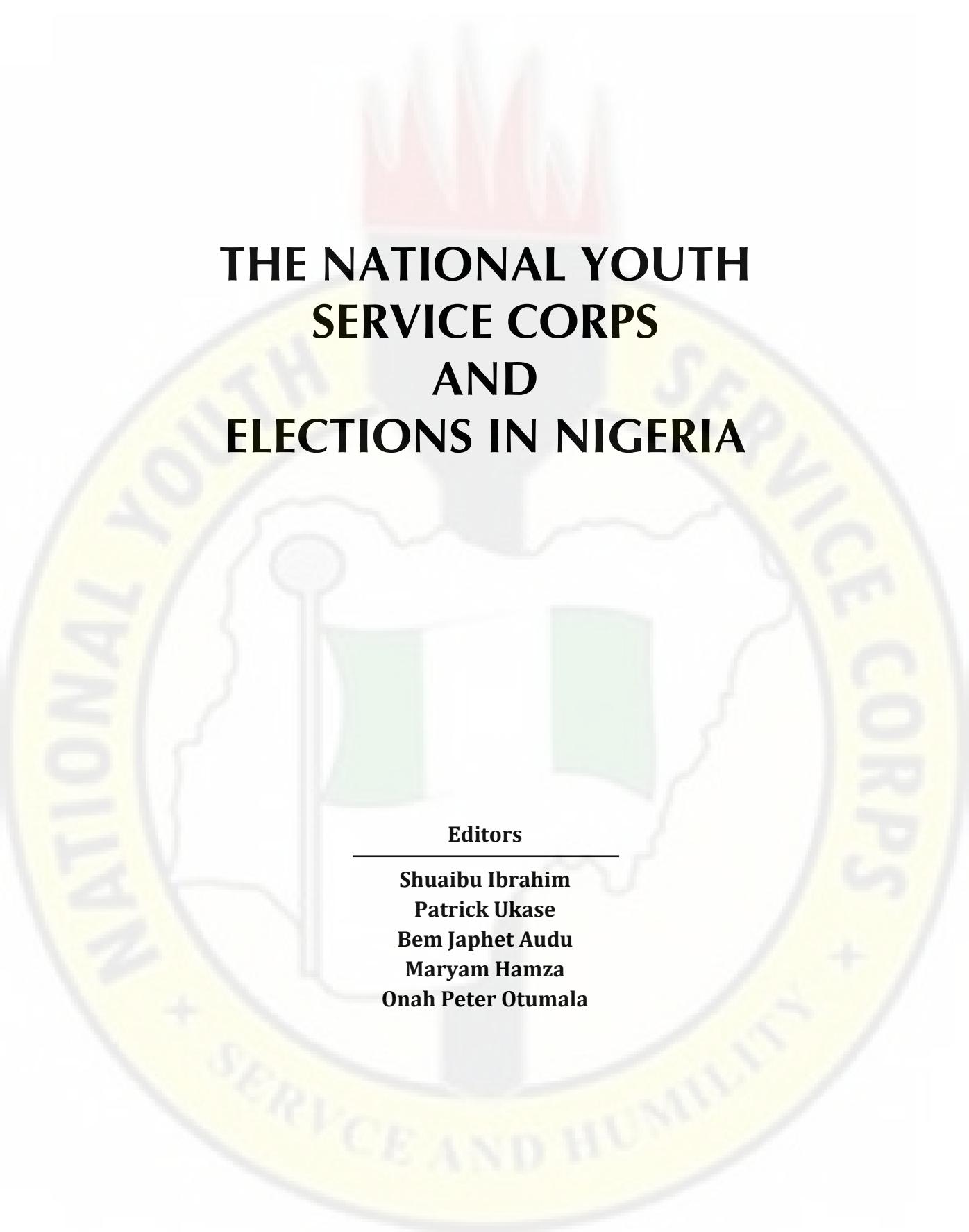


THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS AND ELECTION IN NIGERIA

◆ Shuaibu Ibrahim
◆ Patrick Ukase
◆ Bem Japhet Audu

◆ Maryam Hamza
◆ Onah Peter Otumala





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Editors

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Maryam Hamza, Onah Peter

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Abah Danladi, PhD is a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State.

Abasiama Joseph Nta, is of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Abasiama Joseph Nta, is of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy.

Baba Isaac Ibrahim, is a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State.

Barnabas M. Atime, is with the Department of History and International Studies, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State.

Bem Japhet Audu PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Emmanuel Osewe Akubor, is an Associate Professor in the Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Enoko E.K., is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State.

Gabriel Tyoyila Akwen, is in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Gashua, Yobe, Nigeria.

Hannatu K. Ali, is a senior lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Ineke, Ugbede Joseph, is with the Department of History and International Studies, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State.

Maryam Hamza PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Onoja I. Augustine, PhD is a lecturer with the Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State.

Rabiatus Ibrahim Abdullahi, is of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

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PREFACE

It is a truism that there is an intricate nexus between democracy and elections. Conceptualized as a form of government in which authoritative power and sovereignty rest with the people, liberal democracy is largely and essentially people-centred. Election is generally described as a formal process of selecting a person for public office, or accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting. An election is a formal group decision making process by which a population chooses persons to hold public office through voting. Invariably, there can be no democracy without free, fair and credible elections.

Unfortunately, elections in Africa and particularly Nigeria, have over the years been fraught and marred by inherent inconsistencies and contradictions, thereby producing several post-elections challenges. For instance, since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed six successive general elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) after every four-year electoral cycle. Sadly enough, these elections have been fraught with several challenges such as outright rigging, ballot box snatching and violence. With the integrity of the electoral process highly questionable, elections in Nigeria, particularly since the return of democracy in 1999, have failed to provide, not just an enabling environment for smooth democratic transitions, but have also been unable to midwife a transparent and accountable leadership, and to a large extent, provide good governance and genuine development in the polity.

This untoward development has had negative implications for the nation's democratization process. Apart from throwing up illegitimate leaderships, maiming and killing innocent citizens, it has led to general apathy during elections. This is because each election generates tension and fear of possible large-scale intimidation and violence. There are

clear indications that even for those who were bold enough to go out and vote, their votes, did not count. It was against this background that INEC - Nigeria's election management body, signed an agreement with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 2010 which was subsequently reviewed in 2013, to utilize the services of Corps members in all subsequent election duties, following the successes achieved with the later in the conduct of the 2007 and 2011 elections. For over a decade since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), how has the INEC-NYSC partnership improved the quality of elections in Nigeria? What are the challenges involved in the process, and what possible measures could be taken to improve this partnership?

These eleven chapters edited book attempts to address the various ramifications of elections in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the various interventions of the NYSC Scheme in the nation's electoral process since the INEC-NYSC MoU was signed in 2010. The chapters examined the legal and theoretical issues in NYSC-INEC partnership, the revision of voter's registration exercise, voter education, the conduct of elections in Nigeria within the period under review, election monitoring; welfare issues for Corps members and staff during election, and security challenges, just to mention but a few. Given the submission of these scholars in their various chapters, there is a sense in which we can argue that the INEC- NYSC partnership has produced several positives for the nation's democratization process. There is no doubt that the quality of elections have greatly improved in the last ten years but there are some loose ends that the partnership will need to improve upon, especially in the area of security.

In conclusion, this book cannot claim to have addressed all the issues in the INEC-NYSC partnership in Nigeria's electoral process, but reading through the various chapters, you will BE convinced that this volume is a critical intervention and contribution to elections and the electoral

process in Nigeria. This volume will not only stimulate renewed interest among scholars, policy makers and students, but will also go a long way in filling the gaps in relevant literature especially in the context of INEC-NYSC partnership.

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May God Bless us all.

**Shuaibu Ibrahim, Patrick Ukase, Bem J. Audu, Maryam Hamza
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INTRODUCTION

Brief History of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established in 1973 by the government of General Yakubu Gowon. The history of the scheme is traceable to the events that took place in Nigeria towards the last half of 1960s. The years 1967-1970 were characterized by the Nigerian civil war. At the end of the war, the General Gowon administration came up with new policies that would promote post-conflict peace, reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Consequently, the vital need for national unity led to the birth of the NYSC idea. The NYSC Scheme came into being through Decree No. 24 of 22nd May 1973. It states that the NYSC is being established with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity. After 20 years of existence, the 1973 Decree was repealed and replaced with No. 51 of 16th June, 1993, now referred to as the National Youth Service Corps Act, Cap. N84, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. The Act is preserved by Section 315 (5) (a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), thereby, making the NYSC Act part and parcel of the constitution.

According to Section 1(3) of the NYSC Act, the objectives of the Scheme are to:

- (a) inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves;
- (b) raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of nation achievements, social and cultural improvement;

- (c) develop in Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
- (d) enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment;
- (e) contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy;
- (f) develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration;
- (g) remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and
- (h) develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.”

In order to achieve the objectives stated above, Section 1(4) of the NYSC Act provides that the Scheme shall ensure:

- “(a) the equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in area of national needs;
- (b) that are far as possible, Nigerian youths are assigned to jobs in States other than their States of origin;
- (c) that such group of Nigerian youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigeria as far as possible;

- (d) that the Nigerian youths are exposed to the mode of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria.
- (e) the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences;
- (f) the members of the service corps are encouraged to seek a year for their one year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour;
- (g) that employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of the States or origin."

Basically, the aims and objectives of the NYSC is to reinforce institutional efficiency and effectiveness as well as youth development in the country. It is accepted in several quarters that NYSC is a viable platform for the transitioning of youths into self-reliant adults and the improvement of general welfare and development. The NYSC programme has since inception facilitated steady and effective supply and distribution of skilled manpower, breaking of social and cultural barriers as well as the building of friendly bridges across ethno-linguistic boundaries. It has also assisted in the promotion of values, national unity and development, rekindled interest in neglected but vital areas of national development and promoted leadership qualities in the youths. The Scheme has four (4) cardinal programmes which are: Mobilisation/Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service and Winding-Up/Passing- Out Exercise.

The maximum age requirement for youths under the scheme is thirty (30) years old. They are also engaged in community development programmes and activities. According to Section 2(2) of the NYSC Act, the only groups of youth exempted are those that have served in the

Armed forces or the Nigerian Police for a period of more than nine (9) months or in the security agencies, those over thirty (30) years of age and those conferred with National Honours. In addition, the choice of youths above every other age group was based on the fact that they are considered the most active change agents needed in building a united Nigeria, and a way of achieving this is for the youths to imbibe and nurture a sense of common belonging and national consciousness which would transcend political, social, state and ethnic loyalties.

At the onset of the NYSC in 1973, only 2,346 graduates were mobilized. However, judging by the evolution of the Scheme, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of graduates that are participating annually. NYSC is capable of bringing out the best qualities in Nigerian youth and imparting in them the right attitude and value for nation building that serves as catalyst to national development, sense of pride and fulfillment of its participating graduate youths. The criteria observed in the deployment of Corps members include:

- the equality of states,
- ability of states to absorb the service of participants,
- posting based on concessional considerations (marital and health grounds), posting on demand from various federal government establishments,
- the supportive role of a government is also increasingly becoming a factor in the placement of corps members,
- the deployment of corps members has retained its traditional process with the majority of corps members going to the classrooms.

The Scheme's presence is felt and noticed in all the LGAs in the country, creating higher emphasis in the rural and grass root development in line with its objectives since inception.

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Democracy and Governance in Nigeria, 1960-2019: Challenges and Prospects

Gabriel Tyoyila Akwen

Introduction

All over the world, events like the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the USSR's disintegration in 1991, and the end of the Cold War contributed to democracy becoming the prevailing and most desired system of government. In some parts of the world, democracy has been altered to suit the people's peculiar cultural and political circumstances. Despite this development, a few countries like China, Russia, and North Korea have fervently refused to embrace democracy as the best means of leading people (Ugbada, 2019). Democracy may not be strange to Nigerians. What may be bizarre to them is the type of democracy

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practiced in Nigeria. Nigerians expect that democracy should pave the way for developing human and material resources for political stability, scientific advancement, economic viability, technological breakthrough, educational development, and life-enhancing social services (Ajayi and Ojo, 2014). Given Nigeria's potentials at the time of independence, it was thought that Nigeria would be the bastion of democracy in Africa. Ironically, regarding the practice and delivery of dividends of liberal democracy, Nigerians are yet to enjoy democracy.

The practice of democracy in Nigeria was distorted at a point by incessant military coup d'etat. Notwithstanding, the Nigerian experiences have shown that a coup d'etat cannot destroy democracy. In Nigeria, democracy has survived every assault upon political liberty. An indication that the actual layer of democracy has neither scepter nor sword, but a baneful idea. Paradoxically, the lethal proxy is an idea about freedom. In Nigeria today, freedom from want is a general goal. Millions of people were destroyed by the effects of unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, untreated illness, and inadequate education. With this sad situation, Nigerian political leaders still see themselves as the vanguards of social, economic, and political development. Most of these political leaders still claim to be adherents of the principle of accountability. Nevertheless, the essentials of development are more required than the claims of democracy.

The current dispensation of democratic practice in Nigeria (1999-2021) has raised many issues, one of which is the blatant show of 'militarized political culture' in the democratic era. One wonders why the statesmen's political behaviour in a democratic period is that of combative stance rather than dialogue, negotiation, and compromise as claimed by democratic principles. This situation prompted Frank and Ukpere (2012) to ask why politicians who were never enlisted into military service acting like military commanders in Nigeria's democratic space. Furthermore, a 2008 public opinion survey covering the post-1999 period disclosed that about 78% of Nigerians endorse

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democracy. Even with this optimistic viewpoint on democracy, only 42 % of the studied population were contented with Nigeria's democratic governance (AniKifordu, 2011).

The scenario discussed above shows that numerous challenges are facing democratic governance in Nigeria. It means that for Nigerians to fully enjoy the dividends of democracy, most of these issues discussed in one of the subsequent sections of this chapter need to be tackled.

Conceptual Discourse

Democracy, either as an idea or a governance system, has become ambiguous in current political analysis. The term democracy has been subjected to changing definitions, opposed interpretations, and contradictions. This may be because democracy has been widely complimented and embraced, with many people producing variant strands of democracy to suit their purpose. Politicians from the farthest left to the farthest right always claim that the type of rule they support is the one that is democratic. In this light, Crick (1964) portrayed democracy as the best promiscuous word in the world of civic affairs. This is because democracy is what is moral for a country to be. Therefore, even in places where democracy has experienced numerous setbacks, it has gained momentum compared to science and technology since the Industrial Revolution.

Regardless of the above, some hypothetical attempts at explaining the standard yet complicated and almost abstract definition of democracy are made. Any reasonable attempt to comprehend democracy must start with the ancient concept of democracy as the people's rule. *Demos* and *kratia* are Greek terms that mean people and law or authority, respectively. As a result, democracy means "people's laws." This started among the Greeks in the first half of the 5th century B.C., stating what Robert Dahl refers to as the "transformation from rule by the few to rule by the many" (Dahl, 1989). Although the assertion that democracy started among the Greeks is contestable, there exist elements of

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democratic governance in most African societies without their contact with the outside world.

During the French Revolution (1789-1799), Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), a French lawyer and political leader, described democracy as a state in which the nation, as independent, guided by rules of its own making, does for itself everything that it can do well (Keping, 2018). This description means that there are certain things that "the people" are unable to do or do poorly. Then there is the issue of what these things are. So, who is it that does those things? Abraham Lincoln gave what has since become the most famous description of democracy in his Gettysburg Address. He asserted that all men are created equal and defined democracy as the "government of the people, by the people, for the people". This definition makes the people the subject and object of democracy, or put differently, the 'reason for governance.' This description has many advantages, but it, like all others, has drawbacks. Since all men are supposedly created equal, why emphasize the concept of equality?

In this context, we shall build on Lincoln's foundation to define democracy as a representative government, where the rule of law, constitutionalism, and the principles of equality and rights are observed. In a contemporary representative democracy, there is a distinction between rulers and ruled. In this situation, "once more, the people are not admitted to the public realm, once more the business of government becomes the privilege of the few" (Arendt, 1990: 237). Thus, in most developing countries, instead of seeing representative democracy as a nexus between State and society, it has become a form of statist democracy, whose main aim is to eliminate the majority of the population from political power. On the other hand, democracy should be based on honesty, decency, and good governance whereby the will of the people in choosing their representatives is most effectively-respected (Odeh, 2010). In this disposition, democracy refers to a method of group decision-making that is characterized by equality

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among the participants at an essential stage of collective decision-making.

On the other hand, governance is an English word derived from Latin and ancient Greek, which means control, guidance, and manipulation. Its definition had long been confused with that of the term government, and it was primarily used to refer to administrative and political activities concerning national public relations. Diversely, western political scientists and economists gave it a new definition in the 1990s. Since then, the term has come to mean a lot more than it used to, and it is nothing like what the word government used to mean (Keping, 2018). A democratic government is answerable to the people. Although public officials (political office holders and civil servants) are social servants who represent society and the people, they have to fulfill their end of the social contract. The government is in charge of ensuring equality and promoting fundamental human rights. Heyman (2014) cites the reasoning behind the historical Bill of Rights, claiming that those who wrote it were not concerned that the government would do too little but rather that it would take on too much responsibility.

As a result of the above, government plays a role in achieving both of these noble ideals of liberty and social good. According to the United Nations, governance refers to the formal and informal structures that regulate how public decisions are taken and how public acts are carried out to uphold a country's constitutional principles. It is how a community establishes and manages the laws that govern policy development and implementation (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2007). Drawing from this:

governance presupposes a power structure with its hierarchical categories, incorporating the economic, social, cultural, and political tensions within the society, and thus spreading out an inherent dynamism that absorbs the ebbs and flows of pressures towards ensuring peaceful and practical solutions to

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existential problems confronting the society and its people (Yagboyaju and Akinola 2019:2)

Nzongola-Ntalaja's effort to isolate three significant styles of governance is apt and vital in this context. The first is political or public administration, in which the State, government, or public sector has authority. It has to do with the mechanism by which a society organizes and manages its affairs (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). Second, economic governance, here power is vested in the private sector and refers to service delivery practices, procedures, or institutional mechanisms. The final category is social governance, which is governed by civil society, including individuals and non-profit organizations, which refers to principles and beliefs required for social behaviour to occur and for public decisions to be taken (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). Besides, governance can be seen as:

...the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated, and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest. It has four features: governance is not a set of rules or activity, but a process; the process of governance is not based on control, but on coordination; it involves both public and private sectors; it is not a formal institution, but continuing interaction (Commission on Global Governance 1995:2-3)

We can deduce from the above definitions of governance that exercising power keeps the peace and addresses the public's needs within a specific range. The goal of governance is to use the power of

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various systems and relationships to direct, steer, and control citizens' actions in order to maximize the public good. Governance refers to the process of political administration, which includes the normative basis of political power, approaches to dealing with political affairs, and the management of public resources in terms of political concerns and the administration of public resources.

There does not seem to be much of a distinction between governance and government. They are, however, vastly different in terms of semantics. According to many scholars, distinguishing governance from the government is a prerequisite for a profound comprehension of governance. Governance needs to be differentiated from the conventional concept of government by the State from the very beginning (Gaudin, 1999). Like government by the State, governance is a political administration mechanism that involves authority and power and essentially seeks to preserve a regular social order.

Nigeria's Democratic Governance Journey (1960-2019) in Brief

On the attainment of independence-1stOctober 1960, Nigeria joined the league of democratic states as the fourth world's largest democracy. As earlier stated, Nigeria was arguably unique and accurately planned for democratic governance. Nigeria was quick to break away from its colonial constitutional legacy. Rejecting Britain's congressional system of democracy, which they had continued after independence in 1960, they preferred their first Nigerian-made constitution and adopted the American model instead. They decided with characteristic rationality: Nigeria, just like the United States, is significant, complicated, and heterogeneous. As one of Nigeria's constitution-makers said clearly, what succeeds for the US may work for us (Herskovits, 1979).

Nevertheless, the first republic was brief, ending on 15 January 1966, with a coup d'état. The military ruled the nation between this time and 1stOctober 1979, when civilian rule was restored. The return to democratic rule resulted in adopting a federal constitution that

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featured a multiparty system, judicial independence, and separation of powers, among other attributes. However, on 31stDecember 1983, the military abruptly ended the process, and the nation remained firmly under military rule until 29thMay 1999, when a new democratic experiment began. Though, unlike in 1979, the military did not voluntarily relinquish authority this time. They were compelled by many factors that included the crisis engendered by the annulment of the 12thJune 1993, presidential election that late Chief M.K.O Abiola glaringly won, pressure from the international community, and pro-democracy agitators within Nigeria.

The factors listed above, as well as other issues, shook the country to its base. The catastrophe was sparked by Ibrahim Babangida, the military president who 'dribbled' Nigerians via a series of long-drawn magnificent and intricate but questionable and cunning policies and programs planned primarily for self-preservation in power and ended up cancelling the freest election ever. The problem worsened under General Sani Abacha's tyrannical and repressive government, which came to power after Babangida was forced to "step aside." Nigerians were more eager than ever to drive the military out of control in the face of these circumstances. The people's deep dedication to the establishment of a democratic government paid off when the military, led by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who rose to power after Abacha's sudden death, voluntarily relinquished power (2013, Omotoso). Throughout the period of military rule in Nigeria, the principles of democracy were swept under the carpet. The people suffered various degree of human right abuses.

From the above analysis, Nigeria has tried democracy three times and is now engaged in its fourth attempt. Coups d'etat undermined the first two democracies, and the third barely got off the ground before being overthrown by the military. According to Ungar (1989), Nigeria's post-independence first five years were turbulent and violent, culminating in two coups in 1966 that brought Yakubu Gowon to power. The

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acrimony and wrangling that typified these five years stemmed from the fact that Nigeria had previously been a federation of three vast regions; thus, ethnic rivalries were intensified when this all changed. The proliferation of states brought about ethnic rivalries caused by competition for the national cake and power (Anugwom, 2000).

Problems of Democracy and Governance in Nigeria

As expressed above, the democratic experience in Nigeria faced some challenges shortly after the attainment of political independence in 1960. Since then, the problems of democracy in Nigeria are compounding as new developments unfold in the country. The first problem that confronted Nigeria's democracy was the incessant military interferences in the polity. In many Nigerians' eyes, these military interventions in politics portray democracy as an unstable mode of governance. At this point, western theories of military intervention see the military as corrective regimes. They were assumed to possess the ability to reconcile societal contradictions that the civilians were unable to resolve. In all previous military interventions, the military has consistently accused civilians, especially politicians, of intolerance to the plight of the people, nepotism, tribalism, corruption, and leadership incompetence, among other vices, commonly cited as justifications for seizing power from civilians (Okaneme, 2020). Poignantly, all the military regimes in Nigeria never acted contrarily to the accusations they levied on the civilian leaders.

As a result of the long years of military rule, a militarized political culture emerged, reflecting in the political exercises of the *dramatis personae* in the democratic space. Nigerian political culture has been undermined, and a militarized culture has taken root. Consequently, in a democratic dispensation, the rule of procedure became that of order, war rather than negotiation, disregard for court orders, and abuses of human rights became the militarized civic culture principles. Those mentioned above are the opposite of democratic ideals and norms. Moral beliefs or quality of life that people admire for their own sake are

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examples of democratic ethos. Democracy is founded on a set of core principles or norms. Freedom, equality, inclusion, justice, negotiation, welfare, and compromise are among the principles that provide democracy with inherent worth and give its structures and processes their normative intent (Sodaro, 2008). Furthermore, Frank and Upere, (2012:228) posit that:

...the militarization of governance engenders a militarized civic culture, the outcome of which is militarized psyche. Herein stated that there is significant incongruence between the internalized military culture, character, and the demands of the democratic process. As a result, the democratic arena is seen as an extension of the barrack. This point is given credence to ex-military men's dominance as politicians who are yet to be re-civilianized. This explicates the behaviour of politicians since 1999. The behaviours are the direct correlates of the dialectics of military governance.

Aside from the above, during military rule (39 years), the general public encountered excessive hardship. They were subjected to arbitrary rules. The people were subjected to harsh measures that negated their rights as free citizens and denied them the freedom to make their own decisions. Instead, bribery, subjugation, and force were used to enforce laws, with decrees serving as the legal framework for enforcement. The abolition of freedoms of speech, freedom of association, community procession, and other forms of expression during these times resulted in mistrust among the governed of the mechanisms of government and their Governors. Obnoxious decrees heavily bolstered the media's voice. The general feeling of hostility, apprehension, and skepticism toward government policies was palpable (Ugbada, 2019).

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As a consequence of the characteristics mentioned earlier of military autocracy, when democracy was fully established in 1999, despite the people's excitement, it became extremely difficult for the constitutionally elected government to enact policy reforms that would positively impact society and further enshrine true democracy. "Under the new dispensation, efforts at policy changes often met stiff opposition, while others no matter how well intentioned were sternly resisted. The means of communicating policy change by the government were seen to be crude" (Ugbada, 2019:88). The resistance to reversal to real democratic principles shows that the current crop of Nigerian politicians is using the military legacy to actualize their sit-tight syndrome. Any attempt to change the status quo would place them at a disadvantage.

Corruption and institutional rot are two other issues plaguing Nigerian democracy. The press, political parties, the Judiciary, and the legislature are all rife with corruption. The extent of corruption that has infiltrated the Judiciary, the commoner's ostensibly last refuge, is the most humiliating. Obasanjo referred to the national assembly as unarmed bandits, claiming that the constituency allowances they do collect are a massive scam and corruption (Obilor et al., 2018). Corruption is rampant and widespread in Nigeria. It is afflicting and ravaging the Nigerian State in all fields. Both levels of government share responsibility. Obasanjo bemoaned the negative impact of corruption on governance when he said:

No society can grow and develop when corruption is allowed to progress unfettered as it has grown into cancer in Nigeria. The government and its agencies became thoroughly corrupt and reckless. Members of the public had to bribe their way through ministries and parastatals to get attention. One government agency had to bribe another government agency to

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obtain the fund's release of their statutory allocation (Obasanjo, 1999).

Efforts to tackle the problem of corruption by the Obasanjo administration met its water low, after the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practice and other related offences Commission (ICPC) to combat corruption.

In July 1999, a bill was introduced in the National Assembly to ban bribes and prosecute public officials who participate in bribery, corruption, and other unethical behaviour. The bill was not only watered down by lawmakers for personal reasons, but it also took almost year for both houses to pass it into law, much to the disappointment of Nigerians (Omotoso, 2013). Aside from that, the State Governors questioned the law's legality. In reality, the state governments of Abia and Ondo went to court over it. The case was finally settled after the Supreme Court issued a ruling affirming the laws' constitutionality and legality, except two clauses deemed unconstitutional. In addition to the ICPC the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established by law in June of 2004. The EFCC is in charge of enforcing both economic and financial crimes rules (Omotoso, 2013)

Insecurity is a big issue in the country's democracy and political stability. As previously stated, establishing a democratic system in 1999 enabled different groups to vent their pent-up rage. This is compounded by political issues, with different groups voicing their concerns more forcefully than ever before and preparing themselves for favourable economic and political prospects. Many things that were unlikely under military rule are now possible thanks to democratic rule, which emphasizes the rule of law and the promotion of fundamental human rights. Adebanwi (2004) elaborates this by observing that:

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The constriction of the democratic public sphere for several years under the military prevented various interest groups and social and political formations from advancing their interests and expressing their grievances through democratic means. When the democratic rule was achieved, these interests and grievances burst forth with speed; gushed forth like an overflowing dam whose boundary walls have been brought down on a still-limited democratic space, producing the conflagration which we are witnessing (Adebanwi, 2004: 328)

The activities of Boko Haram terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, and attacks by terrorist herdsmen on crop farmers corroborate the position of Adebanwi. The current insecurity experienced in Nigeria is an indication that the State is finding it challenging to protect lives and property.

The release of bottled-up rage by various groups across the country has exacerbated the insecurity situation well beyond Nigerian security forces' capabilities and resources. The issue is aggravated and deepened by the unemployment issue. With over 70% of Nigerian youths either unemployed or underemployed, the elite can easily hire the already disgruntled youths to fight their political and economic battles. Since 1999, the country has been wracked by political, economic, religious, ethnic, and electoral crises that have threatened its existence (Omotoso, 2013).

The elite composition is another problem facing democracy in Nigeria. Despite the Nigerian polity's structural changes, the elite's individual members and classes are drawn from related and exclusive backgrounds. There is a connection between traditionally ingrained values and interests that deny opportunities to new clusters. The greater the dominance of a small number of individuals or groups in

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society, the more likely that others' rights, as well as the democratic system's openness, inclusiveness, and the rule of law, may be jeopardized. The hampering of new entrants into the Nigerian political elite-hood leads to reproduction instead of political elites' circulation. Reproduction is the outcome of shared behaviours among individuals who share similar backgrounds and social networks. "This reproduction leads to a hybrid form of governance. Here, hybridism refers to incomplete liberalization and systematically curtailed inclusion, matched by quite ineffective government" (AniKifordu, 2011:16).

Elite composition in Nigeria has bastardized the Federal Character Principle (FCP), which is expected to solve the problems of equality and marginalization. The FCP, which was visualized by political elites and ultimately institutionalized as a means for reducing inequality in the political arena, involves promoting inclusion throughout the Nigerian socio-cultural spectrum (Mustapha, 2009). As lovely as this principle sounds, its application is somewhat limited because of the elite struggle for political authority and eminence. In comparison, many writers and analysts have seen ethnicity as a significant problem to Nigerian democracy. There is a need to submerge the analysis of ethnicity under elite composition. Ordinarily, ethnic groups do not have a problem with each other in Nigeria. Most of what we have witnessed in Nigeria is ethnic groups fighting proxy battles of elites. It is usually the political elite that manipulates ethnic groups to suit their political purpose. They do this through the divide and rule strategy.

The elites in Nigeria do not relate well with the masses. Nigerian democracy lacks the forward and backward connexions that are supposed to exist between the political elite and the masses. In a natural democratic setting, the political elite concern for the masses reduces suspicion and enhances a culture of trust, peace, and harmony among the various classes that exist in the society. More so, the Nigerian elite is not ready to consolidate democratic governance. This

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is noticed in their lack of overt aspiration to build an all-inclusive stage for rectitude, accountability, and responsiveness. This can be done by creating a sufficient force for decency, ostracising all forms of executive misconduct capable of tarnishing Nigeria's image.

Despite the considerable importance of political parties, over the years, political parties in Nigeria lack a central pillar of democracy, which is internal party democracy. This lack of intra-party democracy has adversely affected the country's march towards true democracy. Internal democracy is the foundation of any thriving democracy where peace, progress, prosperity, and unity are the pillars that hold the country firmly. In contrast, a lack of internal party democracy is central to breeding lousy governance and incompetence, endangers peaceful coexistence and can degenerate into anarchy. (Akwen and Gever, 2013).

Prospects of Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Many countries, including Yugoslavia, Nigeria, and Liberia, experienced civil wars and ethnic struggles in their history. The repercussions of all these efforts on Nigeria and other developing states is a lag in democratic governance that would have spurred overall development. Despite the negative factors shown above, which have affected Nigeria's potential for good governance, the various democratization waves have brought some hope for Nigeria. There are enormous prospects for the Nigerian State to witness ideal democracy, good governance, security, and stability. The hope for Nigeria rests on the fact that almost everyone in Nigeria desires democracy. Since the feedback mechanism helps a political system to survive eminent collapse, the Nigerian political system need to listen to the message passed from the environment via the feedback loop. The message is clear 'restructuring'. This is the current yearnings and aspirations of the masses.

