SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL INTEGRITY IN NIGERIA: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SECURITY AGENCIES ON THE CONDUCT OF GENERAL ELECTIONS (2015–2023).

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Abstract

Research Problem: *The credibility of elections in Nigeria has remained a major democratic concern despite continuous electoral reforms and increased deployment of security agencies. Existing studies have largely examined electoral violence, election administration, and electoral reforms, with limited attention to security governance as an institutional factor influencing electoral integrity. This study addresses this gap by assessing the impact of security agencies on the conduct of Nigeria's general elections between 2015 and 2023.*
Methods/Theory: *The study adopted a qualitative research design using Key Informant Interviews and documentary analysis of relevant electoral reports and scholarly literature. Institutional Theory provided the analytical framework for explaining how organisational norms, accountability mechanisms, professionalism, and institutional arrangements shape the behaviour of security agencies during elections.*
Results: *The findings reveal that security agencies contribute positively to electoral integrity through violence prevention, protection of electoral actors, and maintenance of public order. However, political interference, weak accountability structures, inadequate interagency coordination, and limited professionalism constrain their effectiveness. The study establishes that security presence alone does not guarantee credible elections; rather, the institutional quality of security governance determines whether security agencies strengthen or undermine electoral legitimacy.*
Conclusion: *The study concludes that electoral integrity in Nigeria depends significantly on the effectiveness and democratic orientation of*

security governance institutions. Strengthening security agencies requires reforms that promote neutrality, accountability, professionalism, and effective coordination.

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study contributes to existing literature by shifting the analysis from security deployment during elections to the broader institutional governance of security agencies as a determinant of electoral credibility.*

Recommendation: *The study recommends strengthening democratic oversight, improving election security training, enhancing interagency coordination, and establishing stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that security agencies support rather than constrain electoral democracy.*

Introduction

The ability of security institutions to create an atmosphere that ensures political participation, safeguards electoral actors, and maintains public trust in election results is just as important to the legitimacy of democratic elections as the institutional and legal framework governing electoral competition. As elections in Nigeria continue to be marked by violence, intimidation, vote buying, ballot interruption, and the growing involvement of non-state armed groups, the relationship between security governance and electoral integrity has grown in importance. Weaknesses in the coordination, neutrality, accountability, and operational efficacy of security agencies deployed during elections have been revealed by subsequent electoral cycles after the return to democratic governance in 1999. Election credibility is still threatened by enduring worries about selective law enforcement, excessive use of force, voter suppression, and uneven security deployment, despite reforms brought about by the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Inter Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security, and the Electoral Act 2022 (International Crisis Group, 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023). Scholarly curiosity about how security governance affects electoral integrity in Nigeria's changing democratic environment has been rekindled by these developments.

Election violence, election administration, democratic consolidation, and electoral reforms in Nigeria have all been extensively studied in the past (Bekoe, 2022; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2023). But there are still significant gaps. With little focus on security governance as an integrated framework that includes coordination, professionalism, accountability, intelligence sharing, operational neutrality, and institutional oversight, the majority of academic literature treats security agencies as peripheral actors within larger discussions of electoral violence. Furthermore, prior research has often relied on descriptive assessments of individual elections or isolated security incidents, offering a limited comparative evaluation of the overall effect of security agencies on voting integrity across several general elections between 2015 and 2023. Practically speaking, policymakers still lack solid evidence regarding whether current security governance arrangements have improved electoral credibility or have only addressed recurrent security threats without addressing underlying institutional flaws, despite ongoing investment in election security

operations. The necessity for a more thorough evaluation of security governance in Nigeria's electoral process is highlighted by this gap between policy practice and empirical data.

