

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Promotion of Democracy in Nigeria: The Study of 2023 Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes democracy and 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria considering the wider set of factors that shaped the organization and the outcome. Elections are critical component to the survival of democratic system, just like a human being would find it impossible to exist without the heart. This implies that an election is the life-wire of democracy. In Nigeria, presidential elections are held every four years in order to select a President and Members of the National Assembly and State-level Assemblies. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the agency that is saddled with the responsibility of the conduct of elections and other related matters. It is worthy to note that an enduring electoral system must be able to enlist the trust and confidence of the masses by ensuring that the number of votes cast in an election reflects the popularity and acceptance of the political parties and the candidates in such an election. However, there are innumerable disputes of carrying out plausible election by the electoral body. It must be clearly stated that ballot snatching, vote buying, bribery, corruption, violation of electoral rules, rigging, manipulation of results for the purposes of winning elections always occur and the 2023 Presidential Election was not an exception. The main objective of this study is to examine the Independent National Electoral Commission and the promotion of democracy in Nigeria with reference to the 2023 Presidential Election. The study adopted the documentary methods of data collection and utilizes secondary sources; and relays on content analysis as its method of data analysis. To achieve this, the authors sourced for information from published textbooks, magazines, journal articles, official documents from the Yiaga Africa, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) West Africa, Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended), 2022 Electoral Act, INEC guidelines, online materials and other relevant publications. The study found out that the activities of Nigeria's political elites ranging from greed for power, vote buying and non adherence to Electoral laws have undermined the country's chances for democratic progress. The study therefore recommends among other things that there is urgent need to address the problem of inequality and poverty in the country, importantly; various political institutions should be strengthened to act as agent of change. The political players have an obligation to abide by the laws and regulations that govern politics. Those who broke the nation's election regulations ought to face harsh penalties. In order to reassure voters that their votes will count and that they will be willing to participate, the electoral administrators should be men and women with a track record of integrity.

Keywords: Election, Democracy, 2023 Presidential election, INEC, Technology, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

In every modern society, election and democracy are classified as essential ingredients of political development. There is no doubt that election has been a factor in Nigeria's political development since independence, even in pre-independence era, it played significant role both at the national and regional levels. But the fact remains that post-independence elections in Nigeria have a unique feature of rigging, violation of electoral rules and manipulation of results which have gone a long way in affecting the democratic ideals and developmental ethos (Lawal, 2005; Durotoye, 2016).

Since independence, most of the general elections conducted so far in Nigeria, such as 1964/1965, 1979, 1983, 1993, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 have been characterized by electoral fraud. Such crisis manifested in 1964/1965, which eventually led to the termination of the First Republic. Also, in 1983, the catastrophe was so much especially in the South Western Nigeria (old Ondo and Oyo States) to the extent that the military had to intervene, and that also marked the end of the Second Republic (Arowolo and Lawal, 2009).

Presidential elections in Nigeria started during the

Second Republic (1979-1984) when the country dropped the parliamentary system of government after the bloody coup in 1966. From 1979 to date, Presidential election took place nine (9) times in the history of the country. The first two elections occurred in the Second Republic in 1979 and 1983. Another took place in 1991 during the Aborted Third Republic which was eventually annulled. In the Fourth Republic, six (6) Presidential elections took place during 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

After a prolonged military rule characterized by the wanton violation and repression of the political, economic, and social rights of the people, the re-democratization process began in 1999 elicited renewed expectations for the consolidation of democracy in the country (Osaghae, 1999). The 1999 general election to finally disengage the military from politics were also rigged like previous elections in Nigeria. There were allegations on shortage of electoral materials at the polling centres, thumb printing of ballot papers outside polling centres, about voting returns bearing little resemblance to the poor turnout of voters, etc. The All Peoples Party (APP)/Action for Democracy (AD) alliance went to court to challenge the declaration of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Olusegun Obasanjo as the winner. Since the restoration of civil rule, attempts have not been made by politicians to deepen and strengthen democracy. Instead, Nigeria has only added to its history of fraudulent and violent elections. For example, this was how the US-based Jimmy Carter Centre for Democracy which monitored the 1999 election as an international observer concluded its report on the outcome of the presidential election like the others before it, "It was not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election" (HRW, 2007; Obakhedo, 2011).

Presidential elections were held in Nigeria on 19th April 2003. Millions of people voted several times. The police in Lagos uncovered an electoral fraud, found five million false ballots. International observers, including the European Union, determined various irregularities in 11 of the 36 Federal states. Thus in many cases votes were pre-filled or results were later amended in some states that did not fulfill minimum standard for democratic elections. In April and May 2003, at least one hundred people were killed and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria. The majority of serious abuses were perpetrated by members or supporters of the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In a number of locations, elections simply did not take place as groups of armed thugs linked to political parties and candidates intimidated and threatened voters in order to falsify results. The violence and climate of intimidation facilitated widespread fraud, invalidating the results of the elections in many areas. Nevertheless, the elections were hailed as peaceful by Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was re-elected, and were widely praised by foreign governments, including

Nigeria's key foreign allies. The 2003 elections were significant for Nigeria as the country's first sustained transition from one civilian government to another. However, the 2003 elections were more pervasively and openly rigged than the flawed 1999 polls, and far more bloody.

The Nigerian Presidential elections of April 2007 were judged by most observers to fall a long way short of the standards for credible, free and fair elections and to be the worst in Nigeria's post-independence, electoral history. Thus far, elections have served the interests mainly of the powerful elite and have had little, if any, significant impact on deepening representative democracy, let alone transforming people's socio-economic livelihoods in a positive manner. The reports of domestic and international observers provided confirmation that all stages of the elections were fundamentally flawed.

The 2011 Presidential elections in Nigeria were not free from crisis. These strategies of causing electoral crisis were used predominantly by the incumbent party and were deployed most vigorously where the electoral contest was expected to be particularly tight. Although, electoral crises have not been the exclusive preserve of the ruling party, candidates and supporters of the larger opposition parties also carried out the acts of violence in the pursuit of electoral victory. Furthermore, whenever crisis was instigated by supporters of one party whether ruling or the opposition, their opponents usually do not hesitate to respond (Lawal, 2014).

The subsequent General elections in 2015, which featured Nigeria's first ever opposition victory at the presidential level, only appeared to deepen the trend of INEC's improving public legitimacy and increased embrace of technology. Stewarded once again by Attahiru Jega, the commission's pre-election preparations featured a cleaned-up voter database, with the previous register of 73.5 million voters reduced to 67.4 million based on the institutions uncovering of duplicate, fictitious or deceased individuals on the voter register. INEC likewise introduced electronic card readers at polling units, allowing only registered voters to cast a ballot, and removing the possibility that vote numbers could be locally padded.

