

Impact of Electoral Malpractice on Nigeria's Journey Towards Democratic Consolidation: an Obstacle to Sustainable Development in the Country

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Abstract: It is descriptive research. Free and fair elections serve as a benchmark for evaluating a nation's level of democracy. Elections that are credible are The platform that allows citizens to participate in democracy by choosing representatives to hold public office It investigates the causes of electoral malpractice in Nigeria, identifies the elements that support the practice in the research region, and talks about how electoral malpractice affects the sustainable development of the nation. It was based on content-analyzed secondary data. The study discovered that some of the reasons for electoral malpractice include the desire for power, the mindset of politicians who view politics as an investment, retaliation, and the tendency to view election cycles as payback periods. The study also discovered that electoral fraud damages Nigeria's reputation, retards progress, and encourages violence. Additionally, the study makes inferences about the consequences of electoral fraud for the Nigerian nation. In order to overcome some of the electoral malpractice wrecks in Nigeria, solutions include the establishment of electoral courts, more political education by the National Orientation Agency and Independent National Electoral Commission, strict enforcement of the electoral act, complete autonomy of the electoral body, and the implementation of suitable laws to penalize violators.

Keywords: election, electoral offenses, development, electoral tribunals, violence, vote-rigging, openness, and pseudo-democracy



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1. A Brief Overview

Global democracy's "third wave" in the late 20th century ensured its spread. By the end of that century, democracy had been ingrained in many nations worldwide. These days, the degree of democracy in a nation is used to gauge its political credentials. Thus, democracy is the "only game in town." Sulaiman (2023). The growth of Nigeria is seriously threatened by electoral malpractice. The practice frequently takes the shape of numerous voter registrations, voter card purchases and sales, bribing election officials, stockpiling registration papers, and using other sly and obscene tactics to defraud political rivals. Ajiteru (20203). Because politicians, voters, security personnel, and the electoral body all participate in the dishonest activity, electoral malpractice poses a threat to Nigeria's progress. According to Oshin (2022), those who commit atrocities during elections often utilize the judiciary—which is meant to represent the hope of the deceived—to defend their actions. Because of this difficulty, it is now challenging to elect leaders at all governmental levels in Nigeria in a free, fair, and credible election (Adeola, 2022). Nigerian elections and electoral procedures cannot be considered credible as a means of determining the country's transfer of power, even though the general elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019 were thought to be "somehow" better than those in 1999, 2003, and 2007. The infamous "operation-wetie" among the Yorubas in the first republic in western Nigeria was the result of electoral fraud crises. Ejigbile (2019) claims that accusations of electoral fraud caused numerous innocent Nigerians to be slain and numerous houses to be damaged in Kano, Bauchi, Plateau, and Kastina States during the outcome of the general elections in 2011. Electoral malpractice has a strong propensity to incite violence and hooliganism, which can eventually regress Nigeria's progress.

This results from the detrimental effects that electoral fraud has on the nation's democracy.

1. How does the quality of Nigerian democracy get impacted by these malpractices?
2. What impact do electoral malpractices have on Nigerian election results?
3. Can Nigerian democracy be strengthened in the face of elections that don't represent the people's will?
4. How can Nigeria establish a viable course for restoring democracy to the nation?

Using theory and secondary data, the qualitative analysis in this work aims to address these problems. The A synopsis of electoral malpractices at Nigerian polling stations, an explanation of the repercussions of these malpractices, an introduction, an overview of conceptual concerns and elections in Nigeria since 1999, and a conclusion with recommendations comprise the paper's six sections. Ajiteru (2023).

