

Between Prophets and Political Scientists: Reversing the Marginalized Role of Political Scientists in Election Forecasting in Nigeria

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Abstract

In Nigeria, there have emerged a trend of unscientific predictions of electoral outcomes, mostly, attributed or rooted in divine, transcendental, sacred or mysterious exposition whereby at every round of elections, certain prophets reel out prophetic declarations of prospective winner or/and loser of the elections without any form of data collection and analysis. Unfortunately, this spiritualization of electoral outcome has seemingly stampeded the evolution of a vibrant public opinion polls culture that should naturally be spearheaded by Political Scientists, in order to advocate for the entrenchment of the science of forecasting in the electoral process to engender objectivity and reliability of predictions. However, this is not the case in Nigeria. Far more dangerous is that these prophetic declarations are made amid tensed political atmosphere sufficient to threaten the democratic process and consolidation in the country. It is in this regard therefore, that this paper critically examines this phenomenon and put forth ways Political Scientists can reassert their voice in the electoral process in Nigeria by making use of opinion polls to forecast electoral outcomes. Also, the paper is a wake-up call for the professional body of Political Scientists in the country to assume its rightful place in the electoral process and to nip in the bud these personalist-prophetic declarations-which most times clash with each other and are capable of threatening Nigeria's democratic process.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Opinion Polls, Political Scientists, Prophets.

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Introduction

Since the transition to democracy in 1999 till date, the Nigerian democratic space is constantly inundated especially during electoral periods with prophetic declarations pertaining to electoral outcomes (Burgess, 2015). Given the fact that religion occupies a central position in Nigerian society and that majority of Nigerians hold their religious leaders in high esteem even far above secular leaders (Obadare, 2006), to the extent that their views on social issues are held as being sacred (Ilo, n.d.). It is important to clarify the term prophets as used in this paper. It is essentially not restricted to a particular religious group. As the case of concern in this paper have shown that the attempt at spiritualizing elections in Nigeria cut across all belief systems; whether Christianity, Islam, traditional religions or even Eastern practiced religions in Nigeria. Hence, prophets are used to denote or represent any individual agency purportedly claiming to espouse a spiritual dimension of physical reality, which, in our case has to do with election, ascribed to a transcendent supreme being. These religious leaders in their varying degrees of attraction now assume larger than life figures making ceaseless and unverifiable predictions and utterances on elections without recourse to any systematic and scientific methods. In fact, during electioneering periods, the Nigerian media is awash with various oracular statements without any form of rigour or sophistication by this pastors, imams and spiritualists predicting the outcomes of elections.

Moreover, the dynamics and manifestation of the above phenomenon within the Nigerian state holds dire consequences. First, it threatens the survival or continuous existence of democracy in Nigeria and this is rooted on the fact that the Nigerian state is a hot bed of conflicts that are mostly of religious colouration (Lenshie and Akipu, 2014). Hence, such prophetic utterances devoid of scientific methodology and not anchored on any theoretical framework especially when made during electioneering period can ignite or incite people to violence (Ikem, et al, 2020). For instance, the 2011 post electoral conflicts that claimed the lives of many innocent Nigerians and led to the destruction of properties worth millions of Naira is largely not unconnected with religious statements made in the course of the elections (Orji and Uzodi, 2012).

Secondly, the incessant pronouncements of these religious clerics on electoral outcomes which have become the norm have relegated political scientists to the murky waters of oblivion in the

Nigerian political space. In Western democracies, government, think tanks, media organizations, politicians, among others to conduct survey and opinion polls on elections, routinely employ political scientists. As a result, well-informed and grounded assumptions containing valid conclusions and projections on the trajectory of elections are made, which are rarely false; thereby, contributing to the growth and development of the discipline (Erikson and Tedin, 2015). Yet, the reverse is the case in Nigeria because political scientists in Nigeria have been pushed to the margin of electoral forecasting. In fact, Nigerian politicians have turned their attention to Clerics for insights on possible electoral victory or defeat (Burgess, 2015; Nigerian Catholic Reporter, 2020). This situation erodes the importance of political scientists and their possible contribution to the development of the Nigerian state. Hence, it is against this backdrop, that this paper seeks to interrogate the nexus between electoral prophetism and the marginalized role of political science in Nigeria. To achieve this task, apart from this introduction, the paper is divided into three sections, the first section attempts to investigate the nexus between elections and political scientists arguing that it is the major task of political scientists to understand the dynamics, trajectory and manifestations of elections in the world today. The second section dwelt on the role of prophets in elections in Nigeria demonstrating how they have become a *Tour du Force* in electoral matters in Nigeria, which does not augur well for the discipline of political science and holds grave danger for the survival of democracy in Nigeria. The third section of the paper concerns itself with making a case for the taking over of electoral forecasting from prophets by political scientists in Nigeria while the last section focuses on conclusion and recommendation.