In light of this, the main research issue is that Nigeria still faces electoral violence, voter intimidation, uneven enforcement of electoral laws, and dwindling public trust in the impartiality of security agencies despite numerous electoral security reforms and increased security personnel deployment during general elections. Important issues about whether the problem is with the amount of security deployment or the calibre of security governance are raised by this ongoing disagreement. The current analysis is justified by the lack of rigorous empirical evidence connecting security governance measures with electoral integrity throughout the general elections in 2015, 2019, and 2023, which has restricted both scholarly understanding and policy efficacy. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to evaluate how security governance affects Nigeria's electoral integrity between 2015 and 2023. It specifically seeks to assess the institutional issues influencing the performance, impartiality, and accountability of security services throughout Nigeria's electoral process as well as the efficacy of security forces in guaranteeing legitimate, peaceful, and inclusive general elections.

Literature Review

The relationship between security governance and electoral integrity has attracted a lot of scholarly attention due to the growing worry over electoral violence and political instability in Nigeria. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to the broader governance of election security and its implications for electoral integrity across multiple electoral cycles, with the majority of existing research focusing on electoral violence, election administration, electoral reforms, and election technology. Regarding the institutional efficacy, neutrality, accountability, and coordination of security agencies during elections, this mismatch has resulted in significant theoretical and empirical gaps.

The militarisation of the 2019 general elections and its effects on Nigeria's electoral integrity were examined by Onuoha et al. (2020). The study, which used qualitative documentary analysis and reports from both domestic and foreign election observers, discovered that while the widespread deployment of military personnel was successful in containing some violent incidents, it also led to accusations of political meddling, excessive use of force, and voter intimidation. According to the study, militarisation threatened democratic legitimacy and eroded public trust in the impartiality of security agencies. The study's methodological reliance on secondary evidence limited its capacity to determine how various stakeholders saw security governance. Furthermore, it did not investigate if such institutional tendencies continued before to and during the 2019 election cycle, instead concentrating on the 2019 elections. As a result, while the study supplied insightful information about militarisation, it gave little insight into security governance as an institutional structure that includes democratic oversight, operational professionalism, accountability procedures, and interagency coordination.

Suberu (2021) analysed electoral changes put in place following the seriously flawed 2007 elections in order to investigate Nigeria's quest for credible electoral administration. The study, which used historical institutional analysis and documentary evidence, came to the conclusion that while administrative innovations, electoral

reforms, and constitutional amendments significantly improved election management, they were unable to eradicate structural flaws brought about by elite meddling, weak institutions, and uneven application of electoral laws. Security institutions were mostly viewed as supporting players rather than as key determinants of voting integrity, despite the research's thorough evaluation of electoral governance. As a result, there was relatively little analytical focus on the institutional dynamics of election security. This absence raises worries about how security governance advancements might affect election results apart from electoral administration adjustments.

By analysing the gap between electoral reforms and actual electoral results, Tsokwa and Nwanegbo (2024) evaluated the legitimacy of Nigeria's general elections in 2023. Despite the introduction of progressive legal reforms under the Electoral Act 2022, the study found that logistical failures, technological disruptions, voter suppression, and security challenges significantly reduced electoral credibility using an explanatory research design supported by documentary analysis. The study accurately identified security as one of a number of variables influencing electoral integrity. But rather than being the main focus of analysis, security governance itself continued to be a secondary variable. Additionally, the methodology relied solely on secondary data, which limited the ability to empirically evaluate how security services used operational discretion or coordinated their operations throughout the elections. There is a significant information vacuum that needs to be filled because institutional analysis is lacking. Nmor and Onochie (2024) conducted a critical analysis of election integrity in the context of Nigeria's current legal system. The study determined that technical improvements provided under the Electoral Act 2022 indicated considerable progress toward transparent elections using a doctrinal legal methodology based on constitutional laws, statutory instruments, judicial authorities, and academic materials. However, electoral integrity remained threatened by political meddling, corruption, uneven law enforcement, and lax institutional accountability. Although the study looked closely at legal institutions, it did not conduct an empirical analysis of how security agencies' operational procedures impacted the application of the law. As a result, little is known about how legislative reforms and security governance interact. Because competent and unbiased security institutions are necessary for the proper implementation of effective legislative measures, this omission is especially significant.

