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Abstract

The concept of election monitoring/observation mission is a relatively new development that has acquired global recognition and relevance. Election monitoring is a key element of building a stable democracy and a valuable tool for improving electoral processes and helps build public confidence and protects the civil and political rights of participant in election. Despite these lofty goals, the conflicting reports of various monitoring groups in Africa that participated in general elections confirmed the fact that their verdicts are as much political statements and subjective reporting. This validates the thesis that election monitoring cannot be insulated from politics, which at times appears to follow the script pre-written by the sponsors of monitoring bodies. The implications of the following are that they have been condemned and criticized for not adding much to the credibility of election. The criticism centered on three main related areas: they are partisan; their results are always inaccurate and inconsistent and are unable to detect electoral frauds and irregularities. The teething problems confronting the mission, the study uncovered are; political entanglement, practical constraint and normative concern that compromise not only their effectiveness, but more importantly, also their long-assured neutrality. The following suggestions were made: observers should base their conclusions on observation, and must do a self-assessment of their election monitoring reporting to ensure that these reports are not merely tailored to conform to the policies of the funding agencies.

Key words: Election, politics, election observation, legitimacy and transparency

1. Introduction

There is a growing concern among stakeholders in the electoral process and civil society groups about the quality of elections in countries undergoing political transitions. This concern is visible in the global attention directed at election observation and monitoring. Election monitoring is conceived as a valuation tool for improving the quality of elections and democracy. It is seen as one way which public confidence is built in the
electoral process and as a strategy for promoting the civil and political rights of the participants in elections. In this sense, election observation can lead to correction of errors or weak practices during elections. Election monitoring can reduce or prevent manipulation and frauds, and to a certain extent expose problems where they exist. According to (Hyde, 2005) when election observers give positive reports on elections, trust is generated for the democratic process and the legitimacy by domestic groups encourages civic involvement in the political process and lead to changes and improvement in the national law and practice.

Election monitoring and observation has long pedigree in the world history. It is on record that the first election monitoring took place in Moldavia and Wallachia in 1857 when French, Britain, Prussian, Austrian and Turkey representatives supervised a plebiscite. There were more cases of observation in the Post-World War II because that period provided more opportunities for countries to hold elections, and the practice of observation and monitoring developed more quickly (Brahm, 2004).

Election monitoring was uncommon until after World War II. Soon after the war, the election observation activities started expanding significantly following the imposition of international standards on the conduct of democratic elections and the process of monitoring organization. The United Nations which was one of the concrete outcomes of the war was saddled with the responsibility of monitoring election in Korea and Germany. The process of decolonization provided more opportunities and in fact accelerated election observation in the 1950-1960s when the United Nations participated in the organizing and funding of elections in order to ensure that they were free and fair.

The second generation observation missions have been generally more comprehensive in terms of scope and common standards, especially with the end of the Cold War with the growing world consensus on the value of democracy. In Africa, democratization began in 1970s, both domestic and international actors have observed elections (and provided electoral assistance) throughout the continent. However, recently African players have started to become more involved in the observation of African elections. They began as early as 1980, with independence elections.

In 1990s, international election observation mission focused attention on elections in countries with weak democracy; however, there have been an increasing number of observer’s missions monitoring elections in long standing democracies, including United States, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. International organizations such as the Organization of American States for Security and Co-operation, the European Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Council of Europe and African Union regularly monitor elections. The United States no longer provides monitoring services, instead, focuses on educational assistance, individual governments also participate in monitoring efforts, generally under the umbrella of an international organization. The national efforts are normally managed by local electoral organizations. A wide array of non-governmental organization participates in monitoring efforts. The Cater Center, for example, played a key role- with United Electoral Assistance Division and National Democratic Institute in building consensus on a common set of international principles for election observation (Venice Commission, 2009). International Observation is complemented in many countries by domestic observers groups.

Many domestic and international actors have been involved in monitoring elections. These include states which operate in observation exercises through both
bilateral protocols and international organizations, and growing number of non-governmental organizations with an interest in spreading democracy of protecting human rights. The expansion of election observation activities over the past two decades are directly related to the corresponding global trend towards democratization. Election therefore, is an activity that has primarily been seen or employed in support of new democracies and countries in transition to democracy. To build new solid democratic structures, observation also provides an assessment of the extent to which new and emerging democracies are meeting their commitments.

However, the integrity and transparency of international election observation/monitoring missions have been questioned and contested as a result of multiple and complex factors confronting the missions. These include: political partisanship, inaccurate and inconsistent final reports, and inability to detect frauds and electoral irregularities. The above enumerated challenges eventually manifested the conditions that make the reports to be suspected and challenged. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to assess the extent to which international election monitoring/observation mission observes election in compliance with international norms and standards of legitimacy and transparency with a view to improving electoral processes and helps build public confidence and protect the civil and political rights of participants in election.