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As said above, majority of Nigerians desire democracy. The only problem is the determination to make it work. The preference for democracy leads to the general agreement that a civilian government is more desirable in Nigeria than a military junta. In this sense, civil rule is equated with democratic rule, which has the potentials of guaranteeing fundamental rights and allowing the masses to choose their leaders via periodic and competitive elections (Ojo, 2001). To achieve the dividends mentioned above of democracy, there is a need for Nigerians, regardless of status, to ponder on the values, visions, and desires of our founding fathers. This needs to be done with particular reference in good governance, formulation, and execution of people-oriented programs and policies through moral leadership.

Another prospect for democracy in Nigeria hinges on the Nigerian Judiciary's potentials, which is the last hope of Nigeria. By discharging justice in a free and fair manner and conferring punishment appropriately, the Nigerian Judiciary will restore Nigerians hope in democracy. Without a doubt, the Judiciary has played an essential role in maintaining Nigeria's democracy. Since the beginning of democratic rule in Nigeria, the Judiciary has been one organ of government that has performed its function to ensure the survival of democratic principles (Maduagwu, 2019). The Judiciary has safeguarded Nigeria's democratic values in various ways: resolving intra-party conflicts, resolution of resource control clashes, impeachment of the Chief executive, and Local Government Autonomy. To consolidate on the gains above, members of the bench who reportedly compromised in the execution of their duties should be investigated and disciplined by the National Judicial Council.

Conclusion

In this chapter, some challenges that hampered the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria are discussed. Military incursion, which was one of Nigeria's first democratic experiment challenges, has become a legacy to the civilian leaders. Even amid this current phrase, the

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military approach could be seen in cases like the Odi and Zaki Biam saga of 20th November 1999 and 22-24 October 2001 respectively, to the End SARS Lekki plaza face-off of 20th October 2020. Democracy based on Good governance (consensus-driven, participatory, law, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, fairness, and inclusiveness, the rule of law) is the only panacea for putting militarism to rest in Nigerian politics. Observance to the rule of law is not the game plan of the current political elite. Once elected or appointed, the Nigerian political elite sees themselves above the law. However, in the real spirit of democracy, the concept of 'people' is central in measuring the existence, growth, and consolidation of democracy. Aside from this, the electoral procedure for selecting public office holders is crucial in assessing democracy. Its importance is such that when the process is free and fair, it strengthens the effective working of governance. This means that the smooth conduct of elections in Nigeria would in no small measure add credibility to Nigeria's democracy.

To this end, there is the need for a genuine commitment to electoral reform in Nigeria that will entrench a credible and lasting democratic system of governance in Nigeria. By and large, the success of democracy in Nigeria does not depend on the government's efforts alone. The desired reform commitment efforts should come from both the government and the masses. This, nevertheless, should be supported by a stable economic foundation. Citizens will be more interested in productive practices in a healthy environment and politics will be regarded as a call to service. The wages assigned to political positions, the ability of elected officials to allocate huge amount of resources in contracts, and the possibility that declaration of assets and properties when they take office and during their service, both at home and abroad, are some of the causes of desperation, murders, treasury robbery, and a lack of economic growth. Political offices should be made less attractive to attract those who are willing to render services to humanity.

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Since states exist to provide public benefits to Citizens living within their borders, human security and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms are the most important. A non-democratic system of government impedes social-economic prosperity, stability, and reconciliation. Governments and their agencies must be available, sensitive, and responsible to constituents. This will go a long way to reduce instances of ungoverned spaces that serve as breeding grounds for the insecurity that threatens our democracy.

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National Youth Service Corps: Civic and Electoral Awareness in Nigeria, 1973- 2019

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Introduction

Nigeria is a multinational state inhabited by more than 250 ethnic groups and speaking about 500 distinct languages, all identifying with a wide variety of cultures. Shortly after the independence of Nigeria in 1960, series of political crises generated fighting between and among Local ethnic groups. This political turbulence continued until 1966 when the military took over power through a bloody coup that swept away many of the political leaders of that period, and this triggered more problems that led to the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970.

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Nevertheless, from 1966 to 1999, Nigeria underwent multiple brutal military regimes and the nation returned to democracy in May 1999 with the inauguration of an elected president. Moreover, following the Nigerian civil war of 1960 to 1970, the NYSC was established, precisely in 1973, to foster national unity and cohesion as well as to help promote development, reconciliation and tolerance throughout Nigeria.¹

Since its inception, the scheme has mobilized and prepared Nigerian youths who have willingly offered their best in the service of the nation and as a result, this had strengthened national unity, integration and inter-ethnic understanding as well as civic awareness among the people of Nigeria. More so, the scheme has inculcated in Nigerian youths, the spirit of selfless service to the nation and emphasizes the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of cultural background. Notwithstanding, political crisis and religious turbulence affecting the nation, the scheme has faced a lot of insecurity and other related challenges over the last two decades which began when four Corps members were killed in the Jos region of Nigeria in November 2008.²

This paper therefore examines the origin of NYSC, the concept of civic awareness, as well as the role of NYSC in the promotion of civic awareness and its relevance to national development.

1. Ebenezer Obadare, "Statism, Youth and the Civic Imagination: A Critical Study of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Programme in Nigeria", Center for Social Development: Washington, p. 14.

2. Innovations in Civic Participation, "Country Profile: National Youth Service Country Profile", available on <http://www.iccp.org/resource-library/icp-publications/global-youth-service-database/africa-2/west-sub-saharan-africa/nigeria/>, assessed on 2 March, 2021.

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The Concept of Civic Awareness

The word “civic” is used to describe the people who live in a town or city. A similar concept is “citizen”. In the Nigerian context a citizen is every person born in Nigeria on or before the date of independence either of whose parents or any of his grandparents belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria or by naturalization.³

Education on the other hand has to do with the gradual process of training, building, developing, sustaining knowledge, skill and character among students. This has to do with how knowledge or experience is been transmitted and it could take place in schools, universities, technical colleges, workshops, colleges of advanced education etc. On this note, we can conclude that, it is very important for a citizen to have the knowledge of how to operate in his or her social environment and to endeavour to sustain a conducive and harmonious relationship with people in the environment.⁴

It is therefore germane to state that, civic awareness involves creating the consciousness among the citizens on the need to make a difference in the civic life of one’s community. In other words, it refers to the ability to promote the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. Civic awareness includes both paid and unpaid forms of political activism, environmentalism, community and national service. Volunteering, national service, and service-learning are all forms of civic engagement.⁵ These activities enrich the lives of youths and are socially beneficial to the community, through the following:

3. Cyprian C. Alozie, “The Relevance of Civic Education in the Realization of National Objectives in Nigeria” Volume 6, Issue 5, May 2019, p. 18.

4. Ibid.

5. Youth.Gov, Civic Engagement, available at <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering>, assessed on 3 March, 2021.

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- i. It helps to improve the knowledge of the inter-relationship between the people, government and the society in general.
- ii. It enables citizens to know the structure of government, its functions and the responsibilities of government to the people and that of the people to the government.
- iii. It serves as an avenue through which citizens are liberated from ignorance and equipped with the needed administrative skills which are necessary to facilitate and maintain national consciousness.
- iv. It develops in the citizens, good values, patriotism and provokes in them the resolve to become good citizens.
- v. It helps in creating the needed knowledge and understanding over the importance of political equality, equity and justice among the citizens.
- vi. It creates awareness and understanding of the duties and obligations the citizens owe to the government and the nation.⁶

Civic awareness aimed at sensitizing the people in order to create a patriotic consciousness among the citizens and the need to support government programmes and policies. More so, it enhances the grooming of effective and proactive leaders and has become an effective instrument for the training of good and patriotic future leaders in various aspects of human endeavour.

However, inadequate civic awareness has been noted to have had a destabilizing effect on the society due to the absence of shared values such as political tolerance, respect for the rule of law and trust in democratic institutions.⁷ As a result of this gap violent crises are triggered which often leads to destruction of lives and properties in the society. This challenge has hampered political development, economic

6. Cyprian C. Alozie, "The Relevance of Civic Education..

7. Ibid.

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viability and socio-cultural progression of the country.⁸ In order to restore political stability and order in Nigeria, it is pertinent to educate Nigerians to consider the country first over and above any other consideration. This can be done through citizenship education and awareness creation among the citizens.

National Youth Service Corps and Civic Awareness in Nigeria: A Panacea for National Development

In the historical context of national development in Nigeria, the role of the youth cannot be over emphasized. The wheel of development of any society, nation or country is propelled by the productive and creative attributes of the youth population. The youth in any society are the engine of growth and development, because, they provide the labour force for production of goods and services.

The NYSC was established in 1973 as a post-civil-war strategy in Nigeria, with a view to promote the development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity. It is important to note that the scheme is a strategy to ensure reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation of Nigeria's post-war economy and since its establishment, it has remained relevant and an apex of youth organization in Nigeria's democratic era. It enforces the policies of national development through the mobilization, deployment, and development of youth capabilities. As one of the longest standing national youth programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, the relevance of the NYSC scheme cannot be underrated as it stands on a critical platform that links educated Nigerian youths to places of employment, and

8. Usman Ugboka Koku, "Citizenship Education as a Panacea for Political Stability in Nigeria" *African Research Review: An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal*, Ethiopia, Vol. 11 (3) No. 47, July 2017, p. 98.

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where their skills can be put into practice and utilized for national development.⁹

In Nigeria, the scheme has contributed meaningfully to every aspect of the economic, social and cultural life. Unrelentingly, it has offered many graduates an entry point into the labour market. Many dedicated Corps members have been offered employment in their places of primary assignment. These are graduates who would ordinarily have roamed the streets unemployed and ignorant of the opportunities that exist in other parts of the country. In addition, there are communities that have benefited from the scheme through services rendered by Corps members, some of which may not have been provided by government or private intervention. The same is the case in urban centres where financial institutions, industries and the petroleum sector also tap from their expertise.¹⁰

Undoubtedly, the NYSC can be considered as a pathway and platform that improves youth transition into productive adulthood and effective citizenship. The result and benefits acquired by the youths of Nigeria through their participation in the NYSC programme includes psychosocial and character development; interethnic tolerance through enhanced cognitive and perceptual shifts that seeks to eliminate discriminatory practices and manage conflicts; creation of platforms

9. Dereck Osadere Arubayi, "Youth in Development: Understanding the Contributions of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to Nigeria's National Development", *A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester on Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Policy and Management*, in the Faculty of Humanities, 2015, p. 24.

10. Patrick Udende and Aishat A. Salau, "National Youth Service Corps Scheme and the Quest for National Unity and Development: A Public Relations Perspective" available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293976288_National_Youth_Service_Corps_Scheme_and_the_Quest_for_National_Unity_and_Development_A_Public_Relations_Perspective, assessed on 6 March, 2021.

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for youths to gain practical experience, reflexive learning and exit opportunities; competence, skills (both soft and technical), and social capital development; improved levels of patriotism and citizenship through awareness, loyalty, and sense of belonging; entrepreneurship development through orientation programmes; as well as, deployment and usage of youth capabilities solely for national interest.¹¹The mobilization of eligible youth participants in the NYSC scheme is carried out by the National Directorate of the Scheme while the State Governing Boards under the authority of State Governors are responsible for deploying mobilized Corps members to places of critical national and community development needs. At the grassroots level, the operation of the scheme is supervised by the State Zonal Officers and the Local Government Inspectors. On the average, the NYSC programme mobilizes an average of 250-350,000 graduates for national service annually.

The NYSC deployment policy has exposed youth Corps members to many similarities and diversities of cultures and traditions in other parts of the country. This has continuously eliminate all retrogressive elements that encourages the entrenchment of ethno-religious prejudices and stereotypes and as a result help Corps members to be positive change agents. To prepare and equip Corps members for civic responsibilities, youth Corps members receive lectures from facilitators from different organizations including; UNICEF, World Bank, the Red Cross, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission – EFCC) and other multinationals.¹²For instance, Dereck Osadere quoted in his work that:

MDGs advocacy programme has trained and deployed about 104,182 Corps members as DKF's. In 2013 alone, the NYSC (MDG) trained and deployed 13, 551 Corps members. While the WAP programme has trained

11. Dereck Osadere Arubayi, "Youth in Development: Understanding..."

12. Ibid.

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3,869 Corps members. The programme has also, empowered 3060 as War Against Poverty (WAP) Corps entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the advocacy programme mobilizedCorps MDGs advocates in carrying out “My World” survey report under the auspices of the United Nations Millennium Development campaign Office to highlight key areas that would be addressed in the post-2015 sustainable development goals agenda.¹³

More specifically, the NYSC is critical in the health and education sectors. The NYSC Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers has been of immense benefit to thousands of Nigerians, many of whom would not have had access to proper health care without this program. Likewise, Corps members have helped in bridging teaching gaps in rural schools. More to this is the outstanding role played by NYSC in ensuring that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) meets its staffing needs in the electoral process of the nation. Before its collaboration with NYSC, INEC struggled to hire ad hoc staff because many volunteers had unverifiable addresses and could not be held accountable when the need arises. Corps members are ideal volunteers because they are registered with the government and are prohibited from engaging in partisan politics during the service year.¹⁴

The involvement of Corps members in elections commenced in 2008 as polling clerks and the involvement of Corps members in the governorship re-run in Kogi State in the same year was transformed into interagency collaboration between the INEC and the NYSC. Consequently, it led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by Nov, 2011. This strengthened the collaboration, thus by 2015

13. Ibid., p. 25.

14. Ebehiyoha, “Why Nigeria Needs NYSC”, available at <https://www.stearsng.com/article/why-nigeria-needs-nysc>, 2018, assessed on 7 March, 2021.

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Corps members participated in the electoral process nationwide. With the successful training on the electoral procedure, Corps members sensitized the electorate consequently the conduct of the election was fair and relatively peaceful.¹⁵

It is pertinent to note that, the Community Development Service (CDS) programme of the NYSC scheme (CDS) programme is aimed at harnessing the skills, creativity and innovativeness of Corps members in every part of Nigeria. As one of the cardinal programmes of the NYSC scheme, the CDS programme enables Corps members to identify the needs of their host communities, and undertake at least one community development (CD) project that will be beneficial to their host community. For this purpose, there are three types of CDS programme, namely: Year Round CDS; Individual CDS and; Traditional CDS.¹⁶ Through these types of CDS programmes, Corps members are directly involved in community development activities in one form or another, including the construction of small bridges, primary health care centres, classroom blocks, market stalls, culverts etc. As a result of these CDS activities many Corps members have impacted lives in their host communities. For instance, a Corps member in 2012 built a mini paint factory in Tungan-Goro, Minna, under Bosso Local Government Area in Niger State, where he trained other youths of the community on how to make paints for painting houses. This kind of action and many more has improved lives in communities where Corps members were deployed for national service. Some of these collaborative CDS were created and supervised by the NYSC in collaboration with government organizations like Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now SDGs, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), National Agency for Foods and

15. Aron E. Umoru, "The Worth of National Youth Service Corps Scheme...", p. 35.

16. Dereck Osadere Arubayi, "Youth in Development: Understanding...", p. 25.

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Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Economic and Financial Crimes and Commission (EFCC), etc.¹⁷

In addition, CDS programmes have also helped Corps members in carrying out projects like sensitization on adolescent reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention, adult literacy campaign, extra-mural classes for students, road safety campaign etc.¹⁸

Another crucial area in which the NYSC scheme has contributed immensely to the development of Nigerian society is the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme. The SAED programme was launched by the NYSC in 2012, with the mission of facilitating access to acquired skills and resources necessary for successful entrepreneurship. The programme is targeted at young Corps members and was designed to be implemented during the required camping exercises (in-camp) and throughout the service year (post-camp). The Corps members are encouraged to learn and become value creators, and leverage on career and business start-up opportunities. The purpose of the programme is to supports the federal government's objective that seeks to improve economic transformation through promotion of entrepreneurship and self-reliance, particularly among youth. It offers opportunity and encouragement to Corps members to start business in any field of their choice. SAED program places emphasis on twelve vocational skill sectors, including the agri-food sector, culture and tourism, agro allied, construction, information and communication technology, education etc.¹⁹ In 2014, the SAED

17. Oral Interview with Israel Ogbonnaya, 2012 Batch 'C' Corp Member, Served Scientific Equipment and Development Institute, Minna, Niger State, Interviewed on 15 Feb., 2021.

18. Ibid., p.26

19. Youth Policy Tool Box, "National Youth Service Corp—Skills Acquisition & Entrepreneurship Development (NYSC-SAED) –Nigeria", available at,

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scheme trained a total of about 159,732 Corps members, made up of 69,904 females and 89, 828 males. Over 500, 000 Corps members have benefited from the NYSC-SAED program since its inception. Out of the total number of trained entrepreneurs, 1,600 had become full-time entrepreneurs and at the same time NYSC encourages Corps members to develop business proposals for funding. This has made so many of these Corps members to become employer of labour in their societies and the country at large.²⁰

Finally, due to the prevailing challenges of security threat in many parts of the country. In order to ameliorate this challenge, the NYSC has devised a number of security measures such as sensitization of the Youth Corps Members on how to be security conscious while discharging their duties in their respective host Communities. Other measures include the production and distribution of security tip booklets and organization and delivery of security lectures by security experts in all States of the federation and Federal Capital Territory,, Abuja. This is in addition to the operation of Distress Call Center where the Scheme receives and mobilizes prompt response to Corps members in distress situation anywhere in the Country..²¹

Conclusion

Civic awareness is an important role in building unity and national development in any giving society. It is a fact that since independence, the nation has faced a lot of conflicts in various aspects which affects the political stability of the country. This include inter and intra ethnic rivalry and struggle for political power, inter and intra-religious crises,

<https://yptoolbox.unescapsdd.org/portfolio/national-youth-service-corp-skills-acquisition-entrepreneurship-development-nysc-saed-nigeria/>, 2017, assessed on 7 March, 2021.

20. Ibid.

21. Osun Kopa- Batch ‘C’ 2019, “21st Century Pandemic”, NYSC Engagement and Opportunities, p. 11

National Youth Service Corps:

structural violence etc. The level of insecurity is high in Nigeria today, due to the activities of Boko Haram sect in the North East of Nigeria, kidnapping, the Niger Delta militants in the South-South region where oil is produced, the crises of legitimacy of government at the Federal, State, and local government, and also the widespread poverty and unemployment, despite the abundant human and natural resources in the country.

However, in the midst of this crisis, the NYSC was established to essentially promote national unity and purposeful development of Nigeria. Since inception the Scheme has contributed greatly to development of Nigeria by engaging in different form of civic awareness programmes the NYSC CDS, SAED, and various activities of Corps members in their Places of Primary Assignment.

It is however important to note that, Nigeria is also plagued with many problems including poverty, mass illiteracy, a shortage of highly skilled labour, inadequate infrastructure, housing, water and sewage disposal facilities as well as roads, healthcare, etc. The NYSC still remains one of the key strategic programmes that government can use to carry out civic responsibilities in Nigeria, both in rural and urban settings. It is therefore important that the administration of the NYSC scheme should re-design and re-organise the scheme in a way that it will liberate many Nigerian youths from the problem of illiteracy. It is very clear that the political violence and instability in Nigeria is the handiwork of the youths who are used by the politicians for their selfish interests and are dumped after they have achieved their aims. Even the inter-and intra-ethnic and religious conflicts are caused by these unemployed youths. So, when citizenship education is well understood by the youths as a way of life, violence would give way to political stability.

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Corps Members and Voters' Education in Nigeria

3

Corps Members and Voters' Education in Nigeria

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Introduction

The importance of voters' education for the health and development of democracy vis-à-vis its accompanying electoral process cannot be over-emphasized. Voters' education like the knowledge of the place of the youths in leadership is in part, very crucial in understanding the control of power and the extent to which individual members of a society participate and involve in politics.¹ As a matter of fact, the success of any electoral process in a polity depends largely on the level

¹ B. Atime "The Place of the Youths in Nigeria's Democratic Leadership, 1999 - 2019" in *Journal of History and Social Science*, Vol.11, No.1, 2020, p.68.

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of enlightenment of its electorates. A well informed electorate is likely to contribute to, and engender a hitch-free electoral process. Therefore, adequate information on electoral processes is an important way to secure citizen's political inclusion and contribution to the democratic process. Voter education is designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate in electoral process in any nation.²

In Nigeria like many African emerging democracies, elections are fraught with and marred by inherent inconsistencies and contradictions synonymous with societies where the electorates are poorly informed. This is because since the country's return to democracy in 1999, there has not been adequate emphasis on voter education targeted at the Nigerian electorates by the country's election management body. This claim is justified in the twin problems of rejected ballots and declining turnout of electorates during elections as observed by Ibeanu.³ Thus, since the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between INEC and NYSC to utilize the services of Corps members in all election duties, the pertinent question is that; to what extent would Corps members be involved in voter education of the Nigerian electorates? This forms the basis for this research. The thrust of this paper is therefore to investigate the extent of the involvement of Corps members in the implementation of voter education in Nigeria and its implication for hitch-free political participation. In order to achieve this, the paper is structured into five sections. Section one is the introduction which provides background information on the subject under analysis, while section two underpins conceptual and theoretical issues. Section three identifies and interrogates the need for

² S.O. Uhunmwuangho and S. Aibieyi "Sensitization of Secondary School Students towards Sustainable Electoral Process in Nigeria: Nigeria Independent Electoral Commission as a Focus" in *African Research Review: An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 6 (3), 2012, p.241.

³ O. Ibeanu "Introduction" in O. Ibeanu and N. Orji (eds.) *Approaches to Civic and Voter Education: Nigeria's Experience in Comparative Perspective* (Abuja: INEC), 2014, p.9.

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voter education in Nigeria. Section four explores the role of Corps members in voter education in Nigeria, while section five summarizes and concludes on the findings of study.

Conceptual Framework

The concept used in this analysis that deserves clarification for better understanding of the issue under scrutiny is the concept of voters' education. The concept, like other political and democratic concepts has been variously explained by scholars. While some scholars associate voters' education with the enlightenment of electorates on the rudiments of electoral process, others likened it to a process of providing citizens with basic information about participation in elections thus making the debate inconclusive. For us in this study, instead of delving into such debates on the concept, it is more rewarding to provide a definitional framework that will serve as a peg for us to hang our wares of analysis. This study therefore adopts the concept of voters' education by Okon (2013) and Nnedinso (2014) to serve as a guide in this analysis. Okon⁴ describes voters' education as the dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform electorates about the specific mechanics of the voting process for a particular election. It is seen by Nnedinso⁵ as the combination of activities to help voters make rational choices about candidates and ballot measures and then carry out those choices accurately, effectively and orderly when voting. It involves informing voters about the candidates, what a ballot looks like, how to use voting machines, where polling booths are located, how to register and how to cast their votes

⁴ G.B. Okon "Voter Education by the Nigerian Broadcast Media: A Normative Appraisal of three Radio Stations in Port Harcourt Metropolis" in *Journal of Media Studies*, 28(1), 2013, p. 57.

⁵ H. Nnedinso "Need for Voter Education for Political Stability in Nigeria" in *Knowledge Review*, 30 (1), 2014, p.29.

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properly. Arising from the above conceptual explanation, it is apposite to stress that voters' education is essential in ensuring that voters are well-informed and can effectively exercise their voting rights and express their political will on Election Day.⁶

Since the emergence of analysis on voters' education, a lot of theoretical constructs have emerged. However, for the purpose of this study, the cognitive mobilization theory of political literacy and participation is adopted to serve as a model for analysis. Proponents of the cognitive mobilization theory such as Dalton argue that the process through which people receive their cognitive cues to make decisions on voting, participation and other forms of political activities is based on political education and engagement which act upon the individual to mobilize his mental capabilities in dealing with politics. Thus, political education according to cognitive mobilization theorists helps people overcome the bureaucratic obstacle involved in voting process.⁷ Three basic assumptions of cognitive mobilization theory are employed in this study. First is that education is a key indicator and determinant in measuring political knowledge and participation. Secondly, access to political education increases engagement in politics by developing the citizens' cognitive skill which in turn enables them to process complex information about political system, and to enhance feeling of civic duty. Lastly, cognitively mobilized publics are more issue oriented in their participation in such activities as voting and less inclined to be led by the elite.⁸ Taking from the standpoint of our analysis which is part of political education, the theory is of help not just in analyzing voters' education but also the importance and role of stakeholders in providing

⁶ T.I. Ofonmbuk "Voter Education through Social Media: An Analytical Study of Independent Electoral Commission's Twitter and Facebook Platforms" in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol.7, Issue 3, 2020, p.28.

⁷ O.R. Amechi *et al* "Political education in Nigeria: the Mobilization Theory Thesis Perspective" in *Arts and Humanities Open Access Journal*, 2(5), 2018, p.248.

⁸ R.J Dalton "Cognitive Mobilisation and Partisan Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Democracy" in *Journal of Politics*, 46(1), 1984, p.274

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voter education to the electorates. To appreciate the connection between voting and election, eligible voters must be enlightened and sensitized about their rights and obligations, the modus operandi of the electoral process, the informed and non-prejudicial choices they make during election, amongst others. By educating voters, they will meaningfully participate in elections; and turnout will also increase, thereby providing a framework for protecting, sustaining and institutionalizing a culture of credible elections and popular participation in governance.⁹

The Need for Voters' Education in Nigeria

The democratic experience in Nigeria cannot be adjudged as positive since all factors that ought to be available such as voters' education are insignificant for sustainable political development. Unarguably, since the return of the country to democracy in 1999, much emphasis has not been placed on the need to educate the voters on election matters.¹⁰ However, voters' education can make a major contribution to electoral integrity, through the dissemination of balanced and objective information on what citizens need to know to exercise their franchise.¹¹

Voters' education is very essential in any democratic system as the proper orientation of the electorate on the essence of casting votes and involvement in a democratic system, will not only bring about the high level of motivation but higher participation level. As earlier stated, voters' education would ensure that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate fully in the electoral process which brings succor to the

⁹ Center for Democracy and Development, "Who is the King Maker in Nigeria: The Voter or the Godfather?" Being a Briefing Note on Voter Education and the 2015 Elections in Nigeria, 2014, pp.1 – 2

¹⁰ S.O. Oduola "Voters' Education and Credible Election in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges of 2019 General Elections" in *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, Vol.XI, No.11, 2020, p.7.

¹¹ O. Osumah "Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria" in *Journal of African Elections*, Vol.1, No.1, 2016, p.6.

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health of democracy. This explains why Gallego posits that well-educated citizens vote more frequently than the poorly educated.¹²

One of the needs for voters' education in Nigeria is the problems of rejected ballots and declining turnout at elections which are widely attributed both directly and indirectly to inadequate civic and voter education. Other issues that have been linked to voter and civic education in Nigeria include poor turnout and participation in voter registration, lack of understanding of voting procedures, underage voting and election violence. In fact, it has been noted that the violence that Nigeria experienced during General elections are partly due to negative mobilization by political leaders and by implication inadequate voter education.¹³ As a matter of fact, political knowledge promotes supports for democratic values. For example, the more knowledge citizens have of political principles and institutions, the more likely they are to support core democratic principles, beginning with the entrenchment of the culture of tolerance. In every election, voter and civic education are necessary to ensure that all constituents, men and women alike, understand their rights, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, and how and where to vote. For an election to be successful and democratic, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must be sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in the voting process. However, INEC, which is principally saddled with the responsibility of conducting voter education, has, in several forums, complained about the inadequate finance required to perform its role well. The Commission has often stated that funds allocated to voter education are not enough. Moreover, going by the present responsibilities of the commission,

¹² A. Gallego "Understanding Unequal Turnout: Education and Voting in Comparative Perspective" in *Electoral Studies*, 29, 2010, p.239.

¹³ O. Ibeau "Introduction" in O. Ibeau and N. Oriji (eds.) *Approaches to Civic and Voter Education: Nigeria's Experience in Comparative Perspective*...2014, p.9.

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there are doubts whether it has the capacity to discharge its mandate, especially in terms of personnel.¹⁴ Arising from the need for voters' education in Nigeria vis-à-vis the challenges faced by INEC in carrying out this function, the prospects of utilizing the services of Corps members in this direction appears promising.

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Consequent upon the signing of MoU between INEC and NYSC for Corps members to help on election duties, it is expected that the NYSC Scheme would assist the election management body in the area of voters' education. In this section therefore, efforts are made at assessing the role of Corps members in voters' education in Nigeria. In order to properly situate the role of Corps members in election duties, it is appropriate to briefly look at the terms of the INEC-NYSC partnership. A cursory look at the MoU between INEC and NYSC shows that the election management body did not include the issue of voters' education as part of the duties to be carried out by NYSC Corps members. The MoU stated in part that, the commission shall train Corps members so engaged for its electoral duties before deployment; NYSC shall provide, in so far as it is capable, the number of Corps members required by the commission for electoral duties in each of the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory.¹⁵ These duties as provided in the MoU, it must be stated, did not include voters' education. As such, Corps members' involvement in voters' education in the country is a later development and as a result, has not yielded the much needed results.

¹⁴ Center for Democracy and Development, "Who is the King Maker in Nigeria: The Voter or the Godfather?" ...2014, p.7.

¹⁵ See for details Memorandum of Understanding between Independent National Electoral Commission and National Youth Service Corps of 24th September, 2013, pp.3 – 4.

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After signing of the MoU in 2013, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), in partnership with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) established a Voter Education Community Development Service (CDS) Group in Osun, Imo and FCT.¹⁶ The main objective of the CDS group was to enable Corps members use targeted, peer-to-peer voter and civic education to encourage women and youth and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to participate in the electoral process in a meaningful way. In light of the partnership with the NYSC, INEC and WFD, assigned officials do sensitize Corps members at the orientation camps on election duties and voters' education. This activity was conducted on June 6, 2018 in FCT, September 10, 2019 in Imo State, and November 5, 2018 in Osun State. The Corps members were further enlightened on INEC activities, the role of Corps members during the election and what will be expected of them as voter educators. A call for volunteers was announced to recruit Corps members into the voter education group as INEC Ambassadors.¹⁷

It is equally important to note that since the establishment of this CDS Group in the aforementioned states and the Federal Capital Territory, the involvement of Corps members in voters' education in Nigeria generally has not passed its best. Be that as it may, the enthusiasm and participation of Corps members in voters' education is felt in Imo, Osun and FCT.¹⁸ Following the establishment of the Voter Education Community Development Service (CDS) Group in these three pilot states, Corps members under the supervision of the INEC Voter Education Desk Officers (VEDOs) and NYSC Local Government Inspectors (LGIs), conducted voter education and sensitization in all

¹⁶<http://democracy-support.eu/nigeria/posts/sensitization-and-recruitment-of-corp-members-at-orientation-camp-june-september-and-november-2018>

¹⁷<http://democracy-support.eu/nigeria/posts/sensitization-and-recruitment-of-corp-members...2018>

¹⁸<https://dailytrust.com/foundation-organises-workshop-on-voters-education>

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the local governments of Osun State. Using the peer-to-peer engagement strategy, Corps members reached out to fellow youths with relevant and targeted messages designed to correct negative perceptions and attitudes of the target group towards elections. This was with the objective of increasing youth and women participation in the 2019 General elections.¹⁹ Unfortunately, not many Nigerian citizens have good knowledge of a credible electioneering process.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examines the role of Corps members in voters' education in Nigeria in ensuring the success of elections. It is observed that while the involvement of Corps members in election duties and later voters' education in few places in the nation has boosted the credibility of elections in Nigeria, the collaboration is still far from being perfect. It is the opinion of this paper that voters' education in Nigeria should include basic knowledge such as how winners emerge and declaration of results. This is possible because most often voters jubilates the perceived victory of their preferred candidates in an election based on results of a few polling units or local governments with the highest numbers of registered voters. This trend often triggers post-election violence in the country. However, it should be noted that the popularity of candidates does not translate into votes. Therefore, constitutional provisions on how winners emerge and the procedure for the declaration of results are adequately captured in voter education programmes. This will help in stemming the tide of post-election violence which often occurs as a result of perceived manipulation of election figures by the ill-informed electorates and supporters.