The problem of "inconclusive election" is another aspect of electoral malpractice. During the Osun State gubernatorial rerun, about seven polling places were reported to have experienced significant disruptions, which resulted in the cancellation of the votes previously cast in those polling places. This event marked the introduction of new language into the nation's electoral system. Votes cast at a polling place where significant violence breaks out would therefore be void, and a new election would be scheduled. When the total number of votes that were canceled exceeds the total number of an election with "lead votes" is inconclusive. Therefore, it might be claimed that in cases where an election is inconclusive due to crises brought on by malpractice, a second election in the form of "repeat votes" must be held later before a winner is declared. Therefore, it has a financial impact on the nation, and economic activity in these regions is frequently hindered. Regrettably, Nigeria has not yet held elections in which the people who will

not be impacted by a repeat will behave civilly. According to Abalaka (2023), the majority of rerun elections that have previously been tainted by malfeasance are actually conducted in fear.

The following are the study's goals because of the aforementioned irregularities as well as a number of others brought on by electoral fraud:

1. investigates the causes of electoral fraud in Nigeria;
2. talk about the elements that contribute to electoral fraud in the nation; and
3. iii Determine the effects that electoral fraud has on Nigeria's progress.

2. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

a. Democracy

Political scientists and other academics give the idea of democracy a lot of thought. There are many definitions of democracy as a result of the numerous attempts to define the term. The majority of the definitions show a clear departure from the traditional definition of democracy, which was popularized by Abraham Lincoln (16th American President, 1861–1865), who defined it as "government of the people, by the people, for the people." According to more recent formulations, democracy is predicated on particular elements or variables. According to several academics, democracy is Some perceive it as citizen engagement, others as political rivalry through regular elections, and yet others associate democracy with civil and political liberties. Democracy, according to Abalaka (2023), is "the process by which power changes hands without violence or force." The peaceful transition of political power within a society is the main emphasis of Addi's term. Likewise, the notion of democracy entails that "a regime has at least universal adult suffrage; recurring, free, competitive and fair elections; more than one political party; and more than one source of information," according to Morlino (2014, p. 5). According to Morlino, a polity cannot be considered a democracy until it has democratic institutions and rights.

According to Aristotle, the finest form of democracy is that which is referred to as mostly because of the equality that exists there; this is what the state mandates, which states that the poor should not be subject to more subordination than the rich, nor should the highest authority be vested in either of them, but rather in both. The work of Sulaiman (2023), which identifies the reasons why a democracy fails in a nation, supports Aristotle's emphasis on the definition of democracy as the equality of all people in a community. These scholars contend that because poverty and inequality are so pervasive and create social segregation, democracy as a form of government has succeeded in certain nations while failing in others. Resulting from these diverse ideas about democracy, when it is implemented According to its principles, democracy gives every member of a society a political platform through elections so they can participate in the process of choosing their leaders. Therefore, the people, not the chosen leaders, are the ones with political power. If a leader doesn't perform, people can easily "dethrone" them.

b. The consolidation of democracy

Democratic consolidation is defined as a phase of a nation's democratic process where democracy gains certain stability-related traits. In a nation with a democratic system, consolidation is impossible without specific political characteristics. Among these characteristics are "repeated, consistent, and predictable patterns of political behavior that define clear, practical rules of the game, establishing more authoritative, competent, and reliable systems for resolving political disputes Abalaka (2023). Furthermore, the tendency toward authoritarian reversal must be remote for a democracy to solidify. As an alternative means of exercising political authority, the military should be completely devoted to democratic institutions in order to prevent the threat or possibility of toppling an elected administration. Most significantly, when citizens' rights are upheld and the governing class is answerable to and responsive to the people, democratic

consolidation becomes evident in a community. The masses' familiarity with political norms and procedures—that is, their ability to "routinize, internalize, habituate, and legitimate" (Im 2020, p. 23) these standards and procedures—is another characteristic of democratic consolidation.