2. **The Concept of Election Observation Mission**

As a concept, election monitoring has to do with the relationship between the government and the governance. Selected observation has become universally accepted norm by which both domestic and international observers are expected to play an important role in providing accurate and impartial assessment about the nature of the electoral process in a particular country.

Election observation and election monitoring are often used as interchangeable terms. But in proper election language, election observation is not the same activity as election monitoring. The difference is simple but crucial in principle. An election observer has no role in the actual administration of an election; an election monitor has. In Nigeria, section of the Third Schedule, 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria requires only Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) to conduct elections. This meant that it is only the Election Management Body (EMB) that has the constitutional right to monitor elections. Unlike the observer, the monitors can, where and whenever necessary, give binding corrective instructions to an election official in the course of executing an electoral activity.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2004) has provided a good definition of election observation as “the purposely gathering of information regarding electoral process and making informed judgments about the process of information collected”. The definition aptly encapsulates the essence of election observation and should cover all the relevant aspects of the organization and conduct of an election as they unfold across the country. But in practice, it is infrequently the case. In essence, election observation is about the extent to which an election is carried out in accordance with the rules, laws, regulations, procedures and processes that are prescribed for its conduct, and the extent to which the election managers, officials and
stakeholders behave properly by acting in accordance with the relevant principles and norms associated with the democratic elections worldwide.

Baker (2002) equated monitoring to an examination process which is now a well understood procedures whereby hundreds of assessors representing dozens of self-appointed “examination board both domestic and external scrutinize the poll and pronounce their verdicts.” According to the author, these are often carried out through the deployment of field workers usually known as monitors/observers that serve as representatives of independent domestic or international organization that undertake election observation at the invitation (voluntary and induced) of the host country, and who may be granted wider access to the election processes than local monitors. Properly understood therefore, election monitoring is a decisive step in the democratization process to promote and determine the extent of compliance with universally accepted standards of electoral politics.

Election monitoring is the observation of an election by one or more independent parties, typically from country or a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), primarily to assess the conduct of an election on the basis of national legislation and international standards. Against this backdrop, the task of observer group is to make an honest, independent, impartial and objective observation and assessment of the general electoral environment and organization, management and conduct of the elections.

3. Review of Related Literature

The importance of election monitoring to democratization has been generally acknowledged and possibly overstated. Scholars and practitioners contend that the activities of election monitoring/observation mission are vital to any successful transition to democracy and its subsequent consolidation. The presumption is that through their activities, election monitors are capable of promoting the openness and integrity of the transitional process by fostering a system of transparency and control.

For instance OSCE (2003) defined elections as the celebration of fundamental human rights and more specifically, civil and political rights, and election observation therefore contributes to overall promotion and protection of these rights. A genuine election is a political competition that takes place in an environment characterized by confidence, transparency, and accountability and that provides voters with an informed choice, a distinct political alternative (OSCE 2003). According to the organization, a genuine democratic election process presupposes respect for freedom of expression and media; freedom of association; assembly and movement; adherence to the rule of law; the right to establish political parties and compete for public office; nondiscrimination and equal rights for all citizens, freedom from intimidation, and a range of other fundamental human rights and freedoms.

On his part, Baker (2002) asserted that election observation enhances accountability and transparency, thereby boosting both domestic and international confidence in the process. The mere presence of international observers alone, however, should be viewed as adding legitimacy or credibility to an election process. Although the presence of observers may indicate that the process merits observation. It is observers conclusions about the process based on acceptable methodology that will form observer’s opinion on the election. The author further sees election monitoring as the key element of building a stable democracy. In states undergoing democratic transition, election
Observers can build citizens’ confidence in the electoral process; while in states holding elections following conflict, observers can help conflicting parties trust the election, that the election will be conducted fairly even if they do not yet trust each other.

Election observation has been found to be useful in strengthening the democratization process and institutions in several ways. According to the Chairman, Election Monitoring and Observation Committee, Ekpenyong (2003), they include:

(a) It has helped to calm nerves and boost confidence and integrity of the electoral process, particularly among opposition politicians, distrustful of the EBM or the government or both,

(b) It has helped to allay the fears and suspicions of voters and thereby engineer a high voter turnout,

(c) It has helped to deter violence, fraud, manipulation and rigging before, during and after elections, even if it cannot prevent them altogether,

(d) It has contributed to making election managers and official sit up to their credibility of elections, and thereby the acceptance of results, and

(e) It has helped to rouse respect for human rights.