In view of the importance of voters' education as mentioned in the earlier part of this paper, suffice it to say that Corps members are

¹⁹ WFD "Assessment of Voter Education in Osun State, Nigeria" retrieved online from <https://www.wfd.org/2020/01/06/assessment-of-voter-education-in-osun-state-nigeria>

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strategically positioned to conduct voters' education in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the deployment of Corps members to all the nooks and crannies of the country makes the youth Corps members particularly suitable for this exercise. The geographical spread in the posting policy of the Scheme ensures that Corps members are evenly deployed and posted across the country. Apart from this, intellectual capacity of Corps members as graduates of higher institutions makes them easily trainable and assets for partnership in voter education exercise. Against this background, there should be a review of the existing MoU and implementation of its content by the two organizations to include voters' education. Put differently, one of the best ways of sustaining the collaboration between the two organizations is to review the MoU to take care of some sections that are vague. Issues such as the definition of welfare should be addressed in the MoU to make for clarity and avoidance of administrative overlap. Provisions such as security of Corps members and their general welfare must be included in the MoU. Participation of Corps members in voters' education may then be made compulsory.

In order to consolidate on the gains of NYSC partnership, INEC should involve Corps members during the voter education, registration exercise, distribution and updating of voters register which ought to commence immediately after the conclusion of any election. Corps members can be mobilized by the Department of Voter Education at INEC to educate communities during the Corps weekly Community Development Service (CDS) program. The continuous voters register can be incorporated in the CDS activities. Corps members have effectively taken part in awareness and voters' education in Imo, Osun and FCT; this could be replicated in other states and local governments of the federation. As such, Corps members' weekly Community Development Service could be used to train Corps members on voters' education and other relevant assignments..

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Corps Members and the Conduct of Voter Registration

4

Corps Members and the Conduct of Voter Registration

Baba Isaac Ibrahim

Introduction

As part of the move for global best practices in governance, democracy is being clamoured for as the alternative to any form of government. Otoide and Akinbi, in this light, observed that, "if military rule is evil, democracy is better evil".ⁱ Accordingly, military rule has in its all benevolence been seen as misnomer and incongruous to any people. The ascendancy of global democracy has made it important for the desire of many African countries and African leaders to enthronedemocratic system of governance in African states. This is germane because barely few years after the attainment of independence by most African countries from their erstwhile colonial overlords,

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constitutionally formed governments were toppled in military *coup d'état*, a development that is an aberration under civil government structures. In the case of Nigeria, military interregnum became part of Nigeria's national life and indeed, the form of government that have stayed longer in office than the elected governments.ⁱⁱ Nigerians became weary of the military in politics and therefore when the campaign for global democracy gathered momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was a welcomed development as the people formed political parties that they hoped would deliver to them the kind of government that they are part of and that would be accountable to the people unlike the military government where "might is right" and the constitution is suspended giving rooms for a rule by decree which is often dictatorial and in extreme draconian.

Democracy is a concept that does not seem to lend itself to any universally accepted definition because of the ideological, cultural and historical contextualization that underpins its several meanings. The liberals or capitalists, socialists and Africans, have in mind their own brand of democracy.ⁱⁱⁱ Inspite of the differences in conceptualizations and practices, all version of democracy share one fundamental objective: how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to all the people.^{iv} The people retain power through the ballot; hence, election is one of the major components of democracy. Election is periodic occurrence in a democracy where the citizens gather to choose who their leader(s) should be over a period of time. Election can be defined as the process or means through which the electorates choose their representatives into government.^v Election is an important aspect of democracy and if the processes are not right, the outcome will never be right. Leaders that emerge through the electoral process, represents the interest of the people or the electorates that chose them. Election therefore, as it were, establishes a social contract between the representative(s) and the people. Election is apparently intended to establish a government that serves the interest of the people.

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Democracy functions through the Constitution. The Constitution served as the guiding principles and supreme law of the land and therefore must be respected and followed. The essence of democracy is to nip in the bud unconstitutional takeover of government. It is the concern of African leaders who are committed to ensuring global best practices in the area of government, governance, economy, social development among others, that made them to come together at a roundtable discussion at various fora to discuss the challenges facing Africa and the way forward, so that Africa can be among the First World and industrialized economies. Consequently, we have several declarations and charters like The African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (ACDEG), which is a very important document on democracy, election and governance in Africa because it is a conglomeration of several previous Declarations and was intended to affirm, strengthen and enhance such Declarations as The 1990 Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the fundamental changes taking place in the world; The 1995 Cairo Agenda for the Re-launch of Africa's Economic and Social Development; The Algiers Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government; The 2000 Lome Declaration for OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government, The 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa; The 2003 Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.^{vi}

This paper therefore, appraises the processes in the pre-election issues as they have implications for the conduct of elections and the practice of democracy in Nigeria and in line with global best practices.

Historical Background of Electoral Commission

The origin of Electoral bodies in Nigeria can be traced to the period before Independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections. The Federal Electoral

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Commission (FEC), established in 1960 conducted the immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively. The electoral body was however, dissolved after the military coup of 1966. In 1978, a new Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. FEDECO organized the elections of 1979, which ushered in the Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It also conducted the General elections of 1983.

In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha, which earlier dissolved NEC in 1993, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which also conducted another set of elections; Local Government councils to National Assembly. These elected institutions were however not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha, on June 8, 1998 aborted the process. In 1998 General Abdulsalam Abubakar's Administration dissolved NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The body organized all transitional elections that ushered in the 4th republic on May 29 1999. It has today repositioned itself to deliver credible elections that would sustain Nigeria's developing democracy.

As a permanent body, INEC comprises the workforce recruited since 1987 under the defunct National Electoral Commission (NEC). Its presence has been established in all the 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory as well as in the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria. The Commission (INEC) is the main agent (umpire) of democracy in Nigeria. INEC is a permanent body created by the constitution to organize Federal and State elections in Nigeria. The mission of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is to:

- i. Educate Nigerian citizens about democracy and the election process;
- ii. Provide for voter registration;
- iii. Compile a credible voters' register;
- iv. Demarcate constituency boundaries;

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- v. Organize and conduct credible elections;
- vi. Monitor the conduct of political parties;
- vii. Audit the finances of political parties, and
- viii. Promote an enduring democratic culture in Nigeria.

While the vision of Independent National Electoral Commission, is that of a dynamic and formidable organization that is a major force in the continuation and furtherance of democracy in Nigeria. Also, INEC seeks to be a widely respected and credible institution for democratic governance in the nation. INEC will be seen as a political anchor of democracy in Nigeria and the whole of Africa.^{vii}

Besides, as an institution that is determined to be excellent in service delivery, the principles that guide INEC in the fulfillment of its mission and vision are:

Transparency: INEC will be open and transparent in all activities and in its relations with the political stakeholders, media organizations, INEC service providers and the people of Nigeria.

Integrity: INEC will be truthful and honest in all dealings with the people of Nigeria, its political stakeholders and each other.

Credibility: INEC will strive to ensure that the people of Nigeria and in particular the political stakeholders will readily accept all of our actions and activities. We will be an institution that the people can trust.

Impartiality: INEC will endeavor to create a level playing field for all political actors.

Dedication: INEC is committed to providing the highest quality election services to the people of Nigeria. We will also work to ensure that merit will continue to be the basis for the compensation, promotion and recruitment of staff.^{viii}

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Election Management and National Youth Service Corps

Election management is a complex process that requires the effort of the umpire, the people, the security agencies, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental and Governmental Organizations. Consequently, this informs the decision of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to begin entering into partnership with various groups like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to ensure that the Commission delivers on her mandate. Looked at closely, one of the objectives of the NYSC is to inculcate discipline in the Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work.... which if critically looked at is in tandem with the guiding principles of INEC. The NYSC has since participated in the management and conduct of elections in Nigeria since the partnership began.

Young people have been active participants in elections in contemporary Nigeria, playing significant and visible roles in election management. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) played a significant role by managing the biometric voter registration exercise conducted by the INEC in 2010 and supported the administration of the 2011 elections.^{ix} The 2011 General elections was a paradigm shift in the management and administration of elections in Nigeria with the constitution of an independent and credible leadership at the Independent National Electoral Commission, and deployment of innovative strategies like the mainstreaming of youth in election management and the deployment of technology to deepen the inclusiveness and enhance the integrity of elections by the commission in its bid to enhance liberal democracy. These new innovations and policy reforms laid the foundation for the conduct of successive democratic elections, and expanded partnership in election management and administration in Nigeria.

As stated earlier several complexities are inherent in the conduct of elections in Nigeria with its vast voting population. For instance, INEC

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requires over 700,000 personnel to adequately manage the conduct of elections.^x With its 15,000 permanent staff and the inability to accommodate more, due to limited budget, the need to recruit ad hoc staff for voter registration and polling station services is critical.

In the past, ad hoc staffs were drawn from government institutions and private individuals who had no definite records or verifiable addresses. The use of ad hoc staff was characterized by various electoral malfeasance which undermined the integrity of elections.^{xi} Defaulting ad hoc election officials could not be held accountable due to poor documentation and unverifiable addresses.^{xii} Following the conduct of the 2007 General elections,^{xiii} INEC resolved to engage young people under the NYSC scheme in the conduct of by-elections and re-run/supplementary elections. The first engagement of NYSC members as polling clerks in the conduct of elections began in 2008.^{xiv} This partnership with INEC has been very productive so far so good and requires sustainability.

The Corps members have participated in pre-election activities like voter registration, which is a core component of the mission of INEC; that is, to provide for voter registration; Compile a credible voters' register. Therefore, it is important to embark on continuous voter registration for those that turned 18 years of age after the last election in the country. As it is traditional to INEC before every General election, voters' registration is carried out in line with the electoral time table, spending huge sums of money. For instance, Atahiru Jega; the then INEC Chairman barely four months after he assumed office in 2011, requested for the release of funds to enable the commission to kick-start the electoral process with the voters' registration exercise.^{xv} But despite the huge sums of money being expended on elections management, Corps members who were deployed for the exercise often complained that their allowances were being withheld or delayed.^{xvi}

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However, further investigation revealed that this delay in payments could be as a result of technical issues in the INEC that are often resolved within record time.

Conclusion

Indeed, the partnership between NYSC and INEC has been very helpful in the management and administration of elections in Nigeria, there are certain challenges which if not properly managed could create clogs in the wheel of progress. To start with; poor welfare and logistics and delay in the payment of allowances if not addressed could hampered the activities of the commission. Besides, Insecurity and violence have been reported on several occasions before, during and after elections and Corps members have been vulnerable to intimidation and violence. Therefore, adequate security should be provided so as to encourage Corps members' active participation in the conduct of electoral process in Nigeria.

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Endnotes

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- ⁱⁱ For more details on Military Rule in Nigeria, see F.O. Ifamosa and O.E. Ojo, *Main Trends in Nigerian History: From 1800 To 2000*. Ibadan: Oluwatoyin Publishers, 2016.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Emmanuel O. Ojo, “Democratic Transition in Nigeria: A Panoramic View of Hurdles in Governance, Democracy and Civil Society”. *Ife Social Review*, 1998. pp.8-9.
- ^{iv} Osaghae, E.E., “Ethnicity and Democracy”, quoted in Emmanuel O. Ojo, 1998, p.9
- ^v B.C. Nwankwo, *Authority in Government: Nigeria and World Politics, Revise Edition*, Onitsha: Abbot Books Limited, 2002. p.147
- ^{vi} See African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance, pp.1-2.
- ^{vii} www.inecnigeria.org and www.inec.gov.ng See also B.C. Nwankwo, *Authority in Government: Nigeria and World Politics, Revise Edition*, Onitsha: Abbot Books Limited, 2002. p.157
- ^{viii} www.inecnigeria.org and www.inec.gov.ng See also INEC Manual for Election Officials 2015, p.10
- ^{ix} Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Report of the Registration and Election Review Committee, 2012; Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Report on the 2011 General Elections, 2013
- ^x INEC Report of the 2015 General Elections, July 2015 (Unpublished)
- ^{xi} Memorandum of Understanding between INEC and NYSC
- ^{xii} Ibrahim, Jibrin and Garuba, D. Governance and Institution-Building in Nigeria: A Study of the Independent National Electoral Commission (Abuja: Center for Democracy and Development, 2008)
- ^{xiii} The 2007 general elections were manifestly the worst in Nigerian electoral history. The election was characterized by massive rigging, violence and voter intimidation. Both international and domestic observers noted that the election fell short of international

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standards for election conduct. President Umar Musa Yar'Adua admitted that the elections were marred by irregularities, hence, his setting up of an Electoral Reform Committee under the Chairmanship of Justice Muhammed Uwais.

^{xiv} In Kogi State Governorship Re-run election held on Saturday, March 29, 2008. 5,851 NYSC members were engaged as polling clerks.

^{xv}Chris Ajaero, "The Pragmatic Radical at INEC", *News watch*, Vol. 52, No. 18, November 1, 2010. p.10.

^{xvi}George Onah, "Corpers on voter registration exercise, down tools, protest non-payment of allowances", Vanguard Newspaper, ON JANUARY 25, 2011.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/01/corpers-on-voter-registration-exercise-down-tools-protest-non-payment-of-allowances/>

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5

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Introduction

By the last decade of the 20th century, the wave of democratization began to blow across the political climate of continental Africa leading to the emergence of democratic regimes and the entrenchment of democratic values and culture. Though with some hiccups, the gradual transition from military regimes and other undemocratic governance practices began to take the centre stage of political discourse on the continent. The old order began to give way to the new emerging era of democracy and democratization. Though in some instances the process

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appeared marred by controversy, instability, frequent or intermittent military incursions, unhealthy political rivalry, ethno-regional crisis leading to a very chaotic political ambience, the crave for democratization continued unabated. The resultant effect was the near-total democratization of the continent's political climate by the dawn of the 21st century. Nigeria, one of the largest democracies in Africa provides the best description and example of democratization process on the continent and elsewhere. Since the disengagement of the military from the political scene in 1999, the country has had in succession six national elections that led to civilian to civilian transitions without disruptions of the democratic system.

It is imperative to note that elections are essential ingredients and fundamental component of any participatory democracy in any democratic society. It provides the citizenry the opportunity of making choices from among contending candidates and political parties in the electoral process.¹ Thus, for any democratic experiment or attempt at democratization to be worth the name, it must be a product of credible elections with all the ingredients of integrity. The electoral process thus becomes a vital component of any democracy. This explains why election management bodies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria occupy a very central, significant and strategic position in any electoral process and by implication the process of democratization and its consolidation. As observed, the primary goal of any election management body is to organize and conduct free, fair and credible elections with an outcome that is acceptable by all stakeholders.²

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

In Nigeria, INEC was established as electoral body by the provision of section 153 (1) (1) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The function of the body as spelt out in the Electoral Act (2010) includes but not limited to registration of political parties, organizing elections, registration of voters and monitoring political

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parties.³ Prior to the establishment of INEC, there had existed other electoral bodies before and since independence. The defunct Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was the precursor of all electoral bodies in the country. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was established at independence in 1960. The FEC conducted the 1964/5 elections. In 1978 following the political transition program orchestrated by the military junta, the military government under the then Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo established the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which midwife the military- civilian transition elections in 1979 and the general elections of 1983 which were conducted under the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) which conducted the national elections of 1987, 1990, 1991 and 1993 was set up by the Ibrahim Babangida military regime. Consequently the Abacha military administration that succeeded the Babangida regime established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). The Abdusalam Abubakar junta that anchored the 1999 political transition program created the present Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998. The most recent of the activities of INEC was the conduct of the 2015/2019 general elections in the country.

The 2015 and 2019 General Elections: The Synopsis

On March 28, 2015 and 23 March, 2019, Nigeria held her fifth and sixth presidential elections since the end of military rule in 1999 and the entrenchment of democratic rule in Nigeria's democratic space through the transition program that led to the transfer of political power from the military to civilian administration. The two main presidential candidates in both elections were incumbent presidents of the ruling political parties and candidates of foremost popular and strong opposition parties. In the 2015 elections, the contest was between the incumbent president of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, the candidate for the leading opposition party, the All Progressive Congress (APC)

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which emerged from a mega merger arrangement in 2013. The 2019 general elections in the same vein were between the incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari of APC and Atiku Abubakar of PDP. While in the 2015 elections the incumbent president lost to the opposition, the incumbent in the 2019 elections won the opposition and was returned as such.⁷ And while the outcome of the 2015 elections further strengthened the country's democratic architecture and advanced our democratic culture and values and instilled confidence in the enduring democratic experiment and the whole gamut of the democratization process as a result of the acceptance of the results by the incumbent president and the rancor-free hand over of political power to the opposition without post-election litigation and violence, the 2019 elections and the consequent declaration of the incumbent as the winner elicited widespread condemnation, rejection and contestation of the results declared by INEC. It engendered post-election litigation that ended at the Supreme Court even as post-election violence beclouded the political landscape of Nigeria. In the face of all these, the gains of the 2015 elections were lost even as the confidence of the citizenry in the electoral body and the electioneering process vis a vis the emerging democratic system began to wane. Just as the June 12 1993 presidential elections outcome actualized the mandate of the amalgamation of 1914 in Nigeria's political history⁸, the 2015 elections firmly entrenched the culture of peaceful transition of political power from civilian-civilian without litigation and any political intransigence, the 2015 elections was to take Nigeria to the pre-2015 political era.

INEC, the body saddled with the responsibility of conducting a free and fair elections in the country grappled with a lot of credibility problems and logistic arrangement and mobilization of both human and material resources as prerequisites for successful conduct of elections. Central and pivotal to the human resources mobilization strategy are the engagements of ad hoc staff that will on behalf of the body conduct the elections in the field. This is against the backdrop of the problem of

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shortage of staff. One group that is often recruited, mobilized, trained, engaged and deployed to the field to practically conduct elections are the youth service Corps members on national service.

The 2015/2019 Pre- Election Environments

It is imperative and essential to critically periscope the pre-election political environments in which the 2015/2019 general elections were conducted. This is necessary against the backdrop of having a knowledge or clue of the nature and kinds of the political ambience under which ad hoc staff with particular reference to the youth Corps members were mobilized to function as election officials. It is pertinent to note from the onset that the campaign process created an atmosphere of political intolerance and unfriendliness occasioned by campaign of calumny and mudslinging, crowned by hate speech and violence in some instances. While party leaders signed peace pact or accord treaty with the security agents, party faithful and supporters committed themselves to inter-party wrangling, rivalries, thuggery, gangsterism and cult-related activities that were inimical and antithetical to peaceful political climate that could guarantee peaceful election. Many Nigerians were deeply concerned about election related violence. As observed in some quarters, Nigeria has the history of election violence in the pre and post election periods and most notably in the 2011 elections in which more than 800 people were killed and tens of thousands displaced in post-election violence. The nation's human right commission reported that in the February 2015 elections, more than 60 incidents of election-related violence took place in at least across the six geo-political zones which had left 58 people dead and many more injured. They also noted an increase of hate speech in the run-up to the election including hate speech published in the media and during campaign rallies by party surrogates. It was also alleged that an outgoing state governor was caught on video calling on party supporters to "crush and kill" "cockroaches." There were other alleged

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incidences of high profile individuals calling for violence against any one campaigning for change.⁹

Insecurity

There was a general feeling of insecurity that permeated all the regions of the country. In the northeastern region, Boko Haram insurgency was one of the many issues that affected the pre-election environment in the north. Available sources hold that over the year's insurgency has claimed over 9000 lives and possibly thousands more and displaced and rendered homeless hundreds of thousands. In February 2015 when INEC postponed the election on the ground of the looming insecurity, Boko Haram controlled 14 LGAs across Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. Soon after the postponement, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau declared the group's intention to violently disrupt the election.¹⁰ Accusations and counter accusations relating to insurgency and insecurity elsewhere were exchanged between political parties and the question of how the various candidates would handle the knotty issue of insecurity took the front burner of political discourse and debates. While the peace and security of the northwest continued to be threatened by the activities of notorious bandits, cattle rustlers and other acts of criminalities by criminal elements, the Middle Belt region was often invaded and ravaged by militant herdsmen who continue to destroy farms, homes and lives of the people indigenous to the area for grazing purposes. There were also incessant criminal activities of kidnappers along the Benue valley and the Niger that made life a nightmare. Both the southeast and southwest were not insulated. Thus, from the Sahara across the north to the east of the Niger, and from the valley of the Benue to the forest belt of the ancient Alafinate, insecurity loomed.

The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

As a result of the activities of Boko Haram in the northeast and the raiding herdsmen in the Benue valley, hundreds of thousands of people

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were displaced, rendered homeless and consequently found themselves in internally displaced persons homes or camps. While many lost their voters card (PVC) during the raids and attacks and as such could not vote hence disenfranchised, there was a legal impediment that prohibited voters from casting ballots outside of their constituencies which created serious concerns regarding how INEC and the government would ensure the IDPs were not disenfranchised.

Since 2015, the major issues that dominated national discourse centered on security, economic hardship, recession, increasing unemployment and anti-corruption in the build up to the general elections of 2015 and 2019. The period also witnessed astronomical increase in the number of registered political parties as different groups and interests jostled for political power. Thus, the 2015/2019 general elections were keenly contested. This was to have marginal effects on INEC in terms of logistics and by extension the Directorate of NYSC as a major stake holder in terms of provision of the bulk of the ad hoc staff in facilitating the overall success of the elections. For instance, 91 registered political parties and 73 presidential candidates contested the 2019 elections.¹¹The pre-election environment just like in 2015 was characterized by a lot of uncertainties and problems that appeared near-intractable. There were a lot of internal wrangling within the political parties, political gerrymandering and cross carpeting by politicians were the order of the day. There was a clear perception that intra-party rather than inter-party conflict dominated the political scene. As a result of the fierce competition among contending interests during party primaries, there were widespread allegations, accusations and counter accusations of elections not been conducted according to the rules of the game leading to series of litigation and in some instances outright cancellation and annulment. Zamfara and Rivers states are cases in point. As noted by an observer team, there were a large number of cases before the court (more than 640) challenging primaries and other issues relating to elections.¹²

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Allied to the above was the “dilapidated” nature of the national economy on the eve of the elections. Though Africa’s largest economy by gross domestic product (GDP), about 87million Nigerians live in extreme and abject poverty according to the world poverty check representing 46.7% of the total population. The economy entered a deep recession in 2016 with attendant high unemployment particularly among the youth (36.5%).¹³ With more than half of the population within the age bracket of 25 and many within the eligible voting age, the economy and unemployment were key concerns across the country with the practice of money politics epitomized in vote buying and inducement to influence the outcome of the elections.

It was against the above cited political backgrounds and pre-election environments that the youth Corps members were mobilized and engaged in the 2015/2019 elections as ad hoc staff and it is against this backdrop that the participation and involvement of the Corps members will be examined.

INEC, NYSC and Corps Members Involvement in Electoral Processes

As election management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission since inception has continued to grapple with the problem of shortage of staff in conducting elections and managing other election-related activities. This explains its reliance on ad hoc staff to achieve success in its electoral processes. Thus, since coming into being in 1960, INEC has continued to employ and engage ad hoc staff to perform various functions during elections. One organisation or body INEC often goes into partnership with to achieve its electoral goals is the NYSC. This is often done through requests and the signing of memorandum of understanding between the two bodies in 2010. This agreement was reviewed and formalized in 2013. Despite the existence of MoU, Corps members are not under any compulsion to partake in elections. The involvement of Corps members in actual elections began with their engagement as polling clerks in the conduct of Kogi State

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governorship re-run election held on Saturday, 29th March, 2008.¹⁴ The success of this first experiment led to further engagement of Corps members in the conduct of bye elections, re-run and supplementary elections adjudged to be satisfactory.

The engagement of Corps members in election assignment is often predicated on INEC perception that as graduates of higher institutions, Corps members are easily trainable, making them useful assets to partner with. It is also the thinking of INEC that the deployment of Corps members to all parts and localities of the country makes the Corps members particularly suitable for national elections. Also carrying out their national service outside their states and localities guarantee their neutrality and non partisanship since they have no political interest at stake. Concomitantly, the nationalistic value inculcated in the Corps members during orientation course makes them ready for any national course. It is also the belief of INEC that the internal disciplinary mechanism as enshrined in the NYSC bye-laws makes sanctioning of Corps members involved in electoral fraud and other malpractices easy.¹⁵

The Roles of Corps Members in the 2015/2019 Elections

By virtue of the training and the inculcation of national values and ethics vis a vis their nationalistic proclivity, Corps members are strategically positioned to partake in a national assignment like elections. In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between INEC and NYSC, the commission opened a website to interested Corps members to apply for engagement ad hoc jobs in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Thereafter, names of short listed Corps members who were considered for the jobs were released. The recruitment exercise was followed by training session or program organized by INEC for the Corps members on their expected roles and responsibilities and the nitty-gritty of the exercise. Their roles as assigned by INEC in the 2015 and 2019 elections include;

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- i. Registration of voters for elections.
- ii. Issuance of voters cards before the commencement of elections.
- iii. Responsible for setting up and managing the polling station and sundry logistics.
- iv. Participating as Presiding Officers during elections
- v. Operating card readers as a requirement for free and fair polls
- vi. Issuing signed ballot papers to voters
- vii. Ensure that voters place ballot papers in the ballot boxes
- viii. Sort out ballotpapers
- ix. Verify the existence of voters on voters list
- x. Verify valid and invalid votes
- xi. Count both valid and invalid votes
- xii. Count in the open the number of votes cast on political party basis
- xiii. Complete the result sheets and paste the result at the polling unit
- xiv. Fill the necessary forms and make returns to the collation centre.¹⁶

Despite the plethora of problems that militated against the Corps members in conducting the two elections like late arrival and distribution of election materials, card readers malfunctioning, lack of security personnel at the polls, threats and in some instances violence against them by party thugs and surrogates and in some cases lack of simple logistic arrangements like seats and tables, Corps members deployed their initiatives and intellectual abilities and capabilities to conduct credible elections. In spite of all these human and material challenges, Corps members put up a brave front in defense of democracy and the integrity of the nation in the face of the international observer teams. However, while the 2015 general elections to some extent was adjudged to be credible, free and fair against the backdrop of which the result of the presidential election

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was not contested or challenged in the court by the incumbent who accepted the outcome and handed over political power to the winner, the 2019 elections were to elicit a lot of litigations and widespread rejection on the ground of the whole processes not being free and fair. The opposition rejected the results and outcome in its entirety and claimed victory. The post-election political climate thus became fused with acrimony, hate speech, accusations and counter accusations of election rigging, vote buying, violence epitomized in ballot boxes snatching, use of fire arms, intimidation and manhandling of election officers including Corps members. Against the backdrop of these abuses, the credibility of the elections and the integrity of INEC became questioned.

Corps Members and the Challenges of the 2015/2019 Elections

Public Skepticism; The perception of the public towards the collaboration between INEC and NYSC has been mixed. The public appear skeptical of the marriage of understanding between the two federal bodies. While some view the collaboration as credible and successful, others are cynical. Many of those who express cynicism often blame Corps members for any hitch or failure in the elections just like other ad hoc staff who are often blamed for hitches or failures in any election-related matters. This kind of sentiment does not augur well for a continuous healthy synergy and collaboration. Corps members are often demoralized and discouraged in participating in such national assignments subsequently. For instance, the failure of the card readers during the 2015 general elections in some polling units was blamed on the ad hoc staff. Even more frightening, this perception has led to instances of molestation sometimes with fatality.

Non Implementation of the MoU

One of the fundamental components of the entity or understanding reached between INEC and NYSC in the deployment of Corps members for election is welfare of which logistics are central and pivotal.

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Fundamental to this issue is the transportation of Corps members to areas or places of primary assignments or “Registration Area Centers” (RAC). The RACs were set up to ease movement of Corps members and materials during elections. Corps members were gathered at these centers where they received election materials before proceeding to polling units. It was incumbent on INEC to provide basic accommodation and sanitation facilities at the centers. However, many of the RACs lack these. Concomitantly, the electoral body failed to make provisions to transport Corps members either to or from the training centers, RACs or the polling units.

Lack of Synergy between the two Institutions

In some instances one of the parties in agreement reneged on the MoU. During the 2015 general elections for instance some of the staff in the institutions worked at cross purposes to the spirit of the MoU. While the MoU clearly states that NYSC State Coordinators are members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS), in some states, Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) blatantly refused to engage them in that capacity until the intervention of INEC Headquarters. Again, Corps members interested in participating in the elections as officials were required to register online. However, the electoral body did not involve NYSC in the recruitment or posting of Corps members. This made verification of the identities of Corps members vis a vis fake Corps members difficult. This incident makes assessing the performance of Corps members problematic.

Electoral Violence against Corps Members

Electoral violence against Corps members on INEC ad hoc assignment can act as a disincentive for further participation in election related activity. For instance, in the 2011 elections, eleven Corps members lost their lives in the course of their election duties. This to a large extent discouraged many Corps members from participating in INEC ad hoc

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jobs. Where Corps members are willing to participate, they are often discouraged by their more circumspect parents and guardians. The tragic incidence of 2011 compelled the youths Scheme to review Corps members participation in electoral processes. Thenceforth Corps members serve as election officials only on their own volition. This impacted negatively on the spirit of the synergy and collaboration as it reduces the number of Corps members willing to serve as ad hoc staff in further elections.

Poor Remuneration of Ad hoc Staff

Adhoc staff engaged by INEC are grossly underpaid. The amount often paid for the work done was grossly inadequate. This poor remuneration dampened the morale of the Corps members and made them susceptible to inducement. INEC failure to state from the onset the remuneration, often create suspicion with attendant speculation. It was speculated in some quarters during the 2015 elections that Corps members would receive a minimum of fifty thousand naira as payment. It took a press statement from NYSC to douse the tension generated by the speculation within the circle of Corps members. In some instances the payment of the honorarium is unnecessarily delayed. In FCT, the management had to intervene and appeal for calm when Corps members wanted to protest due to delay in the payment of their election duty allowances.

The NYSC FCT Management hereby shares with you the pains and all the inadequacies you passed through in your INEC undertakings. The delayed payment of your entitlements, feeding and training allowances by INEC and all other hardships experienced. In view of the above, the NYSC FCT Management has been working tooth and nail with INEC to ensure prompt settlement of all your entitlements and conducive working conditions/environment is put in place in all other future tasks. We therefore implore you to be calm and law abiding. Remember that the NYSC by-law is against unlawful assemblage or participation in

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demonstration or granting any form of address to the press or any other medium of communication whatsoever.¹⁷

This was not restricted to FCT Management alone but cut across the whole country. These are indicators of a failing system. The deplorable conditions the Corps members were subjected to were such that many of them slept in the field and on bare ground without security and with the worst human sanitary conditions.

