Reforming Electoral Policing in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities in The Wake of the 2023 Elections

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Abstract. Electoral policing in Nigeria has long been a significant concern due to its intricate historical and socio-political landscape. The 2023 elections further underscored the urgent need for reform, as issues such as corruption, inadequate training, and political interference persistently undermined the electoral process's integrity. This essay critically analyses the opportunities and problems brought to light by the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The study uses a purposive sampling technique to conduct interviews with 45 selected stakeholders as part of its qualitative analysis methodology. Using a variety of relevant information sources, such as newspapers, textbooks, online resources, and first-hand field observations, this design makes it easier to draw broad conclusions. Expert opinions on politics, security, and law are also included in the study to enhance it. By employing both theoretical frameworks and empirical data, the study explores the structural weaknesses and strength within Nigeria's policing system and proposes reforms aimed at strengthening democracy and governance. It also evaluates the critical role of professionalism and impartiality within the police force and suggests comprehensive reforms to address these structural and operational deficiencies, ensuring free and fair elections in the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, a series of elections have shaped the country's political trajectory, with elections conducted in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and most recently in 2023. While these elections have been instrumental in sustaining democracy, they have also been characterised by recurring issues such as electoral malpractice, violence, voter intimidation, and allegations of fraud (Adekeye & Chima, 2022). These problems persist, casting a shadow over the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process.

The 2023 general elections were marked by widespread reports of electoral violence, with accusations of involvement from the ruling political class (Daxecker & Rauschenbach, 2023). This exacerbated the long-standing challenges of electoral policing in Nigeria. Historically, electoral security has been undermined by a policing system that suffers from weak institutional capacity, political interference, and a lack of public trust.

The role of the police during elections is pivotal O'Shea (2022), as they are charged with maintaining order and ensuring a peaceful voting environment. According to, Nigeria's police force has been widely criticised for inefficiency, a lack of neutrality, and susceptibility to political influence, all of which came to the fore once again during the 2023 elections (Oni et al., 2025). This article examines the state of electoral policing in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges impeding reforms and the opportunities for improving the system. The central argument is that comprehensive reforms in electoral policing are essential to strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria (Ebajemito, 2025). Through a review of relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data from the 2023 elections, this study provides recommendations for reforming Nigeria's electoral policing system.

1.1. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically assess the challenges facing electoral policing in Nigeria and to explore potential reforms that could enhance the effectiveness and impartiality of the Nigerian Police Force during elections.

1.2. The Objectives Are To

- Identify the key challenges affecting electoral policing in Nigeria.
- Assess the role of political interference, corruption, and public distrust in shaping electoral policing practices.
- Evaluate the opportunities for reforming electoral policing in the aftermath of the 2023 elections.
- Propose recommendations for improving the operational efficiency, accountability, and neutrality of the Nigerian Police Force in future elections.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a critical aspect of Nigeria's electoral process policing. Electoral violence and insecurity have long undermined Nigeria's democracy, and the role of the police in mitigating or exacerbating these issues is crucial. By focusing on the 2023 election, this study offers timely insights into the current state of electoral policing and identifies concrete opportunities for reform (Lambe & Mubarak, 2023). These insights could be beneficial to policymakers, electoral bodies, and civil society organisations seeking to improve electoral security and enhance democratic governance in Nigeria.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Policing and Electoral Security in Nigeria

Electoral security refers to measures taken to protect the integrity of the electoral process, ensuring that elections are conducted freely, fairly, and peacefully. In Nigeria, the role of the police is vital in maintaining electoral security. However, studies have consistently shown that Nigeria's police force is often perceived as being complicit in electoral violence and manipulation. Scholars such as Amin et al. (2024) and argue that political interference, underfunding, and poor training have contributed to the ineffectiveness of electoral policing in Nigeria.

Electoral misconduct, including vote-buying, ballot snatching, and violence, is exacerbated by the lack of accountability within the policing system (Arusei et al., 2024). The literature suggests that systemic corruption and the politicisation of the police force have rendered the institution ill-equipped to ensure free and fair elections. Furthermore, state that, the reliance on ad hoc security measures during elections, such as the deployment of military personnel, has led to questions about the independence and neutrality of electoral policing.