A lot of criticisms have been levied against international election observers; that they are accused of being partisan, that their information or reports sometimes are inaccurate and inconsistent and that they are unable to detect electoral frauds and irregularities. According to Obi (2002) their assessments are subordinated to the hegemonic, strategic and economic calculations of the dominant political elites and post-cold war powers rather than expediency. In the same vein, Laakso (2002) observes that international election observers are deeply engaged in a political exercise and not withstanding their guidelines which present electoral observers as a neutral and technical exercise.

In series of studies of election monitoring in some countries, Fawn (2006) concluded that some international electoral observation missions might have been impartial, but that others were definitely not. Impartiality and critical assessments, he argues, were hidden behind those less tried, even questionable observer’s mission, once drawn from the regimes with similar undemocratic practice. Similarly, Bjorndlund (2004) in his study of 1999 elections in Cambodia argued that the international election observers were split on how to assess elections in part because they saw their roles differently and had different interests and motivations.

Kelly (2009) in a study that demonstrates systematic partnership in international election observation mission, finds that international election observers are more likely to endorse election in countries that received development aids, if there has been improvement from previous elections, or pre-election violence. They also observed that international governmental organizations are likely to endorse elections than international non-governmental organizations; and that international governmental election observation organizations with less democratic members states are more likely to endorse elections than international governmental election observation organization whose member’s states are more democratic.

Another area of criticism raised against international election observation mission has been in the area of information presented or report available which has been argued as being inaccurate and inconsistent. In this regard, Geisla (1994) in his first report in 1993 on Africa elections argues that “international election observation exercises remain so
superficial that their conclusions are either too vague or empirically unattainable”. Geisla also suggested that not only inaccurate assessments were accidental weaknesses which require minor remedy treatment, but that some were manifestation of structural phenomenon. Since then a number of studies sprang up to buttress or give credence to Geisla’s argument. For instance, Nevitte (1997) in a comparative analysis between international election observers and domestic observers have found many more data points of analysis than do international observers, who confront the challenge of working with larger margins of errors. Kaiser (1999:42) in a study of the 1995 elections in Zanzibar, quoted the African Confidential, that “Zanzibar felt it ridiculous that some monitors are making assessments of the poll without being present at the count, where most of the abuses are claimed to have taken place”.

Bjorndund (2004) in a study argued that “some observers base their conclusions on startling cursory fact findings efforts, as observers offer personal assessments before ballots are counted based on the personal observations of few outsiders who make brief visit to a handful of polling stations”. An important element of this criticism has been that international observation missions are too focused on the Election Day proceedings. Cannenburgh (2000) argued that international observation mission is heavily focused on the proceedings on polling day, although, it is precisely in the preparation of elections that many opportunities for irregularities and abuse occur” (Van Cranenburgh 2000).

In a review of commonwealth election experience with international election observers, Sives (2001) argued that “a longer term presence is necessary to ensure that all aspects of the process are taken into account”. A long term presence, she argues “add credibility to the findings of international election mission” (Sives 2001). Again, Kelley (2009) in a comprehensive quantitative study measures the inaccuracy of information available to international election observation missions and the inconsistencies in how international election missions analyze this information. By comparing the information available to international election observation missions’ assessments of election with other international election observation mission assessments, then balance is strike. Kelley estimates that international election observation mission’s assessments are inaccurate, 10 per cent of the time. This estimate she points out is very conservative and could be significantly higher.

In another focus of criticism, the international election observation mission has been accused of inability to protect and deter electoral irregularities and frauds. Carothers (1997) observed that in 1997 when optimism about international election observation was at its highest; he argued that “the numerous teams of inexperienced observers who stay for only a short time around election day are unlikely to see beyond the obvious and that government officials planning elections in transition countries often overestimate the ability of the foreign observers to detect frauds. Several studies have explored Carother’s suggestions. Bojornjund argued that unfortunately, many international observers still put undue emphasis on election administration on Election Day and this allows autocratic regimes to manipulate other parts of the process.

Hyde (2005) in a natural experiment in Indonesia was of the opinion that the presence of observers had a measurable effect on vote cast for the incumbent candidate. However, contrary to intuitive reasoning she finds that incumbent candidate received more, not fewer votes in the polling stations. Hyde concludes that international election observers can effect election but that casualty is more complex than generally assumed.
Many studies have even been suggested that international election observers simply encourage shift from observable to non observable types of electoral irregularities. Hyde’s study in Indonesia suggests that international election observation mission may also provide incentive for electoral autocrats to use methods of cheating that are less likely to be detected by international observers such as manipulating the election in advance of Election Day (Hyde, 2005).