Recommendations

i. Improvement in Logistics and other sundry pre-election arrangements

There is the imperative need for INEC to improve seriously on its logistics and other pre-election arrangements. Enough vehicles should be provided to convey Corps members to their posting units on the eve of the elections to concretize preparations for the conduct of the election the next day. Accommodations and bedding materials like foam or mattress should be provided for the comfort of the Corps members on national assignments. The situation where Corps members slept outside in open field is not only appalling but inhuman.

ii. Involvement of NYSC from preparatory stage of elections

The synergy between INEC and NYSC should be such that NYSC and Corps members are brought into view from the preliminary stage of the preparation for elections. They should be involved during the voter education, registration exercise, distribution and updating of voters register which ought to commence immediately after the conclusion of any general election. Corps members can be mobilized towards all these pre-election activities. Their participation and involvement in advocacy program and public education in areas like polio, HIV/AIDS etc, has given them enough experience that could also be replicated in this regard.

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iii. Review of the existing MoU and full implementation.

For a sustainable collaboration, every MoU should be subject to periodic re-evaluation and review. This is capable of prolonging the life span of such an entity as grey areas are looked into. It is against this background that the MoU between the two organizations should be reviewed moving forward to address some vague sections and issues. Issues such as welfare should be re-defined and re-appraised to make for clarity and avoidance of administrative overlap. Provisions such as security of Corps members on INEC assignment and their general welfare must be well articulated and included in the MoU. There is also the need for effective monitoring of staff and officials in the field by the two organizations in order to checkmate excesses and lapses.

iv. Improve welfare package

INEC should make concerted effort to improve the welfare package of its ad hoc staff through increase budgetary allocations. The body should look into the issue of remunerations of Corps members with the view to improving on it. Such improvement or increments can be a morale booster for ad hoc staff. To achieve this there is the need for INEC's proposal for increment in its annual budgetary allocation.

Conclusion

Since 1999 that the military disengaged from Nigerian political scene, midwife a democratic elections and transited political power to a civilian government, the country has had and continue to have an enduring democracy and uninterrupted democratization process that has made Nigeria one of the largest democracies on the continent. This has put an end to frequent military disruptions and usurpation of political power using the bayonet and through the instrumentality of coup de tat. Since the commencement of the democratic experiment in 1999, the country has had six successful democratic transitions i.e 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. This has cultivated, deepened and advanced Nigerian democratic culture and widened the democratic

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space. The 2015 and 2019 elections were to further consolidate our experience. While the 2015 election was adjudged to be a model for other African countries, the 2019 was not because of the attendant post-election issues that interrogated its integrity and fairness. As a willing partner in election management and conduct, the NYSC has been forthcoming in contributing marginally, ad hoc staff(youth Corps members) that facilitated the success of the elections in the field. With resilience and commitment to the national goals and objectives, the Corps members weathered all the vicissitudes and vagaries of Nigerian political environment to ensure success. However, the welfare of Corps members in both elections were appalling to say the least, an issue that needs urgent attention if Corps members will continue to be the bedrock of INEC ad hoc staffs in subsequent elections.

Corps Members and the Conduct of the 2015/2019 Elections

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6

Partnership for National Development: NYSC, CSOS and Election Monitoring In Nigeria

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Introduction

The Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme was a post-civil war initiative of the Federal Military Government aimed at promoting sustainable reconciliation, reconstruction, rehabilitation and national integration process after the horrendous human and socio-economic calamities that accompanied the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970).ⁱ After the War in 1967, the socio-cultural and political cords that held various ethnic groups in Nigeria were severely damaged and there were ominous signs of permanent disintegration.ⁱⁱ The massacre of the Igbos in Northern Nigerian states

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and the looting of assets belonging to the secessionist Igbo traders and residents in Rivers and Lagos states intensified and consolidated the spirit of disunity among various Nigeria ethnic nationalities.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Federal Government of Nigeria, under the then military head of state, General Yakubu Gowon as the military, reasoned, correctly too, that there was the urgent need to establish an institution that will help diffuse the acrimonies and hatred that the civil war created and consolidated. As a result of this, by 1973, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established to help mobilize young Nigerian graduates for a mandatory one year national service. Participants in the Scheme were usually posted outside their home states. Through this process, Corps members were expected to embark on community projects in their areas of primary assignments.^{iv}

Since the establishment of the NYSC, a modicum of achievements have been recorded in the areas of public health, education, entrepreneurship development, community and social development, inter-cultural diffusion through inter-ethnic marriages and other strands of inter-group relations. Besides, more recently, the NYSC Scheme has become a veritable tool for democratic consolidation through its strategic partnership with the electoral management body- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), development partners and civil society organizations (CSOs).^v

The partnership between NYSC and the CSOs in election management involve the training and deployment of NYSC members in the various stages of election management. More importantly, NYSC members have been involved in voter registration, conduct of elections and election monitoring especially for both domestic and international observers. The debates on the deployment of NYSC members in elections especially in election monitoring in Nigeria is nuanced. Some analysts believe that NYSC members should be kept at bay from

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elections because of their lack of experience and sometimes. Inadequate training on elections. Others harp on the inadequate security and proper insurance cover for Corps members who suffered some form of disabilities or lost their lives while on election related duties. Despite these sharp criticisms, scholars like Obadare^{vi} and Marrien 2015 argue that NYSC provides a veritable platform for national integration and democratic consolidation. They recommended the need for a deeper, effective collaboration between NYSC and Civil society to enhance the skills of Corps members on electoral and development issues.^{vii}

Arising from this strand of thought, this study provides an overview of NYSC-CSOs engagement in election monitoring in Nigeria particularly since the 2011 general elections in Nigeria by interrogating the following research problems; what is the role of NYSC in democratic consolidation? What is the pattern of NYSC-CSOs relations or partnership in election monitoring? What are the challenges facing NYSC-CSOs in election monitoring? By focusing on one government institution, (that is, the NYSC), this study contributes to the growing literature on state-civil society relations in Nigeria by highlighting the positive interventions and contributions of NYSC in the current quest towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria through complementary engagement with CSOs. In order to investigate these research problems, this paper is therefore, divided into four sections. Section one provides conceptual clarifications of some key terms such as partnership, civil society, election and election monitoring and theoretical framework of analysis. Section two briefly examines the history and objectives of NYSC, section three focuses on the NYSC- civil society partnership in election monitoring while section four interrogates the challenges associated with NYSC-CSOs collaboration in election monitoring.

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Civil Society Organizations, Election Monitoring: Towards a Conceptual Clarification

Civil Society Organizations have been variously defined by scholars and therefore lack a definitive definition. Traore defines civil society as a set of non-profit, voluntary NGOs, created by individuals with a common objective to maintain a common focus. Often, acting in anticipation or in response to situations of distress, civil society organizations play a role in sensitizing, educating, training and raising awareness of the people^{viii}. Similarly, Chukwuma defined civil society as a set of institutions, organization and behaviour situated between the state, business world and family. These include non-governmental organization, private voluntary organizations, people's organizations, civic organizations, community-based organizations, cultural, gender, religious, and social organizations^{ix}. Ikelegbe sees civil society as the associational life of citizens characterized by common interests, civil and public purposes, and voluntary collective autonomous actions. It also stretches to include all those associations that enable citizens to participate voluntarily, freely and openly within the public realm, and operate and function independent of and outside state and corporate powers though, relating with them^x

Civil society acts as a buffer against the power of central governments and in that capacity, encourages individuals to follow their own courses without fear of intimidation from central governments. The essence of civil society is to advance the interest of a group of people with a common socio-economic, political or cultural interest with no objective to capture political power or make profits but to provide and advance the course of good governance and common good of its members.^{xi} Uwen and Yeero, defined CSOs as the set of institutions and organizations that interface between the state, business world and the family. They further argue that civil society is the arena of un-coerced collective actions around shared interest, and values. In theory the institutions are different from the state, business and family world

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though in practice, the boundary between the state, family, market and civil society are often complex, blurred and negotiated. They identified civil society to include Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), people's organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), civic clubs, and trade unions.^{xii}

Civil society organization refers to community organizations, activist groups, trade unions, faith-based groups, cooperatives, as well as more formal non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Civil society is therefore, in this paper taken to mean the third sector, the cumulus of associational groups that is different from the state, business and family; and that is geared towards the promotion of group goals and objectives. Civil society provides the necessary social lubricants that interface between the government and the citizens especially in the promotion of good democratic governance.^{xiii} Their responsibilities are clearly defined and cut across social, political, economic and cultural matrix of society. Civil society organization serves as a bridge between the state and people in fostering ideals, transparency, speech, and knowledge channelling.

Election Monitoring: Election is the organized processing of choosing representatives of the people in a democratic society. Election is a periodic process, carefully organized in accordance with laws in order to determine individuals who will represent the people in certain elective political positions.^{xiv} In other words, the essence of an election in a democratic society is to provide a periodic viable opportunity for citizens to entrust authority and power to qualified individuals to manage their affairs. In Nigeria, the body saddled with the conduct of federal elections is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In the spirit of federalism, there also exist State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) which conduct local government elections across the thirty six states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja.

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Election monitoring is the systematic observation, guidance and protection of elections to ensure that irregularities or misconducts are curtailed. Election monitoring is the critical observance of the conducts of both the citizens and the electoral management bodies (INEC and SIECs) to the stipulated strict rules and regulations governing elections in a given country or state. The essence of election monitoring is to provide opportunities for domestic and international observers to provide verdicts on the standard and conduct of elections. Election monitors identify loopholes and areas of strengths in an election and provide professional advice to actors in an election.^{xv} Reports from election monitors further help to determine how development partners and donors can support EMBs to improve in future elections. The major contributions of election monitors is to ensure that the norms and rules guiding elections are adhered to by all parties in an election (such parties include voters, EMBs, political parties, security agencies, and politicians). Election monitoring is therefore, a powerful tool in promoting democracy, political rights and good governance CSO mobilize to engage in election observation for different reasons. These include to engage citizens in the election process; deter fraud; expose problems and irregularities; provide an accurate measure of the quality of the election; and provide recommendations for improving the process for the next election.^{xvi}CSOs engagements in election monitoring in the long term, helps ensure electoral integrity, and strengthen civil society's capacity to promote citizen participation, engage in policy advocacy and foster governmental accountability within and well beyond the election circle.

The role of Civil Society in Nigeria's democratization process is understood from the economic theory perspective. In a critical study of civil society and the need to build an enabling environment, Anheier avers that Economic theory provides a better analytical framework for understanding State-Civil Society relations^{xvii}. To Anheier, economic theory offers three answers to understanding the role of CSOs in a

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democratic state. These include: (1) substitute and supplement (2) complement and (3) adversary^{xviii}. The first view is derived from the public good perspective and holds that CSOs provide alternative public good in areas or sectors where government services are in short supply.

The complementary perspective of CSOs, Anheier observes, was propounded by Salamon (2002) and holds that CSOs serve as active agents in the implementation and delivery of public good. "CSOs are typically the first line of defence in addressing emerging social problems of many kinds but face resource insufficiencies over time that, in turn can be compensated by government funding"^{xix}. This view sees civil society organizations as significant supporters to the state through the provision of social, political and economic services which the state may not be able to provide. The theory also suggests that it will be more efficient and effective for government to out-source or "delegate" certain services to CSOs. The benefit of this approach is that it reduces "cost of start-ups, generate more accurate cost data" and boycott bureaucratic bottlenecks in service delivery among others ^{xx}. Similarly, the theory that CSOs and government are adversaries is supported by public good arguments. This emerges when the goals of CSOs are remarkably different from the goals of a majoritarian government. The social movement theory clearly captures this adversary notion of State – CSO relations.

From the above analysis, the relevance of this theoretical framework to this study cannot be overemphasized. First, this theory helps to understand the necessity of improved collaboration or partnership between CSO and NYSC especially in democratic development. Through complementary roles, both CSOs and NYSC are well positioned to synergize towards improved service delivery and contribution to national development through the involvement of NYSC members in election monitoring. Appreciating the mutual gains associated with partnerships by both CSOs and NYSC will go a long way in blurring the

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adversary postures that had often underscores government-civil society relations in the past. It is therefore, within this theoretical plank that these arguments in this study are framed and issues analysed.

NYSC, CSOs and Elections Monitoring in Nigeria

NYSC, CSOs and INEC have remained critical partners in the conduct of elections in Nigeria particularly since the return of liberal democracy after close to three decades of military interregnum in year 1999. The essence of this partnership has been to create a virile atmosphere for the conduct and monitoring of elections that are less prone to violence. In other words, NYSC-CSOs collaboration is aimed at the promotion and conduct of credible elections that meet minimum best international standards. Besides, INEC as the sole agency saddled with the task of conducting election in Nigeria has faced the challenge of shortage of manpower. As a result of this miasma, the election management body reasoned, correctly too, that NYSC with its educated manpower should provide basic services in election management in Nigeria. ^{xxi}

In the build up to the 2011 general elections, INEC with support from several CSOs, which provided the funds for the training and payment of allowances to Corps members, formalized its partnership with the Corps. As a result of this collaboration, NYSC members were massively trained and deployed as adhoc Staff in various Polling Stations across the Seven Hundred and Seventy Four Local Government Areas of Nigeria. They served as Polling Agents, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and Observers for both domestic and international election monitoring groups. ^{xxii}

Some of the CSOs and Development Partners that have been actively involved in election monitoring through direct deployment or provision of funding opportunities to NYSC members in Nigeria, especially since the return of democracy include; Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa (CDD, Abuja), CLEEN foundation, Action

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Aid, JDPC, UNDP, EU, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), USAID, YIAGA Africa, among others. Apart from these, there exist several Community Development Service (CDS) groups within NYSC Scheme in which Corps members are expected to join and participate actively during their service year. Some of the CDS Groups include those dealing directly with good governance, Anti-Corruption, Road Safety, Drug Free, Election and SDGs, among others^{xxiii}

The NYSC-CSOs partnership has had tremendous impact on election conduct and monitoring through several means. First, it has contributed positively to improving the standard and credibility of elections in Nigeria in recent times. Successive reports from local and international election observers particularly those of the European Union (EU), African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) have shown a steady improvement in the conduct and credibility of elections since 1999. They had often commended INEC and acknowledged the supportive role of NYSC members in providing relevant services to electorates especially in rural areas. ^{xxiv}

Besides, NYSC-CSOs collaboration has yielded positive results in the areas of mass orientation/ public enlightenment. Through advocacy, NYSC-Community Development Service (CDS) groups have engaged in massive rural based enlightenment on the need to maintain peace and security before, during and after elections. CDS is mandatory for all members. In this regards, 'Corps members are expected to use one day in a week for group CDS activities. They are not expected to attend duties in their Places of Primary Assignment on CD days. Such days are dedicated to the execution of projects and programs that will improve living conditions of their host communities'.

CSOs especially community based CSOs have found CDS as veritable partners in addressing the potpourris of socio-economic and political challenges that have plagued Nigeria since the forth republic including

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elections. Through collaboration with CSOs, NYSC CDS platforms provide forum for Corps members to experiment with ideas and translate them into concrete achievements thereby relying less on foreign technology and encouraging the use of local raw materials in execution of projects as well as on the job-training and experience for Corps members. CDS also provides platforms for Corps members to critically ‘explore the challenges of rural development and help inculcate in Nigerian youths the ideals of leadership, endurance, selflessness and community service as well as national service, patriotism and creativity. It also complements the activities of government at all levels in the strides towards national development’^{xxv}

Various CDS groups have equally been involved in voter education and election observation especially in state and local government elections. In Kogi State, for instance, the Justice, Peace and Development Commission (JDPC) has been training and collaborating with NYSC members in creating political and social awareness especially during election seasons. Through consistent capacity training of Corps members by CSOs, host communities tend to benefit from the knowledge and skills of NYSC members in the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Corps members in the Service Delivery CDS Groups are committed to attitudinal change-re-branding) through community sensitization and awareness creation. The CDS group focuses on educating rural dwellers on the need for free, fair and credible elections among other essential services. They harp on the need for service delivery and good work ethics. Some of their activities include training, sensitization and group discussions on value reorientation.

Through enhanced capacity training by CSOs, Corps members are empowered with requisite administrative and leadership skills on how to coordinate and manage the conduct of voters during elections. With the help of security agents such as Police, Army and Civil Defence, NYSC members as either Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs) or Presiding

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Officers (P.O), explain basic rules and regulations guiding the voting process in each polling station. Besides, NYSC members are the primary and legitimate custodians of both sensitive and non-sensitive election materials in every polling station. They are the eyes and ears of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and are usually held accountable should anything go wrong with the voting process.^{xxvi.}

Through mutual collaboration with security agents and CSOs, NYSC members are engaged in data collection and analyses especially on election related issues like the time of voting, conducts of voters and electoral officials, role of women voters and conditions of other special voters particularly people with disability and media coverage of elections. The Corps members are also saddled with the tasks of writing post-election reports which help in shaping democratic consolidation particularly in future elections.

Through the deployment of technologies especially the Smart Card readers usually managed by Corps members, the collaboration between CSOs and NYSC has largely promoted the integrity of elections in Nigeria thereby curtailing the incidences of voter frauds. Since the 2011 general elections, the Smart Card Reader has become an indispensable component of the electoral process. Apart from the fact that Corps members are usually trained on the use of Smart Cards Readers by INEC in collaboration with CSOs and development partners, Corps members are also imbued with skills in conveying electoral materials to and fro and announcing election results in polling stations. Through this process, they help to monitor and report election results in each station thereby averting violence arising from contestations over election results. Through this medium, it can be seen that the synergy between NYSC and CSOs has consistently promoted electoral credibility through unfettered monitoring of elections.

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NYSC, CSOs and Election Monitoring: Challenges and way forward

Although the collaboration between NYSC, CSOs and INEC has yielded the desired positive results especially in deepening democracy, development and rural transformation, there exist some challenges militating against overall, seamless sustainable partnership. This section isolates and analyses the dimensions of these challenges and recommend policy options for deepening civil society-government relation through the lens of the NYSC.

There is a yawning gap in the entire gamut of state-civil society relation in Nigeria which continues to undermine the entire civil society relations in Nigeria. The impact of this fractious relations negatively impinge also on NYSC-CSOs relations. The Nigerian state often sees civil society organizations as adversaries and not partners in progress. As a result of this, government agencies are often cautious of the kind of collaborations they enter into with CSOs.

Beyond the hostile operational environment for CSOs in Nigeria, Insecurity is another challenge facing NYSC-CSOs partnership in election monitoring in contemporary Nigeria. Since the Boko Haram onslaught in Nigeria in 2009 coupled with increased ethno-religious violence, armed banditry, farmer-herders conflicts, and militancy, both NYSC and CSOs including INEC have faced serious security challenges in the business of election monitoring and management. Some Corps members on election duties lost their lives while others were kidnapped. This constitutes an albatross to effective participation of Corps members in CSO driven election monitoring or observations.^{xxvii} For instance, in the build up to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, several parts of Katsina state were under siege by bandits.

The Executive Governor of the state, Mallam Aminu Bello Masari publicly admitted that his state could not guarantee the safety of INEC and NYSC officials on election duties due to the notorious activities of

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armed bandits. He claimed that about eight (8) Local Government Areas were under severe attacks by armed bandits. These local government areas include; Jibia, Batsari, Safana, Dan-Musa, Faskari, Sabuwa, Dandume, Kankara and parts of Kafur, Masari Local Government Areas. The bandits in Katsina operates largely from the Rugu forest which is the second largest forest in Northern Nigeria after the notorious, Boko Haram infested Sambisa forest. Rugu forest cuts across the Niger Republic, Katsina and parts of Kaduna States and has become a safe haven for criminal elements. Since 2019, the security landscape of Katsina had worsened.^{xxviii}

Implication of the above on NYSC-CSOs relations especially election monitoring is that effective election monitoring cannot occur in areas occupied by bandits and terrorist groups. In the absence of credible election monitors, most elections become mere rituals or shambolic lacking in accountability and transparency. The high spate of election violence continues to dampen CSO-NYSC collaboration in election monitoring. For instance, a case in point is the dastardly attacks of NYSC members in Bauchi in 2011 where nine Corps members were killed following the post-election violence that engulfed some northern states. The nine serving Corps members and their state origin were Adewumi Seun (Ekiti), Teidi Tosin (Kogi), Adowei Elliot (Bayelsa), Okpokiri Obinna (Abia), Gbenjo Ayotunde (Osun), Ukeoma Chibuzor (Imo), Nwanzema Chukwuonyerem (Imo), Adeniji Jehleel (Osun), Akonyi Sule (Kogi)^{xxix}. As a corollary, Boko Haram insurgency which has led to the displacement of over 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad Basin with over 494,000 internally displaced persons in Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republics has further constitute a major challenge to the involvement of NYSC-CSOs in election monitoring in the North eastern states of Nigeria.

Finance is another major challenge militating against deeper, sustainable collaboration between NYSC and CSOs in election monitoring. Most local CSOs do not often have adequate financial base

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to effectively train Corps members for sustainable election observation. Instead, what is obtainable had often been, an inchoate, adhoc, short term training of Corps members. These trainees are usually posted to unfamiliar terrain without adequate facilities. This unsavoury scenario had led to controversies and possible absentee observations which do not often reflect the reality of the elections thereby leading some analysts to question the merit of reports of election observers in Nigeria.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted, multi-layered inter-agency collaborations. Government at levels must intensify efforts to promote national security through a decentralized policing, improved funding of police, NYSC and INEC. This is important to ensure that adequate manpower and infrastructural facilities are provided to enhance effective and efficient management of elections devoid of frauds and violence. Furthermore, the incessant attacks of CSOs through excessive, burdensome regulations/laws should be discontinued. This is important in order to ensure that donors and local CSOs do not face unnecessary administrative and legislative bottlenecks in funding and executing projects within and outside the NYSC in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges of finance and insecurity which threaten sustainable NYSC-CSOs collaborations in election monitoring, appreciable modicum of achievements have been achieved in deepening democratic consolidation through election monitoring. Due to the changing dynamics of the Nigerian state and its multifaceted national development challenges, the functions and engagement of NYSC in nation-building projects have continued to evolve. NYSC represents a near-perfect agency that had, over the years successfully partnered/collaborated with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to promote democracy through election monitoring, youth empowerment

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development and national unity. The promotion of sustainable democratization process by NYSC and CSOs through involvement in election monitoring and administration should be sustained and improved through more active collaboration with both local and international CSOs. NYSC members should be consistently trained and empowered to conduct and monitor federal and local government elections across Nigeria.

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Emmanuel Osewe Akubor

7

The Welfare of Corps Members and Staff during Election Duties

Emmanuel Osewe Akubor

Introduction

It has been argued and established that the history of Elections in Nigeria has not been rosy as witnessed in most parts of the developed world. In the case of Nigeria, the general thinking was that after long period of military dictatorship in Nigeria, the advent of democratic rule through the conduct of periodic elections would bring with it renewed hope of self-dignity, respect for human rights, constitutionalism and improved quality of government for the Nigerian demos. However, political events in the last decade (since 1999) have shown that rather

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than liberating the people that voted them into power through the ballot boxes, activities of politicians, political parties and their cohorts (*militicians*) seems to reaffirmed that the future of the country and her citizens (especially the youths and resources) have been hijacked, through what has come to be known as Elite Consensus in the Nigerian political circle¹. This has been exhibited in the wide spread imposition of unpopular candidates on the people by a tiny but power political clique, often followed by high class rigging of elections, electoral violence and killings, as well as general state of insecurity². Thus, instead of succour, Civilian dictatorship, democratic authoritarianism, low or non-existent quality of government became the rule rather than the exception. This, of course, dashed the hope and expectations of the Nigerian people in elections and by extension, in the democratic rule.

It is important to state from the onset the concept of welfare used in this document goes beyond just the health, happiness and fortune of the group as considered in monetary terms. It should be considered as the total statutory procedure or social efforts designed to promote the basic physical and material well-being of people engaged by the INEC in her line of duty. This is considered thus when seen in the light of the fact that as ad hoc staff, these individuals do not really have a long term benefit (pension or gratuity) from INEC and as such in case of eventuality in the course of discharge of duty they and other members of their families especially dependants are left unchartered for.

¹Akubor, E. Osewe (2020) Elections and cracks in elite consensus, Olaniyi R (ed), Two Decades of Democracy in Nigeria: Nigeria since 1999, University Press, Ibadan (In Press).

²Akubor E .Osewe, (2013), Nigeria and the quest for credible Election: Lessons from the 2011 National Voters' Registration Exercise, in ChiomaUzoho et al , The Dignity of a French Teacher, Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Julie Agbasiere, Fab Educational Books Awka

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Historical Background to the conduct of Elections in Nigeria

As obtained in countries of the world, the Nigerian state since independence has conducted series of elections to elect their leaders. This is done under the guidance of an organised and legally backed up body. The electoral bodies had changed since 1983 from Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to National Electoral Commission (NEC) to INEC. In spite of appointing eminent jurists and supposedly credible people as heads of these bodies, the elections most of the time had been flawed. But that is not to say that there had not been free, fair and peacefully conducted elections in Nigeria. The generally acceptable and most peaceful elections conducted in Nigeria were those held in 1959, 1979, 1993 and 1999, while the most chaotic, violent and disputed elections were those in 1964 and 1983³.

Scholars have argued that the 2003 and 2007 elections, three elections conducted during this period of ten years of Nigeria's democracy have been lampooned by many critics as far from free and fair. In fact, the election of April 2007, conducted by the existing electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the leadership of Maurice Iwu has been described as the worst election ever held in this country as a result of indescribable irregularities which marred the elections. Analysts have argued that what probably came close to what could be described as the freest and fairest election in the history of Nigeria was the June 12, 1993 election that was annulled by General Ibrahim Babangida. Unfortunately, the country was deprived of the opportunity of taking advantage of this successful achievement to launch itself on the road to true democracy by a greedy and rabid political and military class interested in perpetuating itself in power. The vital lesson from this experience is that a sound electoral

³Siddique A (nd), The June 12 Presidential Election was neither free nor fair. Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training (CEDDERT) Occasional Publication

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process is dependent on having a solid democratic infrastructure in place and vice versa⁴. This depends largely on engaging the services of the best of brains into working and making adequate preparations for upholding the basic tenets of free and fair elections in Nigeria.

Independent National Electoral Commission, Reforming Election and Youths Involvement

Before now, it has always been thought that election is just about voting and the politicians. The roles of the youth as the future leaders have been relegated to the background⁵. However, the politicians having realised the potentials in these young minds with strength and vigour have often employed them as thugs, ballot box snatchers and agents of confusion at polling booths⁶. It is probably a realization of this that made the INEC to have a rethink on how to make young minds put their strength, talents and brains into the process of repositioning the nation's electoral system.

The above is made clear as it is in the statutory mandate of the Commission, as set out in the Electoral Act 2010, in which the INEC is duty bound to undertake effective *voter and civic education*. In this way, INEC has over the period embarked on three key activities⁷. In the first place, INEC has established civic education clubs in high schools. This activity was aimed at educating young people who are mainly first time

⁴Akubor, E. Osewe, "Campaigns and Electioneering: Reflecting on the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria." Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Abuja, Nigeria

⁵Akubor E. Osewe (2014), From Criminal Politics to Full Blown Terrorism in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective; Chibuzo N. Nwoke and OgabaOche, Contemporary Challenges in Nigeria, Africa and the World, The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, Pp 91-130.

⁶Akubor E .Osewe, (2011),Youths and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: A Historical Approach; in Anyanwu, U.D,(2011) The Integrated International Journal of History and Strategic Studies, Vol. 1, No. I, June.The Integrated Academic Systems, Anambra, Nigeria.Pp 1-24

⁷Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 As Amended

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voters on their voting rights and the imperatives of civic participation in nation building. Secondly, in 2014, INEC introduced a new initiative tagged INEC Youth Ambassadors. In conjunction with youth organizations like the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement (YIAGA), and the commission identified young celebrities and influencers as youth ambassadors tasked with the responsibility of conducting voter education⁸. The ambassadors utilized their platforms and existing relations with youth to disseminate voter education and messages of non-violence. Thirdly, social media has been increasingly used by INEC to communicate with youth. In the context of its Citizens Contact Centre for voter education, incident reports and complaints resolution, INEC has established social media channels – especially twitter, Facebook – in addition to ‘traditional media platforms like radio and television,’ dedicated hotlines and the INEC’s website. In addition, INEC has also launched the ‘MyINEC’ mobile app to enhance access to election information by young voters⁹.

Available evidence shows that INEC’s youth engagement is two-pronged i.e promoting youth participation in voting and mainstreaming youth in its organisational setup. In terms of *voter registration*, INEC engages in awareness creation activities to mobilize unregistered voters to register and participate in the electoral process. The commission also enlightens young voters – especially students – on inter-state transfer of voter register. As mentioned above, the voter registration exercise is managed by members of the NYSC who themselves are above 30 years of age¹⁰.

Other relevant activities include awareness creation to encourage mass participation of younger population in the electoral process through

⁸ <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-nigeria>

⁹ Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) National Pre-election Youth Summit Report, January 2015

¹⁰ Independent National Electoral Commission, Activity Report 2011-2014

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consultations, training and campaign monitoring. The area of emphasis has been on hosting several consultative town hall meetings and national summit with young people. This is with the aim of engaging them in electoral activities. As far as training is concerned, the commission trains NYSC members that have been recruited as INEC ad hoc staff on the rudiments of election management especially concerning voter registration and polling station services. The commission also trains duly accredited civil society groups on election observation. The INEC is responsible for campaign monitoring and more specifically for ensuring compliance with campaign finance laws. Given that youth candidates are economically disadvantaged, INEC's role in leveling the playing field contributes indirectly to enhance the chances of the emergence of youth candidates for active participation in the electoral process¹¹.

INEC and National Youth Service Corps: Partners in National Election and Development

As noted in the activities of INEC concerning the involvement of youth Corps members in the conduct of elections, the Commission has trained NYSC members for effective election monitoring and supervision. For a meaningful discourse on how the NYSC became a partner in progress with INEC, there is the need to have a brief background to the development of the Scheme. This becomes necessary in the light of the fact that NYSC was the needed partner for INEC if the integrity of elections and electoral conducts must be credible.

Historically, it has been established that the NYSC Scheme was created in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian Civil war. The unfortunate antecedents in our national history gave impetus to the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps by decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973 which stated that the "**NYSC is being established with a view to the proper encouragement and**

¹¹ <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-nigeria>

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development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity".

**Nigeria and the need for Free, Credible and Fair Elections:
Considering the Role of Corps Members and Staff**

An analysis of the issue of elections in Nigeria shows that as a result of shortage in man power over the years, the Independent National Electoral Commission has from time to time employed the service of ad hoc staff to perform various functions during elections. However, with the need and her quest for neutrality and free and fair elections, the Electoral body decided to seek the inclusion of Corps members in the list of her ad hoc staff. This was particularly in the 2007 General elections which were manifestly the worst in Nigerian electoral history. The election was characterized by massive rigging, violence and voter intimidation. Both international and domestic observers noted that the election fell short of international standards for election conduct. It was this that therefore called for the need to inject into the system, elements of credibility. Observers saw the inclusion of members of the NYSC as giving credence to the program as they could be held accountable. This although contained in the MoU, has also been emphasized by Ibrahim, Jibrin and Garuba, D (2008) thus:

In the past, adhoc staffs were drawn from government institutions and private individuals who had no definite records or verifiable addresses. The use of ad hoc staff was characterized by various electoral malfeasance which undermined the integrity of elections. Defaulting ad hoc election officials could not be held accountable due to poor documentation and unverifiable addresses. Following the conduct of the 2007 General elections, INEC resolved to engage young people under the NYSC

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Scheme in the conduct of by-elections and re-run/supplementary elections¹².