State-level elections since 2019 have likewise featured both questionable logistical failures and legal disputes and the increased integration of technology into electoral administration. The latter has included the introduction of a new Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) that features a fingerprint scan and facial recognition technology. INEC has also developed an online platform where polling unit results are uploaded and can be viewed in real time. Yet, election results have remained contentious at the state level – with various governorship polls having been overturned by courts. The newly introduced technology has itself been the source of dispute, with the defeated APC candidate in the 2022

Osun Governorship Election alleging that the PDP shored up votes in the same polling units where the BVAS happened to not have been in use.

Nigeria's 2023 elections had the potential of being a watershed moment in the country's democratic trajectory. Against a backdrop of historic instability across the country, escalating economic crises (in part due to a state-created currency shortage), and growing national divisions, the elections nonetheless presented a critical opportunity for citizens, especially youth, to engage in the democratic process and to channel grievances through legitimate political means (IRI/NDI report, 2023). In July 2022, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Mahmood Yakubu stated that INEC would deliver "the best-ever election" in 2023, and this was welcomed by many Nigerians and outside observers as both aspirational and necessary. Buttressing this optimism was the Electoral Act 2022, which introduced reforms aimed at more timely organization of pre-electoral processes and increasing transparency in results collation and reporting (IRI/NDI report, 2023).

Despite these positive prospects earlier in the year, the elections fell short of Nigerian citizens' legitimate and reasonable expectations, as significant logistical, technological, and communications failures by INEC; political parties that relied on divisive rhetoric rather than running on issues; regional disparities in electoral integrity; instances of vote manipulation; political violence, and marginalization of key populations marred the electoral process and disenfranchised voters (IRI/NDI report, 2023). Although there were incremental improvements in election administration, advances in results transparency, increased competitiveness in the presidential race, and quality engagement of youth, the elections saw the lowest turnout for national contests in Nigeria's modern democratic history with only one in five registered voters participating. Sustained protests and allegations of irregularities have persisted since February due to the poor administration of the election.

Problematic statement

From high inflation to deadly attacks by gunmen against innocent civilians, the eight-year rule of the out gone President Muhammadu Buhari saw Nigeria faced various crises. Life on the streets, schools, and home was insecure. Corruption was rife and audacious. In Buhari's eight years in office, nothing summarizes his unfortunate isolation and aloofness from the common misery like the bitter experience over the redesign of three of the country's eight bank notes. Not many argued with the merit of the redesign or the powers of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to have carried it out, when necessary. There was reasonable suspicion that massive cash was fuelling corruption, and especially kidnapping and banditry – the new Boko Haram franchise. Although there have been cases of kidnappers and robbers dragging

their victims to ATMs to extort cash, withdrawal limits and fear of exposure reduced the amounts of money that could be extorted. Apart from that, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) could hardly ensure stable monetary policy if the country was floating on cash. Also, politicians who may have stockpiled cash for distribution during the elections were bound to found the naira redesign and restrictions quite uncomfortable. Yet, like every currency, this whole redesign business has two sides. Whatever the benefits in ease, convenience or philosophy, it has so far been implemented with a callousness that makes the ransoms demanded by kidnappers and bandits look like freewill offering. State governors called the supply crisis "currency confiscation". It's a grab, actually; a vengeful grabs that makes India's catastrophic example seven years ago, look like a child's play. According to Kaduna state Governor, Nasir el-Rufai, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) mopped up N2 trillion in old notes, but printed new notes of only N300 billion; that was, N1000 new notes for every N7000 old ones.

According to the CBN (2023) "The currency in circulation increased from N1.4 trillion in 2015 to N3.23 trillion in October 2022. The bank appears not to have taken into consideration the increase in the country's nominal GDP over this period, the doubling of consumer prices, rising population, and the impact of the humongous Ways and Means advances to the Federal Government over this period". And over this period, the governors might have added, the same central banker, Godwin Emefiele, which had also been governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Election in Nigeria usually has the political culture and voting pattern of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which is part of the issues that are bedeviling the successful choice of good leaders in the country (Abdullahi, 2015). Closely related to the above is the politics of winning at all cost where elections in Nigeria are marred with rigging, violence, manipulation of results and intimidation of opposition and their supporters using the apparatus of security personnel and political thugs (Auwal, 2015). Election in Nigeria took the dimension of money politics where vote buying, godfatherism, bribery, corruption, overspending, violation of electoral rules and other irregularities affected the process and its outcome (Sule et al., 2018). The political elites found it expedient to manipulate religion as the easiest means of acquiring power because of their failure to deliver their responsibilities. Politics has been turned into a business venture in Nigeria for self-services and personal accumulation of wealth. The phenomenon of money politics reached its zenith in Nigerian politics during the 2023 Presidential Election. The religious clerics are bought and corrupted by the politicians to sway the voters' opinion into submission to religious sentiments in politics. This has been reported by Sule et al. (2018) the political culture in Nigeria is that of the politics of violence, zero-sum game, militarism, utilization of thugs by politicians and the use of all available

Table 1: 2023 Presidential Election snapshot.

2023 Presidential Election Snapshot	
i.	774 Local Governments
ii.	109 Senatorial Districts
iii.	House of Representatives seats
iv.	993 State Houses of Assembly seats
v.	8,809 Registration Areas (RAs)/ Wards
vi.	176,846 Polling Units
vii.	2,252,471 Registered Voters (consisting of 77,475 newly registered voters)

Source: INEC, 2023; IFES, 2023.

means to secure power at all cost including killings, political assassination, intimidation of opposition and voters. Because of the elites' nature of capturing power at all cost for personal gain, election in Nigeria is turned into a war-like affair (Falola and Heaton, 2008).

INEC and the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

The Presidential election held on the 25th February 2023. Nigerian voters displayed a commendable commitment in the fulfilling of their democratic rights and responsibilities in a generally peaceful and orderly manner (Table 1). This was despite prevailing insecurity across the country, lingering fuel scarcity and the November 2022 decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) to redesign the naira note, which created currency shortages and threatened to derail operational plans. Although the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) confirmed that they had received the necessary resources shortly before the elections, deployment plans appear to have been affected by the uncertainty it caused in some instances. On 18 March, State House of Assembly (SHoA) elections held in all 36 states, while there were 28 governorship elections as eight others follow different timelines due to various court rulings.

The elections took place against a backdrop of economic hardship exemplified by sharpened fuel and cash shortages and a volatile security environment in a number of states across the country with cases of violence resulting in multiple fatalities. There was a widespread sense of expectation for well managed elections ahead of the 25th February polls which had been dashed by failures leading to a tangible public disappointment and concerns about increasing voter disillusionment. The dramatically decreased trust in and mounting public criticism of INEC led to calls, including by civil society, for the resignation of its Chairman.