In a comparative study of all elections between 1990 and 2002, Beaulier and Hyde (2007) argued that international election observation has triggered the use of strategic manipulation, giving incumbent the incentive to select forms of electoral manipulation that the observers are less likely to catch. Also, they argue that “opposition parties are more likely to boycott elections when international observers are present “because they use strategic manipulations to discredit the government, rather than contested the elections” (Beaulier and Hyde, 2007). In addition, Simpser (2008) in a study of “unintended consequences” of international election observation argues that “those forms of electoral manipulation that are less amendable to detection and redress through monitoring can also cause important damage to political, legal and governmental institutions and media independence.

4. The Theory of Pseudo-Democrats’ Dilemma

This theory was propounded by Susan D. Hyde (2011) whose position was that international election observation can only be explained if we comprehend the very consequential signal sent by incumbent leaders to the international community by allowing their elections to be observed. The author explains that that international element of monitoring can be understood with the new theory of international norm formation. She argues that election observation was initiated by states seeking international support. International benefits tied to democracy give some governments an incentive to signal their commitments to democratization without having to give up power. An invitation of nonpartisan foreigners to monitor elections is an attempt of avoiding their criticism, because a widely recognized and imitation signal of a government purported commitment to democratic election.

Hyde draws cross-national data on the global spread of election observation between 1960 and 2006, detailed descriptions of the characteristics of countries that do not invite observers, and evidence of three ways that election monitoring is costly to pseudo democrats. The micro-level experimental tests from elections in Armenia and Indonesia showed that observers can deter election-day fraud and otherwise improve the quality of elections; Illustrative cases demonstrating that international benefits are contingent on democracy in countries like Haiti, Peru, Togo, and Zimbabwe; and qualitative evidence of documentation in the escalating game of strategic manipulation among pseudo democrats, international monitors and pro-democracy forces.

Hyde has produced theoretical elegant and empirical rigorous accounts of the relatively rapid and nearly universal spread of election monitoring. Her theory of norm diffusion is a novel and important contribution to our understanding of how a new practice can become a global standard, and she tests and elaborates her theory using a variety of methods, including the first-ever randomized field experiments assessing the effect of monitoring. Schuile (2012) observed that pseudo democrats’ is a model for how careful social science can be brought to bear on contemporary policy issue. In the same
vein, Cooley (2011) was of the opinion that pseudo democrat’s ground breaking theory how, overtime, individual strategic state actions unintentional norms can generate and diffuse new international norms. With a powerful analytical model, methodological nuance and detail, Hyde not only explains the rise of international election monitoring but also offers a compelling general account of why states now accept a host of intrusive external practices that directly violate their sovereignty (Cooley, 2011).

In the pseudo democrat’s dilemma, Hyde investigates the spread of international elections observation, even to countries that hold less than democratic elections. This spread, Hyde persuasively contends, can only be explained if we comprehend the very consequential signal sent by incumbent leaders to the international community by allowing their elections to be observed. Antonia (2012) agreed that the theory was well written and top of it all, presents a theory about something that is of great practical and theoretical interest. Hyde accounts for the use of the international norm of election monitoring as a result of leaders’ desire to signal to the international community their democratic credentials, even if they are not real democrats. The pseudo democrats’ dilemma is an example of truly theoretically informed empirical research in which the author invokes the best available methods to tests her theory.

5. The Politics of International Election Monitoring/Observation Mission

Today, international election monitoring has become so common that refusing to invite foreign observers is seen as a signal that a regime has something to hide. Among the media and policy circles, the importance of election monitoring is almost universally accepted. This uncritical treatment of international election observation, however, ignores a more complicated reality: that monitors can have both positive and negative effects.

As international election monitors have grown active worldwide, their announcements have gained considerable influence. Sometimes, however, their assessments are puzzling. For instance, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and United Nations (UN) accepted the outcome of Bosnia’s 1996 election, although others called it fraudulent and accused the OSCE of spin. Cambodia’s 1998 election was fraught with problems, but Joint International Observer Group approved it even before counting was completed (Cooley, 2011). Furthermore, according to the Data on International Election Monitoring (DIEM), which codes information on nearly 600 observation missions to 385 elections, observers’ assessments contradict each other in 22 per cent of elections). Many scholars have also criticized international monitors for endorsing flawed election and failing to condemn flagrant fraud such as in Kenya’s 1997 election and Cambodia’s 1993 United Nations supervised post conflict election (Kelly, 2009).