The move therefore to include Corps members according to sources, although began officially during the period towards the February 2007 elections (however, the first engagement of NYSC members as polling clerks in the conduct of elections began in 2008) and as a result a sort of partnership was entered into between Independent National Electoral Commission and National Youth Service Corps and Staff. This alliance was not surprising when seen in the light of the fact that this tallies with the functions outlined in subsection 3 of the National Youth Service Corps regulations, which states thus:

the service Corps shall ensure— **(a)** the equitable distribution of members of the service Corps and the effective utilisation of their skills in areas of national needs; **(b)** that as far as possible, Nigerian youths are assigned to jobs in States other than their States of origin; **(c)** that such group of Nigerian youths assigned to work together is representative of Nigeria as far as possible; **(d)** that the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria; **(e)** that the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences; **(f)** that members of the service Corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus, promoting the free movement of labour; **(g)** that employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service Corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis,

¹² Ibrahim, Jibrin and Garuba, D. Governance and Institution-Building in Nigeria: A Study of the Independent National Electoral Commission (Abuja: Center for Democracy and Development, 2008)

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qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their States of origin.

It was in line with the above that the Independent National Electoral Commission observed that it was necessary to have the National Youth Service Corps members and staff infused into the monitoring of elections in the country. Analysts have observed and specifically noted thus:

Some of the reasons why INEC thought it appropriate to involve Corps members to play vital roles in elections include: a) Intellectual capacity of Corps members. Being graduates of higher institutions, Corps members are easily trainable which makes them assets to partner with. b) The deployment of Corps members to all the nooks and crannies of the country makes the youth Corps members particularly suitable for election duties. The geographical spread in the posting policy of the Scheme makes for Corps members to be posted evenly. c) Since Corps members are posted outside their states and geopolitical zones, there is the likelihood that they would be neutral and nonpartisan. Similarly, the nationalistic outlook infused in the Corps members during Orientation course makes them ready for this type of engagement. d) Internal disciplinary mechanism as enshrined in the NYSC byelaws makes sanctioning of Corps members involved in electoral fraud easy. The NYSC bye-laws section 4(i) prohibits Corps members from taking part in partisan politics. NYSC bye-laws (2001), the youth service has earned for itself, a place in the hearts and minds of the generality of the citizenry. The Scheme and the youths engaged in it are generally trusted by the Scheme's beneficiary

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communities. This goodwill has rubbed off on all elections Corps members participated in¹³.

Realizing the above and as a way of giving this a sort of legal backing, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the two bodies in 2010. This agreement was reviewed and formalised in 2013. NYSC (2014). Corps members are not under any compulsion to partake in the elections. The involvement of the youth Corps members in actual elections began with their participation as polling clerks in the conduct of Kogi State Governorship re-run election held on Saturday, 29th March, 2008. NYSC (2015). The success of this first involvement led to further engagement of Corps members in the conduct of bye- elections, re-run and supplementary elections "which were also adjudged satisfactory". MoU (2013), the following is the statistics of the participation of Corps members in elections since 2009.

¹³*This action is aimed to bring about unity in the country and to help youths appreciate other ethnic groups. There is an "Orientation" period of approximately three weeks spent in a camp away from family and friends. There is also a "passing out ceremony" at the end of the year and primary assignment followed by one month of vacation. The program has also helped in creating entry level jobs for a lot of Nigerian youth. An NYSC forum dedicated to the NYSC members was recently built to bridge the gap amongst members serving across Nigeria and also an avenue for corps to share job information and career resources as well as getting loans from the National Directorate Of Employment.*

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Table 7.1: Corps members involvement in Elections between 2008 and 2011¹⁴

S/No	Date	Place /State	Type of Election	No. of Corps Member	Remark
1.	29TH, March, 2008	Kogi state	Governorship Re-run	5, 851	Successful
2.	29th April, 2008	Adamawa state	Governorship Re-run	5, 727	Successful
3.	19th April, 2008	Maru North, Zamfara state	Bye Election	177	Successful
4.	24th May, 2008	Sokoto state	Governorship Bye Election	3,035 6	Successful
5.	24th May, 2008	Bayelsa state	Governorship Bye Election	1,805	Successful
6.	7 th June, 2008	Nasarawa state	Bye Elections into Lafia/Obi Federal Constituency	447	Successful
7.	23rd August, 2008	Cross River state	Governorship Bye Election	2265	Successful
8.	24th January, 2009	Anambra State	Anambra South Senatorial Re-run	1619	Successful

¹⁴ Table constructed by author based on information gathered from various sources

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9.	28 th February, 2009	Benue state	Guma South Constituency	160	Successful
10.	7th March, 2009	Plateau state	Wampang South Constituency, Rerun	124	Successful
11.	14th March, 2009		Batsari Constituency Re run	173	Successful
12.	25th June, 2009	Ekiti state	Governorship Rerun	806	Successful
13.	20th June, 2009	Katsina	Malumfashi State Constituency Bye Election	21	Successful
14.	15th August, 2009	Ekiti state	Ekiti North Senatorial Bye Election	714	Successful
15.	17th October, 2009	Bauchi state	Gamawa State Constituency Bye Election	177	Successful
16.	5th December, 2009	Osun state	Osun East Senatorial Bye Election	1217	Successful
17.	19th December, 2009	Kebbi state	Kebbi Central Senatorial Bye Election	892	Successful
18.	5th February, 2010	Anambra state	Governorship Election	, 4658	Successful

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19.	10th April, 2010	Abuja	FCT Area Council Election	2400	Success ful
20.	15th January-5th February, 2011	Nationwide	2011 Elections Voters' Registration		Success ful
21.	April 2011	Nationwide	April 2011 General Elections	185, 000	Success ful

A critical analysis of the participation of Corps-members from the period the MoU was signed shows that these youths have become so involved that they have gradually mastered the act of the duty. When it started, there was so much scepticism and as such the participation was low beginning with about 5000 Corps-members. However with time and confidence of their performance, their participation increased with much more responsibility such that at the time of the 2011 General election, the Scheme could supply as much as well over one hundred and eighty thousand (180,000) in just less than ten years. This is an indication of the success of the collaboration. An approximate 375, 268NYSC members have been engaged as election officials between 2008 and 2015 election cycles. For the 2015 elections, 186,000 interested Corps members applied to be election ad hoc staff at the close of the registration. Youth Corps members were mainly employed in the area of Presiding Officers and Assistant Presiding Officers.

Over the years, due to patriotism and professional conduct exhibited by the Corps members, involved in the managing of polling units, it has been discovered that their conduct has improved the integrity of the conduct of the elections. This is exemplified with the acceptability of electoral outcome and decline in the number of post-election litigation. For example, while there were 1290 petitions in 2007 elections, there

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was a sharp decline in 2011, with 732 petitions' and in 2015 , it fell to 611 petitions¹⁵. The participation of these young men have been acknowledge and applauded by domestic and international observers as well as INEC.

The Independent National Electoral Commission and Plight of Corps Members on election duties.

One of the broad objectives of the NYSC is to provide manpower for national development. Corps members¹⁶ are however expected to mix with the people of other ethnic groups, social and family backgrounds, to learn the culture of the host communities. It is in view of the above, that the program serves as a training ground for Corps-members to gain the much needed knowledge that would integrate them into the larger society.

The involvement of Corps members in the conduct of elections is however associated with security issues that must be tackled to guarantee the safety of lives and properties of members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). In 2011 for instance nine serving Corps members (CMs), all young men, were killed by rioters in Bauchi State following the April 16, 2011 presidential election. The particulars of the deceased are represented thus:

¹⁵European Union Election Observation Mission Report, 2011, see also <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-nigeria>

¹⁶Since 1973 graduates of universities and later Polytechnics have been required to take part in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program for one year. This is known as national service year. "Corp" members are posted to cities far from their city of origin.

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Table 7.2: Records of Corps Members on INEC Duty In Bauchi, 2011

S/No	Name	State of Origin	Area of Specialization	State of Primary Assignment
1	Teidi Tosin Olawale	Osun	BSc Computer Science	Bauchi
2	Nkwazema Anslem C.	Imo	HND Electrical Electronic Engineering	Bauchi
3	Okpokiri Obinna Michael	Abia	BSc Environmental Management	Bauchi
	Adowei Elliot	Bayelsa	BSc Computer Science	Bauchi
	Adewunmi Seun Paul	Ekiti	BSc, Social Sciences	Bauchi
	Adeniji Kehinde Jehleel	Osun	BSc Banking & Finance	Bauchi
	Gbenjo Ebenezer Ayotunde	Osun	BSc, Education Economics	Bauchi
	Ukeoma Ikechukwu Chibuzor	Imo	BSc Medical Microbiology	Bauchi
	Akonyi Ibrahim Sule	Kogi	HND Business Administration	Bauchi

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Independent National Electoral Commission and the Welfare of Corps-Members during and After Election

In line with the MoU between NYSC and INEC, it was the responsibility of INEC to take care of the welfare of Corps members as INEC ad hoc staff during the period the elections and other relevant assignments. Although, the NYSC members voluntarily sign up to participate in election administration, different categories of allowances are provided by INEC to cover costs incurred during training and elections. Cumulatively, each NYSC member is entitled to \$179 as INEC standard payment for election officers¹⁷. In line with conventional practice, all election officials are duly insured by the electoral commission throughout the period of their engagement. In terms of discipline and accountability, all Corps members engaged in electoral duties are subject to the directive, control and supervision of both NYSC and the electoral commission during the timeline of the engagement. The Corps members are also bound by the code of conduct for election officials and the NYSC by-laws.

According to a report in 2019, Mrs. Adenike Adeyemi, the Scheme's Director of Press and Public Relations, ..."the NYSC, is disturbed by the uninspiring pictures and tales of woes experienced by many Corps members assigned for the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, duties in several states across the country on the eve of the postponed General elections. This tales of woes by the Corps members have been confirmed as true situation report which is at variance with the spirit of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between INEC and the Scheme.

Decrying the dangers Corps-members were exposed to in the course of election monitoring, she said in part:

"While these incidents have been adduced to the logistic challenges which the INEC experienced, the NYSC wishes

¹⁷INEC Standard Payment for Election Officers. See document <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/INEC-STANDARD-PAYMENT-FOR-ELECTION-OFFICERS2.pdf>, INEC and NYSC, Memorandum of Understanding, November 2010

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to note that the unpleasant occurrences are totally at variance with the spirit of our MoU with INEC.... "Therefore, we are currently engaged in discussion with INEC Management towards ensuring that these and all other sundry issues bordering on the welfare and security of Corps members are quickly addressed and redressed before the rescheduled elections".

The above statement by Mrs. Adenike Adeyemi, the Scheme's Director of Press and Public Relations. The NYSC, was even more disturbed when it considered that in the build up to the participation of Corps members as ad-hoc electoral staff, the then Director-General of the NYSC, Major General SZ Kazaure and members of Management embarked on nationwide tour to meet with INEC State officials, heads of security agencies, community and opinion leaders to obtain assurances on the welfare and security of Corps members before, during and after the elections¹⁸.

Closely related to this is the issue of accommodation for Corps members on INEC assignments. It is important to make adequate arrangements in this regard to ensure the safety of Corps members and the credibility of the elections.

There is also the need for INEC to make available life insurance policy for Corps members. This is to say that the government should step up whatever plans it has to provide life insurance cover for thousands of Corps members deployed for INEC functions.

There is also the need to strengthen arrangement with the National Health Insurance Scheme to get Corps members registered as beneficiaries of the Scheme.

¹⁸<https://cyber3x.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/nysc-knocks-inec-over-Corps-members-welfare-challenges> , see also <https://cyber3x.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/postponed-polls-we-were-treated-as-slaves-nysc-members>

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Conclusion

From the discourse it is clear that despite the signing of MoU by INEC with NYSC, there are still lacuna that needs to be addressed. As earlier noted, Corps members and staff welfare should go beyond just monetary gratification. This becomes necessary based on the fact that as ad hoc staff, these individuals do not really have a long term benefit (pension or gratuity) from INEC and as such in case of death, disability or any fatal injuries sustained in the line of duty would be a welcome development.

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Prof. Mahmood Yakubu at the ongoing Donation to NYSC



Professor Attahiru Jega, Guest Speaker at the 35th Anniversary
of the NYSC Scheme



A corps member attends to ex-President, Olusegun Obasanjo during an electoral process.



Voters in the presidential elections in Abuja, Nigeria.



Corps member on Duty during election accreditation exercises



A presiding officer in Ekiti state explains to voters how to mark a ballot
during Nigeria's 2015 general elections.



Voters casting his vote in the presidential elections.



Corps member on Duty during election accreditation exercises



Corps member on Election duty, voters registration



Corps member counting of Ballot papers in Lagos.



Corps Members on duty in a polling unit



NYSC Corps member with INEC staff making preparation for Elections



Corps member on Election duty, counting ballots papers



Electoral commission officers count votes at Shagari Health Unit polling station in Yola.



Electoral commission officers prepare ballot boxes before the polling station opens at Shagari Health Unit polling station in Yola, Adamawa State



Electoral commission officers count votes.

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8

The NYSC and Elections in Nigeria: An Examination of the Challenges of Corps Members during the Conduct of Elections

Rabiatus Ibrahim Abdullahi

Introduction

Attempt at instituting democracy and democratization in Africa has been seriously marred by unwanted controversy instability and frequent military interventions. The problems experienced in the process in African countries are not peculiar to the continent. Jega

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asserted that: democratization is a gradual process that is both long and tortuous.¹

The Nigerian scenario provides the best explanation for democratic process in Africa and other parts of the developing world. Even though, election deciders or the 'king makers' have for the most part been blamed for instituting violence and other acts of criminalities. Yet majority of the people have the belief that these election deciders are impartial. Though the election management bodies cannot be blamed for the incessant violence and criminalities that ensue, the primary goal of any election management body is to organize free, fair and credible elections with an outcome that is acceptable by all stakeholders.²

Until 1999, Nigeria's experience at democratization was destroyed by the incessant incursion of military into the Nigerian Polity.³ Elections are essential ingredients in any participatory democracy. The electoral process is a way of making choices which gives each member of the electorate reasonable hope of having his/her alternatives elected.⁴ In effect, for any democracy to be worth the name, it must be a product of credible elections whose processes must have a measure of integrity. Kwajao opines that the electoral process is an ideal and integral part of democratic process whether in a developed or developing society.⁵

¹ A.M. Jega, "Electoral Reforms in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges". A lecture by the Chairman INEC Nigeria at the 7th International Electoral Affairs Symposium, 2013, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. P.2

² M.A. Kwaja,. INEC and the Management of Elections: Lessons from Nigeria. Open Society Institute Africa Governance monitoring and Advocacy Project Afrimap, 2008.

³Jega, 'Electoral Reforms in Nigeria...' p.4

⁴K. Faluyi, "Political Violence and other undemocratic practices: A cog in the stability of a democratic polity in The grassroots and political change in Nigeria". Proceedings of the workshop on grassroots participation in politics and the challenges of democratization in Nigeria.New era foundation Lagos Nigeria.

⁵Kwaja,'INEC and the Management of Elections...'

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Election management bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria play a very significant role in the conduct of election, and, by implication, they also contribute in the consolidation of electoral democracy. The primary goal of any election management body is to organize free, fair and credible elections with an outcome that is generally acceptable by all stakeholders. Notwithstanding its perceived inadequacies, INEC has over the years brought about improvements and innovations in the conduct of elections in Nigeria in a way that would make the process more acceptable. These improvements and innovations have further consolidated the gains recorded in organising credible elections in recent times. The involvement of youth Corps members in the nation's electoral processes is one of such innovations.⁶

The issue of attacks targeted at Corps members during elections has constituted a challenge to the progress of successful partnership between the NYSC and Independent National Electoral Commission. Several cases have been reported overtime on how Corps members were attacked by political thugs and in some cases angry mobs that are bent on disrupting peaceful electoral process. The need for the engagement of NYSC youth Corps members in elections arose in 2006 and by 2007, youth Corps members were actively engaged in the electoral process in Nigeria. The engagement of Corps members in the conduct of elections was initially considered as a welcome development by the electorates until the unfortunate incident of the 2011 General elections where Corps members lost their lives in Bauchi and other parts of the country. This development has affected the growing interest of Corps members involvement in elections as most of them became reluctant in participating in elections despite the fact that they are not unaware of its significance to the growth and development

⁶S.B. Harris, "Politics of Privatization in Kano state". A dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science, UsmanuDanfodiyo University, Sokoto.

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of Nigeria as nation. In addition, the issue of welfare for Corps members has been a major subject of debate. This study therefore, aims at interrogating the challenges faced by the Youth Corps members during the conduct elections in Nigeria.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

The Independent National Electoral Commission was established by the provision of section 153 (1) (f) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The functions of the body as spelt out in the Electoral Act (2010) includes but not limited to registration of political parties, organizing elections, registration of voters and monitoring political parties.⁷

The origin of the electoral body can be traced to those electoral bodies which existed before and after Independence.⁸ The defunct Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was the precursor of all electoral bodies in the country. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was established at independence in 1960. This umpire conducted the 1964 and 1965 elections. In 1978, the Military government under then Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo established the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which oversaw the military-civilian transition elections in 1979 and the general elections of 1983 which were conducted under the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari; winner of the 1979 elections.

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) which conducted elections in 1987, 1990, 1991 and 1993 was set up by the Babangida administration in 1987. The Abacha Administration which succeeded

⁷ Kwaja, 'INEC and the Management of Elections...'

⁸ S. Musa, 'Nigeria experience in electoral management. A Paper presented at the Regional Workshop on Capacity Building in Electoral Administration in Africa.' Tangier Morocco 24 – 28 Sept 2001 African Training and Research Center in Administration for Development, United Nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

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the Babangida administration established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). The Abdulsalami Abubakar government, successor to the Abacha administration established the present Independent National Electoral Commission in 1998. The most recent of the activities of the Independent National Electoral Commission was the conduct of the 2015/2019 general elections in the country which was widely acclaimed to be free and fair.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The National Youth Service Corps Scheme was established by Decree 24 of 22nd May 1973 as a deliberate effort to ensure the realization of the Federal Government's policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction introduced by the Federal Government after the Nigerian Civil War. It also aims at raising a new crop of disciplined, patriotic and detribalized Nigerians by allowing the youths to undergo national service in States other than their State of origin for the purpose of national development and integration. The Scheme was established with the view to promote peace, encourage mutual understanding and common ties among Nigerian youths thereby fostering national unity and integration.

Decree No. 24 of 22nd May, 1973, was replaced by Decree 51 of 16th June 1993. With the adoption of the 1999 constitution which ushered in democratic rule, the enabling document establishing the NYSC is now referred to as "the NYSC Act CAP N84, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004".⁹

Involvement of Corps Members in Electoral Processes

The electoral body in Nigeria has since its inception in 1960 employed adhoc staff to perform various functions during elections. The

⁹G. Enegewea and G. Umoden, 'NYSC: Twenty years of National Service, (Abuja: Gabumo Pub, 1993). 10.

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partnership between INEC and NYSC was as a result of INEC's request forwarded to the NYSC Directorate Headquarters soliciting for the services of Corps members in the conduct of elections in February 2007. It was this request that formed the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two bodies in 2010.

This agreement was reviewed and formalised in 2013.¹⁰Under this arrangement, Corps members are not under any compulsion to partake in the elections. The involvement of the youth Corps members in actual elections began with their participation as polling clerks in the conduct of Kogi State Governorship re-run election held on Saturday, 29th March, 2008.¹¹The success of this first involvement led to further engagement of Corps members in the conduct of bye- elections, re-run and supplementary elections "which were also adjudged satisfactory".¹²

Date	Place	No. Of Corps Member Involved
29th,March, 2008	Governorship Re-run, Kogi state	5,851
29 th April, 2008	Governorship Re-run, Adamawa State.	177
19 th April, 2008	Bye Election Maru North, Zamfara State	3,035
	Governorship Bye Election, Sokoto State	3,035

¹⁰NYSC, Managing Nigeria's pluralism for peace and national development: NYSC contribution. Being a presentation of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme to participants of Senior Executive Course (SEC) No. 33, 2011 of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Plateau State between August 29th and September 2nd 2011 at the Conference Hall, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Maitama, Abuja.

¹¹(2011). Managing Nigeria's pluralism for peace and national development

¹²NYSC, Managing Nigeria's pluralism for peace and national development...

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24 th May,2008	Governorship Bye Election, Bayelsa state	1,805
7 th June,2008	Bye Elections into Lafia/Obi Federal Constituency, Nasarawa state	447
23 rd August, 2008	Governorship Bye Election Cross River state	2265
24 th January 2009	Anambra South Senatorial Re-run	1619
28 th February, 2009	Guma South Constituency, Benue State	160
7 th March,2009	Quampang South Constituency, Rerun, Plateau state	124
14 th June, 2009	Batsari StateConstituency Rerun, Katsina State	173
25 th June, 2009	Governorship Rerun, Ekiti state	806
20 th August, 2009	Malumfashi State Constituency Bye Election, Katsina	21
15 th August, 2009	Ekiti North Senatorial Bye Election, Ekiti state	714
17 th October, 2009	Gamawa State Constituency Bye Election, Bauchi State	177
5 th December, 2009	Osun East Senatorial Bye Election, Osun State	1217
19 th December, 2009	Kebbi Central Senatorial Bye Election, Kebbi state.	892
10 th February, 2010	Governorship Election, Anambra state	4658
10 th April, 2010	FCT Area Council Election, Abuja	2400
15 th January-5 th February 2011	2011ElectionsVoters'Registration and April, 2011	
April 2011	General Elections	185, 000
	TOTAL	217,268

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A careful look at this table shows that from a mere five (5,000) thousand participants, the collaboration is now boasting of well over one hundred and eighty thousand (180,000) in just less than ten years. This is an indication of the success of the collaboration.

Reasons for the Involvement of NYSC in Elections

Some of the reasons advanced by INEC for the involvement of Corps members in the conduct of elections include:

- a) Intellectual capacity of Corps members. Being graduates of higher institutions, Corps members are easily trainable which makes them assets in the partnership.
- b) The deployment of Corps members to all the nooks and crannies of the country makes the youth Corps members particularly suitable for election duties. The geographical spread in the posting policy of the Scheme makes it easy for Corps members to be posted evenly for election duties.
- c) Since Corps members are posted outside their states of origin and geopolitical zones, there is the likelihood that they would be neutral and nonpartisan. Similarly, the nationalistic outlook infused in the Corps members during Orientation course makes them ready for this type of engagement.
- d) Internal disciplinary mechanism as enshrined in the NYSC byelaws makes sanctioning of Corps members involved in electoral fraud easy. In addition, the NYSC bye-laws section 4(i) prohibits Corps members from taking part in partisan politics.¹³

The youth service has earned for itself, a place in the hearts and minds of the generality of the citizenry. The Scheme and the graduate youths mobilized are generally trusted by the Scheme's beneficiaries; the host communities. This goodwill has rubbed off on all elections where Corps members participated.

¹³NYSC Bye-laws, (2011). National Youth Service Corps, NDHQ, Abuja.

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Roles of Corps Members in the 2015 General Elections

In view of their background as mentioned earlier in this paper, Corps members are strategically positioned to conduct credible elections in Nigeria. In line with the provision of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between INEC and NYSC, the commission opened a website for interested Corps members to apply for recruitment as Adhoc staff during the 2015 General elections. Interested Corps members applied and at the close of registration, one hundred and eighty six thousand (186,000) Corps members applied.

After the recruitment exercise, a training programme was organized for the Corps members on their expected roles and responsibilities. Their roles in the electoral process in 2015 include:

- (a) Registration of Voters for elections.
- (b) Issuance of voters cards before election.
- (c) Responsible for setting up and managing the polling station.
- (d) Participation as Presiding Officers during elections.
- (e) Operating Card Readers.
- (f) Issuing signed ballot paper to voters.
- (g) Ensure that voters place ballot paper in the ballot boxes.
- (h) Verify existence of Voters on Voters' list.
- (i) Sort out ballot papers.
- (j) Verify valid and invalid votes.
- (k) Count both valid and invalid votes.
- (l) Count and open number of votes cast on political party basis.
- (m) Complete the result sheets and paste the result at the polling unit.
- (n) Fill the necessary forms and make returns to the collation centre. Corps members alongside other citizens participated in the March 28th Presidential and National Assembly elections

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and April 11th Governorship and House of Assembly elections.¹⁴

The 2015 General elections was adjudged credible notwithstanding observed lapses which, as stated inter alia, are synonymous with many elections in the world. Corps members demonstrate high level of competence and initiatives in addition to what INEC provided to ensure the success of the elections. Some of these initiatives include maintaining orderliness at polling units even in the absence of security personnel and the seamless handling of the Card Reader despite some initial hitches.

Notwithstanding the plethora of challenges to dissuade them from taking part in the electoral processes through blackmail, threats and sometimes outright molestation, Corps members put up a brave front in defense of democracy. The outcome of the election result which led to losers conceding defeat is a pointer to the credibility of the elections. This is in addition to the significant reduction in the number of litigations against the outcome of the elections. The 2015 General elections recorded a little above four hundred (400) cases of litigation as against the over six hundred (600) recorded in 2011.¹⁵

Challenges of Corps Members during the Conduct of Elections

Since the commencement of the collaboration between NYSC and INEC there have been reports of inadequate welfare provisions made available for Corps members involved in election duties. According to information gathered from the field, delay in the payment of Corps member's allowances and sometimes complaints arising from nonpayment of Allowances by Corps members who participated in the conduct of the elections contributes to the failures encountered in the

¹⁴NYSC Bye-laws, (2011). National Youth Service Corps, NDHQ, Abuja.

¹⁵NYSC Bye-laws, (2011). National Youth Service Corps, NDHQ, Abuja.

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collaborative efforts between INEC and NYSC.¹⁶ The following are some of the challenges associated with the INEC/ NYSC collaboration.

- i. **Public Perception:** Public perception of the collaboration between INEC and NYSC has expectedly been rather mixed. While some view the collaboration as successful, others are cynical. Many of the latter blame Corps members for any hitch or failure in the elections just like they do to other ad hoc staff of the Commission notwithstanding whether or not the ad hoc staff are actually responsible for the hitch or failure. This sentiment, a bad omen for the collaboration, has been existent from the onset of the collaboration. The failure of Card Readers during the 2015 General elections in some polling booths, for example, was blamed on the ad hoc staff.
- ii. **Electoral violence as a disincentive to Corps members:** Electoral violence, especially the death of eleven (11) Corps members in the 2011 elections played a significant role in discouraging Corps members from officiating in elections. Where Corps members are willing to participate they are often discouraged by their more circumspect parents and guardians. The tragic incidence in 2011 forced the National Youth Service Corps Scheme to call for a review of the MoU on the participation of Corps members in the electoral process. Thenceforth, Corps members serve as election officials only on their own volition. This impinges on the spirit of the collaboration as it reduces the number willing to participate in the process. For instance, out of about two hundred and fifty thousand (250,000) Corps members, One Hundred and Eighty Six Thousand (186,000) Corps members applied to participate

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in the 2015 general elections. With 120, 000 polling units, the electoral body requires 480,000 ad hoc staff. It would have employed all mobilized Corps members as election officials.

- iii. **Lack of synergy between the two institutions:** - In the 2015 elections some of the staff in the institutions worked at crosspurposes to the spirit of the MoU. A number of instances abound to support this position. For instance, while the MoU clearly states that NYSC State Coordinators are members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS), in some states, Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) blatantly refused to allow them function in that capacity until after the intervention of INEC Headquarters. Corps members interested in participating in the elections as officials were required to register online. However, the electoral body failed to involve the NYSC in the recruitment or posting of Corps members. There was therefore no way to verify the identity of all applicants posing as Corps members online. As a result there was the “mixing stones with beans syndrome” as the all comers registration of adhoc staff is aptly described by Gen. MI Tsiga (Rtd), a former Director General of the Scheme . This incident makes assessing the performance of Corps members difficult.¹⁷
- iv. **Non implementation of the provisions of the MoU:** - As part of the agreement reached between INEC and NYSC “Registration Area Centers” (RACs) were set up to ease movement of Corps members and materials during elections. Corps members were gathered at these centers

¹⁷K. Faluyi, Political Violence and other undemocratic practices...

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where they received election materials before proceeding to polling Units. It was agreed that INEC will provide basic accommodation and sanitation facilities at the Centers. However, most of the RACs lacked these facilities. In addition, the transportation made available to transport Corps members either to or from the training centers, the RACs or the polling units was not efficient as some Corps members were left stranded.¹⁸

- v. **Poor Remuneration of Adhoc Staff:** - The unusual silence of INEC on the amount to be paid to Corps members from the onset of the electoral process gave rise to speculations. This is also in addition to the inability of INEC to pay Corps members approved allowances as at when due. It took a press statement from the NYSC to douse the tension this speculation administrative lapse generated among Corps members.¹⁹

Suggestions

One of the best ways of sustaining the collaboration between the two organizations is to review the MoU to take care of some sections that are out of place. Issues such as the definition of welfare should be addressed in the MoU to make for clarity and avoidance of administrative overlap. Provisions such as security of Corps members and general welfare as well as continuous Voter education should be included in the MoU. Increased participation of Corps members would then be encouraged. Similarly, the two organizations need to track their

¹⁸A. Guobadia, Improving the quality of Election Management. A paper presented at a conference of Commonwealth Chief Election Officers organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat in cooperation with the Election Commission of India.

The Ashok Hotel, New Delhi, 24 -26 Feb. 2005 p.9

¹⁹A. Guobadia, Improving the quality of Election Management... p.5

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activities to ensure that their Officers in the field implement and strictly abide by the content of the MoU.

INEC should explore possible ways of improving the allowances of Corps members engaged in electoral duties. INEC can also make adequate arrangement for transportation of men and materials to and from their duty posts. One of the major complaints of Corps members is that they are often left stranded after elections with the attendant security risks. INEC should involve the NYSC and Corps members during the voter education, registration exercise, distribution and update of voters register which ought to commence immediately after the conclusion of any election. Corps members can be mobilized by the Department of Voter Education at INEC to educate communities during the Corps Weekly Community Development Service (CDS) programme. The continuous voters register can be incorporated in the CDS activities. Corps members have effectively taken part in the UNICEF sponsored awareness and sensitization programs on HIV/AIDS scourge and in the MDGs (SDGs) programs in the last decade. This could be replicated in INEC activities.

NYSC budget does not capture the participation of its Staff and Corps members in elections. The NYSC has to draw funds from its overhead to enable its staff monitor Corps members and address their needs to the detriment of its other statutory activities. It is therefore strongly recommended that the Scheme takes cognizance of this and henceforth make necessary budgetary provisions either in tandem with the electoral body or as a separate vote charge. The budget should cover requirements for participation of Corps members and NYSC Staff in elections. The weekly Community Development Service forum could be used to train Corps members in handling the electronic voting system and deploy same for the purpose of voters registration exercise, distribution and actual voting.²⁰

²⁰ A. Guobadia, Improving the quality of Election Management...' p.8

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Conclusion

This paper examined the participation of Corps members in the conduct of elections and the challenges associated with the conduct of elections. The outcome of the elections is a clear justification for the involvement of this class of Nigerians. While the participation of Corps members boosted the credibility of elections in Nigeria and restored a lot of confidence on INEC as the umpire, the collaboration is still bedevilled with numerous challenges as enumerated above. The two organizations must get back to the drawing board and address areas such as provision of security cover for Corps members, voters' education and improved synergy in the implementation of the provisions of the MoU.

