

Democracy And Electoral Integrity in Nigeria: A Critical Evaluation of The 2023 Presidential Election

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Abstract

Democracy thrives on free, fair, and credible elections that empower citizens to choose their leaders and engage in governance. Elections are fundamental to democracy, enabling the peaceful transfer of power and reflecting the people's collective will. Despite the reforms introduced by the Electoral Act of 2022, such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic transmission of results, the 2023 presidential election faced allegations of irregularities, including vote-buying, polling disruptions, violence, and delayed result transmission. The paper adopts Electoral Systems Theory, developed primarily by Arend Lijphart (1984) and Robert A. Dahl

(1989). The study employed a qualitative research design and relied on secondary sources gathered from official reports, including those from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and reports from local and international election observers. The study revealed that the Electoral Act of 2022 introduced reforms, including the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV), aimed at enhancing credibility, transparency, and reducing voter fraud. It showed that electoral violence was one significant challenge that disrupted the election process in 2023. The paper recommended that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should prioritize enhancing electoral technology, specifically by improving

the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). The Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies should coordinate with INEC to deploy sufficient security personnel to vulnerable areas before, during, and after the election.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Electoral Integrity, Nigeria, Presidential Election

Introduction

Democracy as a system of government, is sustained by the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections that empower citizens to choose their leaders and participate actively in governance. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and one of its largest democracies, ties the promise of democracy closely to the integrity of its electoral systems. Since transition to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria's elections have been a key indicator of its democratic progress, showcasing both its successes and ongoing challenges. Electoral integrity refers to the extent to which the electoral process meets democratic principles, ensuring that elections are free, fair, transparent, and inclusive (Norris, 2014). Electoral integrity plays a vital role in this process, ensuring the legitimacy of elected officials and fostering public trust in the democratic system. The 2023 presidential election marked a pivotal point in the country's

political development, occurring at a time when citizens and stakeholders were calling for greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Held in a politically charged atmosphere marked by rising youth activism, economic difficulties, and security concerns, the election added layers of complexity to the process, subjecting the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other institutions to heightened scrutiny.

A notable feature of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election was the implementation of technological innovations mandated by the Electoral Act of 2022. Among the key reforms were the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results, designed to reduce electoral fraud, improve credibility, and ensure that election outcomes accurately reflected the will of the people (INEC, 2022). However, despite these advancements, the election encountered significant challenges, including allegations of vote-buying, irregularities in result collation, logistical failures, and disputes over the outcomes. The election also ignited national debates surrounding issues of inclusivity, voter turnout, and the influence of political parties on election results. A third-force political movement emerged, disrupting the traditional two-party system and signaling a shift

in voter behavior and expectations for transformative leadership. In light of these developments, questions regarding the strength and independence of Nigeria's democratic institutions, the rule of law, and the resilience of its democratic culture have come into sharp focus. This study critically assesses the extent to which the 2023 presidential election adhered to electoral integrity principles and its broader implications for the country's democratic consolidation.

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, serving as a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power and an instrument for reflecting the collective will of the people. However, the integrity of electoral processes remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, often undermined by logistical inefficiencies, voter suppression, electoral malpractice, and political interference. Despite the enactment of the Electoral Act of 2022, which introduced reforms such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic transmission of results, concerns about the credibility of elections persist. The 2023 presidential election was anticipated to be a turning point for Nigeria's democratic consolidation. However, it was marred by various allegations of irregularities. Observers reported incidents of vote-buying, with evidence of financial inducement to voters in several states, undermining the principle of free choice

(Premium Times, 2023). There were also cases of disruptions at polling units, including violence and the destruction of electoral materials in parts of Lagos and Rivers States, which disenfranchised voters (Punch, 2023). Additionally, delays in the electronic transmission of results led to widespread skepticism about the credibility of the process, with opposition parties and civil society groups questioning the transparency of the collation process (Channels TV, 2023).