In a research carried out by DIEM (2004) whose aim was to uncover the politics and norms of international election observation; the following startling findings were made: International election monitors are essentially in the business of policing norms. Because their influence rest on their veracity, the fact that they sometimes endorse flawed elections present a puzzle. This study explains that those nations are molded by self-seeking interest and lies in the previously recognized but seldom explored fact that transnational actors act both normatively and strategically. Election monitors do seek to uphold electoral norms: their assessments are informed greatly by irregularities that they observed on the ground particularly so by the more obvious types of fraud. Nevertheless,
several other less quality-related factors also correlate significantly with whether monitors will endorse a given election. Although monitors seek to base their reports on election irregularities, these irregularities alone do not account fully for their assessments’, several tangential factors such as organizational politics and norms also influence the monitors’ conclusion. Indeed, those factors may make monitors more likely to endorse election despite the fact that most of them should not be expected to produce cleaner elections (DIEM, 2004:34).

The donor or member states may constraint election monitors from a cleaner election. Research on International Monetary Fund (IMF) lending suggests that International Government Organization (IGOs) member states sometimes prevent consistent application of standard. Although some IGO staff have little flexible to implement their agendas, most monitoring mission staff have little flexibility in drafting official assessment. Indeed, organization of documents and discussions with officials reveal that to ensure institutional approval, most IGOs have strict procedures for finalizing official report statements. Both European Union (EU) and Organization of American States, for example, have strict procedures and supervisory mechanism for the drafting of statement (Stone, 2008).

Donor states and member states may also impose political constraints on monitors’ assessments. Human Watch (2008) for example, had accused established democracies of accepting flawed elections for political expediency. If monitors are concerned about upsetting trade patterns or instability of large populous countries, they may also be less apt to criticize large countries or trading partners. Research also suggests that foreign aid recipient countries tend to be strategically and politically favoured. For example, United States aid recipients have fewer conditions on their IMF aid programmed. Case studies suggest that the findings also are true in election monitoring, the sweeping pressures on election organizations stood outstandingly in Cambodia’s 1998 election, for example, when powerful countries and donors wanted to resume aid and normal relations. As noted above, International Government Organizations (IGOs) were much less critical than Western International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs), and the political pressures were apparent (Bojornund, 2004).

International Non-Governmental Organizations are sensitive to their sponsors/or donors’ preferences, they face fewer constraints. Many International Government Organizations also have multiple and diverse stakeholders, which counter the dominance of donor preferences. Furthermore, because INGOs do not speak directly for any government or donor, they have greater freedom; certainly they do not face formal institutional procedures that allow governments to veto the wording of the election assessment (Carothers, 1997).

Monitoring organizations may also limit their criticism to accommodate a broader set of compelling organizational norms. Specifically, although promoting democracy and upholding election standards are complementary norms and often go hand in hand, a conflict may arise when countries have made progress, but the election still falls short of absolute standards. Research on political conditionality, for example, shows that international organizations sometimes face a dilemma between regarding relative progress and criticizing performances that are inadequate based on an absolute standard (Kelly, 2009).
Studies of elections in Russia, Kenya, Cambodia, and elsewhere in 1990s suggested that international monitors may be similarly torn between praising progress— a step in the right direction towards democracy- and denouncing election flaws and possibly causing democracy gains to unravel. Thus, in spite of short comings, the OSCE prematurely hailed the 1999 elections in Russia as “the conclusion of a transitional period forged by Boris Yeltsin since 1991” (OSCE, 2003). Monitoring organizations may thus be particularly inclined to temper their criticism of an election in countries where they fear disrupting their own long-standing programmes and where they seek to build positive long-term momentum toward democracy. Subsequently, monitors may endorse an election if it showed progress, although they would have denounced an election of similar quality in a country that had not displayed progress or was expected to do better.

Fear of violent instability may also temper monitors criticism. Historically, concerned about stability have motivated monitoring efforts and monitors have sometimes offered mediation or sought to minimize violence. Hyde (2005) opined that occupationally, however, fear of violence has entirely paralyzed the truth. This can happen if monitors worry their statements may fuel conflict. In the common fraud scenario, when an incumbent wins through fraud or simply invalidates returns showing an opposition victory, monitors therefore, want to know whether denouncing the official version of events will fuel opposition outrage. As it happen in Zimbabwe 2008 post-election where the incumbent was unwilling to leave office and resorted to violence to squash opposition supporters or if the monitor endorses the flawed elections, will opposition revolt against what its believes is a “rubber stamp” by election monitors.