2.2. Electoral Policing in Nigeria

Electoral policing is an essential element of securing the integrity of elections, particularly in fragile democracies like Nigeria. Studies and highlight the problematic nature of Nigeria's electoral policing, with recurring issues of political interference, underfunding, and poor training (Thompson et al., 2022). Nigeria's police force, due to systemic corruption and inefficiency, has often been unable to maintain neutrality during elections, leading to widespread public distrust.

Electoral misconduct in Nigeria has been linked to a lack of institutional capacity within the police to respond effectively to electoral violence and other forms of electoral fraud (Okorie, 2024). The literature also points to the need for structural reforms, particularly in the areas of training, resourcing, and accountability, as crucial for improving the role of the police in future elections.

2.3. Challenges of Electoral Policing

A key challenge to electoral policing in Nigeria is the lack of public trust (Tiwa, 2024). According to, the police are often viewed as partisan actors who serve the interests of powerful political elites rather than the electorate. This perception weakens the legitimacy of elections and undermines confidence in democratic institutions (Archer & Cawston, 2021). Moreover, the logistical challenges of policing elections in a country as vast and diverse as Nigeria cannot be overstated. The police are often under-resourced and ill-prepared to manage the complexities of electoral security in both urban and rural areas.

2.4. Challenges of Reforming Electoral Policing

Political interference remains one of the most significant barriers to reforming electoral policing in Nigeria. notes that political elites often influence police operations during elections to advance their interests, compromising the independence of law enforcement. According to Ojedokun and Aderinto (2024), Historically, both overt and covert politicization have been major features of the Nigeria Police Force's (NPF) operations. Political parties have a variety of effects on law enforcement in the NPF, at macro and micro levels, and under a range of circumstances. Police officers are routinely used by politicians and the ruling class to achieve their political goals, and systematic politicization and power struggles are frequently reflected in the NPF's management and operational philosophy among competing factions (Nwangwu et al., 2018). The politicization of the NPF thus significantly reduces its overall efficiency in providing its services. Moreover, officers are unable to react to electoral violence effectively due to a lack of resources and insufficient training, which further reduces the effectiveness of electoral policing.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in institutional theory and structural theory, both of which are pivotal to understanding the challenges of electoral policing in Nigeria. Institutional theory asserts that the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies is shaped by the formal and informal institutions within which they operate (Iyamba & Yusuf, 2025). In Nigeria, institutional weaknesses, including poor governance, corruption, and political interference, have significantly undermined the capacity of the police to maintain electoral integrity. These factors contribute to operational inefficiencies that hinder effective policing during elections.

Complementing this is the structural theory which emphasizes the importance of perceived fairness, transparency, and accountability in law enforcement. According to this theory, public trust in the police is contingent on the belief that officers act impartially and uphold justice (Muntingh et al., 2021). In the context of Nigeria's electoral process, this means that reforms must not only improve institutional structures but also ensure that the police are perceived as fair and neutral actors.

By integrating these two frameworks, this study argues that successful reform of electoral policing in Nigeria must address both the institutional barriers that inhibit police independence and the public's perception of the police as transparent and accountable enforcers of the law.

2.6. The Empirical Studies

While there have been some advancements, such as the use of technology to lessen fraud, many of the problems with electoral policing remained in 2023. There were numerous instances of violence, intimidation, and irregularities, especially in rural areas, according to reports from election observer missions. The police were frequently criticized for their failure to stop or adequately respond to these incidents (CDD).

According to Sibe and Kaunert (2022), electoral security during Nigeria's general elections in 2023 was a major issue and some difficulties with regard to electoral security. On the one hand, technological advances have reduced certain types of electoral misconduct. However, the police's involvement in these elections continued to be problematic. Numerous states have reported electoral violence incidents, with police officers allegedly actively participating in voter intimidation or watching passively.