The adoption of the Electoral Act of 2022 made several changes to the conduct and timelines of political party primaries to promote transparency and ease electoral preparations. The Act enabled consensus primaries for nominating a party's candidates, in addition to direct and indirect primaries, despite prolonged efforts by civil society and other electoral stakeholders to mandate direct primaries only in the legislation. The Act also added greater clarity on the processes and procedures

for each mode of party primary. In the case of a direct primary the list of all party members had to be publicly displayed, and in the case of indirect primaries the names of all of the delegates had to be displayed and provided to all aspirants. Should a party adopt a consensus candidate, the candidates removing themselves from the contest needed to provide signed letters of withdrawal from the race. Despite these clarifying procedures, transparency of the party primaries did not largely improve from 2019 as most parties opted for indirect primaries or consensus candidates, prevented INEC and citizens observers to monitor the full primary voting process, and used backdoor negotiations to influence candidate selections. All 18 registered political parties that fielded candidates for the 2023 Presidential elections include:

1. Accord
2. Action Alliance
3. African Action Congress
4. African Democratic Congress
5. Action Democratic Party
6. All Progressive Congress
7. All Progressive Grand Alliance
8. Allied Peoples Movement
9. All People's Party
10. Boot Party
11. Labour Party
12. New Nigeria Peoples Party
13. National Rescue Movement
14. Peoples Democratic Party
15. Peoples Redemption Party
16. Social Democratic Party
17. Young Progressives Party
18. Zenith Labour Party

Source: INEC, 2023; IFES, 2023.

INEC officials were present at polling stations before they opened at 08:30 hrs in just 36.7% of cases, according to observers, with 32.5% arriving an hour or more after voting was scheduled to have commenced. This was a particularly pronounced challenge in the South East and this is likely associated with concerns for personal safety, given that two-thirds of the attacks recorded against INEC since the start of 2021 have been in this geopolitical zone. In some cases, INEC officials arrived

shortly before 14:30 hrs– the time polls were officially due to close (CDD-EAC, 2023).

Nigerians were relieved that the presidential election date was respected without a last-minute postponement as happened in the past; nevertheless, many complained that polling stations 3 opened late across the country on account of the late deployment of staff and materials. These challenges were not experienced equally across the country, and disproportionately impacted voters in the South East and South-South geo-political zones. While this pattern had been experienced in past elections, the regional difference in delays was more glaring during the 2023 elections, and INEC's lack of transparency and communication regarding the cause and extent of these problems undermined confidence in the process, especially in those zones and among parties that considered those areas their strongholds. Because of the delayed openings, many voters had to wait for long hours and in overcrowded conditions before casting their ballots. There was no consistent, coordinated effort to extend voting hours, and long wait times exacerbated tensions at many polling units (IRI/NDI report, 2023).

However, when voting began, some challenges with the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) were noted. Despite training delivered to all INEC ad-hoc staff on the use of the new technology tools, recruitment shortcomings and accurate capacity gaps affected its effective deployment. This was most acute in the North West where 23% of observers noted incidents of voter accreditation being completed in polling units, where BVAS was used, even if the individual was not captured using the BVAS reader (CDD-EAC, 2023). This was in contravention of the legal framework which requires that all voters must be registered by BVAS in order to vote. Section 64 (6) of the Electoral Act also designates a primacy to the results from BVAS in the event of a disputed result. Although less pronounced elsewhere in the country 8.7% of observers witnessed this taking place in South-south, 5.9% in South-west, 9.6% in the northeast, 4.2% in the South-east and 7.7% in the North-central zone.

Technical issues were also noted by our observers, with 23.1% having witnessed issues of BVAS malfunction. This was particularly predominant in the North-East, with 42.7% of observers recording a malfunction, but was also high in the North-West with 28.7% (ibid). Positively, INEC's contingency planning was broadly effective, with more than two-third of the technical hitches resolved within one hour, and where the technology was working accreditation happened at a good pace (ibid). However, in some instances the malfunctioning of the reader created long delays for all those queuing to vote. For example, in Ile-Bale polling unit (002) in Ajase-Ipo ward, Irepodun Local Government Area (LGA), Kwara state, many prospective voters waited for more than three hours due to malfunctioning BVAS machines.

In less than 1% of polling units, no BVAS reader was seen during opening by the observers.

A further consequence of the late opening of polls was that voting continued into the evening in states such as Plateau, Lagos and Imo, following INEC's election day confirmation that those in the queue to vote by the official 14:30 hrs cut off time would be allowed to cast their ballot. However, keeping track of those in the queue for such a long period beyond the deadline was difficult (CDD-EAC, 2023). Beyond that, there have been anecdotal reports of large numbers of people arriving to vote, in urban areas of the FCT for example, but leaving, unable to vote, after queuing for several hours, in areas often outside and open to the elements. This was not only a result of opening delays and technical challenges but also a consequence of problematic polling station allocations which led to scenarios where some polling units had just a handful of voters whilst others had more than 2,000.

Despite well-documented instances of insecurity in all six geopolitical zones, and notwithstanding the fuel and currency scarcity that threatened to derail the electoral process, Nigerians, particularly the youth, had shown a strong interest in participating in the election. Of the 9.46 million voters added to the register by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) before the 2023 election, over 70% were youth (aged 18-34); meaning that they comprised 39.7% of the total electorate of 93.4 million. But this election suggests that ethnic identity remains an important factor shaping voter preference, with the youth not a monolithic block.

The Presidential election result as announced by INEC revealed that a total number of 24,055,878 valid votes were cast, with the four leading candidates, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC) scoring 8,794,726 votes, followed by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar (PDP) who scored 6,984,520 and Peter Obi (LP) scoring 6,101,533, and Rabi'u Kwankwaso (NNPP) scoring 1,496,687, (Table 2). While each of the three leading candidates won 12 states each, Rabi'u Kwankwaso won only his home state Kano. With regards to the geographical spread of votes, Tinubu secured 25% of votes cast in 29 states; Atiku secured same in 21 states, while Obi secured 25% in 16 states (Tables 2 and 3).

The 2023 election was seen as Nigeria's most technologically advanced, with INEC deploying an electronic voter accreditation system and results-viewing portal that enhanced transparency and accessibility. Unlike his predecessors, Mr Tinubu also won the presidential election with the least number of votes (8.7 million). Between 1999 and 2023, Nigeria held seven election circles. All former presidents won their elections with at least 15 million votes in the last six election cycles. In 1999, the first election after military rule, Mr Obasanjo won with a landslide 18.7 million votes, defeating his kinsman Olu Falae who scored 11.1 million votes (Premium Times, March 4, 2023).

Table 2: 2023 Presidential Election Result by States (As declared by INEC).