The presence of pre-election violence may help monitor assess whether denouncing or endorsing fraud is more likely to fuel post-election violence. Most commonly, as in 2000 Zimbabwe election, or the 1992 and 1999 elections in Kenya (International Republican Institute, 1993) the incumbent dominated the pre-election violence. Monitors may therefore infer that the incumbent is stronger than the opposition and that the risk of post-election conflict may increase if they denounce the incumbent, whereas if they endorse the election or are ambiguous, the incumbent may be able to maintain calm because the opposition cannot use the observers’ criticism as rallying cry. Thus, incumbent-dominated pre-election violence may dissuade monitors from denouncing the elections. In 2007 elections in Kenya, for example, EU monitors initially made positive statements but denounced the elections after violence escalated.

Specifically, monitors consider the political interests of members’ states or donors. The analysis shows that international governmental organizations are more likely than non-international governmental organizations to endorse elections and this is particularly true for international governmental organizations with less democratic member states. Thus international governmental organizations may temper their criticism of election violations to appease member states, which fear that future criticism could be directed at them, or states that want to prevent democratic transition (Stone, 2008). The analysis also suggests that foreign recipients are associated with greater odds of endorsement. This is likely because member states or international governmental organization founders discourage denunciations of election in foreign aid receipts countries such as Cambodia and Kenya whose aid status may signify the interests their donors take in them.
Monitors also face compelling normative pressures. Statistically, they are more likely to endorse elections when the electoral process improved from the previous election or when they perceive the election to be transnational. This, of course, is because improvements are associated with cleaner elections. However, because this is significant even when accounting for the nature and the level of irregularities in the observed election, it suggests that monitors sometimes praise improvements in election quality and endorse the outcome – even if it is still substandard to support a country’s trajectory toward more democratic elections in the long term. Monitors may decide that the election was of the best quality possible given the circumstances and that further progress can be encouraged by supporting the election result. This interpretation also concurs with carefully readings of many election monitoring reports that chronicle the progress and endorsement of the outcome. Russia in the mid- to late 1990 is a prime example (Rueter, 2007).

In Zimbabwe’s 2000 election, monitors also stopped short of questioning the final results and praised the well-organized and calm voting day (Laakso, 2002) as this scholar noted, it had become clear to all foreigners that “changing the government of Zimbabwe would not necessary have been easy or peaceful. Because of higher levels of violence, a conflict arose between upholding electoral norms and endorsing an election as a means to quell potential violence after a violent election campaign. That these factors above are significantly associated with endorsements is remarkable, because at least three of them should be expected to correlate with cleaner elections. As noted earlier, transnational election or elections with greater improvements could by their nature be cleaner than others.

This analysis has thus made considerable progress in explaining the behaviour of international election monitors, an understanding that is essential to interpret their pronouncements. Of course, the findings do not themselves reveal how often observer missions are too lenient or grossly mischaracterized elections. The reasons monitors endorse elections are likely more complex than shown herein.

Another area which attention is paid to in the politics of election observation is particularly how the process appears to serve the interest of the agencies that fund the election. Election observation provides a concrete measurement and test on how international actors influence domestic politics, especially in democratization countries. The motive of observation is to find out whether donor stipulated conditions of a “free and fair election” were met, or to evaluate the effectiveness of domestic and international political and economic agendas. Thus Integrity International (2003) had expressed the view that: international observation can include political overturns, donor who provides assistance for election administration condition their funding on free and fair election. In some cases, they can set their benchmark that must be met for international assistance to continue international observation to use to verify whether these benchmarks are met, and whether the election met the free and fair criteria.

In this circumstance, the donor agencies wield considerable power and influence in their policy directives and activities as a condition for further funding. Through their insistence on accountability for funds received, the monitors must play along and remain in the good books of the western donors. Given this weakness, domestic monitoring groups often find it difficult to bargain with the state from the position of strength and influence in the electoral process. Whereas the presence of international election
observer’s team should have ordinarily served as a lever for the above limitation, the reality could not be far away from the truth. This is because as Baker (2002) rightly noted, politics will never be removed from the decision to send a mission, the choice of members, the writing of reports and general response to the reports. The politicization of the whole exercise has revealed in the conflicting reports of various observers mission, despite the fact that they observed the same elections. There is also the problem of coverage of the field not being good enough to warrant any strong, valid and reliable generalization about the electoral process.

Regimes that are unable to extract the sympathy of election observer missions argue that observers particularly the foreign ones lack adequate training and knowledge of local circumstances, and thus have little or no basis for their observations and conclusions. Pam (2007) argued as follows: outsiders are often ignorant of local circumstances related to history, culture and the like. Monitors often arrive shortly before the vote and they usually lack the language or the cultural training to allow them to effectively evaluate the vote. To compound the problem of ignorance, monitors often forego working with domestic observers in order to avoid the appearances of bias. Monitors are not entirely independent, but have a number of limitations. For instance, monitors are not an entity that has funded their missions. Reports may be tailored to the demand of their funds.