Elections and Political Scientists

There is an intellectual agreement among scholars, stakeholders and think tanks that election remains the principal mainstay of democracy. While it is also widely accepted, that democracy is much more than periodic elections, nevertheless, the importance of elections in any democratic process cannot be exaggerated (Omotola, 2007). Hence, it has always been at the core of academic interrogation (Freedom House, 2011; Huntington, 1993). Defining election, Agbaje & Adejumobi (2006), notes that it is a viable mechanism for consummating representative government and facilitating leadership succession. In addition, it promotes political accountability, citizens' participation and gives voice and power to the people. It is against this

backdrop that Aiyedogbon and Omotola (2012) argues that periodic, competitive and participatory (free and fair) elections constitute the cardinal pillar of democratic political systems, hence, elections that fall short of those ingredients of democratic standards undermine processes of democratic consolidation.

To this end, high premium is placed on who wins elections in any state. This has led to rich outpouring of scholarship on electoral forecasting (Lock and Gelman, 2010). Political Science in particular has also contributed to the study and understanding of who wins elections, using sophisticated models and tools to predict electoral outcomes (Walther, 2015). In recent times, electoral forecasting remains one of the chief concerns of political scientists worldwide. Electoral forecasting entails the declaration of the outcomes of the elections before it happens (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaie, 2014). Explaining further, Lewis-Beck (2005, p.145) posits that:

(Electoral) Forecasting aims to tell of events (electoral outcomes) before they happen. It differs from prediction in that it looks to the future, whereas prediction may not (as in a successful reconstruction of some past outcome). Further, (Electoral) forecasting differs from explanation, having the goal of predicting an outcome, rather than the goal of theorizing about outcomes.

In addition, Lewis-Beck & Stegmaie, (2014) observes that there are two broad methods to electoral forecasting which are pre-scientific methods and scientific methods. They argued that scientific methods, which consist of the use of polls, models and markets, have helped in the forecasting of electoral outcomes more than pre-scientific methods, which is made of hunches, guess work and emotions. While the former (scientific models of electoral forecasting) have become an enduring feature of elections in the United States (since the 1930 when George Gallup opened his firm on electoral forecasting) and other advanced democracies in the West, the latter (pre-scientific models of electoral forecasting) has become entrenched in many incipient democracies in the world today.

Surprisingly, since Nigeria returned to democratic practice in 1999, political scientists in Nigeria unlike what is obtainable in more advanced democracies (Walther, 2015) have relegated the science and art of electoral forecasting to the backdrop. Political scientists in Nigeria while focusing on electoral systems and party politics have pushed forecast to the margins of electoral studies. No doubt, electoral forecasting is an under-researched area in electoral studies in Nigeria. This lacuna coupled with the importance of religion and respect for religious leaders

even far above political leaders has made them assume a presumably “self-appointed role” of predicting electoral outcomes (Abati, 2018). It therefore has opened a thriving and flourishing enterprise for “men of God” of the different religious extraction to make declarations on electoral outcomes such that politicians now consult these prophets rather than political scientists. Religious leaders who claim to have heard ‘from above’ the outcomes of the elections constantly inundate the democratic space especially during electioneering period of pre-scientific forecast of winners and losers of elections.