STATE	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
ABIA	8,914	22,676	327,095	1,239
ADAMAWA	182,881	417,611	105,648	8,006
AKWA IBOM	160,620	214,012	132,683	7,796
ANAMBRA	5,111	9,036	584,621	1,967
BAUCHI	316,694	426,607	27,373	72,103
BAYELSA	42,572	68,818	49,975	540
BENUE	310,468	130,081	30,8372	4,740
BORNO	252,282	190,921	7205	4626
CROSS RIVER	130,520	95,425	179,917	1,644
DELTA	90,183	161,600	341,866	3,122
EBONYI	42,402	13,503	259,738	2,661
EDO	144,471	89,585	331,163	2,743
EKITI	201,494	89,554	11,397	264
ENUGU	4,772	15,749	428,640	1,808
GOMBE	146,977	319,123	26,160	10,520
IMO	66406	30,234	360,495	1,552
JIGAWA	421,390	386,587	1,889	98,234
KADUNA	399,293	554,360	294,494	92969
KANO	517,341	131,716	28,513	997,279
KATSINA	482,283	489,045	6,376	69,386
KEBBI	248,088	285,175	10,682	5,038
KOGI	240,751	145,104	56,217	4238
KWARA	263,572	136,909	31,166	3,142
LAGOS	572,606	75,750	582,454	8,442
NASARAWA	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,715
NIGER	375,183	284,898	80,452	21,836
OGUN	341,554	123,831	85,829	2,200
ONDO	369,924	115,463	44,405	930
OSUN	343,945	354,366	23,283	713
OYO	449,884	182,977	99,110	4,095
PLATEAU	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869
RIVERS	231,591	88,468	175,071	1,322
SOKOTO	285,444	288,679	6,568	1,300
TARABA	135,165	189,017	146,315	12,818
YOBE	151,459	198,567	2,406	18,270
ZAMFARA	298,396	193,978	1,660	4,044
FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517
AGGREGATE	8,794,726	6,984,520	6,101,533	1,496,671

Source: INEC, 2023, Vanguard Online News, (2023).

Table 3: 2023 Presidential Election Result by Candidates (as announced by INEC).

Candidate	Party	No. of Valid Votes	%
Bola Tinubu	All Progressives Congress (APC)	8,794,726	36.6
Atiku Abubakar	People's Democratic Party (PDP)	6,984,520	29.1
Peter Obi	Labour Party (LP)	6,101,533	25.4
Rabiu Kwankwaso	New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP)	1,496,687	6.2
Others	-	648,474	2.7
Total		24,025,940	100

Source: BBC News Online, 30th March, 2023, "Nigeria election results 2023: Up-to-date results of presidential and parliamentary races; Ojukwu, Umeifekwem and Okeke (2023).

President Olusegun Obasanjo got 62.8 percent and 61.8 percent of votes in the 1999 and 2003 elections respectively. Meanwhile, in the first election that led to the first handover of power from one civilian leader to another, President Umaru Yar'Adua secured a record of 69.8 percent of total votes cast in 2007. His predecessor,

former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, got 56 percent of the votes in 2011. In 2015, Mr Buhari scored 53.9 percent of votes cast to defeat a sitting President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in the election that brought him to office. President Buhari got 55.6 percent of the votes in the 2019 election which gave birth to his second and final

term in office. More than 15 million Nigerians voted for Mr Buhari in the election that saw PDP's Atiku also finish second (Premium Times, March 4, 2023).

Mr Tinubu's victory in 2023 presidential election marks one of the lowest thresholds secured by any elected president in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which began in 1999. The former Lagos governor secured 37 percent of the total votes cast in the election. No other president-elect scored less than 50 percent of the votes cast (Premium Times, March 4, 2023).

Although vote buying appears to have reduced as compared with recent off-cycle elections, 11% of observers reported some form of vote buying taking place in or around their polling units. This was highest in the Northwest (18%), with the second highest number of incidents, 12%, reported in the Southwest. Only 5% of observers reported voting buying in the Northeast (Premium Times, March 4, 2023). Vote buying is used more by political parties in their strongholds, where they want to ensure that those inclined to vote for them are encouraged to do so. For the most part, vote buying appeared to be the preserve of the two major parties in the last presidential election - the All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) - with the Labour Party's becoming a political party of note at a time when there is scarcity of cash.

An important issue relates to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), which was designed to provide real-time transmission of election results (Form EC 80A) from polling units to the central collation centre in an attempt to enhance the transparency of the electoral process and reduce the incidence of vote rigging and election manipulation. However, as at 21:00 hrs on election day, there were no results uploaded to the platform for the presidential election. By 11:00 hrs on Monday 27, February, just 53,154 polling unit results out of a total of 176,734 were publicly available on the platform despite the legal requirement that results should be uploaded to the platform as soon as they were declared at the polling unit level. INEC stated in a 26 February press release that the challenges were a result of "technical hitches related to the scaling up of the IReV platform" but the delay in making this statement provided room for rumours to flourish that point to the incomplete polling unit results on the platform as evidence of vote rigging.

For instance, there were allegations in some quarters that the IReV and BVAS technologies were deliberately disrupted in collusion with internal saboteurs in INEC whose aim was to circumvent and manipulate the presidential election process. The fact that some senatorial and Federal House of Representatives elections were uploaded, but not the presidential results, also fuelled rumours of vote manipulation. Despite optimism from both INEC and citizens that technology could be a game changer in Nigeria's elections, the manner the technology was deployed during results transmission stage has weakened the public perception

of transparency and accountability of the electoral process. In the run-up to the elections INEC presented IReV as its guarantee of the integrity of the voting process. Its failure to comply with its own publicly stated procedures is a major failure of the organization.

On 1st March, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) proclaimed Tinubu the victor with 36 percent of the vote. His main rivals, Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party and Peter Obi of the Labour Party, won 28 and 24 percent, respectively. Tinubu is the first candidate since 1999, when multi-party politics resumed in Nigeria, to secure the presidency with less than 50 percent of the tally. This weak mandate, which reflects widespread disenchantment with his party's record in the federal government over the last eight years, along with misgivings about his personal eligibility for the office, is among many sources of tension amid the fallout from the election (ICG, 2023).

Expectations for the vote were sky-high, due mostly to INEC's assurances of greater transparency thanks to technological innovations. Anticipating a genuinely competitive race, voters registered in record numbers, making the election one of the most closely watched in Nigeria's recent history. Yet things played out differently than anticipated. For one thing, voter turnout was much lower than expected, an abysmal 27 percent, down from about 35 percent in 2019. There were several perspectives about why the rate was so low: it could have been due to persistent distrust of the electoral system, despite significant INEC reforms under Mahmood Jega's chairmanship (ibid); voter fatigue after previous elections that have brought no improvement in livelihoods; fears of violence by thugs and armed groups; and the effects of the Central Bank of Nigeria's rushed policy of swapping out the bills of the national currency, the naira, which left many voters without enough cash to travel to polling stations.