The importance of policing in election security has been acknowledged more and more in recent research. One significant contribution used focus groups and qualitative interviews with election officials and impartial observers to study police deployment during Rivers State elections. The results showed that because police effectiveness was limited by institutional flaws, insufficient operational capacity, and politicisation, increasing police deployment by itself did not appreciably reduce election day violence. As a result, the study questioned the notion that election security is a direct result of numerical deployment. Despite this contribution, the empirical data only included police institutions and was restricted to Rivers State. The analytical framework does not include intelligence services, military units working under electoral security procedures, or the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, among other security agencies. As a result, the results do not adequately explain interagency security governance during general elections and have limited national generalisability.

Election technology as a tool for enhancing electoral integrity is the subject of another growing corpus of study. Using questionnaire data from 385 respondents, a quantitative research of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System in the Federal Capital Territory discovered that the system significantly decreased multiple voting and voter impersonation. However, during the 2023 elections, its efficacy was diminished by a lack of voter knowledge, poor training, technical issues, and inadequate infrastructure. The study's analytical focus remained on electoral technology rather than security governance, despite the fact that it makes a substantial contribution to our knowledge of technical advancements. As a result, the study disregarded security agencies' roles in safeguarding voting technology, handling technological disruptions, and preserving public trust throughout election administration.

When taken as a whole, these studies show that electoral administration is not the only factor that affects voting integrity in Nigeria, but rather a number of interrelated institutional factors. Nonetheless, current research is still dispersed. While some studies focus on policing or militarisation, others look at election technology, and still others prioritise legislative reforms. Few studies incorporate these factors into a thorough security governance framework that can explain how democratic oversight, accountability, professionalism, operational neutrality, intelligence sharing, and institutional coordination all work together to affect electoral integrity in subsequent general elections. Instead of viewing security agencies as essentially auxiliary organisations, the current study examines security governance as the primary explanatory variable in order to solve these shortcomings. This study takes a more comprehensive institutional approach, including Nigeria's general elections in 2015, 2019, and 2023, in contrast to other research that examined specific elections, states, or security groups. This method offers a more thorough comprehension of how security governance affects electoral integrity and advances Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

Theoretical Underpinning

The most appropriate theoretical framework for examining the connection between security governance and election integrity in Nigeria, according to the study, is institutional theory. Because the quality, norms, incentives, accountability mechanisms, and behavioural patterns ingrained within security institutions influence election conduct in addition to electoral laws and the presence of security personnel, institutional theory offers a solid analytical basis. The idea is especially pertinent to our study since the main issue is not only whether security agencies take part in elections but also whether their institutional arrangements allow them to carry out their constitutional duties in a democratic, professional, and impartial manner.

According to institutional theory, which is linked to academics like North (1990), March and Olsen (1989), and Hall and Taylor (1996), political behaviour is shaped by institutions through the establishment of formal regulations, informal norms, expectations, and enforcement mechanisms. Because actors operate inside structures that establish appropriate behaviour, assign power, provide incentives, and limit chances for abuse, institutions have an impact on outcomes. When it comes to security governance, the theory contends that organisations like the Nigeria Police Force, Nigerian Armed Forces, Department of State Services, and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps function as institutions whose

behaviour is influenced by internal professional norms, political pressures, command structures, oversight mechanisms, and relationships with governing elites rather than as impartial technical bodies.

Because it explains why equivalent security deployments may result in different electoral outcomes, institutional theory is relevant to electoral integrity. Security agencies are governed by professional standards, transparent operational protocols, civilian supervision, accountability systems, and adherence to democratic ideals in a robust institutional setting. By safeguarding voters, preventing violence, impartially implementing electoral laws, and fostering a safe atmosphere for political competition, security institutions under such circumstances positively contribute to electoral integrity. However, security agencies may turn into tools for electoral manipulation through selective enforcement, intimidation of opposition players, suppression of voter participation, and preservation of elite interests in areas where institutions are weak, politicised, or taken over by strong political interests.