Sulaiman (2019) lists two obstacles to the consolidation of democracy. These represent the danger of ethnic disputes in multiethnic governments and the disillusionment of the populace brought on by democratic regimes' failure to provide democratic dividends to raise the standard of living for the majority. This is specifically true of the "third wave" democracies, particularly those that developed in Africa, notably Nigeria, in the 1990s. After more than ten years of democracy, the citizens of these countries have become increasingly disillusioned due to the deteriorating social conditions. Therefore, democratic consolidation entails much more than just the presence of institutions and regular elections.

b. Malpractice in elections

Generally speaking, electoral malpractice is the desecration of acceptable norms and values that give elections legitimacy, replacing them with dishonesty, deceit, manipulation, and cheating are used to influence election results by whatever means. "Illegalities committed by government, officials responsible for conducting elections, political parties, groups, or individuals with sinister intention to influence an election in favor of a candidate(s)" is how Ezeani (2019) defines electoral malpractice. Abalaka (2023). Ajiteru (2023) distinguishes three types of election misconduct, which she refers to as "electoral corruption." These include malpractices centered on electoral administration, malpractices pertaining to preference formation, and malpractices involving the judicial system. Any kind of electoral misconduct is incompatible with democracy due to its regressive impact on a nation's level of democracy. As a result, election misconduct is condemned rather than tolerated anywhere in the world. Election-related fraud must be abhorred. If malpractices When practices like rigging elections, spending large sums of money, using violence against political opponents, and so on are allowed to continue, politicians have a tendency to instill a negative culture of "political larceny." In the end, this lessens the effectiveness of elections as a tool to legitimate political authority and as a peaceful transfer of political power. Abalaka (2023).

3. Nigeria's Legal Framework for Conducting Elections

A crucial component of modern democracy is elections. As previously said, elections' legitimacy and integrity are reliable indicators of a nation's level of democracy. Every nation with a thriving democracy has strict laws governing how elections are conducted. However, since elections are how people choose who will hold specific in order to win elections, politicians and organizations may turn to heinous, dishonest tactics. Therefore, it is the responsibility of any political body to establish guidelines that all participants in the election process must follow. These rules also specify the penalties that must be applied to any sick person or organization that participates in electoral fraud. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and the Electoral Act 2010, as amended Sulaiman (2023), provide the legal foundation for Nigeria, defining the country's election procedures, electoral offenses, and the penalties for violators.

The mechanisms required to hold elections for the various political posts are the primary focus of the 1999 Constitution in Nigeria, as well as the Election Tribunals and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) constitutions. In contrast, the election Act of 2010 provides comprehensive definitions of election malpractices along with the associated penalties. Sections 76, 77, and 78 of the 1999 Constitution, for instance, outline the procedures for choosing National Assembly members as well as the requirements for Nigerian citizens to be eligible to vote in National Assembly elections. Similarly, the Constitution's sections 116, 117, and 118 outline the procedures and dates for holding elections for State Houses of Assembly. In addition, sections 131, 132, 133, and 134 of the 1999 Constitution outline the characteristics of the President of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria selling voter cards and committing offenses while registering to vote. People who "buy or offer to buy voters' cards on his own behalf or on behalf of any other person, commit an offence and should be liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding N500,000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding two years, or both," according to section 23(c) of the Act, for example. Section 24(2b), which deals with voter registration, states that anybody who "in any way hinders another person from registering as a voter commits an offence and is liable on conviction, to a fine not exceeding N500,000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding 5 years." The Electoral Act of 2010 also covers impersonation and voting when not eligible to do so as electoral offenses bribery and conspiracy (section 122), voting without confidentiality (section 125), voting by unregistered voters (section 127), disorderly conduct during elections (section 128), election-related offenses (section 129), undue influence (section 130), threatening other voters (section 131), and so forth. To improve the legitimacy and integrity of Nigerian elections, all of these legal regulations are intended to prevent instances of electoral misconduct. Such fraudulent activities are still common in Nigeria's electoral process, nevertheless, as will be covered in more detail below (Abalaka, 2023).