Prophets and Elections in Nigeria

There exists a thin line between religion and politics that make the both inseparable. Therefore, largely we cannot talk about religion without including politics. However, this strong link was initially lost to scholars in the West, who belief that with modernization and subsequent political development, religion will largely decline (Ellis & Ter Haar, 2008). Hence, over a long period, particularly with the historical occurrence of the industrial revolution and subsequent evolution of the social sciences, religion came to enjoy a marginalized role (Fox, 2015). Great thinkers such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkhiem, Max Weber and Karl Marx among others gave and entrenched the foundation for scientific inquiry in the social sciences. Consequently, religion which was deem as unscientific and bias, did not receive necessary attention as to its role in certain critical moments of historical period. While this line of thought ran through the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, secularists in the west began to talk about the death of religion, hence, giving way to a post-religious world.

Further buttressing this secularist theory of a post religious society, where western scholars who opine that modernization will eliminate primordial tendencies such as ethnicity and religion to the extent that their political roles will become insignificant (Fox, 2018). Especially, between 1950s and 1960s, Modernization theorists began to encourage the third world countries to embrace and follow western-centric development agenda in order to come out of underdevelopment, which had been primarily blamed on traditional and primordial affiliations (Ellis & Haar, 2008). Despite the pessimistic thinking towards religion, it has however experienced a comeback that secularists and other pessimists combine have arguably rethink the critical role and relevance of religion (Fox, 2015). At the international level, the rise in insecurity perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists, ethno-religious conflicts and the tendentious projection

of the clash of civilization thesis propagated by Samuel Huntington, has incentivized the need for more focused inquiry into the role religion play in politics, security, foreign policy, democratization and elections (Fox, 2001; Mead, 2006; Warner & Walker, 2011; Grzymala-Busse, 2016).

In the case of developing democracies like Nigeria, there has been considerable influence of religion in almost everything. In particular, with regard to politics in Nigeria, enough studies have established the influential role religion play- that is, pointing to its elitist manipulative tendencies (Maduagwu, 2016), hegemonic struggle (Kukah, 1993), means to capture state power (Obianyo, 2010), strategy for electoral mobilization and legitimization (Ezeibe, & Ikeanyibe, 2017), while also hinting on its integrative role in the country. Yet the polemics that follow the study of religion and politics is seemingly not settled. While some see religion as an anti-democratic consolidation force, with its ease of manipulation, others view it as a binding force which coherence enable integration (Lenshie and Akpu, 2014).

In this regard, religion has come to be recognized as a tangible force in Nigerian politics, Ayantayo (2009) noted that the public space is increasingly becoming religiously defined, sustained and justified. In like manner, politics and elections have therefore become spiritualized. Interestingly, in the area of election, Ayantayo (2009) observed that the impression has been created in Nigeria to denote that for any candidate to be successful in any election; huge reliance is placed on divine intervention or divine help, manipulation and inducement. And to a large extent, that which make for a robust political outing and mobilization are mainly if not totally disregarded with the hope that as long as the electoral victory is spiritually discerned to favour a candidate, such matter is presumed to be settled. And going into an election therefore may just be a ceremonial event. Perhaps, this is the reason why the notions of “divine call” or “divine mandate” claims by politicians have become a popular rhetoric during elections. And anything done within this period seem to revolve around this claims, including seeking for affirmation by spiritual leaders, whether from the Christian fold, Islamic imams, traditionalists as well as any other spiritualist that may claim access or insight to the spiritual configuration of the moment. In capturing this properly, Ayantayo (2009) aptly remarked that:

Spiritualization of electoral process connotes the act of taking into spiritual or supernatural realm, thereby creating an impression that success in election is independent of wisdom,

foresightedness, logical plan, widespread political tour and good campaign, adequate political logistics, and people oriented political manifestoes but by divine intervention or divine help, manipulation and inducement (p.101)

Thus, politicians in Nigeria in their bid to secure electoral victory must necessarily consult with someone claiming to possess the adequate access and insight into the spiritual realm to validate their hope of being elected. Kalu (2008) collaborated this point when he notes “Politicians will hire traditional rainmakers to scatter opponents’ political rallies with heavy rains. Primal religiosity is employed in electoral pranks instead of using hostile advertisements” (p.204). On his part, Abati (2018) opine that election in Nigeria is not only a do-or-die battle on the physical plane, it is spiritual war. This unconventional manifestation of political culture may not be unusual since there is a high premium placed on the possession of state power, which equally defines the material security of its possessor. Thus, any political contest notably, electoral competition in post-colonial state like Nigeria, is organically linked to the process of primitive accumulation (Onuoha, et al, 2020), which consequently make politics a do-or-die affair. As Ake (1996, p.8) rightly stated, “Our politics is not a lawful competition to select those to manage our common concerns but a fight to capture and privatize an enormous power resource”. Strictly speaking, it is a fiercely contested terrain where legitimacy norm gives way to the norm of expediency. In this kind of situation therefore, it may not be unusual for certain political actors to resort to diabolical practices. Kalu (2008) notes that ethnic secret cult groups over time emerged as core instruments of political mobilization in Nigeria. And as ethnic competition intensified, communities resorted to these mobilization systems.