In Arriola et al. (2021), According to data from reports by election observers, the 2023 elections demonstrated progress in some areas, but the election's policing was uneven and occasionally tainted by political interests. Empirical data indicates that police were frequently used inefficiently and occasionally did not have the tools needed to address violent incidents.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative method of data collection, drawing from primary and secondary sources. Key informants with whom structured interviews were used to gather primary data were police officers, representatives of the electoral commission, and civil society organizations involved in election monitoring. Additional data was sourced from reports by election observers, academic journals, and media reports (Macdonald & Molony, 2023). The qualitative design of the electoral police service in Nigeria has enabled it to understand both opportunities and challenges that can be thoroughly understood thanks to the Nigerian electoral police. The thematic analysis of the data concentrated on important topics like public trust, political interference, and the effectiveness of election security measures.

3.1. Population

The population for this study consists of key stakeholders in the electoral process, including police officers, members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society organisations, traditional rulers, political parties, NYSC, Journalist and electoral observers.

3.2. Sample Size

The study employs a purposive sampling technique, selecting a sample of 45 participants. These include 10 police officers, 5 INEC officials, 5 representatives from civil society organisations, 14 NYSC, 2 journalist, 2 traditional rulers, 4 political parties and 2 electoral observers.

3.3. Data Collection Process

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, providing in-depth insights into the challenges of electoral policing and the potential for reform. The interviews were conducted face-to-face on the availability and location of the respondents.

3.4. Search Strategy

Google Scholar, JSTOR, Research Gate, and the Wiley Online Library were among the academic databases that were thoroughly searched in order to find pertinent literature on electoral policing in Nigeria. "electoral policing", ""Nigeria elections", and "police reform."

3.5. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study focused on Nigeria's electoral policing and reform efforts, particularly those examining elections post-1999, the Key informants who had experience and insights related to the research topic and were willing to participate were included (Paniagua, 2022). However, articles that did not specifically address electoral policing or focused on non-electoral security challenges were excluded, as were potential participants who, despite their qualifications and expertise, declined to participate due to the sensitivity of their positions.

3.6. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was performed on the data, coding and analyzing recurrent themes like public trust, corruption, political meddling, and police training in light of existing literature. A qualitative approach was used to capture the respondents' complex views (Malodia et al., 2021). A comprehensive understanding of the topic was obtained by synthesising the findings, and conclusions were drawn from the interviews. This interactive approach made sure that the analysis was exhaustive, objective, and representative of the state of the field's research at the time.

3.7. Categorisation of the Participants

Participants' numbers and various designations are displayed in Table 4 point 1. The names of the participants were substituted with codes to maintain their anonymity. To bolster the study's argument, the exact words from the interview transcript were used.

Table 1: Participants Designation, Number of Participants, and Assigned Codes.

Designation	Number of participants	Code
INEC	5	IN
Traditional King	2	K
Lawyers	4	L
Non-governmental organisation	2	NG
National Youth Corp member (Group 1)	7	NYF1
National Youth Corp member (Group 2)	7	NYF2
Party chairman	2	PL
Party secretary	2	PS
Nigerian Police	10	P
Journalists	3	J

3.8. The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Nigerian Police Force In Managing Electoral Security, as Observed by Participants

1. Strengths: A visible police presence was identified as crucial for deterring electoral violence, with participants IN1, NY6F1 and J3 noting that the deployment of personnel at polling stations helps to maintain order and reassure voters. The importance

of specialised training and collaboration with other agencies was also emphasised, as these enhance the police force's capacity to enforce electoral laws effectively. Participants IN3 by Musa (2019), IN5 and P5 also stressed the significance of public trust in law enforcement, which promotes cooperation during elections. International partnerships were also recognised as valuable in strengthening police capabilities.

2. Weaknesses: Participants IN2, K1 and NY6F1 highlighted political interference as a major challenge, with external pressures compromising the neutrality of law enforcement. Resource constraints, including insufficient personnel, outdated equipment, and allegations of corruption, further impede the police's effectiveness in managing electoral security. Poor communication and coordination within the police force were also identified as barriers to swift and effective responses to security threats. Finally, negative public perceptions of the police, fuelled by allegations of inefficiency and corruption, undermine public confidence in their ability to prevent electoral violence.