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E.K. Enojo

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Security Challenges in the Conduct Elections in Nigeria: A Study of NYSC Members Adhoc-Staff

E.K. Enojo

Introduction

Elections was first organized and conducted by the colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for greater participation in colonial government. In 1922, Nigerians were given the first opportunity to occupy certain political offices. Though, the franchise was restricted and representation limited, it was an achievement for the nationalists who were struggling for the enthronement of democratic order as a pre-requisite for greater participation of the people in the process of government (Akpotor,

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2009:34). After 1922, several elections were conducted in different parts of the country to elect leaders at national, regional and local levels. However, it was the 1959 general elections that paved way for the emergence of Nigeria as a “sovereign state”. Since then various elections have been held either in transition, from one civilian government to another or in transition from a military regime to a civilian government. What is paramount or central to this study is the nature of the political violence and assassinations that beset these elections, which not only undermine the Social Contract theory of the State, but in most cases culminated in the collapse of democratic government in Nigeria and the credibility and acceptability of these elections. The fourth republic (1999-date) did not make any difference, although the system did not collapse, cases of political violence and assassinations were rampant in virtually all the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Guyer, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

For the sake of understanding political violence and assassination in the conduct of elections in Nigeria, elections can be broadly categorized into three, that is elections organized by the colonial government in 1922, 1951 and 1959, the military regimes in 1979, 1993, 1999 and finally the ones organized by civilian government in 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. Among these three categories, the latter appears to be more violent and crisis riddled compared to the former.

This study argues that, like the colonially supervised elections, the 1979 and 1993 general elections presided over by the military were not beset by the problem of political violence. Therefore, it can be rightly argued that, military regimes in Nigeria have organized relatively violent-free elections although these elections suffer from the problem of credibility as the case of the 1999 Presidential Elections. Egwu and Jibril (2006:8) argued that the logic behind this success is the

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excessive powers wielded by military in coercing the citizens to operate within the bounds of the existing laws and decrees.

It is significant to note that, political violence associated with election and electoral process in Nigeria started with the 1959 federal elections designed by the British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence. The problem intensified with the 1964 General elections. Even before the elections were held, it was clear from the extreme positions taken by the two major alliances of political groups, that is; the Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), that no matter which one of the two groups won, the results will be hotly contested. The manipulation of electoral laws by the ruling party, Northern People's Congress (NPC) resulted in the call for boycott of the elections by the opposition (Ihovbare, 2003). In describing the conduct of the 1959 general elections, Dudley (1982:37) stated that; The electoral officers were terrorized into absconding from their offices once they receive the nominations papers of governing party candidates, leaving the opposition candidates with no opportunity of registering the nomination papers. So, fragrantly was electoral procedure abused that at close of nominations some 88 out of a total of 174 NPC candidates in the North had their candidature unopposed. In the West, about 30 percent of the NNDP were supposed to have been unopposed. The situation in the East was not much different. Therefore, as envisaged by many people including the proclaimed winners of the 1964 general elections the results were not only rejected, but the opposition especially in the Western region resorted to violence to contest what they perceived as the reverse of their mandate by the ruling NPC. The situation gave birth to arson, looting, killings, massive destruction of properties and total breakdown of law and order beyond the control of the central government. Consequent upon this, a state of emergency was imposed and the then Prime Minister declared the Western region as the "Wild-Wild-West".

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The intensity of the electoral violence recorded after the 1964 general election affected the legitimacy of the new civilian authority and subsequently, the military intervened in Nigerian politics on January 15, 1966. After a prolonged military rule that lasted for thirteen years, the military resolved to hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1979. Although, Murtala Mohammed who initiated the transition to civil rule programme was assassinated in a bloody military coup of 13th February, 1976, his decision was upheld by his predecessor. As such, arrangement was made by Obasanjo's administration to facilitate the smooth transfer of power to civilians and the disengagement of the military from active politics. The 1979 constitution was drafted and the ban on politics was lifted, which saw the emergence of several political associations seeking for registration as political parties. Finally, five political parties were registered namely National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), People Redemption Party (PRP), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), and UNPP. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was also established to conduct elections at various levels of government. As stated earlier, the 1979 elections that was organized and supervised by the military was relatively peaceful, though, not violent-free in its entirety. Few cases of political violence were recorded in some parts of the country contesting the outcome of the elections. The major issue was the question of 2/3 of 19 states, which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the NPN presidential candidate, by the Supreme Court (see Ake, 2002:41; Nnoli, 1995, and Adisa, 1960).

However, the situation was different in the 1983 elections. The 1983 elections both at national and state levels were a replica of the 1964 general elections. A contention of this study is that the political violence that gripped the Nigerian state since the country's return to democracy in 1999 and the aftermath of the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections, has posed a great challenge for the survival of federalism and the Nigerian state. Nine years after the return of the country to civil

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rule, for instance, politically motivated killings have continued to haunt Nigeria's nationhood. In this and other related crisis, it is estimated that over 11000 Nigerians have lost their lives; hundreds of thousands have been displaced, while properties worth billions of Naira have been destroyed with the 2011 post-elections political violence and assassinations as the worst ever mostly in some Northern states of Bauchi, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, Nassarawa, and Borno. In short, the political climate has been very hostile, frustratingly uncertain, and unstable. Intra and Inter-party conflicts, lawlessness and the devastating influence of godfatherism have continued to pose serious challenges to the survival of the country's statehood. It is within this context that the issue of the theory of the state of nature and political violence and assassinations is examined with the view to finding lasting and acceptable solution. For instance, in the 2011 presidential post-election violence, about 1,938 deaths were recorded. The breakdown shows that, Kaduna alone recorded 520 deaths, Borno 420, Kano 350, Plateau (Jos) 51, Abuja, the Federal Capital, 17, Suleja 7 and Bauchi 34 (for more details, see The Punch, Thursday, 8 July 2011:3-4).

Political violence, the state of nature and a stateless society cannot be separated from each other considering their interrelatedness and interdependency. A stateless society is a term developed by political anthropologists, which draws attention to the fact that the state has not always been present in human societies. Hunter-gathering society founded based on kinship-exhibited forms of political organization but they evolved no formal division of labour or coercive institutions empowered to exercise force over the people. The present states are consequence of the development of social stratification and class relations, or exogenous, resulting from military conquest (McCormick, 2001:6) or in a Hobbesian state of war against all. This is similar to the state of nature except with some relative limitations in organization and style that were controlled and centralized by elites.

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A state of nature is the condition of humankind before a specific event, intervention, or artifice. Whether treated as a historical reality or as the result of a mental experiment, the concept of the state of nature has been used as a point of departure to mark the opinions of various writers. For instance, Hobbes argues that the state of nature depicted conditions in the absence of political power and authority or in the absence of the artifice of the state. Locke's thought of the state of nature as antecedent to the formation of civil society. Rousseau feels that the state of nature was associated with man in a pre-social, pre-linguistic world. In Christian thought, the state of nature or man's natural condition was likely to be equated to what was thought to be his biblical fate, and the story in Genesis (especially chapters 1-3), contrasted natural innocence with sinfulness after the fall. The many meanings of "natural" in this context embrace a characterization of human nature. For example, the orthodox Christian account saw human nature after the fall as inevitably flawed. The research will, however, argue that the state of nature simply refers to lawlessness, violence and crises that debase human philosophical and psychological intelligence and general understanding. It also connotes actions that are not led by reason and intellect but rather appetite, desires and passion for primitive accumulation of wealth as witnessed from 1999 when the fourth republic began showcasing four general elections with high level of political violence, assassinations, kidnapping and ethno-religious conflicts were freely, absurdly, primitively and immorally promoted or executed by the Nigerian elites (McCormick, 2001:189).

Given the current harvest of political violence and assassinations that characterized the Nigerian political landscape and its worrisome nature, the study, using a retrospective analysis of events, accepts the thesis that "the emergence of the Nigerian Colonial State is a by - product of a 'fraudulent social contract' and not of a' negotiated will' of the wielded parts" (Akpotor, 2019:7). As a result of this, the colonial state, in order to be able to protect the commercial interests of the

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colonialists, imposed a patrimonial system of administration by enlisting the dominant group in their services as co-conspirators. Nigerian post-colonial state inherited this mode of administration and its vices from their colonial master, Britain. Thus, the relationship between the political leaders and the led masses was that of domination and exploitation sometimes through force and impunity. Governance deviated from a call to service, but avenue for corruption and accumulation of wealth.

A system of patronage in public offices and the practice of political intolerance became the order of the day. This actually led to political violence and assassinations because professional, economic and political elites sought political power as a condition to fulfilling and furthering their economic interests. The control of instrument of the state gave them access to a share in the profitable opportunities offered by the Neo-colonial economy which otherwise refers to as imperialist economy. It is against these matrices of historical deformities amidst the seeming privatization of political power by few in both the colonial and post-colonial state that shape the nature and character of our Nigerian political elites, actors and office holders in the current democratic dispensation; the implications on democratic good governance as well as the way out, can be understood. The prevalent 'loot and warfare' approach to politics, the opposition phobia, the pre-occupation with interests of politics of survival and personal security and political violence and assassinations due to sit-tightism seek expression in this paradigm and our leaders keep drawing inspirations from Machiavelli political thought, with emphasis on his slogan, the end justifies the means.

NYSC Members Adhoc-Staff and Security Challenges in the Conduct of Elections in Nigeria

Considering the political violence and assassination that had taken place in Nigeria from 1999 to date, it is obvious that during this period,

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Nigerians lived in something close to a failed state or similar to the state of nature as our experiences revealed outright savagery, banditry and brutality in a naked fashion and unprecedented form. All these contrasted with the social contract theory of the state as espoused by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The research is of the view that civility means absence of extreme disorder, violence and assassination. The foregoing shows the various fragmented violence recorded against the NYSC adhoc staff.

The 1999 Election Violence

However, the election observers in 1999 were unanimous in their reports: massive irregularities existed in all the elections. For example, while the international monitoring groups put the voter turnout to be in the order of 20%, the election results indicated one of about 30 – 40%. Jimmy Carter refused to put his stamp of approval on the presidential vote that elected his friend Olusegun Obasanjo, writing that “There was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final result that has been reported from several states. Regrettably, therefore, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election.” The Transition Monitoring Group spread the blame around quite democratically stressing that fraud was committed by both sides and it was difficult to say the extent to which the efforts of the parties that contested the elections cancelled each other. Yet the election results of the 1999 elections were all upheld. Though the degree of electoral violence recorded was not much, it is unfortunate that there were some casualties especially as six NYSC adhoc staff members lost their lives. Three died from boat mishap, while three died from rampaged caused by political clashes between thugs who snatched ballot and shot heavily to scare voters.

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The 2003 Electoral Violence

In April and May 2003, at least one hundred people were killed and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria. The majority of serious abuses were perpetrated by members or supporters of the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In a number of locations, elections simply did not take place as groups of armed thugs linked to political parties and candidates intimidated and threatened voters in order to falsify results. The violence and climate of intimidation facilitated widespread fraud, invalidating the results of the elections in many areas. Nevertheless, the elections were hailed as peaceful by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was re-elected, and were widely praised by foreign governments, including Nigeria's key foreign allies. The 2003 elections were significant for Nigeria as the country's first sustained transition from one civilian government to another (Enojo, 2018).

One year later, local government elections took place across Nigeria on March 27, 2004. These elections too were characterized by serious violence and intimidation, as well as widespread fraud and rigging. There were reports of dozens of people killed before, during and after the local government elections. The stage for this unacceptably high level of violence was set in the year leading up to Nigeria's 2003 elections, during which hundreds of people were killed in political clashes or targeted killings, without any serious official response in terms of investigation and prosecution. Although government officials had publicly vowed to punish perpetrators of political violence in the pre-election period, it was clear by the time of the 2003 elections that these were empty statements. Most of the perpetrators from all sides of the political spectrum have escaped without facing justice.

This report documents cases of electoral violence in 2003. It concentrates on incidents which occurred during the election period in April and May 2003, whereas earlier reports documented political violence in the preceding months. It also refers to incidents of violence

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reported around the 2004 local government elections, although most of Human Rights Watch's detailed research were attempts to sweep the 2003 election violence under the carpet. All these would have long-term consequences for Nigeria. If the government continues to allow these crimes to go unpunished, those with political ambitions for the next elections will revert to the same tactics, knowing that they are unlikely to have to answer for their actions. This has already been demonstrated by the conduct of parties and candidates in the 2004 local government elections.

Many incidents of violence were recorded during the April 12 and 19 elections. By the time the State Houses of Assembly elections rolled around on May 3, much of the electoral violence had run its course. In several key areas, including the south and the southeast, this was at least partly because opposition parties started boycotting the polls, complaining of rigging and fraud in the earlier elections and urging their voters not to cast useless votes. Independently from these party boycotts, many voters had simply become disillusioned following the experience of the first two phases of the elections. Others were deterred by the prospect of fresh violence. Nonetheless, some serious incidents were recorded around the May 3 elections. The highest level of violence during the 2003 elections was in the south and the southeast, where PDP Governors and their supporters universally succeeded in resisting opposition bids for office. These were also the areas where the greatest rigging and fraud were recorded by independent electoral observers. In these areas, the direct link between violence and election fraud was clear (Nsongola-Ntalaja, 1997).

More than three quarters of the incidents of "violence, intimidation, harassment, ballot box stealing and stuffing and vote buying" reported by TMG election observers were recorded in the south and the southeast; however, they also reported violence and disruption in other areas, including the western, central and northern states. The situation in some areas in the oil-producing Niger-Delta, in the south, was so

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serious that a non-governmental organization which monitored the elections stated: "In parts of Rivers and Bayelsa States observed by our monitors, the elections could be characterized as a low intensity armed struggle. Weapons and firearms of various types and sophistication were freely used." The largest number of deaths during the elections occurred when opposing bands of political thugs, in some cases armed on both sides, fought each other for physical control of a locality, attempting to displace supporters of the opposing party. Witnesses reported numerous incidents to Human Rights Watch in which armed thugs, usually though not exclusively from the PDP, shot into the air or otherwise threatened voters with violence, created chaos, and then ran away with the ballot boxes. In some instances, these groups shot directly at individuals from opposing parties. In other cases, their threatening behavior and public display of weapons ranging from knives to firearms was sufficient to scare off their opponents, as well as ordinary voters. This type of intimidation was especially common in the south and the southeast, but also occurred in other areas.

There were also cases where people who tried to intervene to prevent rigging were beaten by thugs hired by the various parties. Protests at rigging also often took a violent form, with aggrieved opposition members, as well as other frustrated voters, smashing election materials and equipment to prevent fraudulent votes from being used, and, in more serious cases, attacking PDP members or others suspected of rigging. Some election observers were threatened, and in some cases physically attacked, in order to prevent them from witnessing or reporting abuses. Some of these threats were made by state or local government officials, others by members of the security forces. At least three TMG observers in the southeast were among the victims of violent intimidation during the State House of Assembly elections: in Enugu State, a TMG observer was whipped with a chain by a paramilitary mobile policeman apparently acting in collusion with PDP supporters; an observer in Ebonyi State was beaten by a candidate for

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the state House of Assembly; and an observer in Ebonyi State was chased out of two polling stations.

In the vast majority of violent incidents involving local government politicians, PDP officials, PDP candidates, or their supporters, no one was charged or tried. In a few cases, low-level PDP supporters were arrested or questioned, but were usually released within a short period. Many of the candidates whose supporters carried out violence and intimidation are now occupying political positions at local or state level. There were also incidents in which soldiers engaged in acts of violence, for example in Benue and Rivers states. Overall, however, independent observers reported that the deployment of the military in many areas of the country reduced the level of violence, although some noted that it created an intimidating atmosphere for elections.

While security forces were not partial actors in all incidents, in many cases they were unable or unwilling to protect those who came under attack. Typically, police were reported to flee the scene or to do nothing when violent clashes broke out or armed people invaded polling booths. They frequently failed to arrest the perpetrators, even in cases where violence was committed in full view of many witnesses. They also failed to respond to calls for help from some individuals who reported receiving direct threats from their political opponents. The leadership of the various political parties also bears a heavy responsibility for the actions of their members and supporters, particularly for the failure to halt violence and intimidation during the elections. While some party leaders admitted reluctantly that their supporters may occasionally have engaged in acts of violence, most of them denied it and simply blamed their opponents. The 2003 general election was not different from the previous elections, where some NYSC adhoc staff members lost their lives. The difference here has to do with the fact that, though the figures were low, the nature of violence recorded against the NYSC adhoc staff members was the most barbaric and totally absurd. The acclaimed figure of casualties was put at eleven

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deaths, and five brutally injured with two female Corps members who suffered from acid bath because they refused to comply with political thugs that hijacked ballot boxes and requested them to rewrite and sign the manipulated results.

The 2007 Electoral violence

The 2007 elections are regarded as the worst in Nigeria's post-independence history. Widespread malpractices occurred throughout all stages of the elections, with failures in the late delivery of voting materials, late commencement of polls in most of the states, ballot box stuffing, allocation of votes where voting did not take place, falsification of votes, deliberate denial of election materials to perceived strongholds of the opposition, and other such actions. Moreover, the current ruling party fixed the results in advance, even for local government, in all but a handful of states as part of an intra-elite deal, accidentally leaking (accurate) 'results' to the press a few days prior to the election. Some states, such as Rivers, Ogun, Oyo, and Ekiti, saw vote totals far above the number of registered voters. 2007 broke from 2003 in going from 'competitive rigging' to a vote-allocation, or 'direct capture'. In addition, all stages of the elections were marked by extraordinarily high levels of political violence. 55 people died on the day of the elections and unofficial estimates for the whole electoral period were 200 deaths nationwide. The electoral administration itself, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has not earned the public trust and is itself a compliant tool of the ruling PDP. INEC acknowledged the 2007 contest exhibiting widespread irregularities and fraud, but blamed the parties themselves. Moreover, the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) that ran the local government elections were overwhelmingly partisan and incompetent. The Transition Monitoring Group adjudged the 2007 ballot to have been programmed to fail from the beginning by the politically motivated activities of the Obasanjo regime in close collaboration with the politically partisan INEC. This conclusion is reinforced by the

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startlingly close 4 to 3 decision of the Nigerian Supreme Court to affirm the election of President Yar'Adua. In doing so, however, the seven justices united in criticising INEC and holding that the poll was marred by gross non-compliance with the electoral laws. It is no wonder; therefore, that many consider the 2007 general elections in Nigeria as 'stolen elections'. This is not to say that the elections had no redeeming features. Most reviews mention that the media and civil society showed an increased effectiveness and that there were election tribunals considering post-election disputes. But these were modest positives in a generally disappointing picture.

The 2011 Electoral Violence

Nigeria's 2011 General elections- in particular the Presidential election- was seen widely as being well - run. This was especially important given the universally decried elections of 2007. A number of factors contributed to ensuring that Nigeria's 2011 elections were successfully administered. They include the fact that the voters' register was the most accurate and there was also adequate training and fielding of election Observers. The Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Attaching Jega, was well regarded and judged independent from the government. And, the parallel vote tabulation used by domestic Observers allowed poll monitors to concurrently record the results of the elections along with INEC as a means to provide a check on the official results. In addition, ordinary citizens were encouraged to report, via calls or texts, any incidents of fraud or violence that they witnessed or experienced. INEC declared incumbent Goodluck Jonathan the winner of the Presidential poll with 59 percent against Muhammadu Buhari's 32 percent. But despite a more transparent election, about 800 people- mainly in Kaduna lost their lives and about 65,000 people were displaced, with the violence depicting religious colouration. Once violence erupted, only Soldiers succeeded in stopping it.

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Two commissions were established in May, following the elections, to examine the factors leading to the violence. Governor Patrick Ibrahim Yakowa established a 12- person commission in Kaduna, and nationally, President Jonathan established a 22- person commission. But just like the track records of past commissions, the findings and recommendations of these commissions were not effectively implemented and could not addressed the root causes of the 2011 electoral violence.

The 2015 Electoral Violence

Boko Haram attempted to disrupt the election by attacking voting centres, killing 41 people. An opposition politician, Umaru Ali, was gunned down in one attack. In addition to the threat of Boko Haram disrupting the election, many Nigerians were deeply concerned about election-related political violence. Nigeria has a history of violence in the pre- and post-election periods, most notably the 2011 elections in which more than 800 people were killed and tens of thousands displaced in post-election violence. There were, unfortunately, a number of instances of violence in the pre-election period. In February 2015, Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission published a report in which it documented more than 60 incidents of election-related violence in at least 22 states spread across all six geopolitical zones which had left at least 58 people dead and many more injured. Some NYSC adhoc staff members were reported maimed or injured.

The 2019 Electoral Violence

The Nigeria elections in 2019 that brought President Muhammadu Buhari back into office for a second term were marred by political violence, some of it by soldiers and police officers, Human Rights Watch said. Buhari should take concrete steps to address the widespread political violence, and to ensure accountability for human rights abuses by soldiers and police as he begins his second term. The election period included persistent attacks by factions of the insurgent group Boko

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Haram in the northeast; increased communal violence between nomadic herdsmen and farmers spreading southward from north-central states; and a dramatic uptick in banditry, kidnapping, and killings in the northwestern states of Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara. Security forces have failed to respond effectively to threats to people's lives and security.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 32 people, including voters, journalists, election observers, activists, and Independent National Electoral Commission officials in Rivers and Kano states, and documented 11 deaths specifically related to violent interference in the election process during the February 23 presidential election and subsequent state elections. The national and state elections in February, March, and April 2019 contributed to the general insecurity across the country. The politically related violence reported in many states was in contrast to the relatively peaceful 2015 elections that brought Buhari into his first term in office. According to a report by SBM Intelligence, which monitors socio-political and economic developments in Nigeria, 626 people were killed during the 2019 election cycle, starting with campaigns in 2018.

Kano state, in northwestern Nigeria, has the highest number of registered voters in the country. Rivers state, in the Niger Delta, receives the largest share of crude-oil-based national revenue, representing significant electoral value to any political party. The history of elections in both states is replete with violence by criminal elements. Human Rights Watch focused its research on both states in view of projections and reports of violence during the 2019 elections. Despite police claims of increased security measures to ensure peaceful voting, there seems to have been little police response to reports of threats and acts of violence by hired political thugs and soldiers against voters and election officials, Human Rights Watch found.

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On March 15, the spokesperson for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Festus Okoye, accused security agents of intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials in the state.

Banditry and the recurring cycles of deadly violence between herdsmen and farmers appear to have taken the lives of thousands. According to civil society reports, over 3,641 people have died from deadly clashes between herdsmen and farmers since 2015 and at least 262 people have been killed by bandits since the beginning of 2019 in Zamfara State alone. The government deployed 1,000 military troops to the state in response, but few of those responsible for the violence have been arrested or held to account. The northeast conflict with Boko Haram and its splinter groups also remains one of Buhari's pressing challenges. Although Boko Haram's territorial control has shrunk to small pockets of villages around Lake Chad as a result of sustained government military action since 2015, the group continues to carry out attacks against civilians and military targets in the region and in neighboring Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.

Renewed fighting between Nigerian government forces and a faction of Boko Haram, known as Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), has led to secondary displacement of civilians. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 27,000 civilians have died and about 1.8 million people have been displaced since the beginning of the conflict in 2009. Nigeria's elections have historically been fraught with controversy, violence, and other abuses, with the 2015 elections, widely believed to have been largely free of violence, bucking this trend. There were reports of voter intimidation and violence around the 2019 elections at both the federal and state levels, including armed men hired by candidates and political parties.

Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, and Rivers states were particularly affected by violence during the March 9 gubernatorial

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elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission cancelled elections in places where the elections were disrupted, and held supplementary elections later. Kano state had supplementary elections on March 23, and Rivers state on April 13. Kano and Rivers states were probably the worst hit of the six states. They were identified by both local and international analysts ahead of the elections as holding great potential for electoral violence. Both are major political strongholds for the two leading political parties, Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP). Abdullahi Ganduje of the APC won the 2019 election in Kano, and Nyesom Wike of the PDP won in Rivers State.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The summary of our discussions appears drastically frustrating with reference to the degree of violence against the NYSC adhoc staff members especially in the conduct of elections in Nigeria from 1999-2019. The conclusion is that, apart from deaths, injuries and other physical wounds sustained, the most traumatic is the psychological and structural violence they sustained in the conduct of elections. Two reasons are presented, for using NYSC adhoc staff during elections. Education and accountability are imperative in the conduct of elections, and these qualities are deposited in the NYSC members. The second is identification, and all NYSC members have identification, because of the national primary assignments. Unfortunately, these two intrinsic qualities possessed by Corps members which qualifies them as adhoc staff during election, have become potential threats to elements with subversive characters and untoward behaviour.

The conclusion is that, the sophisticated nature of our political architecture and engagement makes it extremely impossible to completely eradicate electoral violence and other forms of insecurity during elections, especially as this sordid and absurdity affect NYSC adhoc staff members, during each election conducted. We are not

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subscribing to total impossibility of violence free elections in Nigeria, and consequently, we have the following recommendations that:

- ✓ Adequate security arrangement should be provided for NYSC adhoc staff members during election duties.
- ✓ Culprits especially during the conduct of an elections should be arrested, tried and punished to serve as deterrent to others with criminal tendencies,
- ✓ CCTV should be installed at all polling centres to enable law enforcement agents record the activities, violence and identities of those that commit such crimes, and finally;
- ✓ Aside from lawful prosecution of perpetrators of violence during elections, appropriate compensations should be paid by political parties and their agents (thugs) to affected NYSC adhoc staff members involved in the conduct of elections. This would help reduce the frustration and anger associated with the structural violence sustained during the conduct of elections and serve as a deterrent to perpetrators of violence during elections.

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Youth Restiveness in Nigeria and its Effect on the NYSC Scheme

10

Youth Restiveness in Nigeria and Its Effects on the NYSC Scheme

Nta, Abasiama Joseph
and
Udoh Sebastine

Introduction

Youth restiveness in Nigeria has been a reoccurring issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including things like hostage-taking of prominent citizens and expatriate; oil workers, as well as oil bunkering, arms insurgence, cultism, bomb blasts, and abduction. Youths are regarded as the foundation of the society hence they are

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important to the future of any nation. Their inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments.

In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.¹ Incidence of youth restiveness in Nigeria has affected Nigeria's security and sustainable development including the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) which is a programme set up by the Nigerian government to involve Nigerian graduates in nation building and the development of the country. In a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian Civil war, the National Youth Service Corps was established by decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973 with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity.²

As a developing country, Nigeria is plagued by the problems of underdevelopment which includes: poverty, mass illiteracy, acute shortage of high skilled manpower (coupled with most uneven distribution of the skilled people that are available), inadequate socioeconomic infrastructural facilities, housing, Water and sewage facilities, roads, healthcare services, and effective communication system. These problems essentially affect the economic development programmes of the country. This paper is therefore an attempt to bring to limelight the role of the NYSC in tackling youth restiveness in Nigeria

¹ A. O Ozohu, "The Nigerian Youth in Contemporary Political Development: Relevance, Challenges and Role Expectation", *Journal of Constitutional Development*, Vol. 6, No.4, 2006, 97-98.

² NYSC, "Summative Evaluation Report of Ten years of the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria" Lagos: Directorate of the National Youth Service Corps, 1983.

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and advancing the cause of development in Nigeria through its objectives.

Conceptual Clarifications

Youth: Nigerian youth can be defined as persons between ages 18-35, the target youth group for this study are young Nigerian graduates, eligible to participate in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme i.e. persons between ages 18-30.³

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Programme: The NYSC was established in 1973 as a post-civil-war strategy in Nigeria, with a view to promote the development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity.⁴ Despite the fact that the NYSC was essentially established by a military regime as a strategy for the implementation of the reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation agenda of Nigeria's post-war economy, it remains relevant as an apex youth organization in Nigeria's democratic era, that enforces the policies of national development through the mobilization, deployment, and development of youth.⁵ As a foremost national youth development programme in sub-Saharan Africa, the relevance of the NYSC Scheme cannot be overemphasized as it stands as a critical platform where educated Nigerian youths develop their potentials and contribute towards the realization of national development agenda.

Youth Restiveness: this can be defined as a combination of any action or conduct that constitutes unwholesome socially unacceptable activities engaged by the youths of any community.⁶ It

³ NYSC, "Summative Evaluation Report of Ten years of the National Youth...

⁴ NYSC, "Summative Evaluation Report of Ten years of the National Youth...

⁵ NYSC, "Summative Evaluation Report of Ten years of the National Youth...

⁶ A. O Ozohu, "The Nigerian Youth in Contemporary Political Development: Relevance...92.

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can also be referred to as a despicable act which is being perpetrated by a significant proportion of youths whose activities have led to a near breakdown of law and order and low productivity due to disruption of production activities.

Causes of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

Youths are the most active segments of any society, youth are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation.⁷ Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined in part by youth. Although youth restiveness is not generally new in Nigeria, it is presumed to be as a result of catalogue of closely related factors. Some of the presumed factors include poverty, bad governance, unemployment, inadequate educational opportunities and resources, lack of basic infrastructure, and inadequate information and communication flow.

More than seventy percent of people in Nigeria are in abject poverty, living below the poverty line, and one third survive on less than US \$1 dollar a day.⁸ This figure includes youths in urban centres in Nigeria who struggle to make a living by hawking chewing sticks, beverages, handkerchiefs, belts, etc. The sales-per-day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above the poverty line. Disillusioned, frustrated, and dejected, they seek an opportunity to express their anger against the state.⁹ There is a link amongst poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality, and youth restiveness as evidenced by the numerous violent protests against the wielders of power in Nigeria. Poverty in Nigeria remains significant and despite high economic growth over the years, Nigeria's socio-cultural

⁷ N. Onyekpe, "Managing Youth at Election" *Journal of Constitutional Development*, Vol. 7, No.1, 2007, 76-87.

⁸ D. Amorawo, "Mal-distribution and Poverty as Factors in the Crises of the Nigeria State" *Journal of Constitutional Development*, Vol. 1, No.2, 2000, 1-3.

⁹ R. Hassan, and P. Birungi, "Social Capital and Poverty in Uganda", *Development Southern Africa*, Vol.3, No.1, 2011, 19-37.

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environment has become very unstable and is sending signals of insecurity on daily basis.

Despite making huge revenue from oil exploration over the years, Nigeria is still referred to as one of the poorest countries in the world.¹⁰ This often makes it's citizens to ponder how much of this revenue actually found its way into the region where this oil is produced as the areas of investment in infrastructure or the development of human capital such as economic growth is yet to translate to economic development and an appreciable increase in the standard of living of the Nigerian masses. Poverty and youth restiveness are two concepts that are related because one cannot exist without the other, it is as a result of poverty that most youths become restive in the society.

Many Nigerian youths are concerned about their future which they considered to be under serious threat. They are concerned about basic amenities such as inadequate electricity supply, bad roads, and the distorted academic calendar, poor security and enabling environment for entrepreneurship.¹¹ Good governance is required for the growth and development of any nation. Where good leadership is in short supply, societal challenges manifest in form of social vices.

Unemployment is one of the challenging features among the youth in all developing countries. The rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria is alarming. Unemployment is an unwanted social trend and its effects on the aggrieved youth naturally breed crime. The despicable situation of Nigeria's unemployment status has worsened. The problem of bad governance and corruption among political leadership in Nigeria since her independence in 1960 is partly responsible for this unfortunate

¹⁰ I. Hagler, *Nigeria: After the Nightmare*, Maryland: University Press of America Inc, 2011,98.