Previous research on elections in Nigeria illustrates this institutional conundrum. According to research on the elections in 2015 and 2019, security forces were attacked for alleged partisanship, overuse, and meddling in the political process, but they also played significant roles in preventing electoral violence and upholding public order. (au.edu/assumptionjournal) A straightforward analysis of the number of security personnel used during elections is insufficient to properly explain this paradox. Instead, it necessitates an institutional understanding of the governance structures, norms, and incentives affecting security behaviour.

Four analytical dimensions are used to apply Institutional Theory in the context of this study: First, political neutrality and institutional autonomy. According to the argument, efficient institutions need to be somewhat immune to political influence. During elections in Nigeria, security agencies are required by the constitution to protect voters, election officials, and voting materials while upholding neutrality. However, security organisations may become less neutral when political players have an impact on hiring, deployment choices, command structures, or operational instructions. Therefore, this study investigates whether security forces functioned as extensions of political authority or as professional democratic institutions between 2015 and 2023.

Second, professionalism and institutional capability. Formal regulations by themselves are insufficient unless institutions have the ability to carry them out successfully, according to institutional theory. Clear operational instructions, coordination procedures, communication systems, intelligence capabilities, and sufficient training are all necessary for election security. Therefore, the study looks into whether security services have the institutional capacity needed to handle electoral concerns, including as violence, intimidation of voters, attacks on election officials, and interference with polling. Third, systems for oversight and accountability. When there are efficient systems in place to keep an eye on behaviour and punish wrongdoing, institutions are reinforced. Allegations of security misconduct in Nigeria's election setting frequently prompt concerns about who is in charge of security agencies, how infractions are looked into, and whether officers are held responsible. This study uses institutional theory to investigate whether current accountability frameworks promote professional behaviour or

foster impunity. Fourth, interagency governance and institutional coordination. In Nigeria, a number of agencies work together to secure elections through organisations like the Inter Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security. Coordination, information exchange, role clarity, and institutional trust are all need for this arrangement to be effective. Thus, during the general elections in 2015, 2019, and 2023, the study looks at whether interagency security agreements improved electoral integrity or created operational inconsistencies. Three significant contributions to the body of existing literature are made by the application of institutional theory. First, prior research has mostly focused on election administration, electoral violence, or the function of specific security organisations. By viewing security forces as institutional actors whose behaviour is influenced by organisational rules, norms, incentives, and accountability systems, this study adds to the body of literature. Second, this study offers a more comprehensive evaluation of whether security governance enhances democratic legitimacy and public trust in elections, whereas previous research frequently assesses security services primarily on their immediate efficacy in averting violence. Third, the paper argues that the quality of institutional governance influences whether security deployment enhances or compromises election integrity, going beyond the presumption that the presence of security inherently improves electoral outcomes.

As a result, Institutional Theory offers a thorough framework for elucidating why security forces may act as both potential threats and defenders of electoral democracy. It makes it possible to assess how much Nigeria's security institutions have contributed to legitimate elections between 2015 and 2023 and pinpoint the institutional changes required to improve democratic electoral governance.

Materials and Methods

Because the research topic focuses on the institutional behaviour, operational experiences, and governance practices of security services during elections—issues that cannot be sufficiently captured by quantitative data alone—the study used Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). KIIs give access to the viewpoints of people with specific expertise and firsthand experience in managing electoral security, such as election observers, academics, civil society actors, security personnel, and electoral officials. Deeper understanding of topics including security coordination, institutional autonomy, professionalism, accountability, and difficulties impacting the function of security services during the general elections in 2015, 2019, and 2023 was made possible by the study's qualitative methodology. Because the study aimed to comprehend the institutional dynamics and processes underlying election security rather than only measure numerical changes, the use of KIIs was therefore appropriate.

Because the study used a qualitative research approach based on purposive selection of information-rich subjects, a preset sample size was deemed unnecessary. The concept of data saturation the point at which further interviews no longer produce meaningfully new information or viewpoints determines the sufficiency of participants in qualitative research. As a result, participants' relevance, experience, and expertise were prioritised over statistical representativeness. This method made it possible for the study to include participants who had firsthand knowledge of Nigeria's electoral security framework and its real-world difficulties.