Voter turnout in the 2023 election was reported at just 29%, one of the lowest in Nigeria's democratic history, despite an increase in voter registration and heightened political awareness before the election (INEC, 2023). This paradox highlights deep-seated issues such as disenfranchisement, a lack of trust in the electoral system, and barriers to inclusivity, particularly for women and marginalized groups. Moreover, the emergence of a third-force political movement, represented by candidates outside the dominant two-party system, revealed growing voter disillusionment with traditional political structures. However, it also exposed the vulnerabilities of an electorate grappling with polarization and the challenges of navigating a complex political landscape (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023). The recurring deficits in electoral integrity threaten Nigeria's democratic stability

and the legitimacy of its governance. These challenges not only undermine the credibility of elected officials but also erode public trust in the democratic process, potentially discouraging future participation. If unresolved, these issues could exacerbate political tensions, as evidenced by post-election protests and legal disputes challenging the declared results (BBC News, 2023). The study intends to answer the following research questions;

- i. How did the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) perform in the management of the 2023 general election?
- ii. What were the challenges encountered during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?
- iii. How did emerging political movements and public perceptions of electoral fairness influence the legitimacy of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

1. Democracy

Democracy is widely regarded as a system of governance where the power lies with the people, who exercise it directly or through elected representatives. It emphasizes the principles of equality, participation, accountability, and the rule of law. A core element of democracy is electoral competition, which

ensures that leadership and policies reflect the will of the majority while safeguarding minority rights (Britannica, 2024; V-Dem, 2024). Democracy is a system of governance where leaders are chosen through elections, with the aim of ensuring that governmental policies reflect and address the preferences of the public (Amin and Ambali, 2020). It is characterized by mechanisms that allow citizens to influence policy decisions, either directly or through elected representatives. The concept emphasizes responsiveness to public opinion and the protection of individual freedoms, making it a foundational pillar of participatory governance (Przeworski et al., 2000; Norris, 2014). Yio (2012) sees democracy as “a system of government based on the acquisition of authority from the people, institutionalization of the rule of law, emphasis on the legitimacy of rules, availability of choices and cherished values as well as accountability in governance. Ukase (2014) sees democracy as a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a competitive struggle for the votes of citizens. It is a situation in which people have the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the

men who are to rule them.

2. Election

Diamond (2020) describes elections as the primary method by which a polity expresses its democratic will, with citizens' preferences being translated into political leadership and public policy. He emphasizes that for elections to strengthen democracy, they must be conducted with integrity to prevent manipulation and ensure outcomes reflect the people's will. Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi, (2000) define elections as a formal method of selecting individuals for political office. They argue that elections function as a peaceful means for resolving political conflicts, allowing for a legitimate transfer of power, provided they are free and fair. Huntington (1991) views elections as essential for ensuring political stability and legitimacy within a democratic system. He suggests that elections are not only about choosing representatives but also about maintaining peaceful governance and allowing leaders to remain accountable to the electorate. Dahl (1998) defines an election as a process where citizens choose their leaders through free and fair competition. He argues that elections are fundamental to democracy, as they offer mechanisms

for government accountability and public participation in decision-making processes.

3. Integrity

Larrabee (2016) defines integrity as "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles." In this context, integrity involves adhering to ethical standards and being consistent in one's actions, ensuring alignment between one's words and deeds. McCracken (2012) describes integrity as the adherence to ethical guidelines and the transparent operation of institutions. Integrity in organizations ensures that decisions and actions are aligned with core values, fostering trust and accountability. Integrity involves an individual's internal alignment between their ethical beliefs and actions. It is not just a matter of external conduct, but also of the inner conviction to do what is right, regardless of external pressures (Williams, 2010). Mill (1863) posits that integrity is intrinsic to personal well-being and societal trust.

4. Electoral Integrity

Norris (2014) defines electoral integrity as the absence of serious flaws in the electoral process and highlights that elections should be free, fair, competitive, and transparent. She emphasizes that

it also involves a broader context of legal and procedural norms that ensure elections are conducted in a way that the public trusts and respects the outcome. Reynolds (2010) defines electoral integrity as the degree to which an election is free from fraud, manipulation, and bias. He emphasizes that electoral processes must reflect the true preferences of voters and be conducted in a way that upholds democratic norms and values. Ziblatt (2006) connects electoral integrity to the consolidation of democracy. He defines it as the adherence to rules that ensure elections are competitive, inclusive, and allow for political pluralism. He notes that the legitimacy of elections is based on the degree to which they are conducted with fairness and without disenfranchisement.