4. An Overview of Nigerian Election Malpractice Since 1999

Nigeria has had five national elections since the Fourth Republic, when democracy was restored (in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019). These elections have a lot in common, including They differ in a few ways. For example, all of the elections were held on a regular basis as planned, were widely watched by both domestic and foreign observers, sparked a range of contestations from Nigerian people and politicians, and were tainted by malfeasance to differing degrees. With each succeeding election, the legitimacy and acceptability of the elections declined even further, with the exception of the polls from 2011 and 2015. Nigeria has yet to exhibit the characteristics of a developing democracy, according to the conduct and results of these elections (Abalaka, 2023). The general features of the Nigerian elections, the types of malpractices, and an evaluation of how each election varied from the others in terms of acceptability and legitimacy are all summarized in this section.

What caused the subtlety of the type, scope, and complexity of electoral malpractices set the 1999 elections unique from others that followed. For example, lethal misconduct that caused a huge number of casualties, such physical violence during and after an election, was less obvious. Following 1999, Nigeria held its next elections for the National Assembly, the Presidency, and the Governorship State Assemblies on April 12, 2003, and May 3, 2003, respectively. Nigeria's democracy was put to the test in the 2003 elections. The 2003 election was the first to be held by a civilian government, while the 1999 elections had been run by the military. Following a disastrous effort at a civilian-to-civilian power transition, the 2003 elections resulted in Nigeria's first successful inter-civilian transfer of power According to Ajiteru (2020), the voter list was checked off [on the register] in alphabetical order.

A monetized electoral process was made possible by the enormous sums of money raised by certain political parties before to the 2007 elections. For example, the amount of money raised by the ruling PDP from unreliable sources was enormous and dwarfed by the total amount raised by all other parties. These monies were a part of the electoral process. For example, a seasoned Abuja politician claims that part of the fraud [in the 2007 elections] might be explained by political finance. He clarified that the PDP actually consists of 37 parties, one for each state and one at the federal level. Each party raises funds, mostly through dishonest business dealings between the state and its contractors the government. The PDP raised enormous amounts of money that no other party in Nigeria had, even after its "victory" in the 2007 elections. Business magnates Femi Otedola and Aliko Dangote reportedly contributed N1 billion and N3 billion, respectively, to a ceremony held on November 15, 2008, to raise money for a new PDP secretariat project in Abuja. Additionally, Strabag, a Nigerian construction company, donated N100 million. N100 million was

donated by an unidentified donor (Okocha & Taiwo 2018). Because donors could be certain of receiving their money back through contract awards if the party they backed won the election, political parties' aggressive fundraising tactics were the main cause of electoral malpractice in the 2007 polls (Aluaigba 2019b, p. 110). Additionally, in Nigerian electioneering From INEC officials to party agents, security agents, and the electorate, "money is used to influence everyone involved in the election process since 1999" (Bryan & Baer 2015, p. 101). During the general elections in 2007, such techniques were popular.

The following electoral malpractices were most common during the 2007 general elections, according to a study on the process by Abalaka (2023): purposeful manipulation of election results, stuffing of ballot boxes, use of violence, wrongdoing by security personnel, collusion between polling officials and party agents to rig elections, intimidation of voters, and vote buying. Figure 1 below depicts further malpractices. These included stealing vote boxes, declaring election results fraudulently, voting by minors, and failing to keep voting secret so forth. Both foreign and domestic observers who kept an eye on the elections confirmed the existence of these corrupt activities (Sulaiman, 2023).