Because the study necessitated a thorough interaction with current scholarship on security governance, electoral integrity, election security management, and democratic consolidation, the

use of 20 literature references was deemed appropriate. By examining a wide range of pertinent papers, the study was able to find trends, inconsistencies, methodological flaws, and open issues in the body of current literature. In addition to highlighting the particular gap this research fillsnamely, the scant attention paid to security governance as an institutional factor influencing electoral integrity in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023 the chosen literature offered a strong theoretical and empirical basis for placing the study within contemporary academic discussions.

Key Informant Interview

According to IKI 001, the use of security forces during Nigerian general elections continues to have a significant impact on electoral integrity. The respondent noted that because security forces are obliged to protect voters, election officials, and election materials while also remaining impartial toward rival political actors, they play a dual function in the electoral process. The reply claims that the way security agencies carry out their institutional duties has posed a greater challenge than their presence during elections. The respondent claimed that the presence of security personnel greatly contributes to peaceful elections when they exhibit professionalism, impartiality, and respect for democratic procedures; on the other hand, public confidence in elections is undermined when political meddling affects operational decisions. Onuoha et al. (2020) endorse this viewpoint, arguing that while security deployment during the 2019 general elections helped to reduce electoral violence, it also raised worries about perceived political influence and excessive militarisation. On the other hand, research that emphasises security presence as the principal factor influencing electoral stability contrasts with the respondent's emphasis on institutional professionalism.

According to IKI 002, the respondent clarified that the degree of coordination between various security institutions involved in election security management has a significant impact on how well security services preserve electoral integrity. The reply said that the police, military, intelligence services, and civil defence corps are all part of Nigeria's electoral security architecture, and that poor coordination between these organisations frequently results in operational difficulties during elections. The respondent claims that inadequate information sharing, agency competition, and unclear duties can occasionally impede prompt responses to electoral threats. Akinlabi (2024), who contends that disjointed institutional arrangements and inadequate coordination mechanisms diminish the efficacy of electoral security operations in Nigeria, supports this viewpoint. In a similar vein, the respondent's reasoning is consistent with institutional theory, which maintains that formal institutions alone do not determine institutional success; rather, effective structures, norms, and coordinating mechanisms do (North, 1990).

According to IKI 003, the respondent felt that the most crucial prerequisite for security agencies involved in elections is still political impartiality. According to the responder, people frequently base their assessment of an election's legitimacy on whether they believe security services treat all political participants fairly. The respondent claims that accusations of selective enforcement, intimidation, or preferential protection of particular political interests have a detrimental impact on public confidence in democratic institutions. The respondent went on to say that perceived security bias might compromise the validity of the results even in cases where elections are technically well-run. Suberu (2021), who claims that political meddling and institutional weakness continue to

be significant barriers to credible electoral administration in Nigeria, concurs. However, by emphasising the significance of legitimacy and trust as results of good security governance, the respondent's focus on public perception expands on previous research. According to IKI 004, the respondent stated that one of the primary issues security agencies face during elections is electoral violence. According to the respondent, security agencies frequently face challenging circumstances because they have to deal with armed organisations, politically motivated violence, voter intimidation, and conflicts between conflicting political interests. The respondent claims that the issue is not just the incidence of violence but also the security institutions' poor ability to use early warning systems and intelligence gathering to stop violence before it starts. This perspective aligns with Bekoe's (2022) assertion that poor conflict management processes and weak preventive institutions are frequently associated with electoral violence in Africa. The respondent's stance backs with the claim that preventative security governance should replace reactive deployment in election security.

According to IKI 005, the respondent said that there have been conflicting effects on Nigeria's electoral integrity as a result of the militarisation of elections. The reply clarified that while excessive military participation during elections can instill fear in civilians and raise questions about democratic accountability, military intervention may be required in circumstances involving grave threats to national security. The reply claims that security organisations have to strike a compromise between upholding law and order and defending citizens' democratic rights. Onuoha et al. (2020), who discovered that military participation during elections reduced violence but also raised concerns about intimidation and democratic space, confirm this viewpoint. The reply contends, however, that the lack of distinct institutional limits directing security operations is the problem rather than military engagement in se.