Wattenberg (2015) defines electoral integrity as the quality of elections in terms of both technical aspects (such as vote counting and transparency) and political factors (such as the fairness of campaigns and the freedom of the press). He also notes that public perception plays a crucial role in determining the integrity of elections. Diamond (2008) views electoral integrity as the quality of electoral processes that contribute to the legitimacy of democratic governance. He

argues that electoral integrity must be supported by strong legal frameworks, the protection of civil liberties, and the absence of political violence or coercion. Dahl (1971) refers to electoral integrity within the broader context of “polyarchy” or the ideal of democracy. He defines it as a system in which elections are competitive, inclusive, and fair, without restrictions or manipulations that compromise the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Empirical Review

Chitlaoarporn (2015) examined the relationship between elections and democracy. The main objective of the study was to investigate how electoral processes, when compromised by malpractice, can undermine democratic development. The study employed qualitative and empirical, drawing on documented instances of electoral malpractice and analyzing patterns of unethical behavior within electoral systems. The findings identified at least twelve distinct patterns of electoral malpractice that threaten the legitimacy of democratic elections. These include bribing law enforcement officers, bribing election officials, manipulating election centers, causing power outages during vote counting, negotiating to eliminate competition, issuing threats, engaging in vote buying, deploying

large numbers of election agents, using excessive financial resources, making continuous monetary payments, exploiting access to military-controlled zones, and treating elections like gambling to secure outcomes. The study recommended strengthening of electoral laws and enforcement mechanisms to deter and punish electoral fraud. Equally, the professionalization and independence of electoral commissions, enhanced transparency in campaign financing, and civic education programs to sensitize citizens about their rights and the importance of electoral integrity. International electoral observers and civil society organizations were also encouraged to play a more active role in monitoring elections and reporting malpractice.

Amin and Ambali (2020) wrote on the impact of democratic governance on social amenities in Bode-Saadu, Kwara State of Nigeria. The study addressed the challenges that transcend national or regional boundaries. However, at the local level in Nigeria, governance holds greater significance as citizens generally have limited expectations from the central government. This study evaluated the impact and challenges of democratic governance on the provision of social amenities in Bode-Saadu. It utilized both primary and secondary data. The elite theory served as the study's theoretical framework. Findings

reveal that democratic governance has not effectively fostered social development in Bode-Saadu due to limited developmental vision, poor commitment, and a lack of political will to translate aspirations into actionable policies and programs. Most respondents agreed that leadership failure at the local level hinders development, with inadequate community progress linked to corrupt practices among local government officials. The study recommends that leaders develop the political will to invest in infrastructure to support the development of Bode-Saadu. Furthermore, appointments should be merit-based rather than influenced by political or religious affiliations.

Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, and Okeke (2023) conducted an analysis of democracy and Nigeria's 2023 general elections, considering a wide range of factors that influenced both the process and outcome. The 2023 election posed a critical test for Nigeria's democratic progress, as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced new technologies like the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) to enhance the election process. The Electoral Act 2022 also introduced reforms intended to improve electoral organization and increase transparency in result reporting. However, despite these

innovations, the election was conducted under a tense and disputed atmosphere, marked by insecurity and controversial government policies. Numerous election observation groups reported significant issues, including delays in distributing Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), malfunctioning election technology, vote manipulation, political violence, and a lack of transparency in result collation and declaration. The election was further hindered by Nigeria's broader issues of poverty, corruption, insecurity, and inadequate electoral infrastructure, which have historically affected voter participation. The study recommended strengthening the independence of the electoral body, introducing measures to prevent fraud and manipulation, and ensuring that future elections genuinely reflect the will of the people.

Abumbe and Owa (2024) conducted a study on democracy and electoral integrity in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, examining the complex factors that influenced both the election process and its outcome. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study drew data from secondary sources, including textbooks, journals, internet resources, the official INEC website, and over 26 Nigerian daily newspapers. These materials were contextually analyzed within the context of the topic. The findings revealed that, despite the optimism generated by INEC's introduction of improved

electoral technologies, such as the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV), the 2023 elections were conducted in a difficult environment marked by widespread insecurity, uncertain government policies, logistical and operational challenges, malfunctioning technologies, violence, voter intimidation, electoral fraud, and a lack of transparency in result collation and communication. The study recommended strengthening INEC's independence to ensure a fraud-free election that reflects the true will of Nigerians, thus bolstering democracy and promoting more stable future elections.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts Electoral Systems Theory, developed primarily by Arend Lijphart (1984) and Robert A. Dahl (1989), explores how the design of an electoral system affects democratic outcomes, political representation, and electoral integrity. The theory argues that the structure of the electoral system whether majoritarian, proportional, or mixed shapes party systems, voter behavior, and the overall quality of democracy. One key assumption of the theory is that the electoral system influences how well election outcomes reflect the preferences of the electorate. For instance, proportional representation

systems tend to provide more inclusive and accurate representation of political parties, while majoritarian systems, such as first-past-the-post, often result in a “winner-takes-all” outcome that can marginalize minority voices (Lijphart, 1984; Dahl, 1989).