¹¹ Claude Ake, *Political Economy of Africa*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1987.

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development.¹² Since Independence, no political leadership has fully honoured its promises of sustaining the growth and development of the national economy in way that would provide job opportunities and addressed the problem of unemployment especially among the youth population. To worsen the unemployment situation in Nigeria, tertiary institutions in Nigeria annually turn out many graduates into the over-saturated labour market with little or no employment opportunities available. Some of the graduates are actually unemployable due to their poor capacity to live up to expectations in the contemporary economy.¹³ Hence, material hardships, physiological and psychological damage due to unemployment are likely to be issues of growing concerns among the youth population in Nigeria. In the absence of any meaningful job to sustain them, some of them settle for the many obnoxious trades such as child trafficking, prostitution, internet fraud etc, to make ends meet. Most youths idle away due to high rate of unemployment in the country.¹⁴ Many graduates roam the streets on daily basis looking for jobs that are not readily available.

¹² R.N. Amarachukwu, "The Challenges of Quality Education and Good Governance in Developing Economy, *African Journal of Education and Technology*, Vol.1, No.3, 103-110.

¹³ B. Ajubo, "The Rising Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: Effective Career Guidance a Panacea" *Journal of International Multidisciplinary*, Vol.7, No.1, 2013, 307-321.

¹⁴ O. Ajaegbu, "Rising Youth Unemployment and Violent Crimes in Nigeria" *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, Vol.2, No.5, 2012, 315-317.

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Figure 10.1: Unemployment Rate in Nigeria



Source: Labour Force Statistics – National Bureau of Statistics, 2017.

Some of them become willing tools and are hired for thuggery or assassins mostly for political reasons. Others end up as armed robbers thereby aggravating the problem of insecurity in the society. Some of the job-seekers in Nigeria do not have any additional skill for self-reliance. As a result of seemingly shattered dreams and expectations they engaged in so many criminal activities and other deviant behaviours. The alarming rate of youth unemployment has prompted Government to establish a number of empowerment agencies as well as adopt various measures and strategies such as Poverty Alleviation Programme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and recently the National Social Investment Programme among many others. Inadequate job opportunities are the major cause of youth restiveness which to a large

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extent has serious negative multiplier effects on the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria as a nation-state.¹⁵

Inadequate educational opportunities are another major factor that triggers youth restiveness.¹⁶ Education is any act or experience that has a foundational effect on the mind, character or physical capacity of an individual.

Some of the challenges faced in Nigeria educational system that contribute to youth restiveness are centred on funding and secure environment whereby the schools and teachers could do their work effectively in a conducive atmosphere.¹⁷ Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The knowledge and skill that young people acquire help determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. The after effect of poor education in Nigeria has led to the situation whereby thousands of young people roam the streets in cities in Nigeria and some Students who manage to complete secondary school could not proceed to tertiary institutions due lack of funding. As a result of this, they are disorientated and readily available for antisocial activities.¹⁸

Inadequate basic infrastructure is another major setback that have contributed to youth restiveness in Nigeria. The importance of infrastructure to the industrial sector of any economy cannot be overlooked, thus making its development key to the survival of the

¹⁵ E. Okafor, "Youth Unemployment and Implication for Stability of Development in Nigeria" *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol.13, No.1, 2011.

¹⁶ I. Okonkwo, *Poverty and Unemployment Alleviation Strategies in Nigeria*, Lagos: American Publishers, 2005

¹⁷ P. Ogunyoni and B. Oginni, "Youth Self Reliance Programmes and Unemployment Challenges in a Development Economic: A Nigeria Case" *Journal of Economic Research and Global Business*, Vol. 2, No.3, 2013, 18

¹⁸ P. Ogunyoni and B. Oginni, "Youth Self Reliance Programmes and Unemployment...18.

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sector. Poor infrastructure is a factor responsible for stunted growth of the Nigeria's economy. The only way out of the economic doldrums is conscious massive investment in infrastructure by all levels of government in the country.¹⁹ Apart from providing paying jobs for the teeming Nigerian youths, infrastructural development will certainly integrate the country and place it on the path of fast growing economies across the globe.

Many rural communities and urban slums in Nigeria have no access to potable water, primary health centres, electricity, communication and commercial facilities, etc. Behind social unrest and youth restiveness in the country is the agitation for equitable distribution of resources.²⁰

Inadequate information and communication flow is a major factor that has contributed to youth restiveness in Nigeria.²¹ Communication creates room for sharing information. It helps people express their thoughts and feelings, clarify problems, and consider alternative ways of coping or adapting to their situation. It also promotes social cohesion where people have access to communication facilities, communicate and influence decision making.²²

Effects of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

The incidence of marginalization, denial of social rights, environmental degradation and economic devastation activities had triggered off the irate youths in Nigeria to engage in all sorts of restiveness to demand

¹⁹ M. P. Todaro, *Economics for a Developing World*, London: Longman Group Limited, 1979.

²⁰ A. O Ozohu, "The Nigerian Youth in Contemporary Political Development: Relevance...101

²¹ F. Ajegbomogun, "Information Availability and the Internet use in Public Library , *Journal of Information Science*, Vol.7, No.1, 2008,65-74.

²² E. Curras, "Information as a Fifth Element that Influence on the Culture of the People" *Journal of Information Science* Vol. 13, No.3, 1987, 27-36

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for of their perceived rights. This situation is largely responsible for abduction, hostage taking and kidnapping of oil expatriates and as well as banditry in parts of the country. Democracy will be difficult to thrive in crises. The leaders would spend the time they would have used to formulate policies for good governance in addressing avoidable conflicts and investing hard earned resources in rebuilding infrastructure destroyed by youth restiveness. The situation would not also encourage international cooperation. Many foreign investors would also not be willing to invest in a vulnerable and crisis prone economy.²³ Youth restiveness has serious and lasting effects on the physical, mental, and social health of young people. It is a leading cause of death for young people in Nigeria.²⁴

Youth restiveness negatively impacts perceived and actual safety, participation in community events, school attendance, and viability of businesses.²⁵ Youth restiveness accounts for most of the social crimes perpetrated by youth in the Nigerian society today. The rise in violent crime such as robbery, kidnapping, thuggery, terrorism among others, committed by the youth is a sign of gaps in the society. In the long run, youth restiveness will result in people engaging in illegitimate activities in order to actualize their expectations in the society. Kidnapping has become a very lucrative business and could be seen as a by-product of youth restiveness across the country.²⁶

²³ O.S. Elegbeleye, "Recreational Facilities in Schools: A Panacea for Youth Restiveness, *Journal of Human Ecology*, Vol. 18, No.2, 2005, 93-98.

²⁴ B. Girigin, *Issues in the Problems of Youth Restiveness: Niger Delta*, Owerri: Springfield Publishers, 2007, 22.

²⁵ H. Igbo and I. Ikpa, "Causes, Effects and Ways of Curbing Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: Implication of Counseling" *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.4, No.3, 131-138.

²⁶ O. Uriah, and P. Egbezor, "Academic Background, Socio-economic Status and Gender Implications for Youth Restiveness and Educational Development" *International Journal of Applied Sociology*, Vol.5, No.1, 2015, 16-19.

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Youth restiveness drives vulnerable individuals in to living against the provisions of the law as a desperate means of survival as well as avenue for expressing dissatisfaction with the perceived apparent neglect of their existence.²⁷ Youth restiveness affects the economy a number of ways. First of all, it increases the cost of doing business and in providing public services as it has become necessary that armed guards must be hired for protection of lives while on duty. Secondly, resources which would have been invested in the funding of critical sectors of the economy such as education, health, agriculture and in the provisions of other essential services will be diverted into crime prevention and procurement of relief materials for the displaced persons.

Finally, the increase in crime rate and youth restiveness could lead to collapse and or relocation of business enterprises from one location to another.

Effects of Youth Restiveness on the National Youth Service Corps

The nature of youth restiveness in Nigeria has spiral effect on the operations of the NYSC both in scope and dimension. It was reported that the November 2012 Orientation Course was postponed in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States due to reported issues of insecurity.²⁸

The effects of youth restiveness on NYSC in Nigeria, can also be seen manifested in the number of relocation requests from Corps members who wish to be relocated to other states, where the wind of safety is higher. However, it is heartwarming to note a good number of Corps members are currently serving in all parts of the country and utilizing the security services provided by NYSC that sufficiently guarantee peaceful participation in the national service experience.

²⁷ O. Uriah, and P. Egbebor, "Academic Background, Socio-economic Status and...32.

²⁸ D. Aladelokun, "Bishop Seeks Scrapping of NYSC Scheme" *The Nation*, April 22, 2011, 4.

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The Role OF NYSC in Curbing Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

The National Youth Service Corps is viewed as a strong incentive for the promotion of national cohesion and nation building. NYSC Scheme is a compulsory one-year programme that mobilizes all young (international and local) university and polytechnic graduates between who are not above 30 years of age at the point of graduation. The only exemptions are those that have served in the armed forces, the Nigerian Police Forces, other national security agencies and national honours and merit award recipients. The NYSC scheme has since assumed multiple mandates with focus on youth development, national integration and infrastructural development.²⁹ Over the years, NYSC has Inculcated discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves.³⁰ NYSC has raised the moral tone of our youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement. It has also develop in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.³¹

The Scheme has contributed to the accelerated growth of the national economy through making youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment. The skills acquired for self employment will help in curbing unemployment which is one of the major causes of youth restiveness. In Enugu state, a female Corps member had her service year in Enugu, and did not leave after the service; she established a bakery in the state because of the skills she acquired from NYSC Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Department (SAED) programme. She is currently a successful business

²⁹ NYSC “National Youth Service Corps Handbook”...

³⁰ NYSC “National Youth Service Corps Decree No. 5 of 1993, Abuja:NYSC, 1993

³¹ NYSC “National Youth Service Corps Handbook”...

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woman and supplying bread for NYSC Camp in Enugu. The Scheme has indeed help in removing prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups which has helped to develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria. Mohammed Bawa, an ex-Corps member at Umunya Camp in Anambra State explains that before he was mobilized for national service, he thought that the Igbo's were money conscious and can do anything including ritual killings to acquire wealth, love themselves at the detriment of other ethnic groups.

He testified that it was the NYSC scheme that exposed him to the uniqueness and enterprising and hospitality nature of Igbo culture and people. He was eventually endeared to the people and made so many friends across the South East geo-political zone. The Scheme has indeed helped Nigerian youths to understand that the negative effects of crisis as a result of youth restiveness will in the long run affect their future; be it in form of ethnic or religious conflict. NYSC Scheme has served as a pathway and platform that facilitates youth transition into productive adulthood and effective citizenship.⁴¹ The expected outcomes of youth participation in the NYSC programme includes but not limited to psychosocial and character development which has helped curtail youth restiveness in the country.

NYSC has helped in inculcating positive attitudes in the Nigerian youths through giving them orientation on inter-ethnic and religious tolerance through enhanced cognitive and perceptual shifts that seeks to eliminate discriminatory practices and manage conflicts. The Scheme has helped in the creation of platforms for youths to gain practical experience, reflexive learning and exit opportunities, competence, skills (both soft and technical), and social capital development, improved levels of patriotism and citizenship through awareness, loyalty, and sense of belonging.⁴² Mercy Akpan, a Corps member serving in Kaduna State attested to the fact that without NYSC

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she would not have known how to relate with people of different ethnic groups and family backgrounds. The NYSC experience has taught her how to manage individual differences and mutual respect.

The NYSC Scheme has also helped the youth population in the area of entrepreneurship training through orientation programmes as well as in the deployment and utilization of youth capabilities in the national interest. This has made NYSC an outstanding and invaluable Scheme that has helped in transforming the lives of Nigerian youths as positive agents in national development agenda. This transformation has helped immensely in controlling youth restiveness in the country because youths who are gainfully employed rarely participate in antisocial activities.

The NYSC Scheme facilitate social integration through the provision of opportunities for cross cultural interaction that has led to inter-ethnic marriages. This has further help in reducing inter-ethnic stereotypes and mutual suspicions which are inimical to national unity and development. The Scheme also serves as an employment buffer where number Corps members eventually secured employments in their places of primary assignments after the service year. This has helped in limiting youth restiveness as unemployment is one of the major causes of youth restiveness in Nigeria.

The NYSC scheme instills in the Nigerian youths a sense of patriotism through participation in the scheme. The national service experience exposes youth Corps members to the practice of obeying the clarion call and other national symbols such as NYSC and National flags, Anthems and other relevant issues of national significance. All these have contributed in no small measure to curb youth restiveness by instilling in Nigerian youths the spirit of patriotism and nationalism. In addition, NYSC as a scheme through various community development service efforts has created the necessary enlightenment where the youths and other members of the host communities were empowered

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on so many issues of development. It presents host community members with information required to guide their actions promoting peace and unity in a multi ethnic and heterogeneous society. This will reduce the frequency of violence, acrimony, and confrontation associated with youth restiveness.

In addition to providing job opportunities, NYSC creates enabling environment for acquiring skills for career development. Most programmes organized by the scheme help provide career guidance and counselling and will help reduce the number of idle, frustrated youths that would be willing tools and vulnerable to acts of violence and other forms of youth restiveness in the society in the society.

NYSC serves as a change agent, a promoter of ideas and opinions. It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure that youth have access to information and orientation that will guide their actions. Most Nigerian youths who participate in civil unrest across the country are basically uninformed and acting based on ignorance. Indeed, NYSC has playing a major role in curbing youth restiveness in Nigeria through the conduct of various orientation activities focusing on awareness creation and sensitisation of youth Corps members on the need to realise that the future is brighter, it belongs to them and must not be destroyed. This sensitisation also exposes them to the reality that the future and its nature depends on the decisions and choices they make.

More so, the NYSC scheme through its orientation programme has given a sense of history, especially of the noble and heroic contributions of the youths in the past to the development of Nigeria. In comparison with the ignoble role of many youth today, NYSC has been sensitising the youths on the need to embrace the rule of law and democratic ideals.³² The scheme has liberated a lot of Nigerian youths psychologically and mentally from the control of self-seeking business

³² O. Gbosi, and .A. Ihugba, "Unemployment and Nigerian Economic Growth". *Mediterean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.2 No 1. 2017, 67.

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and political elites by changing their orientation towards seeking greater employment and educational opportunities as a means of redirecting their energies and ideas from anti-social activities to creative efforts. NYSC as a Scheme, is a catalyst and strategic instrument for addressing youth related problems and other national development agenda.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to capture the role of NYSC in curbing youth restiveness in Nigeria. The future belongs to youths who make productive use of information and knowledge. With sufficient information and orientation through NYSC scheme, Nigerian youths can develop their potentials and participate actively in nation building. To effectively curb youth restiveness in Nigeria, NYSC would continue to serve as a veritable platform for increased accessibility of information for skill acquisition, self-employment, job opportunities, and self-reliance among Nigerian youths.

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11

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Elections in Nigeria: Success, Challenges and Prospects

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Introduction

There is no gain saying that the National Youth Service Corps stems from the spirits of the 3R (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration) instituted by General Gowon. Although this policy was principally concerned with undoing the ills of the Civil War, the NYSC Scheme was birthed by one of the three Rs. The Scheme went along way to integrate the nation between 1973 to date. The Scheme had played a much significant role in augmenting the lop-sidedness in the

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spread of trained manpower across the country, aside its integrative score. Prior to the 1970s for instance, Nigeria was majorly challenged by a structural imbalance in the distribution of skilled personnel. According to the National Manpower Board, about 40 per cent of the nation's 57, 000 high level manpower excluding teachers were domicile in Lagos.¹ It was also reported that in the medical sector, about 70 per cent of the country's medical and para-medical personnel were basically employed in the few urban areas; principally in university areas and state capitals. Hence, it took the timely intervention of the NYSC mobilization, deployment and Posting Policies to deconcentrate the conglomeration of high skilled personnel in a few state capitals into other states of the federation and subsequently to the rural areas across the country. This measure successfully contributed towards debunking the stereotype about the rural areas as inhabitable places for civilized people among the educated elites.

With the establishment of the Scheme in 1973, the restriction of most Nigerian youths in a geographical and ethnic enclave was fore closed within ten years of the existence of the Scheme. This is because in 1986, it was reported that 62 per cent of the Corps members had not visited their places of deployment and primary assignment prior to their service year. Towards the tail end of the 1980s for instance, majority of the rural dwellers in the country became exposed to many of the social derivatives that were associated with the Scheme. The Scheme has over the years assisted many of the states and rural villages with deficient manpower in filling the void. According to Ejela Emenako, both the urban and rural areas in the country have benefitted considerably from the contributions of Corps members at the places of primary

¹ See the *National Manpower Board*, (1964), *High-Level Manpower 1963-70, Manpower Studies No. 2*, cited in Folayan Ojo. (1977), *Evaluation Report on Four Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. P.4

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assignment and the entire host Communities.² Right from its year of establishment, the Scheme became indispensable to states as a constant source of quality manpower for both government and non-governmental institutions, especially in schools.³ In the defunct Bendel state in 1982/83 for example, many of the rural health Schemes were heavily dependent on the services of Corps medical doctors and their teams for operation. Within this period more than seventeen mobile clinics in the rural communities in the state were manned exclusively by the Scheme's medical team.⁴

It is important to also note that the broad objective of the Scheme aims at ensuring the equitable distribution of members of the Service Corps and the effective utilization of their skills in areas of national needs. It is against this background that it was thought worthy to utilize the availability of Corps members in virtually every part of Nigeria in election related matters in 2011 in order to forestall the reoccurrence of the shortcomings of the 2007 General election. Suffice it to say that this aspect of the Scheme's intervention in national affairs is yet to attract much study. This study is however concerned with the involvement of Corps members in elections in Nigeria since 2011.

An Overview of Elections in Nigeria, 1959-2007

Election is one of the critical issues that is central to most of the crisis in Nigeria since independence. According to Osumah, since 1959, questions have been asked about elections integrity in the country.⁵

² Ejela Emenako (Ed.), (1986), *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. P. 82

³ Ejela Emenako (Ed.), (1986), *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. P. 82

⁴ Col. Obasa, P.K. (1995), *NYSC: A Nations Attempt at Mobilising the Youths*, MDL Consultants Marketers, Ilorin. P. 71

⁵ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*. 5

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Both the Regional and Federal elections of 1964 and 1965 were reportedly associated with allegations of widespread irregularities and rigging, molestation of electoral officials, abduction of candidates, and use of security agents to intimidate voters and facilitate election malpractices in most parts of the country.⁶ Suffice it to say that the youths were the major actors in the rigging and rejection of the election results. The political instability and cracks that followed, were partially responsible for the 13 years of military intervention in the country between 1966 and 1979. In spite of the fact that the 1979 election was conducted under the watch of the military, the outcome of the election was allegedly questioned and termed controversial to an extent that it took the intervention of the Supreme Court for the issue to be laid to rest.⁷ This as a matter of fact, created the expectations and hope that the country will stage a crisis free election in 1983 under the new democratic dispensation. This hope was never sustained due to the outcome of the General election staged in the Second Republic. This was attributable to the fact that the elections was characterized by a gross misuse of state power (incumbency), money, thuggery, violence, rigging, and other election related malpractices. It was alleged that the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), in collaboration with the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), the police and other state agents all manipulated the election process in favour of the NPN.⁸ The inability of the court to reverse most of the election results, fuelled several waves of tension, arson, murder and instability in the country. This development, hence, became one of the excused for the third military intervention in governance in Nigeria on December 31st, 1983.

⁶ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*. 5

⁷ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*. 6

⁸Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 15, No. 1. 6

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This development closed the window of civil rule in the country until 1993 when the presidential election which was adjudged as the freest and fairest in the history of the country was held. Despite the wide legitimacy and credence of the election, the election was subsequently annulled.⁹ The inability of the various regimes and administrations in the country to stage an acceptable and democratized elections since independence until 1999 casted a thick shadow on elections in the country to the extent that a strong public opinion was formed that the government irrespective of the regime cannot give Nigerians a legitimate election and leaders.

By 1999, Nigeria as a nation has had its fair share of transitions, from the imposing colonial regime to elected administrations and from the elected administrators to military regimes and back to civil rule.¹⁰ Irrespective of these forward and backward attempts at governance, the country struggled to register an orderly transfer of power from one civil rule to another until 1999. With the return of democracy and a new constitution after the long military intervention in politics and governance in the country, the country has since continue its search for the consolidation of its democracy. This was kick-started by the General Election of February 1999. The election was witnessed by both local and international observers, including the Commonwealth Group under the leadership of Sir Ketumile Masire. The election was adjudged to be riddled with various irregularities but acclaimed to have reflected the will of the Nigerian people.¹¹ According to Ezekiel Edogbanya, the conduct of the 1999 election was not taken with hard feelings being the first attempt at the transfer of power back to civil rule since the 1993. He explained that it was hoped that subsequent elections under civilian

⁹ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 15, No. 1. 7

¹⁰ Emmanuel O. Ojo. Nigeria's 2007 General Elections and The Succession Crisis: Implications for the Nascent Democracy. 14

¹¹ Nigeria General Elections, 23 February 2019. Commonwealth. 4

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administrations would avail the nation a reputable election with the much needed credence in 2003 should the military allow the nascent democracy to blossom. This expectations, was however, dashed by the manner in which the 2003 General election was conducted.

The first Presidential elections organised under a civilian administration was the April 2003 Election. The conduct of the election according to Osumah was progressively worse than the 1999 elections.¹²This was despite the measures introduced by the 2002 Electoral Act which was introduced to forestall the eventualities of the 1999 elections. This was attested to by both local and international observers. Since the return of democracy, the 2003 marked the beginning of the mobilisation of youths to execute violence during and after the election. In preparation for the election, there was a general apprehension which was attributed to the recruitment and arming of militia groups as political mercenaries to harass and intimidate political opponents, rig the elections, commit brigandage and organise violent protests.¹³These anti-democratic attributes of the elections were captured in the reports of the election observers. According to the Commonwealth Observer Group, headed by former Tanzanian Prime Minister and former Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, 'in most of Nigeria, despite significant challenges, a genuine and largely successful effort was made to enable the people to vote freely and that in most of the country

¹² Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 15, No. 1. 9

¹³ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 15, No. 1. 9

....For instance, the major oppositions in Abia and Anambra States alleged that the incumbent governors in the states were using the Bakassi Boys to settle political scores which were initially instituted as a Vigilante group. There were concerns and tensions that the governors were manipulating the group to rig elections or safeguard against being rigged out in their re-election bid.

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conditions were such as to enable the will of the people to be expressed. However, there were parts of Nigeria in which many Nigerians were denied the right to participate in an authentic democratic process'.¹⁴ According to Daniel Okolo, most international and local observers chose to be diplomatic and optimistic about the future to an extent that they were reluctant to put the actual event to paper in order not to dissuade Nigerians from disliking its nascent democracy.¹⁵Hence, with each election, Nigerians became more concerned with elongating civil rule regardless of the process through which the leaders emerged due to the desperacy to maintain civil rule. This was the situation in the country at the eve of the 2007 election which was to mark the first transfer of power from a civilian to another civilian without any interruption from the military for the first time in 8 years.

The year 2007 was remarkable epoch in the history of the country because it ushered the country into its first 8years of an attempt into the practice and consolidation of democracy in the country, the longest since independence.¹⁶The election in spite of its significance was reported to be marred with serious electoral malpractices which resulted in violence. According to Ojo, the election was generally perceived as the worst in the history of the election administration in Nigeria, with both domestic and international observers concluding that it was badly flawed.¹⁷It was observed that with election in the country, the standard and conduct of the election process kept getting

¹⁴ Nigeria General Elections, 23 February 2019. Commonwealth. 4

¹⁵ Ineke Okolo is a retired civil servant who has witnessed all the post independence elections in Nigeria. He is over 75 years old. He was interviewed at Egume on 12-02-2021

¹⁶ Emmanuel O. Ojo. Nigeria's 2007 General Elections and The Succession Crisis: Implications for the Nascent Democracy.21

¹⁷ Emmanuel O. Ojo. Nigeria's 2007 General Elections and The Succession Crisis: Implications for the Nascent Democracy. 21

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compromised and bastardized. The Commonwealth Observer Group for instance, led by former Tanzanian Prime Minister, Justice Joseph Warioba, in its report noted that:

‘the elections was a crucial test for the country’s young democracy, but an opportunity to take a major step forward was missed...our overall impression of these elections is that, in organisational terms, they fell short of the standards Nigeria has achieved in 2003, and certainly well below the standards for democratic elections to which Nigeria has committed itself. We believe that there were impediments in the ability of voters to express their will fully, freely and fairly’.¹⁸

This was corroborated by Alhaji Umaru Yar’ Adua, the Presidential winner of the 2007 election who admitted that the country’s electoral process lacked credibility and that the 2007 elections fell short of international standards.¹⁹ According to Osumah, President Umaru Musa Yar’ Adua even as a key beneficiary of the electoral fraud, during his inauguration speech acknowledged that the conduct of the 2007 General election did not satisfy the conditions of best practices.²⁰ It was however, this confession that inspired the President to set up an Electoral Reform Committee in order to right the wrongs of the previous elections which was fast becoming a norm in the country’s electoral process.

Be that as it may, the heavy manipulation of election results between 1999 and 2007 in the country was relatively, blamed on the use of partisan youths as ad hoc staff for the election umpire and the

¹⁸ Nigeria General Elections, 23 February 2019. Commonwealth. 5

¹⁹ Emmanuel O. Ojo. Nigeria’s 2007 General Elections and The Succession Crisis: Implications for the Nascent Democracy.²¹

²⁰ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 15, No. 1. 10

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mobilization of youths as thugs. It was sequel to the above that the country in conjunction with the National Youth Service Corps and the Independent National Electoral Commission decided to incorporate Corps members in the conduct and management of the country's electoral process in 2011. The effects of this move will be discussed in the next section where the involvement of the National Youth Service Corps and the electoral process will be discussed.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and the Electoral Process In Nigeria, 2011 – 2019: Success, Challenges & Prospects

The 2011 election presented the country the opportunity to test run its new approach to the conduct of elections and also an avenue for the masses to gauge the commitment of the government in its promise to conduct a free and fair election. This was as a result of the progressive decline in the conduct of elections in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999.²¹ It was against this background that prior to the 2011 General election, the country adopted a new framework for the 2011 election following the amendments to the electoral act and constitution in 2010 and early 2011. These modifications were to address the flaws in the framework that governed the 2007 polls and further incorporated many recommendations proposed by the Election Reform Committee (ERC) constituted after the 2007 elections. The new law for instance provided for the declaration of results at each polling units, better screening of election officials and separation of the federal and state electoral cycles.²² In order to improve the accuracy and credibility of the voter register, INEC prior to the election, re-registered all voters using a biometric data system that included a photograph and complete set of fingerprints through the use of the members of the

²¹ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*. 2

²² 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 7

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National Youth Service Corps. Prior to the commencement of the voters registration, members of the National Youth Service Corps across the country were trained by the Independent National Electoral Commission on the use and handling of the Direct Data Capturing Device, the INEC Registration Platform, and other technicalities associated with the registration process. In line with this, INEC successfully registered 73, 528,040 Nigerians in three weeks.²³ This was made possible due to the availability of NYSC Corps members in communities and every Local Government Area in the country from where they were further transferred to the different registration points prior to the commencement of the voters registration exercise.

In pursuance of the above, the utilisation of the members of the National Youth Service Corps as Registration Officer I and II in different Local Government Areas (LGAs) as a matter of fact, in the anal of elections in Nigeria, marked the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria that over 90 per cent of the ad hoc staff recruited by the electoral commission were drawn from a pool of university graduates performing their one year of mandatory national service with the NYSC. There is no gain saying that most of the people welcomed the decision to use the Corps members, as they were seen as less dependent on the government and less susceptible to party or local community influence. As higher degree holders, their assumed computer literacy was expected to facilitate the use of Direct Data Capture (DDC) machines and other technical equipment during voter registration.²⁴ According to the report of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Report, many of the assumptions above were true but it was observed

²³ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 7

²⁴ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 20

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that some of the ad hoc staff had trouble operating the DDC machines largely as a result of the inadequate training.²⁵

In the course of the 2011 elections however, the NYSC members made up the majority of the 360, 000 youths used as temporal ad hoc staff that operated the polling stations.²⁶ Out of the total number of the 360 000 ad hoc staff engaged, the members of the National Youth Service Corps accounted for approximately 240, 000 of the non-partisan participants that manned virtually each of the 120, 000 polling units in the country.²⁷ These Corps members demonstrated patriotism, commitment to democracy and at times heroism during the electoral process and they maintained positive attitudes and dedication despite enormous obstacles. Most Corps members were exhausted from overseeing the elections within the space of four weeks in a row and sleeping in polling stations overnight before and after each election day, and might have paid out of their pockets for their transportation and food when their stipends were delayed. Be that as it may, it should be noted that the NYSC members increased public confidence through their roles as poll workers and voter registration officials, as they were seen as more neutral than past officials.²⁸ This was in addition to the neutrality of the Corps members which gave credence to the election. It was this that specifically, informed the recommendation of the National Democratic Institutes (NDI) to recommend to INEC to 'build institutional expertise by incorporating the now-experienced NYSC ad

²⁵ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 20

²⁶ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 20

²⁷ Nigeria National Elections, April 2011. 2014. International Republican Institute. Retrieved from www.iri.org, accessed on 20-04-2021

²⁸ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 60

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hoc poll workers as future trainers and INEC Staff.²⁹ The outcome of the 2011 General elections was succinctly captured in the report of the Commonwealth Observer Group for the 2011 General Election under the leadership of the former President of Botswana, Festus Mogae, who noted that:

‘the 2011 elections marked a genuine celebration of democracy in Africa’s most populous country and a key member of the Commonwealth. As consequence, previously held notions that Nigeria cannot hold flawed elections are now being discarded and the country can now shake off the stigma and redeem its image. Notwithstanding the organisational deficiencies that resulted in the elections, the election was acclaimed to be the most credible and a reflection of the will of the Nigerian people’.³⁰

The success of the 2011 elections cannot as a matter of fact be disassociated from the nature, composition and dynamics of the ad hoc staff used in the election process by the Independent National Electoral Commission. It should be recalled that the composition and dynamics of the National Youth Service Corps is such that necessitates a relatively even distribution of skilled graduates across the country in places that are different from their place of origin. Hence, the fact that the members of the National Youth Service Corps are not part of the community they were posted was enough to disassociate them from being partisan. Most of the members of the National Youth Service Corps took the election as part of their national assignment. Through the foregoing, the Independent National Electoral Commission was able to avoid the engagement of indigenes as polling officers or presiding officers, thus making the whole process transparent.

²⁹ Statement of the National Democratic Institutes International Election Observer Mission to Nigeria’s April 16 Presidential Election, Abuja, April 18, 2011. 7

³⁰ Nigeria General Elections, 23 February 2019. Commonwealth. 6

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With the success of the 2011 election, the Independent National Electoral Commission was charged with consolidating the success of the 2011 elections in the 2015 elections which was the fourth consecutive nationwide election since 1999. In the conduct of the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission introduced an anti-rigging approaches like the Permanent Voters Card and Card Reader devices in the conduct of the election.³¹ Aside the introduction of these devices and approach, the successes recorded via the use of the devices were tied to the readily available, skilled and computer friendly graduates in all parts of the country through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Posting Policy.