Further collaborating this, Ayantayo (2009) also states that;

The impression the public and politicians do have is that electoral issues are better settled spiritually thorough (sic) prayers, manipulation of angelic beings and the use of magic than making appeals to political wizardry. Some candidates practically demonstrated this by boasting that if certain groups of people or individuals refused to vote for them, then, some natural objects like stones, pebbles and leaves would for them in their stead. Counting on this, some politicians did express their much reliance on the power of prayer or magic to win election. This also goes with the use of charm, magic and occultic powers to either threaten political opponents to withdraw in election contest or at times to threaten electorates not to vote for candidates of their choice, even after they might have been convinced of the need to do so, going by the content of political manifestoes such party or individuals might have presented to the populace during campaigns. Some equally used magic to hypnotized voters to vote for them or for a particular party against the party the

initially had in mind. Though we do not have statistical data at hand to practically demonstrate the degree at which the religious methods above had worked or are working, we cannot deny the fact they are issues during election periods in Nigeria, and that they negate the spirit of democracy (p.101).

No doubt, these practices pose serious threat to democracy and the evolution and sustenance of a well-fine-tuned political culture in Nigeria. Giving an insider view, former presidential spokesman, Reuben Abati disclosed that three elements are inevitable for elections to be won in Nigeria, these include need for spiritualists, thugs and money (Abati, 2018). More worrisome is the general perception that politics is evil, and that only those whose hands are stained can succeed (Meyer, 1995). Arguably, this view seem to resonate among certain segments of Nigerians, and therefore, encouraged apathy for politics. No doubt, this situation later spur a political engagement theology from Christian leaders who maintain that Nigeria must be delivered from the power of darkness and their agents in power through prayer to be able to prophetically launch her into her destiny. Corroborating this point, Meyer (1998) observed in her study of Ghana's political process that political leaders blame the immorality of power responsible for the country's misfortunes on the use of occultic powers. This view may arguably represent majority of public held sentiment about politics in Nigeria, because, since this democratic dispensation, Christians of all suasions have resorted partly to spiritual warfare as means of political engagement in order to improve the society (Burgess, 2015). Burgess (2015) notes that spiritual tools like prayer and prophecy both become potent and inevitable means for Pentecostals political discourse as well as political engagement.

Given the large congregations these religious leaders oversee and their widely acclaimed influence, politicians increasingly seek their counsel and spiritual endorsement for their election as a divinely approved endeavour. While some of these religious leaders have maintained discretionary distance from appearing partisan, others have the "image of themselves as kingmakers of the country, just like the papacy in medieval Europe" (Ihejirika, 2012, p.190). Hence, at every turn of elections in Nigeria, there are plethora of prophetic declarations released to the public apparently to signal those presumably divinely approved to lead the country (see **Table 1**). These prophetic declarations of electoral outcomes have explicitly made the presence of these religious leaders in the public space widely acknowledged. This has consequently attracted droves of politicians seeking to know their fate in an election. Sensing the deleterious

electoral consequences this might have on democracy, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) sent a note of warning prior to the 2019 general elections that "Politicians must avoid going to seek the outcome of election from priests and pastors" (Nigerian Catholic Reporter, 2020), rather Nigerians should judge contestants by the quality of their tract records not prophecy.

Table 1: Some Prophecies Prior to the 2019 Presidential Election.