The theory also emphasizes electoral integrity, assuming that the design of the system can either enhance or undermine the transparency and fairness of elections. Systems with clear procedures for vote counting, result collation, and fraud prevention are thought to bolster electoral legitimacy. In the case of Nigeria’s 2023 general election, the introduction of technologies such as Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV) aimed to enhance transparency and reduce electoral fraud. However, despite these technological advances, the election faced numerous challenges, such as insecurity, violence, and malfunctioning technology, which compromised its integrity. According to Electoral Systems Theory, while reforms like BVAS and IREV were designed to improve transparency, their success depended on effective implementation and the broader institutional capacity to uphold fairness and prevent fraud (Abumbe & Owa, 2024; Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, & Okeke, 2023). The theory also assumes that the electoral system influences voter behavior and

participation. Fairer, more transparent systems are assumed to encourage greater voter engagement and trust in the election process. In Nigeria’s 2023 elections, despite technological reforms, issues like political violence and logistical failures led to decreased voter confidence and turnout. Electoral Systems Theory thus underscores the importance of a well-designed system in ensuring both electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy (Lijphart, 1984; Dahl, 1989).

The critics of Electoral Systems Theory argue that the theory overemphasizes the role of electoral system design in shaping democratic outcomes and electoral integrity, often neglecting other important factors. One criticism is that the theory places too much focus on structural design, such as whether an electoral system is majoritarian, proportional, or mixed, as the primary determinant of election outcomes and democratic functioning. While system design is certainly important, critics like Hayek (1988) and Reed (1997) point out that factors such as political culture, socioeconomic conditions, historical legacies of authoritarianism, and the strength of political institutions also play significant roles in shaping electoral integrity. In countries like Nigeria, these factors often complicate the effectiveness of electoral reforms, such as those implemented in the 2023

elections, where despite technological improvements, challenges like violence, insecurity, and political manipulation persisted.

Another major critique is the limited consideration of political context in the theory. Critics argue that Electoral Systems Theory fails to account for the broader political environment, including issues such as ethnic divisions, the role of political parties, and the legacies of past regimes. This is particularly pertinent in developing democracies, where the design of an electoral system alone may not be sufficient to ensure free and fair elections. Norris (2014) contend that political factors such as media influence, political polarization, and the level of voter education play a crucial role in determining voter behavior and participation, which the theory overlooks.

Furthermore, the theory has been criticized for oversimplifying voter behavior. It assumes that more proportional or transparent systems automatically lead to better voter engagement and higher participation. However, critics argue that social and political factors, such as media coverage, political violence, and institutional trust, are often more decisive in shaping how voters behave and whether they turn out to vote. In Nigeria's 2023 elections, for example, despite technological reforms designed to enhance transparency, issues

like low voter turnout and widespread violence highlighted the limitations of focusing solely on electoral system design. Finally, technological reliance is another point of critique. While the theory assumes that technological reforms like BVAS and IREV will significantly enhance electoral integrity, critics like Farrell (2001) argue that these tools alone cannot guarantee fair elections in weak institutional environments. In countries with fragile institutions, such as Nigeria, electoral reforms may be undermined by issues like corruption, lack of political will, and logistical challenges. Therefore, critics maintain that Electoral Systems Theory oversimplifies the complexities of ensuring electoral integrity, relying too heavily on system design and technology without fully considering the broader political and institutional factors that shape election outcomes.

Electoral Systems Theory remains highly relevant for analyzing democratic processes, particularly in the context of understanding electoral integrity and outcomes. The theory provides a framework for examining how the design of electoral systems impacts political representation, party dynamics, and the transparency of elections, all of which are crucial for evaluating the integrity of an election process. As Lijphart (1984) and Dahl (1989) argue, the electoral system shapes the relationship between voters and political parties, influencing

the legitimacy of electoral results and democratic outcomes. This makes the theory essential for understanding the mechanisms through which electoral systems can either promote or hinder democratic consolidation, particularly in developing democracies like Nigeria.