The election suffered from logistical and technological shortcomings, as well as reports of staff misconduct, some of which the electoral commission has yet to clearly explain. In many areas, tallies for the presidential election were not uploaded from polling stations to INEC's electronic portal for several days after voting was over, and even after the commission had declared Tinubu the winner, despite pre-election promises that the results would appear online in real time. Unfortunately, INEC did not deliver on its promises. External observers joined reputable Nigeria-based groups, such as the Civil Society Situation Room, Yiaga Africa and the Centre for Democracy and Development, to criticize the process. The European Union's mission said INEC's "lack of efficient planning in critical stages and effective public communication reduced trust in the process, including on election day" (Yiaga Africa, 2023; ICG, 2023). At the same time, the election produced significant upsets in several local races, suggesting a clean vote in those places. Disparities in the conduct of the polls and

credibility of results among various locations, some even within the same area, have led to intense disputes between winners, who claim the polls were free and fair, and others who reject the results as irredeemably flawed. While the elections were largely peaceful in most states, armed thugs disrupted voting in a number of them. They did such things as snatching or destroying of polling materials; intimidate voters and election officials; block citizens from casting ballots for anyone but particular candidates; and force electoral staff to credit candidates with votes at the expense of others or to upload badly altered result sheets to the INEC platform. In Lagos state, these disruptions targeted areas that had large Igbo populations, known to be strongly supportive of the Labour Party's- Mr. Peter Obi. Particularly in Lagos and Rivers states, the police and other security personnel seemed unwilling or unable to counter such acts or downplayed reports of malfeasance, giving ammunition to opposition supporters who charged that their votes were significantly suppressed.

Shortcomings in the conduct of the elections and collation of results have led to several legal challenges by the opposition parties, notably the People's Democratic Party and the Labour Party. The lawsuits challenged Tinubu's qualifications and eligibility to contest the election on two counts: first, by making allegations about his connection to a 1993 drug trafficking case in the U.S. (ICG, 2023); and secondly, that his candidacy was tainted by the alleged double nomination of his running mate, Kashim Shettima, as vice president while still a senatorial candidate in Borno state, contrary to Section 35 of the Electoral Act of 2022 (On 26 May, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down a case on the second count, filed by the opposition, Peoples Democratic Party). The opposition's lawsuits are also contending that Tinubu was not duly elected by the majority of the lawful votes cast in the election – that not only did he fail to score the highest number of votes but that he also did not win at least one quarter of the votes cast in the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), a constitutional provision over which lawyers and courts have offered diverse interpretations (ibid). Furthermore, they argued that numerous alleged corrupt activities during the polls, along with INEC's non-compliance with the provisions of the 2022 Electoral Act and other extant laws, substantially affected the results, rendering Tinubu's election invalid.

Petitioners acknowledged they have immense evidence, including that derived from examining INEC's balloting hardware and materials, in support of their challenges, but some of their cases may not be decided until months after Tinubu's inauguration. While past presidential elections attracted similar cases, except in 2015 when President Goodluck Jonathan readily conceded defeat, no tribunal or court has ever overturned Nigeria's presidential election results.

The discontent stirred up by the presidential election bodes ill for Nigeria's stability. The post-election tensions

have not triggered large-scale violence, as some analysts had feared. Fatalities in 2023 are far lower than the levels seen after most previous elections, particularly in 2011, when ethno-religious violence killed some 1,000 people in twelve Northern states. Still, it is hard not to worry about what may be coming down the pike. On 6th April, former President Olusegun Obasanjo lamented that the vote had eroded national cohesion: "Given what we saw during the election, Nigeria is now even more divided and more corroded than we thought" (ICG, 2023).

Indeed, the election threw the country's often blurry ethnic, religious and generational fault lines into sharp relief. Five areas are of particular concern.

First, ethnic tension became more pronounced, arguably most significantly in Lagos state, which includes the country's most populous city, Lagos. This city was Nigeria's federal capital for over six decades until 1992, and it continuously attracts large numbers of people from all over the country. In the countdown to the elections, frictions grew in Lagos between Tinubu's supporters from the Yoruba ethnic group and Obi's backers of Igbo ethnicity. There were also reports of communal tensions in other states, though to a much lower degree. Demands for expulsion of some ethnic groups, boycotts of businesses run by other groups and inflammatory rhetoric, including among mainstream political figures before and after the vote, suggest a rise in inter-communal acrimony. Given this environment, any minor incident could trigger deadly violence.

Secondly, the election result has left an especially sour taste among Igbos, who voted overwhelmingly for Obi, hoping he would make history as the first president of Igbo descent since Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose largely ceremonial presidency was terminated by a coup in 1966. Some non-Igbos, notably including the leader of the pan-Yoruba Afenifere group, Ayo Adebajo, and the leader of the Pan Niger Delta Forum, Edwin Clark, had also supported Obi's bid as a way to end the "marginalization" of Igbos in the Nigerian federation and to heal wounds lingering from the 1967-1970 Biafra war (ICG, 2023). That war pitted Igbo separatists against the federal government, and though the government put reconciliation programmes in place after the war, many argued that electing an Igbo as president would, both symbolically and substantially, signal Igbos' full readmission to the Nigerian nation. Some Igbos, including prominent clerics, politicians and newspaper opinion writers, have cited reports of election irregularities as evidence of a conspiracy by other groups to exclude the Igbo from national leadership. Some have gone so far as to say Igbos should have their own country, as they seem to be barred from holding the Nigerian presidency. This narrative resonates strongly with many citizens in the South East, with its large Igbo population, but it overlooks the fact that many Igbo politicians did not back Obi and, indeed, actively supported one of his non-Igbo opponents, Tinubu or Abubakar. Even so, some Igbo

leaders already point to Tinubu's appointment of an inauguration committee with no Igbo among its thirteen members as a portent of Igbo exclusion from the incumbent government. The national vice president of the pan-Igbo group, Ohaneze Ndigbo Worldwide, Damian Okeke-Ogene, said Tinubu, just like Buhari before him, is determined to keep the Igbo out of his administration – though this claim does not fairly represent Buhari's record with respect to appointments (ICG, 2023). The tensions may already be aggravating Biafra separatist agitation. On 10th April, reacting to the reports of intimidation of Igbo voters in parts of Lagos state during the elections, the separatist Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra urged Igbo businesses to relocate to their South East homeland (ICG, 2023). This call would not be heeded by millions of Igbos living across the country, and nor would similar urgings by other pro-Biafra groups, but it could feed into a new wave of secessionism in the South East. Particularly if the government fails to make inclusive appointments and allocate infrastructure projects equitably, it may embolden Biafra separatists.