Since the year 2011 when members of the National Youth Service Corps were largely introduced into the electoral process in Nigeria through voters registration and election duties, they had become a strong component of all the subsequent elections that were held between 2011 and 2019. Shortly after the 2019 election for instance, some of the Corps members of the National Youth Service Corps were reported to have distinguished themselves in different locations that they were deployed to in the course of the election.³² According to the *Thisday Newspaper*, months after the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) rewarded some of the Corps members that performed excellently during the election. The Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission Prof. Mahmood Yakubu at the event to reward the Corps members averred that there can be no successful election in Nigeria without the contribution of the

³¹ Oarhe Osumah. 2016. Paradigm Shift: Youth Engagement in the Conduct of the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 15, No. 1. 12

³² Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

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National Youth Service Corps members.³³ Prof Yakubu declared at the occasion that in recognition of the Corps members' laudable contributions to the conduct of elections in the country, the commission would offer jobs to those who performed well in the 2019 General elections. At the same occasion, the European Union (EU) which has partnered with the Independent National Electoral Commission for long, presented Information Technology (IT) equipment to about 75 dedicated and patriotic Corps members for working hard during the 2019 General elections.³⁴ The Head of EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Ambassador Ketil Karlsen, said the gesture was in recognition of the immense contributions made by the Youth Corps members to the success of the General elections.³⁵ According to him, over 290, 000 Corps members participated in the elections, during which the EU observed their dedication and commitment to the process. The INEC Chairman, further underscored the role of the NYSC in successful conduct of the elections and declared that:

“there cannot be any elections in Nigeria without the NYSC. I have said it before, I want to say it again and I will not be tired of saying it, that the youth Corps members are the most dedicated, educated, patriotic,

³³ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

³⁴ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

³⁵ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

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willing, able, readily available and the most committed election duty staff in Nigeria".³⁶

Suffice it to say that the involvement of the Corps members is not just about election. It is much more concerned with the electoral process. This is tied to the fact that Corps members are always available for voter education, registration, display of voters register and election day duty. As presiding officers, they count votes, record, take results to collation centres throughout the different locations in the country through the land and sea.³⁷

The successes recorded in the country's electoral process through the involvement of Corps members were not without serious challenges. Starting with the 2011 election for instance, most Corps members were stranded in the various polling units due to the absence of a working arrangement to transport both the Corps members and the electoral materials to and from the polling units. The situation as witnessed in some parts of Ibadan, Oyo State became very challenging after the election because the Corps members found it difficult to transport the election materials back to the collation centres and as a result had to resort to being transported to the collation centres by some concerned members of the communities they were posted to serve. During the 2015 Governorship election in Bayelsa State, most of the Corps members on election duty were transported to the various polling units with election materials via water to places like Oproma in Southern

³⁶ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

³⁷ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

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Ijaw and to Ekeremo and Brass.³⁸ Also, in Ondo State for instance, during the Governorship election in 2017, some of the Corps members that were bringing back results from Ilaje had a boat accident at night. It however, took the timely intervention of the Nigerian Navy who were at the background to come to their rescue.³⁹ This explains partly the challenging situation and the sacrifice of Corps members during the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

Aside the issue of logistics, security was a major challenge to the Corps members on election duties. During the 2011 election for instance, at least ten persons lost their lives while others sustained fatal injuries including Corps members at the Independent National Electoral Commission's office in Suleja, Niger State. ⁴⁰ On the day of the Presidential Election two separate explosions were reported in Borno and Kaduna State while sporadic shootings were reported in Jos. It was however estimated by the Human Right Group that at least 800 persons were killed during this period, including eleven members of the National Youths Service Corps on election duty in Bauchi.⁴¹This went a long way to influence the public opinion that the government and the Independent National Electoral Commission did not make adequate provisions for the security of members of the National Youth Service Corps upon which the commission depended for the success of the 2011 elections. Suffice it to say that the increasing waves of insecurity

³⁸ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

³⁹ Reward for Dedicated Corps Members. *Thisday*, June 20, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/06/20/reward-for-dedicated-Corps-members/>

⁴⁰ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 40

⁴¹ 2011 Nigerian Elections: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Final Report. 2012. New York: National Democratic Institute. 42

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in the country coupled with the mass relocation of Corps members from parts of the North-East and North-West due to the effects of Boko Haram, Banditry and religious extremism constitutes a big challenge to the Independent National Electoral Commission because the implication of the above implies that the aforementioned locations would be deficient in the required number of Corps members needed for national assignments like voters education and election duties. According to Ocheme Mark, the absence of IT-inclined graduates and youths in good numbers in most of the rural communities in the core north means that the Independent National Electoral Commission will struggle to assemble the needed number of graduates to conduct elections in such area.⁴²

It should be noted that after the active engagement within three weeks in a row, there were cases of inadequate provisions of accommodation for the Corps members who were posted for election duties outside their host Communities and as a result of this, many of the Corps members on election duty found it very difficult to buy food.

Prospects

1. Adequate security should be provided for Corps members on election duties.
2. Adequate accommodation arrangements should be provided for Corps members.
3. Corps members should be exposed to IT Trainings and INEC assignments during the 21 days Orientation Course and the service year in anticipation of their engagements in election and other related duties.

⁴² Ocheme Mark is an ex-Corps members who served in Bauchi State and participated in the 2011 General Election as a Registration Officer I and a Presiding Officer in the 2011 General Election. He was interviewed on 30-01-2021

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Conclusion

This paper concludes that the National Youth Service Corps since its first intervention into the country's electoral process has become an integral part of the subsequent elections in the country. The paper also argued that the involvement of Corps members in the conduct of elections was made possible by the relative distribution of skilled and educated graduate members of the Scheme throughout the country as a result of its deployment and posting policy which has ensured that each part of the country gets a trained and qualified graduate to serve within the period of one year. Paper contended that the Scheme was able to give credence to elections in the country since 2011 due to the fact that Corps members are not basically allowed to serve in their state of origin, hence making them non-partisan.

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12

Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim: An Overview of His Achievements as 18th NYSC Director-General

Bem Japhet Audu
and
Maryam Hamza

Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) has attained tremendous height since the assumption of office by Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim as the Director General (DG) of the Scheme. This is not surprising, given the fact that Gen Ibrahim is a thoroughbred military administrator, who combines scholarship, emotional intelligence and finesse in his administrative duties. His experiences cut across administration in the

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military and civil establishments, which combination have accelerated the pace of the modest service rendered to the NYSC.

Key issues that confronted the Scheme upon his assumption of office include the need to sustain the relevance of the NYSC in a fast-changing world; second, inadequate motivation and welfare for Corps Members and staff of the Scheme. The third was the challenge of unemployment among the youths after the mandatory one year national service.

Gen Ibrahim's track record as a visionary leader readily came to play in tackling these challenges. He initiated a five-point policy thrust to address them. These five-point policy thrust include the following:

- ❖ Sustain effective utilisation of the potentials of Corps Members for optimal benefit;
- ❖ Strengthen existing collaborations with critical stakeholders;
- ❖ Improve on the welfare and security of Corps Members and staff;
- ❖ Pursue a technologically driven organisation to deepen effective service delivery;
- ❖ Reinvigorate the NYSC Ventures and SAED in line with the NYSC Act for greater impact.

It is against this backdrop that this essay examines the achievements of Gen Ibrahim as Director General of the NYSC, using a descriptive approach and evidence -- based study. The paper argues that Gen Ibrahim has not only transformed the NYSC, but has also repositioned it to benefit the Corps Members, members of staff and indeed, the nation at large.

The assumption here is that leadership is a process of galvanising resources to attain group goals. Gen Ibrahim's leadership style has led to the transformation of the NYSC by strengthening the institution, in terms of welfare, security, innovations and technological advancement. Despite these laudable achievements, there have equally been

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challenges. The Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic threatened to derail the activities of the Scheme. As an astute administrator, he rose to the occasion through a robust coordinated response to manage the pandemic that has become a reference point and template for other establishments in the country.

Towards a Biography of General Ibrahim: Trends in his Academic, Military and Administrative Career

Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim (Associate Professor), was born on the 13th July, 1967 and hails from Nasarawa Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. He attended the famous University of Jos where he obtained Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in History (1989 and 1992 respectively), before proceeding to bag a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education from Tai Solar in University of Education, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State. Driven by his tenacity to acquire knowledge, he went on to obtain a Ph.D in History from the University of Abuja in 2007.

Since his commissioning into the Nigerian Army, he has served in various capacities in military formations across the country. His appointments and postings include: The Institute of Army Education (Research Officer). Researched and produced Nigerian Army Journals and Briefs for the Nigerian Army in particular, and the Military in general; NYSC (Military Assistant to the Director General) 1997-1999; Nigerian Defence Academy (Taught 100 and 200 Levels 2000-2004; National Defence College (Staff Officer I Military History 2004-2009; Headquarters Nigerian Army School of Education (Senior Instructor) 2009-2011; Commandant Command Secondary School, Suleja 2012-2014; Nigerian Defence Academy (Head of Department, History and War Studies), 2015-2018; and Registrar, Nigerian Army University, Biu, Borno State(2018-2019).

Brigadier General S Ibrahim is a scholar of high repute, who authored, co-authored, edited, co-edited and contributed articles/chapters to numerous books and academic Journals.

Despite his tight schedule, Brig Gen S Ibrahim still devotes time to academic work, including the supervision of students' thesis and

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dissertations, serving as Internal and External Examiner of Master's Students at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim was appointed 18th Director General of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and assumed the leadership of the Corps on 10th May, 2019. This ushered in a transformation era for the Scheme which has not only been a source of immense benefit to the Service Corps, but the entire country in general.

The General also had a cluster of completed courses in the military, and excelled in these courses. Brig Gen Ibrahim is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna. These feats in both military and academic trainings, as well as experience in service are what marked him out as a visionary, seasoned and ingenious administrator.

Since assumption of duty as the Director General of the NYSC, the media has been awash with burgeoning records of his strides. His vision for the Scheme informed his decision to roll out a five-point policy thrust, geared towards utilising the potentials of the Corps Members maximally. Since assumption of duty at the NYSC, his pragmatic leadership skill has set the Scheme on the path of rejuvenation and continuous relevance. Like his predecessors, he came up with robust and ambitious programmes, aimed at repositioning the Scheme as a self-sufficient and revenue -- generating government organisation.

This chapter will attempt an appraisal of the delivery of these specific goals by the administration of Gen S Ibrahim within a short period of two years, in spite of the huge challenges facing the Scheme.

Sustain effective utilisation of the potentials of Corps Members for optimal benefit.

The successful conduct of the 2019 NYSC Sports and Cultural Festivals is a remarkable achievement of the Director General in harnessing the

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huge potentials of the Corps Members for national development. The NYSC Sports and Cultural Festivals serve as one of the veritable avenues through which the Scheme promotes national unity, cultural integration, as well as showcasing the abundant talents of Corps Members in the areas of sports and culture for gainful employment in the sports and film industries. The Festivals were revived by the present management. The grand finale was held in Abuja. Not only that, measures were put in place to ensure that the event holds annually.

Another success of the NYSC Director General is the production of an NYSC movie titled "A Call to Service" currently undergoing post production work. Apart from its entertainment value, the movie is being packaged to create public awareness on the roles of stakeholders to the Scheme. These stakeholders include the three tiers of government, Corps employers, as well as serving and prospective Corps Members. Ultimately, the film will promote better understanding of the Scheme to the public, in addition to sensitising them on their expected roles to the Scheme.

Another noteworthy achievement of the Director General is the establishment of NYSC National Cultural Troupe. This initiative is to provide a veritable platform for Corps Members to develop their talents in drama and cultural dance, while also eliciting public support towards harnessing such talents through private and corporate patronage. Remarkably, the NYSC Cultural Troupe will also shore up the revenue base of the Scheme through its activities which will be commercialised.

In the same vein, the NYSC Director General has successfully organised a National Anti-Corruption Walk. This is in furtherance of the NYSC's contributions to the fight against corruption through the activities of the Corps Anti-Corruption and Integrity CDS Group. The programme involved the participation of thousands of Corps Members in the first ever nationwide rally/road walk organised by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development on 14th February, 2020.

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The Director-General personally joined the Corps Members and officials in Kano State for the rally, which was tagged “Nigerian Youths March Against Corruption.”

This action further boosted the commitment of the NYSC in eradicating corruption and promotion of good moral and ethical values in the country.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic nearly crippled the global socio-economic activities and did not spare the Scheme. The 2020 Batch “A” Orientation Course was suspended barely eight days into the programme. However, the ever resourceful and proactive Director General challenged the creative ingenuity of Corps Members who responded appropriately to the challenge by producing non-pharmaceutical intervention materials such as face-mask, liquid soap, alcohol - based hand sanitiser and donated same to the indigent populace across the length and breadth of the country.

Under the leadership of Gen Ibrahim, the NYSC has also carried out public awareness campaigns on containment measures for the dreaded virus. The initiative of the Director General was later adopted by some public institutions.

Another innovative contribution of the NYSC in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic is the fabrication of foot-operated water, liquid soap and hand sanitizer dispenser by individual Corps Members in several States.

For instance, Babatunde Dolapo Dayo and Sebe Godspower - Abia State; Abdullahi Sani - Kano; Abdulsalam Abubakar and Obiefuna Ebuka - Kwara; Adeyanju Adeyemi, Afolabi Victor, Ogunmoye Victor - Oyo and Onyekwere Chiwotaoke – Zamfara and Ilori Deborah - FCT were among the Corps Members that fabricated and donated the devices.

In addition, Corps Members, acting on the platform of Charity CDS/SDGs Group, have been contributing towards mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 at the grassroots, through the donation of food and

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other relief items to State and Local Governments, as well as indigent members of the society. These strategies by the Director General paved the way for the Scheme to obtain approval from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to resume full operations, especially the Orientation Course.

Relatedly, several Corps Members on teaching assignment also contributed towards sustaining the educational progress of their students by adopting virtual teaching approach while schools remained closed as a result of the pandemic.

As per the pursuit of a technologically-driven organisation to deepen effective service delivery, the Director-General recently conducted the first ever video conference with the 2021 Batch 'A' Stream 1 Corps Members in all the 37 Orientation Camps. It was an avenue to interface with thousands of Corps Members simultaneously, in line with COVID-19 safety protocols. He has sustained this initiative by periodically holding virtual meetings with serving Corps Members, as well as NYSC State Coordinators across the country.

It is gratifying to disclose that the Director General's interface with National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) has ensured the equipping of the NYSC Rivers Secretariat with computers by the agency. That singular gesture has in no small measure deepened the proficiency of Corps Members and staff members in the area of Information technology.

The Chief Executive introduced the inscription of date of birth on the Certificate of National Service and Exclusion Letter, beginning with the 2019 Batch "A" Corps Members and 2019 Batch "C" respectively. This is in a bid to check the manipulation of date of birth by ineligible persons seeking mobilisation for National Service, and it has had a positive effect in checkmating the falsification of records for employment, visa, political appointments, among others.

Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim conceptualised and designed a state-of-the-art ICT Office for the Scheme. The design had already been forwarded

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to the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) and Federal Ministry of Works and Housing for approval. The cost of construction was appropriated in the 2021 Budget, and the Scheme is awaiting the release of funds for its commencement.

Other laudable efforts by Gen Ibrahim to deepen effective service delivery include, the development of a Five-Year Strategic Development Plan for the Scheme, review of the NYSC Composite Policy Document and documentation of the activities of the Scheme, all aimed at positioning the Scheme as a research hub for academics and the general public.

Under his watch, the Federal Government drafted the NYSC into the Presidential Steering Committee on Alternate School Programme. The inclusion of the Corps in the Committee is in recognition of the invaluable contributions of the Scheme to national development, particularly in the sphere of Education.

NYSC is a repository of talents, parading the most enlightened class of Nigerian youths, who in forty - eight years of the Scheme's existence have continued to make varying degrees of multi-sectoral contributions to the growth and well-being of the nation.

Therefore, the inclusion of the Scheme, whose visibility has been top-notch in the last two years as member of the Mambila Hydro Power Project speaks on the high premium the Federal Government places on the Corps.

Undoubtedly, membership of these august bodies have clearly underscored the high pedestal the Director General has taken the Scheme in his two years of his eventful and remarkable administration.

In respect of improving the welfare and security of Corps Members and staff, in a rare demonstration of empathy and commitment to the welfare of Corps Members, the Director General personally visited and encouraged Corps Member Saidu Mohammed Adamu, who was admitted at the Federal Teaching Hospital, Ado-Ekiti, as a result of gunshot injuries that he sustained while on election duties during the

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recent bye-election held in Ekiti East Local Government Area of Ekiti State in March 2021.

Similar visits were also paid to several members of the Service Corps on admission in hospitals in Sokoto, Katsina, Edo, Plateau, Taraba and Kwara States, among others, following their involvement in road traffic accidents.

The Director General has also paid condolence and reassuring visits to the families of deceased and missing Corps Members in Plateau, Kaduna and Edo States. Such gestures have increased the confidence of Corps Members and their families in the Scheme, and have also engendered more zeal for patriotic service by the members of the Corps.

The Director General further demonstrated his commitment to Corps welfare by procuring prosthetic limbs for a Corps Member in furtherance of his welfare policy. The sum of Thirty-two Million Naira (N32,000,000.00) was expended to procure the limbs for Corps Member, Nuraddeen Tahir from Kano State, who, along with other Corps Members, was involved in a road traffic accident, while on his way to report for Primary Assignment after the 2019 Batch 'B' Stream 1 Orientation Course in Taraba State. The Corps Member, who had earlier lost an arm at a younger age, had the other one amputated as a result of the accident. The artificial limbs have already been supplied, while Nuraddeen was trained on the effective use of the limbs before he was re-united with his family. With this development, he can now effectively perform normal tasks such as writing with the limbs.

The Director General relentlessly pursued the issue of increment of Corps Members' allowance in the wake of approval of the new National Minimum Wage. His effort paid-off and the allowance of Corps Members was increased from Nineteen thousand, Eight hundred Naira (N19,800.00) to Thirty-three Thousand Naira (N33,000.00). Following the commencement of the payment of the new rate with effect from January 2020, the Director General along with the Honourable Minister

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of Youth and Sports Development and some representatives of Corps Members paid a “Thank-you” visit to His Excellency, the President and Commander-in-Chief, Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari GCFR on 6th February, 2020 at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Following improvement in the security situation in the country, the Director General sought for, and got approval from the Federal Government for a return to the earlier suspended ceremonial passing-out of Corps Members. Accordingly, the Passing-Out Ceremony of the 2019 Batch ‘A’ Corps Members was marked with colourful parades nationwide, thereby increasing the visibility of the NYSC.

The successful conduct of Orientation courses is also another achievement of the Director General as he oversaw the successful conduct of the 2019 Batch ‘B’ Streams I and II, as well as 2019 Batch ‘C’ Streams I and II Orientation Courses.

As a proactive measure, NYSC Management suspended the 2020 Batch ‘A’ Stream 1 Orientation Course just a week into the exercise as a deliberate effort to avert the spread of COVID-19 in the Orientation Camps. The commendable action equally brought to the fore his concern for the health and general well-being of Corps Members and staff.

In recognition of his efforts at curtailing the spread of COVID-19, Victims Support Funds (VSF), an organisation chaired by Lt Gen TY Danjuma donated 60,000 RDT test kits to the Scheme. The kits are used for the screening of prospective Corps Members and camp officials for COVID-19 in NYSC Orientation camps nationwide.

In his quest to expand the administrative structure of the Scheme, the Director General ensured the smooth take - off of the NYSC Area Offices, whose approval had earlier been secured by the immediate past administration of Gen Kazaure, one in each of the six geo-political zones of the country, headed by a Director on salary grade level 17. This feat

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has opened up more vacancies, allowing for posting of other cadre of staff alongside the Directors to man the Offices. The Area Offices are located in Kaduna (North West), Niger (North Central), Bauchi (North East), Enugu (South East), Osun (South West) and Delta (South South) have since taken off and have in no mean way boosted staff morale and operations of the Scheme.

In line with one of the cardinal points of his policy thrust, the Director General has been pursuing policies that are geared not only towards motivating staff, but also promoting industrial harmony in the Scheme. This has been aptly demonstrated through prompt payment of entitlements, capacity building programmes, as well as timely and transparent conduct of promotion examinations. During the 2020 Promotion Exercise for instance, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighteen (1,718) out of the Two Thousand One Hundred Fifty-One (2,151) officers that participated in the event were elevated to the next grade level after meeting the requirements stipulated in the Public Service Rules and NYSC Conditions of Service. Additionally, the 2021 Senior Staff Promotion Examination recorded a huge success. The impact of these promotion exercises has reinforced the commitment of staff to work for an enhanced performance.

Meanwhile, as Management strives to enhance the motivation of staff, much premium is laid on the need to have a highly disciplined workforce. In this regard, officers who commit infractions are reprimanded in line with the provisions of the Public Service Rules (PSR).

On strengthening the existing collaboration with critical stakeholders, on assumption of office, the Director General saw the dire need to sustain and strengthen the existing collaboration with critical stakeholders to garner more support and involve them in the management of the Scheme. He therefore embarked on advocacy visits to the stakeholders such as the former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, whose administration founded the Scheme. The Director-General has had interface with the 36 State Governors, the Governor of

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the Central Bank of Nigeria, heads of Security and Anti-Corruption Agencies, Federal Road Safety Corps, among other stakeholders. The impact of this initiative is the improvement already being achieved in stakeholders' support to the Scheme which is of great essence.

The Director General also addressed a meeting of the Nigeria Governors' Forum – the first of such engagement by any Chief Executive of the Scheme. He used the occasion of the meeting to appreciate the State Governors for their support to the Scheme, through various intervention projects in their respective States. He drew their attention to other areas that needed to be addressed, being part of the obligations of the State Governments to the Corps, as spelt out in the NYSC Act.

Consequently the hosting of the meeting of NYSC top Management with the representatives of State Governments and the Federal Capital Territory Administration, a fallout of the meeting with the Governor's Forum is aimed at strengthening the collaboration with the Scheme, with a particular focus on the discharge of the statutory obligations of the States and FCT to the NYSC, as spelt out in its enabling Act.

The impact of the meeting is profound, as several State Governments have made remarkable gestures in support of the Scheme. Prominent among them is the donation of two NYSC permanent Orientation camps by Edo and Anambra States, plans by the Lagos State Government to build a 14,000 -- capacity Orientation camp and the ongoing upgrading and rehabilitation of camp facilities in twenty five States, while the expansion of camp facilities has commenced in nine States to meet the 5,000 -- Corps Member and 500 -- course official -- capacity camp.

Other notable gains derived from the meeting include, constitution of functional NYSC State Governing Boards in seventeen States, with eighteen States enhancing the regular payment of state allowance to Corps Members, provision and upgrading of transit camps for Corps Members in thirty -- one states, provision of watertight security for Corps Members in all the States and the FCT, issuance of circulars by

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State Governments against the rejection of Corps Members, increased partnership with the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), provision of decent accommodation or payment of allowance in lieu of that to Corps Members and provision of office and residential accommodation by the States hosting the Headquarters of the Area Offices.

In Promoting NYSC/Media relations, the Director General has since assumption of duty, strived to strengthen the cordial relations the Scheme enjoys with the Media. This, he kick-started with his maiden chat with Editors, Bureau Chiefs and Youth Correspondents of various Media Organisations in the country on 15th August, 2019. Brig Gen S Ibrahim also paid courtesy visits to Media offices in Abuja, including the Headquarters of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Media Trust Limited and Leadership Group Limited. Similar visits with Director-General's directive were also made to Lagos Head Offices of The Punch, Daily Sun, The Nation newspapers, among others. He has consistently maintained his Media-friendly posture, thereby attracting wider publicity for the Scheme's activities.

To deepen and sustain the wide publicity that the Scheme has enjoyed, he has resuscitated the production and airing of the NYSC Half Hour programme on NTA International Channel 251 and Armed Forces Radio FM. So far, plans have reached an advanced stage to establish the first ever NYSC FM Radio that will be useful to adequately drive the publicity efforts of the Scheme and showcase its activities to Nigerians and the entire world.

The Director-General in furtherance of his transparent, inspirational and all-inclusive style of administration paid visits to some former Chief Executives of the Scheme. The gesture was aimed at appreciating their respective contributions to the development of Scheme when they were in the saddle of leadership, and also tap into their vast wealth of experience. The former Chief Executives appreciated the initiative as it was the first ever visit paid simultaneously to them.

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The maiden meeting with the Registrars of some Foreign Corps Producing Institutions was also held, having, uncovered the fraudulent activities of some tertiary institutions in Africa, especially in the West Africa sub region which have the penchant to issue questionable academic certificates to unqualified persons, who in turn present same to get mobilised for national service. The Director-General has commenced an aggressive fight against this menace which has earned him the commendation of the President, His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari GCFR, during his address at the 2018/2019 President's NYSC Honours Award Ceremony. Similar commendations were given to him by a broad spectrum of vice chancellors of some indigenous and foreign institutions, including the Honourable Minister of Education.

In addition to hosting the meeting with the Registrars, internal mechanisms have been put in place for easier detection of unqualified persons attempting to present themselves for mobilisation for service. As a result of the stance of Management, some of the foreign institutions are now volunteering to alert NYSC of suspected fraudulent practices by their students. Interestingly, out of over twenty thousand (20,000) persons who registered online as foreign-trained prospective Corps Members of the 2019 Batch 'C' Service Year, only three thousand, four hundred and twenty (3,420) turned up for the pre-mobilisation physical screening of their credentials.

To serve as a deterrent to others, sixty-five (65) unqualified persons arrested during the 2019 Batch 'B' Stream II Orientation Course in camps across the country are being prosecuted with some convictions already secured. These steps taken by Management have helped to create national awareness, especially on the need for parents and guardians to check the accreditation status of the institutions attended by their wards, and also monitor their academic progress.

The bold move by the Director General in sanitising the mobilisation process will also ensure that only well trained and competent persons occupy critical positions that will fast-track the development of the country.

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The Director-General has equally hosted a national sensitisation programme on the NYSC Act on 24th July, 2019 in Abuja. Prior to this, it was clear that many Nigerians were not aware of the provisions of the Act – a situation that has led to avoidable infractions. With the sensitisation, which is still on-going, organisations and individuals are now having better understanding of their obligations to the Scheme. In particular, cases of evasion and abscondment from Service, especially by the foreign-trained Nigerian graduates, are expected to reduce drastically.

Broadly looking at the reinvigoration of the NYSC ventures and skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programme in line with NYSC Act for greater impact, the Director General has been speaking passionately about his desire to make the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) Programme and NYSC Ventures Management Departments more functional.

To match words with actions, he has taken several steps towards reinvigorating the SAED programme, including, but not limited to the following:

- Renewal of commitment by the NYSC and Bank of Industry towards the resuscitation of empowerment of Corps entrepreneurs with business loans under the BOI-NYSC Graduate Empowerment Fund.
- Intensive monitoring of GEF beneficiaries.
- New collaboration with NIRSAL Microfinance Bank on empowerment of Corps entrepreneurs.
- New partnership with Unity Bank Plc on a programme named 'Allawee' aimed at empowering Corps members.
- Collaboration with British-American Tobacco Foundation on empowerment of Corps Members with agricultural skills and business trainings, farm internship, mentoring and farm input supplies.
- Hosting of the 2020 NYSC SAED Stakeholders meeting aimed at reviewing the programme implementation strategies, as well as

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- strengthening of existing partnerships and exploring new ones for further technical and material support.
- Pursuing the completion of the North West Skill Acquisition Centre in Kazaure, Jigawa State, this is now at advanced stage.
 - Commencement of work on the North Central Skill Acquisition Centre in Keffi, Nasarawa State.
 - Research-based collaboration with OAU-NACETEM sponsored by a Canadian Agency, International Development Research Centre on evaluation of the impact of SAED and reinvigorating it for greater impact.
 - Resuscitation of NYSC Water Factory and Bakery at NYSC Orientation Camp Kubwa. The NYSC Water Factory and Bakery were revived and revitalised by the Director-General immediately he assumed office, and these two ventures are now producing at full capacity. The water and bread produced in these ventures are being supplied to the FCT, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kaduna and Niger State Orientation camps and the general public. These ventures now generate revenue to the Scheme and help Corps Members acquire skills too.
 - Purchase of modern farm equipment for the four NYSC functional farms namely, NYSC Farm Kwali in FCT, Saminaka, Kebbi State, Dungulbi, Bauchi State and Iseyin Oyo State. Each of these farms now has tractors and other basic farm equipment.
 - The consistent support in terms of funding and staffing has increased the hectares under cultivation from 60 hectares to 160 hectares during the 2020 farming season.
 - Reclaiming of NYSC farmland at Ezillo which hitherto was collected by the Ebonyi State Government. Immediately after the reclaiming, tractor was purchased for farming operations at the Ezillo Farm.
 - The structure of Ventures Management Department was expanded which gave room for the promotion of staff, and has in no mean way motivated the staff members.

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- Registration of the two NYSC Garment Factories, Water Factory and Bakery with the Corporate Affairs Commission. Arising from the last Meeting of the NYSC Top Management with Representatives of State Governments, the Governors of Edo and Ekiti States announced the donation of land for the sitting of two garment factories which will boost the production of Corps Members' kit items.
- Developing partnership with relevant institutions such as International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA), NCRI, NCAM, ARMTI, NCAC etc. to enhance the productivity of NYSC Farms/Ventures among others.
- Resuscitation of moribund NYSC Feedmill, Lagos. The mill is now ready to start production of animal feeds.
- Construction of new poultry pen at NYSC farm Kwali, FCT.
- The Director General has met with the State Governors and other stakeholders with a view to securing land in all the States for agricultural production.

In addition to the above, twelve States have opened up their skills centres for the post camp training of Corps Members to further strengthen the skills and entrepreneurship training acquired in camp.

- The tremendous support given by the Director General has repositioned all the NYSC Ventures for greater revenue generation for the Scheme.

Interestingly, the Scheme paid into the national coffers over Two Hundred and Eighty Million Naira (N280,000,000.00) as internally generated revenue which is unprecedented in the annals of the Scheme.

The Director General who has introduced the use of name tags by every member of staff for easy identification, equally in an unprecedented move sought the help of the Federal Government in tackling the ecological challenges confronting some of the NYSC Orientation camps. Government granted the request through the deployment of Ecological

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Fund to tackle the menace. Eight camps have been approved as beneficiaries in the first phase of the intervention. Already, work is ongoing in Cross River, Taraba, FCT and Nasarawa Orientation camps.

In recognition of his service to the nation, Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim who has institutionalised Farewell Parade for outgoing NYSC Chief Executives - a novelty, has received numerous commendations and awards which include:

- Chief of Army Staff Award as the Overall Best Participant for 2013 NAEC Executive Management Course.
- Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) Special Recognition Award 2014.
- Award for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Public Service/Fellowship (FCAI) by Institute of Corporate Administration.
- Professional National Award (Historical Society of Nigeria HSN) and
- Chief of Army Staff Commendation Letter 2018.

Conclusion

The above discourse has given an insight on the achievements of General Shuaibu Ibrahim since becoming the Director General of the National Youth Service Corps. Within the last two years, the Scheme has made some giant strides owing to the pursuit of strict implementation of the Director General's five-point policy thrust. Therefore, the contributions of Brig Gen Ibrahim to the NYSC since his ascension into office cannot be overemphasised. These contributions are indeed remarkable, and will undoubtedly stand the test of time, having set the Scheme on growth trajectory and continuous relevance.

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Emeka -- Rems Mgbemena, Deputy Director and Head, Publications Division, Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 50+, Interviewed at Abuja, 15/3/21

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