In the context of the 2023 Nigerian general elections, the theory offers insights into how electoral reforms, such as the introduction of Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV), could potentially enhance transparency and reduce fraud. Despite these technological innovations, the challenges faced such as political violence, insecurity, and malfunctioning technologies underscore the relevance of the theory, as it emphasizes that electoral system design alone is insufficient without strong institutions, political will, and a stable political environment (Abumbe & Owa, 2024; Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, & Okeke, 2023). Moreover, the theory's focus on the relationship between electoral systems and voter behavior is particularly relevant in contexts where voter engagement is shaped by factors beyond system design, such as political polarization and social divisions. For instance, Norris (2014) highlights that despite a well-designed electoral system, electoral integrity can still be compromised by issues such as voter disenfranchisement,

apathy, or manipulation factors often present in Nigerian elections.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore the relationship between electoral integrity and democratic outcomes. The primary aim is to understand the key factors influencing the 2023 election process and its overall integrity. Data collection involves secondary sources gathered from official reports, including those from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and reports from local and international election observers, such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the European Union (EU). Media sources, such as Nigerian newspapers, news websites, and television broadcasts, will provide insights into public perceptions and coverage of the election, while academic journals and books offer a theoretical background on the subject.

INEC Performance, Electoral Challenges, and Legitimacy of the 2023 Presidential Election

The Electoral Act of 2022 introduced crucial reforms designed to enhance the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process, particularly through the adoption

of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results. The BVAS was intended to combine fingerprint and facial recognition technology for voter accreditation, ensuring that only eligible voters participated in the election. This system was aimed at addressing issues such as voter impersonation and multiple voting, which had marred previous elections. Okoye (2023) argue that the introduction of BVAS represents a paradigm shift in curbing electoral malpractice, emphasizing its role in enhancing transparency and electoral credibility. Similarly, Uche and Eze (2023) contend that the system's dual-authentication mechanism reinforced trust in the accreditation process and reduced the incidence of electoral fraud. However, despite its success in many areas, technical glitches and logistical failures especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas—limited its full effectiveness (Omoruyi, 2023; Omodia & Aliu, 2023). The electronic transmission of results through the IReV platform was widely seen as a critical step toward transparent and accountable elections. According to Oladeji (2023), the real-time upload of polling unit results minimized opportunities for result manipulation at collation centers, a common flaw in previous elections. Nwangwu and Nwoke (2023) further affirm that IReV helped reduce the opacity surrounding the collation process, empowering citizens

and election observers to independently verify outcomes. Yet, issues such as network failures, server downtimes, and delayed uploads raised doubts about the system's reliability (Olawale, 2023; Adebayo, 2023). Duruji et al. (2023) also note that although the platform was a commendable innovation, INEC's inability to consistently implement its use undermined public confidence in the final outcomes.

The performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during the 2023 elections was a subject of intense scrutiny. INEC received commendations for its early deployment of materials and expanded voter education efforts. However, scholars such as Ogundiya and Baba (2023) assert that these gains were significantly offset by operational challenges, especially in the areas of logistics and infrastructure. While Adewale (2023) acknowledges the Commission's intent to improve transparency through technological adoption, the inconsistencies in BVAS performance and delays in IReV transmissions led to questions about INEC's preparedness and neutrality. Similarly, Ojo (2023) posits that INEC's credibility was severely tested by its inability to address emerging problems in real time, especially in areas like Lagos, Rivers, and parts of the North.

Vote-buying remained a deeply

entrenched issue in the 2023 elections. Despite regulatory frameworks, political parties continued to deploy financial inducements to sway voter behavior. Ibeanu (2023) notes that vote-buying in Nigeria has become “institutionalized,” reflecting both the desperation of political actors and the vulnerability of impoverished voters. Reports from Lagos, Rivers, and other states confirmed widespread monetary and material inducements, which corrupted the electoral process and undermined democratic choice (Adebayo, 2023). Onuoha and Ayodele (2023) argue that the persistence of vote-buying reflects deeper structural issues, including poverty, poor civic education, and institutional weaknesses in enforcement mechanisms.

Electoral violence also significantly marred the 2023 polls. In places like Ogun, Enugu, Kano, and Imo, election-related violence led to voter suppression and disruptions at polling stations (Olawale, 2023). Albert (2023) emphasizes that the normalization of violence during elections in Nigeria signals a democratic deficit, where coercion substitutes for legitimate political engagement. The presence of armed thugs, intimidation of voters, and attacks on electoral officials highlight the failure of the state to provide a secure environment for free participation. Ajayi and Ijaiya (2023) further maintain that

electoral violence disproportionately affects marginalized groups, especially women and youth, and discourages future participation in democratic processes. Logistical failures were another area of concern. In rural parts of Kaduna, Benue, Akwa Ibom, and Kogi, late arrival of materials and malfunctioning BVAS devices delayed the voting process and discouraged many voters (Omoruyi, 2023). According to Obi and Idike (2023), these operational issues are a consequence of systemic inefficiencies in electoral planning and execution. They argue that without significant investment in infrastructure and training, the technological innovations introduced by INEC may fail to deliver on their full promise.

