

# POLITICS

## 2007 ELECTIONS: How security agencies fared

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**P**ERHAPS, Nigerians did not quite grasp the enormity of security preparedness by the Federal Government before the just concluded elections in the country. However, when it came, it was like a thunderbolt. Indications to this manifested during a seminar on 2007 elections entitled: 'The Security Challenges And The Rule Of Law', organised by the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Lagos State Council at the Airport Hotels in Ikeja. The Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero who was represented by the Assistant Inspector-General of Police in-charge of Zone 2, Mr. Israel Ajao surreptitiously threw a bombshell. He announced that 80,000 assorted guns and 32 million rounds of ammunition were to be made available to the Police by the Federal Government to enhance the Organisation's capability to handle threat to security before, during and after this year's election. Giving a breakdown, the Police boss said that 40,000 units of AK-47 rifle with 20 million rounds of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition, 30,000 units of K2 rifle with 10 million rounds of 5.5 x 45 ammunition and 10,000 units of Biretta pistol with four million rounds .9mm ammunition would be procured.

The Police boss went further to say that they had been organizing seminars and in-house workshops in order to enlighten personnel on their roles and responsibilities and that some relevant publications were being made available to the Force personnel. Aside the general training on the traditional Police duties, he also said that recruits were given specific instructions with regards to general conduct of elections and that the anti-riot units are also given intensive drills and training to prepare them for the election duties.

Though, while the Police was busy shouting itself hoarse on their readiness to ensure that there were no security breach during the election, little attention was paid to the role of the Military during the very important exercise, which is the first time that the country is transitioning from a one civilian regime to another. With a barrage of criticisms trailing the announcement of procurement of huge arms and ammunition by the Police on the grounds that the country was not going to war, indications soon emerged that soldiers would also be used in providing surveillance during the elections. The chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Maurice Iwu personally confirmed that when he told a gathering of representatives of the country's security operatives at Sheraton Hotels in Ikeja,



\*Obasanjo: Admits lapses during polls.



\*Iwu: Says we're improving.



\*Ehindero: Ensured all hands were on deck.

Lagos that all hands should be on deck in ensuring that peace and order reigned in the country during the exercise.

On the eve of the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, both the Police and military held special meetings where they marshaled out strategies for the elections. By 12 midnight, heavily armed soldiers in war mood were stationed at strategic places all over the country. States that were considered volatile probably because of the tense political situation, got more than they bargained for as battle-ready soldiers in military fatigue uniforms mounted road blocks in almost every nook and cranny of the capitals and other towns. In Lagos, troops were seen being transported with military trucks from one point to another. On their part, the police sent out stern-looking anti-riot mobile men to monitor activities all over the state and beyond.

Earlier in the day, opposition parties like the Action Congress (AC) had raised alarm that security agents were carrying out indiscriminate arrest of prominent members of the Party. They accused their rival party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of orchestrating the massive arrests with the intention of harassing and intimidating their loyalists. The situation seemingly got out of hand when it was announced that some security aids to Governor Bola Tinubu of Lagos State were whisked off to Abuja over an undisclosed offence.

However, in spite of these preparations by security agents including the Military and the Police, the elections were characterized by massive violence in states like Edo, Oyo, Ogun, Enugu, Anambra, Lagos, Delta, Osun, Rivers and others as voters were protesting many irregularities during the conduct. These protests led

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to the imposition of curfew in some states like Osun, Kogi, Ondo, Bauchi etc. Some governorship aspirants like Comrade Adams Oshomole of the AC in Edo State was arrested. Party Chieftains from Ebonyi State like Chief Ogbonnaya Onu and Chief Chima Udeh, the ANPP and PPA candidates suffered the same fate over disturbances at Ohaozara Local Government area of the state.

The violence took a different dimension particularly in Edo State where an official of INEC was set ablaze while the PDP Secretariat was razed. Three persons were feared dead while several others were seriously injured following protests over the declaration of Prof. Osunbor as the winner of the election. Curfew was imposed in Kogi State following the declaration of Governor Ibrahim Idris of the PDP and as the winner of the election. The imposition of curfew soon spread to other states like, Osun, Bauchi, Ondo etc while the Inspector-General of Police who was visibly worried by the escalation of violence not only placed a ban on street protests but issued a shoot-on-sight order at arsonists in some of the states.