Thirdly, the election reopened religious fissures. By informal convention, the Nigerian presidency rotates between Muslims and Christians. As Buhari is a Muslim from the North, many Christians had expected that the next president would be one of their members. Even more unsettling to them is that Tinubu, in defiance of another unwritten rule, chose a fellow Muslim, former Borno state Governor Kashim Shettima, as his vice president. Many Christian groups reject the result (ICG, 2023). Responding to the INEC declaration on 1st March, several prominent clerics said Tinubu was not their president. Others referenced the graft allegations that have dogged Tinubu's career, claiming that the questions about his integrity disqualify him from the top office. The risk of incurring deep resentment among Christians in the Middle Belt and Southern states would be especially great if the incumbent government fails to balance religious identities in its cabinet (ibid).

Fourthly, many youths, especially in the Southern states, view the election outcome as a lost opportunity for a generational shift in the country's leadership, which they consider crucial to improving their economic prospects and livelihoods (ibid). Youth disenchantment was already high, in part driven by poor economic conditions and bad governance. The four to five million young Nigerians who enter the job market annually struggle to find work. The National Bureau of Statistics recorded an increase in the unemployment rate from 23.1 percent in 2018 to 33.3 percent in 2020. With little economic growth, the rate has probably kept rising since then (fully up-to-date figures are not available). The multinational consulting firm KPMG estimates that 37.7 percent of the population was jobless in 2022 and that 40.6 percent could be in 2023. In the near term, youth anger could morph into unrest if the new administration

puts in place policies, such as withdrawing fuel subsidies, which are bound to have inflationary effects. Such policies are overdue but would be highly unpopular and should be calibrated accordingly. In the longer term, deepening disillusionment among youth could feed urban crime and rural banditry, as well as Islamist, secessionist and resource-linked Niger Delta militancy. Youth disillusionment leads to greater emigration of Nigerian youth to Europe, North America and elsewhere, either through official channels or by dangerous irregular crossings of the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea. In January 2021, a World Bank survey reported 50 percent of Nigerian youths wanting to leave the country in search of a brighter economic future abroad. Nigeria placed third among the West African nations whose youth were polled on this question, trailing only Liberia (70 percent) and Sierra Leone (60 percent). Youth emigration has increased sharply in recent years, draining away talent from sectors including health, education and information technology (ibid).

Lastly, young women have an additional set of concerns, particularly regarding women's representation in government, which began to decline in 2011 and fell to three percent in the National Assembly in the 2023 elections. The participation of women in political office in Nigeria continues to fall behind as the country currently holds the lowest ratings in Africa. In early 2022, the National Assembly rejected five constitutional reform bills that aimed to promote women's rights and political empowerment. Women represented a mere 9.9 percent of presidential and national assembly candidates in 2023, a drop from 12 percent in 2019. Exclusionary internal party nomination processes and the prohibitive costs of nomination forms and campaigning favoured political elites and disadvantaged women, youth, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs), and other marginalized groups. The legal framework's restriction on independent candidates also deprived individuals from these groups of viable alternatives to party apparatuses (IRI/NDI report, 2023). Nevertheless, the epoch-making events did not include eight states — that is, Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi, Ondo, and Osun — for which the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) will conduct off-cycle elections at various times within the next three years to determine their governors.

Social Media and the 2023 Presidential Election Conduct: The Good, the Bad and the Future

In the last decade, social media has increasingly played a huge role in the lives of Nigerians. According to Statista, there are estimated 32.9 million active social media users in Nigeria (Nwokoma, 2023). Of the usual suspects, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook are the most popular platforms, Facebook, for example, previously made provisions that allowed Nigerians to access its platform without an Internet connection. Apart

from various polls by real and or ponzi pollsters that dotted the social media of happenings around the country, the 2023 presidential election may go down as one of the most popular events where technology played strange roles.

Although Nigeria has a vibrant and pluralistic information landscape, with a wide variety of traditional and digital outlets, it remains a challenging environment for media (IRI/NDI report, 2023). The deliberate spread of disinformation both online and in traditional media around the 2023 elections contributed to voter confusion, sowed doubt in the electoral process, and exacerbated underlying cultural and ethnic tensions. Interlocutors noted that all the major presidential campaigns benefited from the generation of manipulative and discrediting content online. Though the official accounts of party leaders and major candidates often remained above the fray, they relied on spokespersons and - sometimes paid - online influencers and supporters to generate and amplify provocative, misleading, and inflammatory rhetoric (ibid).

In the Nigeria information landscape, while some renewed level of sophistication was observed in the disinformation campaigns during this election, many of the strategies used were similar to those observed in 2019 elections. A rise of doctored, synthetic and manipulated media images was used to push certain narratives against candidates and videos were presented out of context to misinform the voting public. For instance, a video showing Peter Obi campaigning for Atiku Abubakar in 2019 re-emerged hours before the 2023 vote; adapted from TikTok, it was shared widely across the platform and WhatsApp (CDD-EAC, 2023). Efforts to undermine INEC's credibility were recorded throughout the campaign and even as polls were set to open. An audio file that started as a WhatsApp voice note and evolved into a video that was shared across platforms, claimed the PDP candidate was working with the INEC to rig elections. Disinformation peddlers stitched the voices of Atiku and two other political actors together to form a conversation about rigging the election (CDD-EAC, 2023). Political actors and influencers started sharing unverified election results immediately after polls closed in some areas and took advantage of the small trickle of confirmed election results from INEC. There were also many reports around electoral malpractice and the lack of strategic and crisis communications from INEC allowed such accusations to go unchecked. Rumors of rigging were being enhanced in some instances by pre-election polling that presents a different picture to the reality announced by INEC (IRI/NDI report, 2023).

Meanwhile, closed messaging platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram provided a permissive and largely opaque environment for rumors and divisive narratives to thrive, especially in local languages, which was often exploited by political operatives. Information manipulation tactics

and hate speech were present around the presidential elections, but also in the run-up to the March 18 gubernatorial and state assembly elections, where ethnically based content stoked tension and violence, especially in Lagos (ibid).

Despite fact-checks of these proving the falsehoods, many persons still chose to believe the disinformation, if it favoured their political leaning (CDD-EAC, 2023). The politicization of fact checking was furthering this challenge. In addition, distributing fact-checks via media houses was a challenge as several expressed concern that they couldn't publish or share some of them because it seemed like they were working for certain candidates.

Social media companies were largely non-responsive to election day mal-information. Meta took down one post about misleading images about INEC offices in Northern Nigeria, and Twitter suspended an imitation account claiming to be the wife of former President Muhammadu Buhari on the eve of the election for sharing misinformation about naira redesign policy, but no activity was taken in response to more than 20 pieces of false content flagged by CDD fact checkers. Almost 72 hours after the fake audio on rigging was debunked by CDD and other fact checking partners, much of the video is still available on TikTok, Twitter and Meta platforms (CDD-EAC, 2023; IRI/NDI report, 2023).