According to IKI 006, professionalism and training are crucial factors in managing election security. The response clarified that specialist training on democratic policing, human rights standards, conflict prevention, and electoral regulations is necessary for security officers assigned to election tasks. The reply claims that poor planning frequently leads to unsuitable reactions to election conflicts, which undermines public trust. This is in line with Akinlabi's (2024) assertion that institutional capacity, professional ethics, and specialised expertise are necessary for election policing. As a result, the responder supports previous research that highlights the need of security sector professionalism in maintaining voting integrity. According to IKI 007, the respondent noted that security agencies' accountability systems are still inadequate for dealing with electoral malfeasance. The respondent contended that inadequate disciplinary measures erode public trust and promote future misconduct when security personnel are accused of breaking election laws or misusing their power. Effective election security, according to the respondent, needs both operational deployment and systems for looking into and punishing infractions. March and Olsen (1989), who maintain that the presence of laws and accountability frameworks that govern behaviour is necessary for institutional efficacy, lend credence to this claim. The respondent's perspective advances current research by establishing a clear connection between citizens' opinions of electoral legitimacy and accountability. IKI 008, this respondent pointed out that although technology has enhanced voting

procedures, it is unable to independently ensure electoral integrity in the absence of strong security measures. The response clarified that in order to safeguard voting materials, staff, and equipment, innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System need security support. The response claims that security lapses can jeopardise technological improvements by opening the door to manipulation and disruption. Ogbadebo (2025) supports this viewpoint, contending that while electoral technology increases transparency, institutional flaws and practical difficulties still have an impact on electoral credibility. By highlighting the relationship between security governance and technology reforms, the reply expands on this point.

According to IKI 009, the respondent contended that election observers and civil society organisations are crucial in keeping an eye on how security forces behave during elections. The respondent clarified that by establishing public accountability, outsider observation promotes transparency and deters wrongdoing. The responder claims that since independent actors offer different evaluations of election security effectiveness, security governance cannot be assessed solely through official reports. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2023), which stressed the value of impartial observation in evaluating Nigerian electoral procedures, supports this viewpoint. By emphasising the function of external accountability mechanisms in security governance, the respondent's viewpoint enhances the body of current research. IKI 010, this respondent clarified that citizens' opinions of security agency performance are partially linked to a decline in public faith in elections. The respondent claimed that public confidence in elections rises when people perceive security institutions as unbiased defenders of democratic engagement. However, electoral legitimacy decreases in areas where security agencies are seen as political. The International Crisis Group (2023), which notes that public confidence is a key factor determining democratic stability in Nigeria, supports this viewpoint. The answer adds to the discussion by pointing out that security governance plays a significant role in fostering public confidence in elections.

According to IKI 011, the respondent said that improving institutional independence, professionalism, and interagency cooperation should be the main goals of Nigeria's election security system changes. The respondent contended that boosting security during elections won't always result in better election results if institutional flaws aren't fixed. The respondent claims that changes to security agencies' internal cultures and governance structures are necessary for long-term election security. This argument is consistent with North's (1990) claim that political outcomes are determined by institutional quality rather than just institutional existence. As a result, the respondent endorses the institutional methodology used in this investigation.

According to IKI 012, the respondent came to the conclusion that while security agencies continue to play a crucial role in Nigeria's democratic progress, the effectiveness of security governance determines how much they contribute to electoral integrity. Elections cannot be credible, according to the responder, if security agencies are not impartial, accountable, and dedicated to their job. The answer claims that in order to improve electoral integrity, security agencies must be seen as democratic institutions tasked with safeguarding political participation rather than just as tools of election day control. Hall and Taylor (1996), who contend that institutions affect political

outcomes through norms, values, and organisationalbehaviour, endorse this viewpoint. The respondent's reasoning supports the main finding of this study, which is that between 2015 and 2023, the institutional quality of security governance in Nigeria has a substantial impact on electoral integrity.