In Studies and Abdi and Hashi (2024), discuss the challenges of corruption and inefficiency within the policing system, highlighting their impact on public perception. Additionally, research by Olowojolu et al. (2019) and address concerns about the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in preventing electoral violence, resonating with the observations of participants. These findings underscore the importance of addressing public perceptions and building trust in the policing system to enhance its effectiveness in preventing electoral violence. While the Nigerian police force demonstrates strengths in visibility Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), significant challenges such as political interference, resource limitations, and negative public perceptions must be addressed to ensure effective electoral policing reform in Nigeria.

3.9. Challenges And Constraints the Police Face in Safeguarding the Election Process

According to the study, Nigeria's policing system faces serious structural and resource-related issues, notably its lack of autonomy, accountability, and sufficient funding. Insufficient funding, personnel, and equipment limit the police's ability to effectively prevent electoral violence, as participants PL2, PS1, P5, and J2 stressed. Political interference and a lack of accountability are further jeopardizing law enforcement agencies' impartiality and effectiveness, according to participants IN2, K1, NY6F2, PS1, PL2, J2, and P3.

Calls for urgent reforms underscore the necessity to address these systemic deficiencies, enhance accountability, and improve resource allocation (Abbas & Miller, 2025). In addition, the study emphasizes the value of advanced training and professionalism, pointing out that the current approaches are inadequate to address the unique problems caused by electoral violence. In addition to resource limitations, participants IN1, NY6F2, K2, L3, PS1, PL2, P3, and J3 said that police corruption undermines public confidence and reduces the efficacy of law enforcement.

One of the legal and governance concerns highlighted is the need for a more robust legal framework to guarantee accountability and prevent violence. In order to ensure cultural relevance and modernization, NY6F7, K2, IN1, L3, J2, PS1, and PL2 support more localized policing, addressing past legacies and present shortcomings (Oghogho et al., 2024). These insights highlight the urgent need for extensive reforms to guarantee fair and efficient law enforcement during elections.

3.10. Incidents Highlighting the Need for Police Reform

Participants IN1, NY6F1, K2, L3 and J3 highlighted various aspects of corruption, misconduct, and inadequacies within the police force, contributing to challenges in preventing electoral violence. These include instances of police brutality, bias, discrimination, and a lack of accountability, exacerbated by security threats such as election violence and insurgency.

The participants identified several critical issues affecting the Nigerian police force's ability to manage electoral violence effectively. Widespread corruption within the police force undermines public trust and confidence, leading to inefficiencies in preventing violence. Instances of police brutality, excessive force, and extrajudicial killings were noted, with participants IN2, K1, L3, NG2 and J1 calling for reforms to ensure adherence to the rule of law. Inadequate training and resources were highlighted as major challenges, with outdated methods and insufficient equipment contributing to inefficiencies in addressing modern security threats.

Ethnic and religious bias within the police force were also noted, exacerbating social tensions and undermining public trust (Blair et al., 2021). The lack of accountability for police misconduct further perpetuates violence and impunity, eroding confidence in law enforcement. Moreover, the numerous security challenges facing Nigeria, including insurgency, banditry, and communal violence, complicate the police's ability to prevent electoral violence effectively.

The study calls for comprehensive reforms to address these multifaceted issues. Previous research supports these findings, that the problem of election rigging is one of the biggest obstacles that Nigeria's electoral process is now confronting (Grace et al., 2023). This often manifests as voter manipulation and intimidation, with political thugs being deployed to intimidate voters and disrupt the electoral process while police officers stand by, failing to intervene. Moreover, incumbency frequently plays a significant role in elections, with those in office using their positions of power to influence the electoral outcome (Frantzeskakis & Park, 2022).

4. RESULTS

The findings of this study indicate that the reform of electoral policing in Nigeria is hindered by several entrenched challenges, including:

- Political Interference: Police officers often operate under political influence, which compromises their neutrality and effectiveness in ensuring electoral security (Bhatnagar, 2025).
- Lack of Training and Resources: Many officers deployed for election duties lack the necessary training in crowd control, conflict management, and election-specific policing, which exacerbates the risk of violence.
- Corruption: Corruption within the police force remains a significant barrier to reform. Officers are frequently accused of accepting bribes and turning a blind eye to electoral malpractices.
- Public Distrust: The lack of trust between the public and the police undermines the effectiveness of electoral policing. Citizens are reluctant to report incidents of violence or misconduct to the police, fearing retribution or indifference.