In Makurdi, Benue State, there was palpable tension as hundreds of supporters of All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) staged a peaceful protest at the Benue State office of INEC demanding the release of the results of the governorship and state House of Assembly elections. Worse still, unknown gunmen stormed the Makurdi residence of ANPP governorship candidate, Prof. Daniel Saror and killed one of his aides. The gun men had arrived a few minutes to noon and were sighted by the ANPP candidates' gate men who were suspicious of their movement as they drove around in the high brow area. The gun men were said to have taken advantage of the arrival of one of the drivers of Saror to enter the premises. The driver had hardly driven into the gate when the gun men rushed into the residence. One of them then opened fire on the group of people standing within the compound, hitting Saror's aide identified as Samuel Yongo in the stomach.

The same tension prevailed in Adamawa State over the disqualification of the gubernatorial candidate of the Action Congress (AC), Alhaji Ibrahim Bapetel. In

Enugu State, soldiers horsewhipped elder statesman and octogenarian former Governor of the State, Chief C.C. Onoh and many other prominent citizens of the state as they were demanding to see the Resident Electoral Commissioner in the state, Abdul Bulama following alleged irregularities perpetrated by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Enugu State case was particularly programmed for violence after security officials refused to heed genuine calls by members of the opposition parties that all vital electoral materials were hijacked to an unknown place while fake ones were distributed. Chief Onoh who led the protest with some elder statesmen including former Ministers in the state to the INEC headquarters was horsewhipped by stern-looking soldiers, armed to the teeth, who barricaded the entrances to the Commission's office. A bullet fired into Onoh's vehicles missed its mark and shattered the glasses. At a stage, the whereabouts of the governorship candidate for the Action Congress in the state, Chief Dubem Onyia who collapsed after inhaling balls of tear-gas and was revived minutes later by his supporters, remained unknown.

In Imo State, many colours of protests over cancellation of polls reared its ugly head. INEC had earlier cancelled election into the governorship race in the state citing violence in some local councils. One person was killed in what INEC officials tagged acts of lawlessness. The story was the same in Ogun where protests greeted the re-election of Governor Gbenga Daniel. As soon as he was declared the winner, some youths in Oke-Sokori, Abeokuta suspected to be supporters of ANPP mobilized themselves with sticks and stones, took to the streets, chanting war songs.

A few meters away from President Olusegun Obasanjo's Ita-Eko private residence the youths lighted bonfires, with used tyres on Sokorilbara road. Their militant attitude kept residents in the area indoors and motorists avoided the routes. About 15 armed policemen later rushed to the area but as they were advancing, the protesters started hauling stones at them. The policemen who were later joined by soldiers responded by releasing canisters of teargas at them. Sanity was restored later.

In many parts of Delta State, the elections were marred by violence. No fewer than 11 people were feared killed in clashes among party supporters. In Delta Central Senatorial district, seven persons were killed in the zone. The violence was not unconnected with alleged shoddy handling of the poll by INEC in the district, which by 12 noon could not get its officials to most polling stations where people had queued since 8am to vote but could not find the Commission's officials. The highest number of casualties was in Orhuwhorun road in Udu area, at the palatial home of PDP stalwart known as Pogo where seven persons were confirmed killed and two others severely wounded in protracted gun duel between PDP loyalists and those of opposition parties. All the buildings in the estate were burnt down. In the same vein, five persons were reportedly killed while several others sustained serious injuries during the polls in Osun State, however Police authorities in the state claimed there were no casualties. It was gathered that trouble started immediately after the commencement of the exercise in Ila-Orangun, the home town of the National Chairman of Action Congress, Chief Adebisi Akande between hi

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party's supporters and those of the PDP. Before calm could be restored in the town, five persons had reportedly lost their lives. So far, five of the 100 persons who were arrested at different locations in connection with the incident and kept in police custody had reportedly died in police cell. A detachment of soldiers from 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Division of the Nigerian Army, Odogbo, Ibadan, Oyo State sent to maintain law and order effected the arrest. The suspects died when they could not withstand series of torture they were subjected to by the investigating police officers. Earlier when all the