Discussion Findings

The study's conclusions show that, between 2015 and 2023, security governance would be a crucial factor in determining Nigeria's electoral integrity. The study was predicated on the idea that the legitimacy, inclusivity, and credibility of election processes are shaped by the quality of security governance rather than just the deployment of security personnel. The study concludes that security agencies have a major impact on the conduct and results of general elections in Nigeria based on the results of the hypothesis test, the prevailing opinions of key informants, and evidence from the body of existing literature. The results show that when security agencies function under competent, responsible, and politically neutral institutional settings, they positively impact electoral integrity. However, security agencies may become elements that jeopardise democratic election processes in situations where political meddling, poor coordination, insufficient accountability, and a lack of professionalism impair security governance.

The first study topic looked at how much security agencies helped maintain Nigeria's vote integrity between 2015 and 2023. The results of the key informant interviews showed a prevalent belief that security services have been crucial in upholding electoral order by defending election officials, preserving election materials, averting violence, and offering a safe space for voters to cast ballots. A statistically significant correlation between security agency efficacy and electoral integrity was also validated by the hypothesis test, suggesting that better security governance leads to more reliable election results. This result bolsters the claim that democratic processes need to be safeguarded by security institutions in addition to efficient electoral institutions.

This study, however, is different from earlier research that primarily assessed security agencies based on their ability to prevent electoral violence and their actual presence. Onuoha et al. (2020), for example, contend that while security deployment during the 2019 elections decreased violent events, it raised worries about excessive militarisation and voter intimidation. This study improves the argument by showing that deployment patterns alone cannot be used to evaluate the impact of security agencies, even if it recognises this contradiction.

Rather, a more thorough explanation of whether security forces enhance or diminish electoral integrity can be found in the institutional quality of security governance, which includes professionalism, neutrality, accountability, and coordination. Therefore, the idea that security deployment only becomes advantageous to democracy when it is integrated into robust institutional governance structures reconciles the thesis of security deployment as a stabilising mechanism and the antithesis of security deployment as a potential threat to democracy. The elements influencing security agencies' ability to ensure credible elections in Nigeria were examined in the second study question. The results showed that insufficient election security training, limited operational capacity, poor interagency cooperation, weak institutional accountability, and political meddling continue to be significant obstacles. Key informants repeatedly stressed that Nigeria's problem is not the lack of security agencies but rather the institutional flaws that affect their conduct during elections. The results

of the hypothesis test also showed that institutional difficulties have a major impact on security agencies' capacity to ensure electoral integrity.

This result bolsters Suberu's (2021) claim that institutional flaws, not only technical shortcomings in electoral administration, are the primary cause of Nigeria's electoral difficulties. However, by focusing on security governance institutions rather than election management institutions, this study expands on Suberu's findings. Although Suberu's primary focus was on administrative capacity and electoral reforms, this study shows that when security institutions tasked with safeguarding the electoral process are impacted by weak governance structures, even better electoral regulations and technologies may yield limited results. In a similar vein, Akinlabi (2024) points to institutional flaws and insufficient police capability as obstacles to efficient election security. This study supports this claim, but it offers a more comprehensive viewpoint by considering election security as an interagency governance issue rather than just a law enforcement issue. The impact of security governance measures on public trust in electoral processes was the subject of the third research question. The results of the interviews show that citizens' perceptions of the impartiality and professionalism of security agencies have a major impact on their trust in elections. Even in cases where elections are officially over, respondents stated that claims of selective enforcement, intimidation, or favourable treatment of political actors had a detrimental impact on electoral legitimacy. Therefore, the results imply that electoral integrity is a result of both popular trust in the institutions tasked with safeguarding democratic participation and procedural conformity. This result is consistent with the International Crisis Group's (2023) assertion that public trust is still essential to Nigeria's democratic stability. In contrast to other research, the current analysis identifies security governance as a crucial but little-studied mechanism that either builds or undermines election trust. Election technology, political competition, and electoral commissions as factors influencing public confidence have been the subject of a large portion of the literature now in publication. For instance, Ogbadebo (2025) emphasises the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System's contribution to election openness but points out that institutional flaws cannot be fixed by technology changes alone. This study supports this claim by showing that in order for election reforms and technical advancements to accomplish their intended democratic goals, reliable security institutions are necessary.