S/n	Name	Remark	Source
1	Prophet Temitope Aduroja	the 2019 presidential poll "is going to shock many people. The incumbent President (Buhari) will have no choice but to accept defeat.	Jesusegun Alagbe (2020) 'Gone with the wind: 2019 prophecies that were wide of the mark', https://punchng.com/gone-with-the-wind-2019-prophecies-that-were-wide-of-the-mark/
2	Prophet Wale Olagunju	God said it would take his own intervention for the present government to survive total defeat by the Peoples Democratic Party. God said Buhari had become a disappointment in his sight and he (God) had sought and found a man after his heart to replace him	Ibid
3	Prophet Okechukwu Daniel Udoka	God told me that any man that would want to stop Atiku from entering will go down and might not witness Atiku's celebration of victory...When the election was going on, it was not favouring APC. I saw a different thing altogether. It was not free and fair.	The Nation (March 2, 2019) 'Seer who goofed', https://thenationonline.ng/seers-who-goofed/
4	Prophet Ekong Ituen	Let me start by telling Nigerians that election result will spring surprises, but in my revelation, it has been established that President Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressives Congress (APC) will win the 2019 presidential election	Olakunle Olafioye (2019). 'Presidential poll: The clerics and their prophecies', https://www.sunnewsonline.com/presidential-poll-the-clerics-and-their-prophecies/
5	Prophet TB Joshua	The election will be closely contested between the two leading political parties but I see Muhammadu Buhari winning	Fikayo, 2019, 'Buhari vs Atiku: How TB Joshua, Mbaka, Iginla, other's Prophecies on 2019 Presidential election came to pass', https://dailypost.ng/2019/02/

- 27/buhari-vs-atiku-tb-joshua-
mbaka-iginla-others-
prophecies-2019-
presidential-election-came-
pass/
- 6 Pastor Samuel Akinbodunse Please Nigerians warn Buhari that he is going beyond his boundary. That the Lord said his tenure is once and not twice. If not, he will not see the election o...if he made (makes) a mistake to campaign for elections, before they vote, he will die. Adeniyi G. & Omogbolagun T. March 3 2019, 'Failed Prophecies on Buhari, Atiku Presidential Poll Contest', <https://www.punchng.com/failed-prophecies-on-buhari-atiku-presidential-poll-contest/>
- 7 Apostle Chris Omatsola President Muhammadu Buhari is God's mandate for 2019. God said he is giving President Buhari another opportunity to make history Ibid

Authors' compilation (2020).

Also, it is important to note that some fringe groups which had been oblivious have joined the fray of prophetic projection. These include the Witches and Wizard Association of Nigeria, and Guru Maharaji among others, who use other diabolical medium. These groups lay claim to the secularity of the Nigerian state, maintaining that it is not only Christianity and Islam that constitute the religious configuration of the country (Ajayi, 2016). We may therefore conclude that the projection of prophetic revelations in the public space by acclaimed prophets or spiritualists, broadly interpreted is the quest to assume a public prophetic role in steering the direction of the state and its governance (Burgess, 2015). As a result, therefore, the spiritualized entrenchment of electoral forecasting in Nigeria, explicitly demonstrate the tendentious attempt to capture the public space and perhaps increase the political leverage of these various groups. While political scientists may not be blamed for the spiritualization of the electoral process given our socio-cultural context, however, they must take responsibility for the entrenchment of spiritualize forecast of elections.

The unfortunately account of fringe groups rising to prominence in electoral forecasting in Nigeria raises serious concerns about the presence and activities of political scientists in the country. In fact, ruminating on the conspicuous absence and the pathetic state of political scientists during elections, Prof. Ayo Olukotun wrote a critical piece titled: Elections: Where are our Political Scientists? Lamenting the seemingly marginalized although apparently self-inflicted

damage political scientists are confronted with which further undermine their contribution to public issues. This is despite the plethora of problems that are currently plaguing the country that should require both the professional and disciplinary perspectives of political scientists, unfortunately, are largely lacking. More regrettably, is that during election circles in Nigeria, the voices of prophets, acclaimed spiritualists are mostly heard than those of political scientists. What can be done therefore to remedy and reverse this trend? Because if left to continue, there may eventually be unforeseen consequences given the tensed atmosphere elections are conducted in Nigeria.