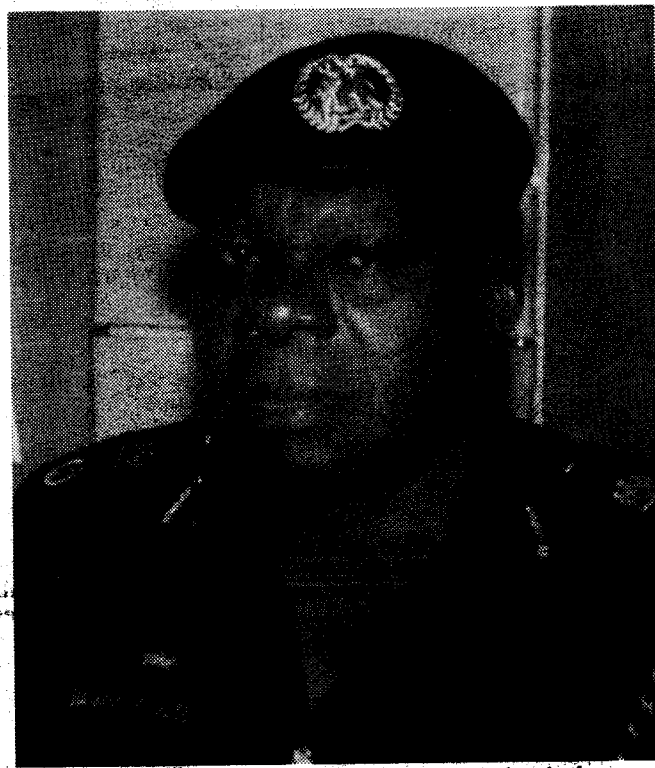
suspects appeared in court, one of them had bullet in his right hand and was writhing in pains in the courtroom. The second person had bullet in his chest which was yet to be extracted; it had been there since Monday, April 16, 2007 when they were picked up by security operatives. Some of the suspects still in custody are expected to sit for the Senior School Certificate Examinations which will kick off next week in the country.

During the Presidential and National Assembly elections which was concluded last Saturday, the orgy of protests and violence remained unabated. In Adamawa, a group of thugs who were protesting late arrival of voting materials stopped Governor Boni Haruna from performing his civic duties. In Kwara State, over 50 anti-riot policemen were drafted to the house of AC Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Rasaki Gidado following an attack on his house by people suspected to be political thugs. About five persons were said to have sustained serious injuries with properties worth several thousands of naira allegedly vandalized by the thugs. In Ogun State, some suspected political thugs also destroyed voting materials meant for the elections. The incident occurred at the Ward 15, Ibara, Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State. An attempt by the thugs to snatch a ballot box led to wastage of the entire votes cast in the centre at the polling booth behind OPIC Headquarters building at Oke-Ilewa area of the state capital. Six thugs armed with dangerous weapons had arrived in an unmarked 605 Peugeot car and tried to overpower the INEC officials at the centre. Attempts to prevent them from carting away the ballot box led to spewing of ballot papers on the ground, thus causing damage on them. The thugs escaped before security officials came to rescue the situation.

The Inspector-General of Police who was addressing a post election conference at Force headquarters in Abuja disclosed that during the elections, 20 persons lost



\*Adebayo, Former Lagos CP: Redeployed before the polls.



\*Azeez: New Lagos CP: Brought in to maintain law and order.

their lives, 30 were injured, 300 arrested in relation to election violence, while 100 cases of offences such as, snatching of boxes, using under-aged voters were recorded by the police. He also said that 25 assorted arms were recovered from hoodlums around the country. Reports also show that about 30 policemen lost their lives during the exercise while over 40 civilians died. Security operatives had earlier foiled attempts to burn down INEC headquarters at Maitama area of Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. A tanker loaded with explosives raised security consciousness around the commission's building. The attackers had attempted to roll the unmanned tanker into the building but the vehicle missed its target, crashed into a lamp post and came to a halt. Although, there was a small fire, the detonators failed to trigger a large explosion.

On the part of the soldiers who were drafted to do surveillance duties, some of them ended up making significant inroad into armed robbers den and even made arrests. In Surulere area of Lagos State, a troop from the 9 Brigade on election duty succeeded in arresting two armed robbers who invaded a church and robbed worshippers around 12 mid night. Army Public Relations Officer, Captain EM Adeniyi said his men exhibited gallantry by dealing with the dare-devils.

While winners of the election are jubilating and losers are gearing up for next time, the question on every lip is whether the tight security arrangements witnessed during the elections would be sustained for the benefit of all.

But the entire Police Force, right from its number one man, the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero to the least rank, will no doubt be heaving sighs of relief following the conclusion of the so much talked

about 2007 general elections. This is because the Police whose statutory duties and responsibilities as spelt out in section 4 of Police Act 1968 to be: The prevention and detection of crime; the apprehension of offenders; preservation of law and order; protection of lives and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations which they are directly charged. One of such regulations, include to ensure a violence free polls during the just concluded elections.