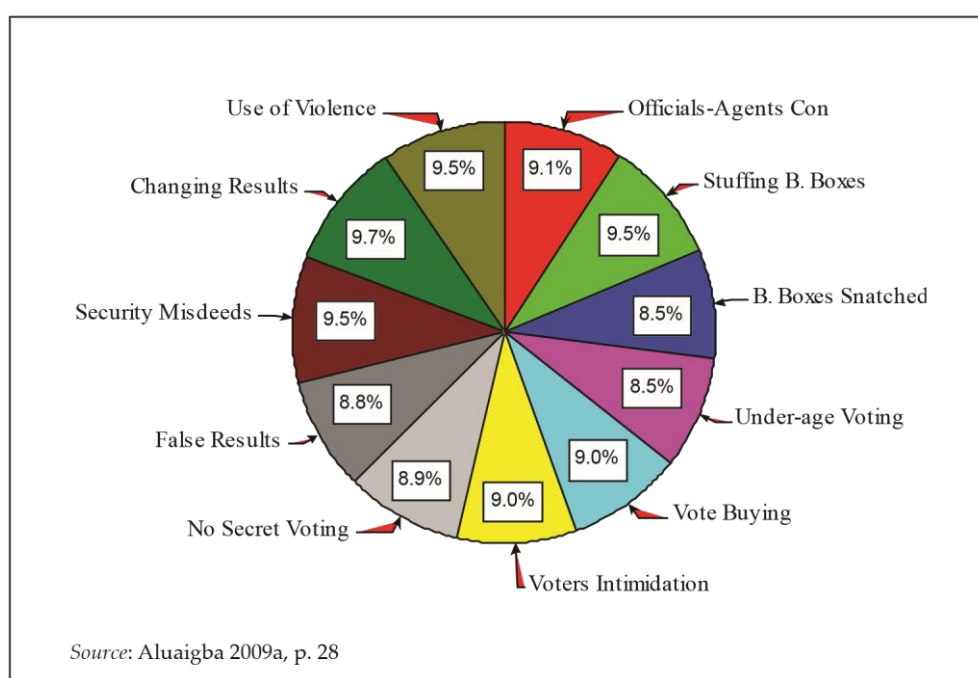


Illustration 1

Election irregularities observed in Nigeria's national elections in 2022

Regarding the prevalence of vote buying in the 2007 elections, a different survey verified the vile practice by stating that:

Voters are typically promised cash (68 percent of all attempted purchases in 2007), goods (clothing or food, 26 percent), or jobs (6 percent) in Nigerian vote-buying transactions. The most popular incentive, or modal, in the most recent and past Nigerian elections was 500 naira, or roughly US\$4. However, the median cost of a vote payment increased from 1,750 naira to 2,250 naira between 2003 and 2007, primarily due to the proportion large payments (10,000 naira or more per vote) have grown over time, according to Sulaiman (2023). The 2011 general elections were held on three separate dates in April to elect members of the National Assembly, the president, and governors or State Assembly members, respectively. The first round of elections was supposed to take place on April 2 but was postponed to April 9 for logistical reasons (Akaeze 2017, p. 18) and as an unavoidable precaution against a shortage of election materials on election day. Before the election, Nigerians were making predictions about the reliability of the 2011 polls

previous elections. Nigerians' fears were allayed by the Jega-led INEC, though, and by the end of the 2011 elections, both domestic and foreign observers generally agreed that the polls had been fairly free and fair and that the results were more reliable than those of the 1999, 2003, and 2007 surveys. The new leadership of INEC, which was committed to reforming the electoral organization to achieve better election administration in Nigeria, may be responsible for the increase in the credibility profile of the 2011 elections. Despite the initial disappointment caused by the postponement, INEC was commended for the improvements noted in logistics and the comparatively seamless voting procedure during the polls. The elections' outcome put an end to the entire supremacy of the PDP, which had ruled with a majority since 1999. In contrast to the 2007 elections, when it had won 27 states, the party lost its two-thirds majority control of the Senate and only won 23 of 36 states for governor. Members of the National Assembly lost a sizable portion of their seats in the 2011 elections, in contrast to the previous elections when they had largely kept their seats. For example, 260 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives did not return to the house, while 72 of the 109 senators lost their seats. These patterns demonstrated Nigeria's gradual but comprehensive advancement in its quest for democratic consolidation.