4.1. Solutions

Despite these challenges, the study also identifies opportunities for reform, including the potential for greater collaboration

between the police, civil society, and electoral bodies (Dad & Khan, 2023). Technological innovations, such as the use of real-time monitoring systems, can also enhance transparency and accountability in electoral policing.

4.2. Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to the post-2023 election context, focusing specifically on the challenges and opportunities for reforming electoral policing (Singh, 2022). The study does not address broader issues of law enforcement reform in Nigeria, such as general crime prevention or anti-corruption efforts outside of the electoral process.

4.3. Limitations of the Study

While this study on Reforming Electoral Policing in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities in the Wake of the 2023 Elections offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations.

- Scope of the Study: The study is primarily focused on the 2023 elections, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to future or past elections in Nigeria. The dynamic nature of political and institutional contexts means that challenges identified in the 2023 elections might evolve in subsequent elections.
- Data Constraints: The study relies heavily on qualitative data from interviews and secondary sources. The lack of comprehensive quantitative data, such as official crime or violence statistics specific to electoral periods, limits the ability to provide an extensive empirical analysis of electoral policing performance.
- Access to Key Stakeholders: Access to some critical stakeholders, such as high-ranking police officers or political elites, was limited. This may have constrained the study's ability to capture a complete picture of electoral policing challenges, particularly from the perspectives of those directly involved in decision-making and policy implementation.
- Potential Bias in Responses: Participants in the study, particularly police officers and government officials, may have offered responses influenced by social desirability bias or fear of repercussions. This could affect the reliability of the data, especially on sensitive issues such as corruption and political interference.
- Time Frame: The focus on the immediate aftermath of the 2023 elections means that long-term effects of reforms, or lack thereof, were not fully assessed. Electoral reform is an ongoing process, and this study does not account for potential future developments or sustained reforms.
- Regional Variations: Nigeria's political and security landscape is highly diverse across its regions. This study does not fully explore the regional variations in electoral policing challenges, which may differ significantly between urban and rural areas, or between the northern and southern regions.

These limitations highlight the need for further research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of electoral policing reforms in Nigeria and to broaden the scope of the study to include more diverse data sources and perspectives.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The police should be guided by and adhere to appropriate principles, regulations, codes of ethics, and laws governing their duties, particularly with crowd control, and the use of force and firearms. Officers must perform their duties without fear or favour, ensuring impartiality at all times. They should avoid any form of collaboration or discrimination between ruling and opposition parties, regardless of size or influence.

The police should adopt proactive measures to prevent electoral fraud, coercion, intimidation, or other forms of manipulation or violence, minimising the use of force and firearms to the greatest extent possible during elections. Moreover, the police must avoid actions that could intimidate or discourage citizens from voting. They should also conduct themselves in a manner that ensures voters do not feel pressured or obligated to support any particular party or candidate.

Throughout the election campaign period and the lead-up to voting, the police must have access to effective intelligence to assess threats to free and fair elections across various regions. This will enable them to take appropriate steps to prevent a breakdown of law and order during voting, counting, and the announcement of election results.

6. CONCLUSION

The reform of electoral policing in Nigeria is vital for enhancing its democratic integrity. This study highlights key challenges such as political interference, corruption, inadequate training, and public distrust exposed during the 2023 general elections. While these challenges are significant, they offer an opportunity for reform. Addressing these issues will promote free, fair, and peaceful elections, fostering political stability.

To improve electoral policing and security, comprehensive reforms should focus on reducing voter intimidation, curbing identity politics, and preventing violence. The use of technology, such as electronic voting, could enhance transparency and reduce election-related conflict. Legislative amendments should be made before the 2027 elections to address opposition concerns and reduce divisive rhetoric.

Additionally, peace and reconciliation efforts in regions like the South-East, which experienced heightened political unrest, should be prioritised. Dialogue addressing the root causes of unrest is essential to preventing violence in future elections. Furthermore, improving collaboration between federal and state governments is critical for addressing insecurity and building community resilience.

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