There are problems with the observers themselves which are basically related to the cultural differences. The observation between international observers and domestic monitoring groups constitute another problem. There is the problem of autonomy of observer missions. Many observer missions either respond to the dictates of their patrons or succumb to domestic pressure. Since many of the election observers are made up of representatives of states, it becomes difficult for analysis to ignore the discussions. In addition, many non-governmental organizations involved in monitoring are not autonomous because they draw their funding from national governments. Other groups do have connections with prominent political parties, trade union or religious-affiliated organization (Sha, 2007).

Though every election witnessed the eruption of many international observers, but these observers lack the autonomy needed to make them effective participants in the election monitoring. For one thing, the geology of these groups, suggest that most of them emerged as a response to the globalization of election monitoring, since it is an exercise that is fast becoming a serious business and a source of wealth for its chief executive through the attraction of foreign funds. Funded by foreign donors many groups lack financial autonomy, since “he who pays the piper calls the tune”, the domestic monitoring agents would appear to be no more an appendage of global capitalism for advancement of western interests (Baker, 2002).

The quality of observer team members remain a source of worry. Today, election monitoring has become an affair and it has become an avenue for the distribution of patronage. Some have even come to see it as part of the cold war peace dividend in the form of reparation to the country. The concomitant of this is the “mad rush of people of all categories to share the benefits”. Consequently, the emphasis is not so much on the quality of participants as on the gains they generated in return. This development may have been facilitated by most of the coordinating non-government organizations at the state level. For them to be able to mobilize their constituencies in support of the exercise,
they had to present it as economic empowerment scheme to participants. And to strengthen their strong hold on their means of livelihood, allocation had to be based on patronage, to make beneficiaries perpetually loyal and remain committed. To sustain the system, potential competent participants were frustrated as they were seen as threats to their hegemonic interest. Just as this was true of domestic team, Baker (2002) further wrote that international observer teams are not always the people most suited to be assessing democracy. The author emphasized that although there is increasing talk of professionalizing membership, many of the teams are still a mixture of academics, politicians and civil servants with limited knowledge of the country under observation, while political appointees still often chair the missions.

Republican observer organizations face political pressure from powerful states or international organizations, particularly when elections are anticipated as important marks of transitions, such as the elections in Egypt and Tunisia (International Republican Institute, 1993). Such pressure is usually subtle and varied. Donors and politicians may seek to influence assessments behind the scenes, or by strategically choosing mission’s staff from friendly member states. For example, in Nigeria in 1999, both the Commonwealth Secretariat and the European Union reminded their members to endorse the elections as a way to restore normal relations with Nigeria (Geister, 1994).

In a keynote address at the 7th annual symposium of the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) in Johannesburg, the then president of Nigeria, Obansajo said that non-African observers’ missions should be banned from monitoring polls in the continent. According to him, "we must reflect the role of non-African observation mission or the so called international observers. It is appellation that they continue to trouble me" (Premium times, 2002:12). According to Obasanjo, the roles of non-African observer missions have been controversial especially in polarized elections. The former Nigerian president suggested outright ban of non-African election observers and that they should no longer be present in Africa elections. Obasanjo’s claim seems to rest on the three ideas:

1. That outside observers sometimes conduct themselves in a less than wholesome manner;
2. That they undermine the sovereignty of the nations they operate in; and
3. Those African election observers have matured and developed enough capacity to do the job themselves.

According to him, “there were times where they have been accused of taking sides or deploying missions only in countries in which they have a stake. The value of having non-African observer had been questioned” (premium times, 2013:26). In some cases, the conduct of these non-African observers have been less than wholesome to the extent that they have in some instances been accused of undermining the sovereignty of the country. Election in Kenya unfortunately often provides a case in point where the United Nations (UN) monitors have been dragging their feet with the final report. Meanwhile, the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted numerous problems and criticized the swiftness with which international observer groups drew their conclusion. The international observation mission also drew criticism from the United Nations (UN) Independent Review Commission; the body reports that members at times based their claims on misunderstandings. President Obasanjo’s view seems to be in line with thought expressed by the president Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Pansy Tiakula, the South
African Chairperson of Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) agreed by conceding that foreign observers were problematic (Premium Times, 2013).

In 2011 election in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the disparity between African and non-African observer missions were startling. The Carter Centre called elections problematic, International Foundation for Electoral Systems and European Union (EU) were highly criticized. Even when the citizen’s observers and local media saw the process as highly flawed, yet by contrast, the African union and four other African observer missions including SADC declared the poll “successful” and urged both parties to show restraint (Nevitte, 1997).