Journalists were targets of harassment and violence by political party activists, and some security services in the lead-up to and during the elections. Media outlets faced government interference, especially by some state governors, through a politicized regulatory system, as well as pressure aimed at silencing critical media coverage. Several cases were reported of outright harassment and arbitrary detentions. At the same time, the prevalence of disinformation during the national and state elections, especially on social media platforms, distorted the election campaign and threatened to significantly undermine confidence in the electoral process. Content aimed at demeaning election opponents or damaging the credibility of the electoral process and of INEC were especially commonplace. A surge of disinformation on the February 25 election day itself, and during the week following the elections while the results were being processed, fueled rumors, and spread false post-election narratives (CDD-EAC, 2023).

Yet, the 2023 elections took place against the backdrop of a social media-sparked citizen movement (Chukwurah, 2022), mostly made up of young people who appeared determined to upturn the political system, which has typically favored traditional candidates, especially men from the major parties. The effect of this renewed youth involvement on Nigeria's growing voter apathy and the potential effect on women's candidacy are key points of interest. Indeed, in the 2023 elections, heightened youth involvement—and support for the disruptor Labour Party—hurt outcomes for women candidates, especially those representing Nigeria's main

political parties. The Labour Party's upset, paradoxically, had negative consequences for women in parliament who were standing for reelection as candidates of Nigeria's dominant parties but lost their seats to male candidates running on the platform of the Labour Party.

The Judiciary and Election Petitions in Nigeria

According to Black's Law Dictionary, Election petition is "a petition for enquiry into the validity of a parliament member's election when the member's return is alleged to be invalid for bribery or other reasons". Election petition, therefore, is a special proceeding, guided by a particular electoral law made specifically for the conduct of an election to a certain office. Election petition has also been defined as a petition of inquiry into the validity of the candidate's return at any election by any of the various reasons including valid nomination, exclusion on other grounds, disqualification and other electoral malpractices and offences (Ochem, 2007). Hence, there is no doubt that there may be one complaint or another against a candidate or the conduct of an election at the end of every election and this complaint can only be resolved before a competent court or tribunal set up for that purpose. Thus, for such court or tribunal to adjudicate properly on such matter, it must have the requisite jurisdiction to do so. In resolving this dispute or complaint, brought before the court or tribunal for adjudication, it is expected that the petition must as a matter of fact prove such facts raised in his petition by credible evidence.

It suffices therefore, to state that election petition filed is adjudication upon by the court or tribunal on the basis of the electoral law under which the election was held. The electoral law will prescribe the court or tribunal where the petition shall be filed, the parties, grounds for presentation and the conduct of the entire proceedings. Election tribunals are established to fast-track judicial proceedings arising from the electoral process. Consequently, it follows that promptness in presenting election petitions before the tribunals is indispensable for a speedy determination of petitions and a condition precedent under the Electoral Act 2022. The essence of imposing time limit within which to file an election petition is also to avoid a situation where a candidate who was wrongly declared winner of the election continues performing the functions of an office illegally.

The tribunals are constitutional bodies established to decide post-election complaints related to the validity of elections. It is also a judicial control mechanism aimed to ensure that a candidate declared elected meets all legal requirements, in particular obtaining the required majority of votes in accordance with the law. Depending on the type of election, petitioners are served by National and State Assembly Election Tribunals, Governorship Election Tribunals or Court of Appeals, acting as the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (PEPT). In total,

307 judges were appointed to this function, but depending on the number of petitions, more panels and judges can be appointed as needed (CDD-EAC, 2023). Only political parties and candidates have the right to submit a petition. The grounds for questioning elections are also strictly defined and include: a candidate was not qualified to contest, occurrence of corrupt practices or non-compliance with the Electoral Act or a candidate was not elected by a lawful majority of votes. However, the mere fact of non-compliance with the Electoral Act is not enough to invalidate the election. The petitioner, on whom the standard of proof rests, must prove that non-compliance substantially affected the outcome of the election (ibid).

As with the pre-electoral dispute cases, the election tribunals have extensive timeframes for deliberation. An election tribunal has 180 days for determination, which can be appealed to the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court, which have up to 60 days to issue a judgment. In the case of an election for governor, there is a further appeal to the Supreme Court. This can give approximately up to eight months to have a final judgment. This means that the final decisions on the validity of the elections will in many cases be made long after the candidate whose election is in dispute assumes office and in contravention of international and regional standards. Challengers have 21 days from the election/announcement of results to file petitions (CDD-EAC, 2023).

Both PDP and the LP and their candidates decided to challenge the presidential election results through the legal process. Both applied to PEPT to secure access to documents and data held by INEC. The applicants demanded access to and the right to copies of nearly all possible documents and data, and even to conduct "thumbprint analysis" (CDD-EAC, 2023). This was granted efficiently, on March 3, but INEC submitted a request for varying two parts of the order, arguing that combined access to ballots and accreditation data stored in BVAS devices can reveal the identity of whom the voters voted for. The good faith implementation of PEPT's order was questioned by both PDP and LP representatives, who complained to the media about not having access to documents needed for their petitions. On March 10, the PDP submitted a motion demanding INEC to comply with PEPT's order, claiming that the Commission had refused access to documents and data, but withdrew it shortly after meeting with INEC Chairman where it was assured that access would be granted (ibid). Assessing this initial phase, the PEPT worked efficiently, ensuring prompt and substantive deliberations and well-reasoned rulings. The hearings were public and open to all interested parties. Explanatory notes on the content of the petitions, judgments and their reasoning have been published on the website of the Court of Appeal, contributing to transparency, and providing clarifications. Earlier, in 2022, the Court issued the revised Election

Judicial Proceedings Practice Directions. The same year, a revised Judicial Electoral Manual was published which contains a collection of references to court cases (CDD-EAC, 2023).

According to data compiled by the Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI), a total 505 petitions were submitted after Presidential and National Assembly elections. Among them 5 presidential, 134 related to senatorial and 366 to the House of Representatives elections. This was a significant increase compared to the 2019 elections, especially considering that 91 parties contested, compared to only 18 in 2023. For both Senate and HoR elections, the percentage of parties and candidates challenging elections in court more than doubled, while for presidential elections it increased nearly six-fold. This demonstrates not only an increasing rejection of electoral outcomes but, subsequently, greater involvement of the judiciary in determining the lawful election of candidates (CDD-EAC, 2023).

Following the February 25th elections, numerous stakeholders expressed a loss of confidence in and dissatisfaction with INEC (ibid). This sentiment also resulted in some demonstrations against INEC and calls for the Chairman to resign. The Chairman stated that INEC would work to surmount the logistical and deployment challenges faced in the February 25 elections while noting that all staff found to be “negligent” should not participate in the gubernatorial and state assembly elections. Along these lines, INEC suspended RECs in Sokoto and Abia, and INEC representatives reported that the performance of ad-hoc and permanent staff would be reviewed at the state level to identify those who should be replaced with staff drawn from existing reserve lists. INEC’s reported steps to address misconduct and poor performance were positive but limited. In addition, citizen observers, such as Yiaga Africa, underscored the need for INEC to hold all staff accountable for failing to adhere to INEC procedures and regulations in order to serve as both a deterrent and to build public confidence (ibid).