Before the elections, there were threats of thunder and brimstone from the various parties, should the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in anyway, try to rig the elections. Nigeria was literally sitting on a time-bomb ready to explode any moment. The situation no doubt, created trepidation, and fear of the unknown in the minds of every Nigerian. Not wanting to leave anything to chance, religious bodies in the country embarked on prayers for successful polls. Prior to the elections, there were public sensitization activities which were unusually high, especially during the campaign rallies, with different people supporting different parties. Unfortunately, some of the campaign rallies were marred by attacks from opposition parties, therefore signaling an inevitable crisis ahead.

Thus, the role of the Police in such situation became so important because without adequate security or a politically impartial and peaceful policing environment, the quality of service rendered by electoral officials to voters will be unsatisfactory and could cause voters to sit back in their homes and damn voting.

Sensing the danger that lurked ahead if steps were not taken to check the possible breach of the peace in the country, the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, swung into action

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and summoned his top officers to several round table meetings to re-strategise security measures during elections.

Also, several workshops aimed at ensuring a smooth transition process in Nigeria were organised by INEC. Participants who spanned all sectors of the country and various walks of life, were adequately equipped for a hitch-free 2007 general elections. The participants who included representatives from the Military, the Police, the Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration Service, Federal Road Safety Commission, Nigeria Civil Defense Corp and other stakeholders displayed a good chunk of determination tailored towards free and fair election.

In one of the workshops held at the Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja, Lagos, the Inspector-General of Police, assured of Police preparedness towards the elections. Ehindero who recalled during the occasion that past elections in Nigeria were characterized by irregularities, called on representatives of the

security agencies present to shun any act of rigging, admitting that: "a free and fair election is important in the context of good governance, stability and peace of our nation. A free and fair election has the potential of opening up new opportunities for improved democratic processes."

Ehindero who went further to warn political thugs, trouble makers, election riggers and their would-be sponsors to desist from doing so during the elections, threatened to deal decisively with anyone or group that violated electoral laws in the course of the elections.

Before the election, there were allegations and reports of a possible manipulation of the Police by President Olusegun Obasanjo. But in order to assuage this fear, the Police Commission effected a major shakeup in the Force which witnessed the posting of all Commissioners of Police (CPs) to other state commands. This, as gathered, was to avoid a situation whereby any of the CPs would be used as agents of rigging by the state governors. Also, in the respective state commands, all the Area Commanders were posted to other area commands other than where they had hitherto been while on the part of the Divisional Police officers, they were all posted to different divisions just two days to the elections and were expected to return to their respective divisions after the election.

On the part of the Lagos State Command, which was reported to be one of the volatile states, a Quick Intervention Units (QIU) was established by the command boss, Mr. Bashiru Azeez at the eight area commands in the state, with a unit of the Mobile Force attached to each area command and some standby at the state's headquarter, Ikeja. The CP declared war against political thuggery and violence.

Prior to the gubernatorial

elections, all party candidates were invited by the former state's Commissioner of Police, Mr. Emmanuel Adebayo where they were warned against the use of thugs while he spelt out the dos and don'ts to the electorate.

### Election Day

It would be commendable to state the effort of the Police during the general elections, as their presence including those of other security agencies were felt in all the states. But on the other hand, one may be tempted to raise an eye brow on the activities of the security agencies, following their inability to arrest culprits of some reported cases of snatched ballot papers and the hijacked of some ballot boxes. For example, the case of some ballots boxes allegedly found in the home of a PDP member at Odo-Ona-Elewe, Ibadan by men of the State Security Service seemed to have been swept under the carpet as nothing has been done concerning the issue since it was reported.

Also, nothing seemed to have been heard of the reported interception of a truck filled with thumb-printed ballot papers in Kaduna, on the eve of the presidential elections. The truck with plate number AA 765 FKA which was intercepted by some Army officers, who were drafted to check points was said to have driven the truck and the 20 passengers in it to One Mechanized Division of the Nigerian Army. As expected, the suspects and the exhibits ought to have been handed over to the Police for further investigation and necessary sanction. But sadly, nothing has been heard further about it till date and this again goes further to justify the cry of lack of confidence in the security agencies by members of other political parties. Also in Lagos and other parts of the country, there were reported cases of snatching of ballot boxes in public glare and in the presence of policemen at different polling stations. Though there were pockets of arrest of ballot boxes in some parts of Lagos State and some arrest during the gubernatorial and Presidential elections.

Elections have come and gone with the exception of a bye-election in some of state and the postponement of the senatorial elections, following the non-inclusion of some of the parties on the voting sheets, accusation and counter accusation have continued to trail the election which many alleged was rigged. Candidates of other parties also expressed failure on the part of the law enforcement agencies which they alleged were used by the present administration and incumbent governors of some of the states to rig the elections. On whether these claims are true or not, posterity will definitely judge in future.