Reversing the Marginalized role of Political Scientists: Need for Associational Assertion

With regard to election matters, there are fundamental issues, which have made the critical role of political scientists important on the one hand, and on the other, exposes the precipitating factor that might be partly held responsible for the prominence of so-called prophets. And this is the seemingly suspicion that attends the activities of the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) and subsequent loss of confidence on the electoral body to conduct free and fair elections. Actually, both partisan parties and neutral parties have always questioned elections conducted since this democratic dispensation by the Electoral umpire. And in Nigeria, there seem to be more belief on religious leaders than the political leaders (Obadare, 2006). This can be blamed on systemic institutional weakness.

As stated earlier, the array of national problems almost threatening the survival of Nigeria today, no doubt, requires the role of political scientists in proffering solutions. The field of political science is concerned with power and power relations in a polity (Olaopa, 2015). As Ayo (2015) succinctly put it, the discipline is primarily focused on the study of politics, political processes, political institutions as well as political behavior. Therefore, it is within the province of political science to bring to bear its disciplinary perspectives and associational vibrancy rooted in its methodological and analytical frameworks to tackle critical issues facing the country. Furthermore, Olaopa (2015) notes that:

If the political scientist is concerned with the question and the consequences of who gets what, when, and how, then we immediately see how political science constitutes a veritable disciplinary contribution to the ongoing process of

understanding and transforming Nigeria and her national project. Nigeria, in all her plural complexities, constitutes a real theatre for political analysis

It therefore brings to the fore the need for the scientific and the methodological tools and procedures in political science to proffer objective research and policy related matters in general, but more particularly, in the electoral process. Nigerian political scientists need their voice to be heard in the political discourse and happenings in the country. Pathetically, the full extent of involvement of political scientists in election related activities seem to be only on television shows as public analyst; or as ad-hoc electoral officers, mostly on individual basis. Yet, there are serious need for analysis guided by scientific objectivity for feasible models and paradigms that could steer efforts in understanding the trajectory, trend and pattern of pre and post-election issues in Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria, the unbiased and well-informed scientific aspect of political science that enable objective models that can forecast elections by its ability to predict political behaviour is critical at this moment. In doing so, attendant uncertainty of post-election tension that has always characterized Nigeria's elections might be douse to certain degree (Fridy, 2016) Apart from the annual national conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), where papers are presented with seemingly limited impact on policy issues, should not be the case. As noted earlier, the disciplinary perspectives and associational vibrancy and sophistication should be brought to bear on matters of national importance such as election. Unfortunately, the NPSA has been in comatose condition and as a result, its impact not felt (Olaopa, 2015). It is only of recent that appreciable attempt is being made to resuscitate and reinvigorate the association.

Therefore, to reverse the NPSA's marginalized role, the annual conferences whether at the national or regional level should not just be a talk shop, rather, appropriate steps to be taken to push for consideration and possible implementation of its communiqués. Moreover, election cycles should be a time to reel out a non-partisan and scientifically conducted research as regards the outlook of the election and other matters that may arise therefrom by the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has attempted to interrogate the place of political scientists and prophets as regards electoral forecasting in Nigeria. It argues that political scientists in Nigeria have been pushed to

the margin in the science of electoral forecasting. A practice, which has been readily taken up by religious leaders since the return to democracy in Nigeria. Politicians who rely upon their proclamations to legitimize the prospect of seeking an elective office routinely consult these acclaimed prophets. Nevertheless, this practice holds dire consequences for the survival of democracy given the nature and character of the Nigerian state as well as the continuous relevance of the discipline of political science. To this end, the paper advances a call to arms by political scientists in Nigeria and its associational bodies to redeem electoral forecasting from the clutches of prophets in Nigeria. To achieve this intellectual redemption, the following must be done:

- Encouragement of research into electoral forecasting by political scientists and associational bodies. A chair, an award or research center can be created for investigating and entrenching the concept of electoral forecasting in Nigeria
- Funding of research in electoral forecasting by associational bodies and other interested stakeholders. A fixed amount should be mapped out to fund groups who are genuinely keen on electoral forecasting by the associational bodies and stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission.
- Also, if the Nigerian Bar Association can be ascribed an election observatory role, no less should be accorded the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) as the professional body which remit covers election studies. Doing this will properly integrate the body in the scheme of things in making Nigeria's electoral process better effective, robust and vibrant.

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