The 2023 Nigerian Elections and its’ Effect on Democracy

Democracy as Abraham Lincoln defined it is for the people. This means that government cannot exist without the people. Unfortunately, Freedom to vote and participation, leadership responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy hold tenaciously on free and fair elections. Where there is free and fair elections, the citizens will appreciate the values of democracy. What we witness in Nigeria is imposition of wrong candidates on the people’s right to choose candidates of their choice, lack of people’s participation, absence of leadership responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy.

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria will have far-reaching implications for the nation’s future and its

democratic progress. By looking back at the progress the nation has made since transitioning to democracy in 1999, and looking ahead to the issues the nation faces, it is clear that the 2023 elections was a historic moment for Nigeria and a test of its commitment to the principles of democracy and free and fair elections. “Thus far, elections have served the interests mainly of the powerful elite and have had little, if any, significant impact on deepening representative democracy, let alone transforming people’s socio-economic livelihoods in a positive manner.

In Nigeria, political leadership has been one of the biggest barriers to democracy and progress. Political leadership since independence has not produced much. Their orientation has been distributive rather than productive, and their political and economic management has been wasteful and corrupt. The problem with Nigeria has been described simply as that of leadership (Achebe, 1983). Human security is threatened, which is not surprising given the nature of the nation’s leaders. The division within the political class, which lacks the authority and discipline necessary to promote political and socio-economic stability, is not unrelated to this.

One of the main reasons for the nation’s political, social, and economic strife is poverty. Poverty is incompatible with democracy’s tenets and essential values. When people live in poverty despite abundance, it breeds discontent and drives them to act violently. It limits people’s capacity for autonomous decision-making and active participation in the process. It lowers their sense of self-worth and their capacity to hold people they elect accountable.

However, corruption is the cause and consequence of poverty in the society. It has slowed down the benefits of democracy and increased the precariousness of civilian authority. In Nigeria, corruption is a poisonous phenomenon that permeates every sphere of public and private life. It has persisted unabatedly in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. There has been a deluge of accusations, charges, and claims of financial misappropriation totaling billions of Naira at the federal, state, and local government levels. These are monies meant for all round development at these levels of government which have found their way into private bank accounts and homes of public officeholders. Local government councils are supposed to fast-track the process of development at the grassroots. However, Local government administration has been characterized by stealing, looting and misappropriation of funds. As a recent survey puts it, “the system of Local government administration has been plagued by a lack of transparency and accountability” (News watch Magazine, April 2, 2012). Such acts of criminality by public officers create enough social insecurity in the land that can be capitalized on by other tendencies to destabilize the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria.

The nation has searched for a functioning democracy

ever since gaining its independence. Everyone who loves peace in Nigeria should be concerned about what this means. Democracy is a contentious idea. It isn't guaranteed. Countries ought to figure out how to make it relevant to their own situation. The path ahead is to figure out how to accommodate liberal democracy to the nation's pluralism. In order to share power among rival parties and political interests in the nation, it could be necessary to pursue some form of consociational system. An intensely divided nation such as Nigeria cannot afford a winner-take-all majoritarian government (Joseph, 1987).

Again, an additional requirement of such a system is the establishment of a new, tolerant political culture. It is not necessary for politicians to make politics a "do or die" situation; instead, they should learn how to play the game. All parties involved in the political system should embrace a new political culture of accommodation and tolerance, compromise and bargaining, disagreement and consensus.

It is detrimental to the country's business existence and democracy's future for politicians to consistently undermine the system whenever they fall short of their objectives. It is certain that the economy will begin to recover and flourish if the nation manages to get its politics in order. The much needed peace for development will evolve as investor (both foreign and indigenous) will begin to develop faith in the system (Akhakpe, 2008).

An essential component of preserving democracy and upholding law and order in society is the judiciary. The court should administer justice impartially and fearlessly in its capacity as the guardian of the constitution. Even though the court has done a commendable job since the return to civil rule in 1999, they should quickly administer justice to ensure that everyone is certain of their impartiality.

It is a delay and denial of justice to take three and a half years to resolve an electoral dispute that resulted from general elections. When carrying out its constitutional duties, the judiciary ought to be impartial and open. It ought to be protected against the raging plague of corruption that is permeating every aspect of the political system. In this regard, government must continue to emphasize merit in the appointment of judges.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, there has been a steady decline in electoral participation due largely to non-democratic processes- imposition of candidates at all elective positions, election rigging, corruption, violence during and after elections and politics of exclusion and victory is viewed as a must, according former president Obasanjo "do or die affair". Electoral victory ensures material benefits to the victors. The irregularities and the level of

violence discourage an average Nigerian from taking part in politics including voting during elections. There are weak political institutions in the country and this contributes to the problem. The political parties lack ideologies and wallow in ideological confusion. There is high level of insecurity, poverty, inequality, and massive youth unemployment.

It is clear that armed with an improved electoral act, administrative procedures and requisite technology, the INEC has increased the transparency and confidence of the public in its election administration processes. Nevertheless, the 2023 presidential election has been fraught with shortcomings ranging from non-transparent party primaries, corruption, intimidation, impunity, violence, assassinations, disenfranchisement and helplessness of the electorate were all possible because the rentier Nigerian state had been hijacked or captured by an unrepentant political class and state elite bent on satisfying their interests and not that of the people. The implication is that any serious attempt at upturning the system will face resistance. But this is to be expected.

Doing the bidding of a handful of people in power would result in a disgruntled populace who are far removed from those that have stolen their votes and make a mockery of democracy. It is worthy to note that 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was not about popular vote but about power relations, patronage and selection. So far, Nigeria's contemporary politics has simply been disastrous since there is nothing as criminal and painful as being disenfranchised and having strange elements and corrupt individuals imposed on the people. The end of this is usually violence, chaos and retrogression. The Nigeria of tomorrow must be a Nigeria whose elite are enlightened, rational and people-oriented. An elite that is collectively willing to do the right thing for the country despite their differences. Anything short of this breeds anarchy.

Thus the following recommendations are put forward from this study: there is urgent need to address the problem of inequality and poverty in the country. The various political institutions should be strengthened to act as agent of change. The citizens should be educated on the basic tenets of democracy and electoral victory. The youths of this country should be provided with jobs to avoid being used by disgruntled politicians. The political players have an obligation to abide by the laws and regulations that govern politics. Those who broke the nation's election regulations ought to face harsh penalties.

In order to reassure voters that their votes will count and that they will be willing to participate, the electoral administrators should be men and women with a track record of integrity. To lessen the possibility of post-election contestation, constitutional interpretations pertaining to the conditions for announcing a presidential winner or potential run-off contenders should be defined ahead of future elections.

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