The 2023 election also witnessed the growing influence of youth-led political movements, especially those that emerged from the #EndSARS protests. According to Ibrahim and Salihu (2023), these movements reflect a growing political consciousness among young Nigerians and a rejection of the traditional political elite. Their use of digital platforms for voter education and mobilization injected new energy into the electoral process. However, public perception of electoral fairness remained low, as many of these youth activists expressed distrust in the system due to reported irregularities, delays in result collation, and incidents

of violence (Adebayo, 2023). Chukwuma and Balogun (2023) argue that the inability of electoral institutions to match public expectations for reform has deepened political disillusionment, especially among first-time voters. The legitimacy of the 2023 presidential election is thus contested. Ogundiya (2023) maintains that legitimacy is not just about constitutional compliance, but also about public perception. In this case, the gap between the legal procedures and citizens' expectations led to a trust deficit. Reports of vote-buying in Lagos, violence in Ebonyi, and delayed result uploads in Ogun and Benue fueled the perception that the process was manipulated. As Diamond (2023) asserts, when elections are not seen as credible, the broader democratic project is put at risk.

Conclusion

The paper examined the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. Despite the landmark reforms introduced by the Electoral Act of 2022, revealed both significant progress and deep-seated structural challenges within Nigeria's electoral system. The adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) represented a technological shift aimed at enhancing electoral transparency, curbing

malpractice, and restoring public confidence. While these innovations improved aspects of the accreditation and result collation processes, their inconsistent implementation, especially in remote areas, weakened their overall impact. Technical glitches, delayed result transmission, and inadequate infrastructure not only hindered efficiency but also reinforced voter skepticism and institutional distrust.

Moreover, the persistent challenges of vote-buying, electoral violence, and logistical inefficiencies overshadowed many of the gains from electoral reforms. Vote-buying remained systemic, reflecting the entrenched role of poverty and political desperation in Nigeria's electoral culture. Electoral violence and intimidation, particularly in volatile regions, compromised voter turnout and democratic participation. Despite the growing political awareness and activism especially among youth-led movements public perception of the election's fairness and legitimacy remained low. Ultimately, the failure of institutions like INEC to consistently enforce the reforms led to a contested election outcome and undermined the trust essential for democratic consolidation.

Recommendations

- i. The Independent National Electoral

- Commission (INEC) should enhance its operational capacity by investing in the training of both permanent and ad-hoc staff, improving logistics, and ensuring robust technical infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas. It should also establish an internal monitoring and rapid-response unit to address technical issues swiftly during elections.
- ii. Electoral technology reforms such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) should be institutionalized with clear, enforceable operational guidelines. INEC, in collaboration with the National Assembly, should standardize their deployment across all polling units and conduct regular simulations and audits to ensure technological readiness. Tackling vote-buying requires the joint efforts of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the National Orientation Agency (NOA). These institutions should intensify enforcement actions and voter sensitization campaigns, while the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs should prioritize poverty alleviation programs to reduce citizens' vulnerability to inducement.
 - iii. Electoral security also needs urgent attention. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Department of State Services (DSS), and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), working with INEC through the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), must adopt a non-partisan approach and conduct thorough pre-election risk assessments in vulnerable areas to ensure peaceful and safe elections.
 - iv. Additionally, voter education and civic engagement must be deepened by the National Orientation Agency (NOA), INEC, civil society organizations, and the Ministries of Education at both federal and state levels. These bodies should develop inclusive civic education programs targeting youth, women, and rural populations, using diverse communication platforms. In light of the increasing political engagement of youth-led movements such as those emerging from the #EndSARS protests, INEC, the Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, and the National Assembly Committees on Electoral Matters should create formal engagement platforms to include youth voices in the electoral reform process.

- v. INEC should partner with the Ministry of Communications, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), and telecom providers to expand internet connectivity in underserved areas, ensuring the seamless and real-time transmission of election results. Finally, the National Assembly must expedite the passage of legislation to establish an Independent Electoral Offences Commission. This body, separate from INEC, would be mandated to investigate and prosecute electoral offenses, thereby ensuring accountability and reducing the burden on electoral administrators.
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