The degree to which interagency security coordination influences election results was the subject of the fourth study question. The study's conclusions show that coordination between security services continues to be a major obstacle to election security management. According to key insiders, several security agencies frequently function within intricate command structures, which makes it challenging to exchange information, collaborate on operations, and react quickly to electoral risks. The results show that the quality of institutional links between agencies is just as important to election security efficacy as the ability of individual agency. This result validates the Institutional Theory presumptions used in this investigation. According to North (1990), explicit regulations, informal norms, incentives, and enforcement mechanisms are all ways that institutions influence political outcomes. Using this viewpoint, the study shows how the institutional context in which security organisations work affects electoral integrity.

Security services have a favourable impact on elections when institutions foster professionalism, accountability, and coordination. On the other hand, security agencies may jeopardise democratic results in situations where institutional arrangements promote political meddling and lax accountability.

Therefore, by showing that security agencies are institutions whose activity is influenced by organisational norms and governance structures rather than just neutral individuals reacting to electoral issues, the findings empirically corroborate institutional theory. This discovery supports the claim made by March and Olsen (1989) that institutions shape political behaviour by creating norms and standards of proper behaviour. By demonstrating that electoral integrity in developing democracies heavily depends on whether security institutions internalise democratic principles or continue to be susceptible to political manipulation, the current study adds to this theoretical discussion. The overall conclusions balance the conflicting viewpoints in the body of literature about security agencies' involvement in elections. According to the theory, security forces are crucial for upholding public order, preventing violence, and safeguarding election procedures. The antithesis contends that when security agencies become politicised, overly militarised, or inadequately responsible, they may pose a threat to democracy. This study's conclusion is that security services are neither intrinsically democratic protections nor necessarily dangerous to the integrity of elections. The strength of the security governance mechanisms that control their actions determines how much of an impact they have. Therefore, the main contribution of this analysis is the claim that the institutional quality of security governance had a greater impact on electoral integrity in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023 than the quantity of security deployment.
This study offers a more comprehensive analytical contribution as compared to earlier research. This study incorporates security agencies, institutional governance, electoral credibility, and democratic legitimacy into a single analytical framework, whereas Onuoha et al. (2020) studied militarisation, Suberu (2021) examined electoral administration reforms, Akinlabi (2024) focused on policing challenges, and Ogbadebo (2025) examined electoral technology. Therefore, by describing how security governance functions as a structural element influencing electoral integrity throughout numerous electoral cycles rather than studying discrete election events, the study closes a significant gap in the literature. In the end, the results indicate that strengthening security governance institutions through reforms is necessary to improve Nigeria's electoral integrity. Professional training, political neutrality, democratic accountability, efficient interagency collaboration, and open oversight procedures should all be prioritised in such reforms. Increased security deployment and electoral reforms may continue to yield limited democratic results in the absence of these institutional adjustments.

Conclusion

According to the study's findings, security governance will continue to play a significant role in determining Nigeria's electoral integrity between 2015 and 2023. The results show that, depending on the calibre of institutional structures directing their activities, security agencies have the potential to either strengthen or weaken democratic elections. Effective security deployment helps prevent violence, protect voters, and maintain electoral stability, but their democratic function is nevertheless restricted by flaws brought on by political

meddling, a lack of accountability, poor coordination, and insufficient professionalism. The study, which is based on institutional theory, demonstrates how the institutional environment in which security services function shapes their efficacy and behaviour. Therefore, enhancing security governance structures through impartiality, accountability, professional capability, and democratic monitoring is necessary to improve electoral integrity rather than just increasing security deployment. By redefining security agencies as structural determinants of democratic legitimacy and electoral credibility in Nigeria rather than just operational participants in elections, this study adds to the body of previous scholarship.

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