In a referendum in Zimbabwe, Mugabe had banned western observers organizations, but the ICG had already issued report claiming that there were so many problems with the upcoming vote that there was no way it could be legitimized. Still, SADC sent its mission and although it noted some problems, issued a largely positive report—just as Mugabe had desired, and just as the rest of South African would have hoped (Birch, 2008).

One crucial factor that largely determines the extent to which monitoring can be relevant or not to the electoral process is the influence of the state. The state is expected to be unbiased and neutral in the transitional process. In that case, it is expected to acts as a public power that ensures peace between associates and protects the rights of individuals (Hirst, 1994). However, this is not always the case, as Kothara (1999) maintained that, there is historical or theoretical evidence to support the view of a state as a “buffer against the predatory capital and a non-partisan arbiter in domestic conflict. These were explicitly demonstrated in many elections symbolized by many ruling parties. The state was deeply interested and enmeshed in the electoral process as a contender in the struggle for the control of government.” Accordingly it was tempted to deploy the state resources at its disposal to its own advantage and to frustrate opposing parties and monitoring agents. The problem is not about the use of state resources per se, but how they are used to the detriment of the entire system. When a party is determined to retain the presidency of a country, there are little or nothing elections observers can do to prevent it. The appropriate role of monitors in this kind of situation is problematic. While negative verdict that emanated from some of the observers no doubt had implications for the image of the country, the truth of the matter is that political succession is overwhelmingly matter for domestic political management. Even when foreign powers have interest in the outcome of an election, they usually do not have the leverage needed to influence it and are obliged to work with whosoever is thrown up by domestic process. Simpser, (2008) noted that Western countries have no choice other than to accept the results and congratulate the person who is claimed to have won the election.

The political economy of a country in a year of transition is another critical factor that affects the direction of election monitoring either for good or for ill. Jega (2003) and Jinnadu (2002) recalled that the political economy of Nigeria was bad in 2003. Not only was ethno—religious crisis pervasive, almost all economic indicators had not shown any sign of improvement. Owing to pervasive conflicts, it followed that the crisis ridden/prone areas became inaccessible to the election observers. In some cases, where reports were returned from the “red” zones such as the Niger Delta, they might have been fabricated from the hotel rooms of foreign observers and might not have been a product of any field observation. The economic downturn of the country in the year of transition also
necessitate a situation in which the concern of some actors made easy for them to be susceptible to manipulations, since the observers, particularly local ones are part of the system and they could not have acted differently.

The observer reports are not binding on the government because they have no force of law. Despite the negative verdicts returned on elections by some observers’ missions, the results were upheld and government inaugurated amidst pomp and pageantry. After initial resentment from the western countries they eventually succumb to the pressure of domestic realities by accepting the result and congratulating those who claimed to have won in the election. What this suggests is that truly succession is overwhelmed by the domestic affair and that no particular observer missions have monopoly of legitimization. This further underscores the centrality of the host state to the relevance or otherwise of election monitoring, depending on its dispositions. It also reinforces the thesis that specific role of observers in situation where the ruling party is hell bent on retaining power is still hazy. Election observation exercise serves the interest of agencies that fund the election mission and, this provide the basis for actual accusation that international actors influence the domestic politics through influencing countries undergoing democratic transition.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study of international election observation mission is crucial because it enable the international community to evaluate the legitimacy of government and because their appraisals is inform of the used by scholars to study democracy. Furthermore, the study of international election monitoring exemplifies that understanding the behaviour of many international organizations and transnational actors requires attention to their politics and preferences beyond their formal missions. In addition to broadening the understanding of International Non-Governmental Organizations and International Governmental Organizations behaviour, the findings have implications for comparative analysis across many countries of the world by international relations scholars because election monitors’ assessments often inform the data used in macro analysis.

For effective and efficient election monitoring/observation exercise, the following are recommended:

(1) Observers should maintain strict impartiality in the conduct of their duties and at no time they should publicly express or exhibit any bias or preference in relation to national authorities, parties, candidates or with reference to any issues on contention in election process,

(2) Observers should base their conclusions on observation,

(3) Observers should comply with national and domestic laws,

(4) Observers should exhibit the highest levels of personal discretion and professional behavior at all time

(5) Civil society organizations must do a self-assessment of their election monitoring reporting to ensure that these reports are not merely tailored to conform to the policies of the funding agencies.

(6) Monitors should be able to resist pressure from the host and donors governments to validate the elections. They should give an independent and frank assessment of the quality of the elections and to convince everyone that they are doing so.
7. References
DIEM (2009) www.edu/wed/diem


