflict and encourage issue-based campaigns; refrain from using inflammatory language or hate speech; as well as enjoin party supporters to avoid violent conduct that could jeopardize the credibility of elections (Moliki, 2021). The Commission has also collaborated with Nigerian and international civil society organizations and has established a stakeholders forum where INEC and stakeholders can share ideas in order to promote a peaceful process.

Lastly, though not exhaustively, the use of the result form called EC 60 pasted at every collation center, especially polling units at the end of the election, is meant to show credibility, transparency and integrity of the process, while the recently completed expansion of polling units was not only a historic feat, especially noting that it came twenty-five (25) years after the last exercise. The exercise aimed to expand voter access to polling units by converting the erstwhile voting points (VPs) and voting point settlements (VPS) to polling units and relocating some of them to unserved and underserved areas to make it easier for voters on election days.

All of these actions are intended to improve INEC's organizational and technical operations and eliminate suspicion, corruption, and partisanship by fostering a free, fair, credible, and transparent process with peaceful and acceptable outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

Democracy is arguably one of the most widely known and acceptable forms of government, with one of its major features being periodic elections meant to bring about a smooth and peaceful change of governments. In Nigeria, INEC is responsible for this periodic exercise. Unfortunately, in most African countries, as it is in Nigeria, this exercise is often challenging, chaotic, and conflictual. The reasons for the above are not farfetched; firstly, INEC deals with a heterogeneous Nigerian state whose politics is based on competition and power struggle with desperate politicians who employ "do or die" approaches to win elections. More to the above is that political power becomes a major instrument of wealth accumulation and therefore places those politicians in a vantage position to decide, as the American political scientist Harold Lasswell would put it, the question of "who gets what, when and how".

The large and complex geography of the country, the enormous voting population, security challenges, and many others outside the control of INEC make it difficult for INEC to perform its roles optimally. Moreover, corruption, unethical and fraudulent activities as well as partisanship of some staff of the Commission, coupled with the technical, logistical and operational weaknesses of INEC, have also been said to be responsible for election-related conflicts in the electoral process.

To overcome these challenges, however, the EMB has adopted some measures which, if applied professionally in addition to the recommendations made here, can change the narrative against the Commission as an institution that is responsible for election-related conflicts to one with credibility and integrity, delivering free, fair, transparent, and peaceful elections, thereby deepening democracy and engendering development in Nigeria as the vision and mission of INEC state.

## Recommendations

The analysis and examination of the role of INEC in election-related conflicts has exposed the internal weaknesses of INEC responsible for these conflicts. It has also exposed the challenges external to INEC, yet also responsible for conflicts in elections. Therefore, arising from the above, this paper recommends that:

1. The organizational, technical, and structural shortfalls of INEC can be overcome to perform optimally if INEC upgrades the level of diligence and proficiency in the training of its permanent and ad-hoc staff (personnel) on election duties.

2. INEC should have a more robust deployment of logistics and a better mechanism in the distribution of vital election materials – vehicles, motorbikes, camels, donkeys, trucks, helicopters, boats, and canoes, including life jackets where necessary. INEC should continue to plan for all elections in a strategic and long-term manner so that the Commission can begin activities early or on time, avoiding the fire brigade approach, which can lead to conflict on election day or afterward.
3. INEC should continue with aggressive awareness campaigns in the media through jingles etc. while also holding or organizing stakeholders forums to educate Nigerians about their duties and obligations as well as the negative effects of conflicts before, during, and after elections.
4. The perks of office should be withered down to make political office less attractive and to be for service rather than wealth accumulation. Nigerian politicians must stop seeing elections as something they must win at all cost. As a corollary to the above, there should be proportional rather than the current first-past-the-post type of representation, whose spirit of winner take all engenders conflicts in the electoral process.
5. Lastly, there should be an election offences tribunal to try and punish INEC staff and individuals as well as groups that get involved in offences related to conflict during elections and other vices.

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