Comparable to this issue of instability, but the violence that followed the election in Northern Nigeria, which killed over 1000 people, was far more harmful to Nigeria's democratic process. The elections were also the deadliest in Nigerian electoral history as a result. On April 18, 2011, violence was reported in several Northern Nigerian cities, including Kano, Katsina, and Yola, when the results of the presidential election were announced in favor of President Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent PDP candidate. The riot was most violent in Adamawa, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Nasarawa, and certain portions of Niger, although it expanded to 14 other states in the region. In retaliatory attacks, the demonstrators targeted churches, businesses, and occasionally mosques in addition to the homes of PDP leaders. Abalaka (2014) noted that election violence can be caused by voters' annoyance stemming from their fear of an unjustified loss due to a shady electioneering campaign or unfair judicial decision-making in the resolution of electoral disputes. These elements contributed to the violence in Northern Nigeria following the 2011 election.

According to Gabriel (2015), Nigeria's general elections of 2015, which took place on March 28 and April 11, were the greatest in the country's electoral history. Both domestic and foreign observers gave this election high marks due to the thorough planning done and the generally orderly and peaceful way INEC conducted the voting. Indeed, INEC's innovations and integration of technology into the election process led to the 2015 polls being described as credible. For example, before the actual election, there was voter registration using biometrics. INEC unveiled the Smart Card Reader during the actual polling. Additionally, ballots and result sheets—sensitive electoral materials—were tailored with high security codes and features. Nevertheless, data suggests that the 2015 elections were not entirely faultless, even with these significant advancements in the democratic process. In the Northern portion of the country, INEC's operational issues included "late arrival of election materials, overcrowding, failure of the card reader, result manipulation, and voting of under-aged in some units" (Udu 2015, p. 102). Inflation of election figures and thugs stealing vote boxes and electoral materials were two more electoral malpractices that were visible during the 2015 elections. For instance, around 430,000 voters were authorized to cast ballots in Akwa Ibom State for the governor and state house of assembly, Sulaiman (2023).

5. However, the governor-elect received nearly 900,000 votes!

(Sobowale, 2019). These electoral vices may have occurred during the March and April elections, as evidenced by the Appeal Court's and Election Tribunal's December 2015 orders to suspend and hold new gubernatorial elections in states like Akwa Ibom and Rivers, respectively. Nevertheless, the elections for governor of Rivers and Akwa Ibom were ultimately upheld by Nigeria's Supreme

Court. This final ruling supports the widespread opinion that the 2015 Nigerian elections were among the most reliable in the nation's electoral history. What is clear from the Nigerian election review above Since 1999, none of them have been exempt from the venality, deceit, and duplicity brought about by the egregious violations of electoral laws and the exploitation of the Nigerian people's will. These electoral malpractices have serious repercussions for the type of governance Nigerians have been subjected to since 1999, as will be covered in the next section. The quality of democracy that has been shaped in the nation since the military left office years ago is also impacted by these detrimental impacts. The dreams of Nigerian citizens have been dashed by electoral malpractices, which also desecrate democratic norms based on accountability, transparency, and good governance. Nigerians' optimism during the 1999 democratic rebirth depended on enjoying the benefits of democracy, which included bettering the living conditions of the individuals.

5. Electoral Malpractice's Impact on Democratization in Nigeria

The development of democratization is definitely hampered by electoral malpractices. This is particularly true for nations that have successfully negotiated the political terrain of moving from authoritarian to democratic regimes and are negotiating the shift to a consolidated democracy. Following the painful experience of electoral corruption since 1999, Nigeria has been and will continue to be impacted in a number of ways by the issues brought about by the opaque election process. First, a population's degree of voter apathy tends to increase more quickly when election malpractices occur. If a prior or current poll is "won" via egregious means, such as rigging, declaring losers as winners, etc., people will not vote in succeeding elections as well as bribing election officials. Due to actual or suspected duplicity in the National Assembly and Presidential elections held on April 9 and April 16, respectively, there was a very low voter turnout for the governor's and state houses of assembly polls held on April 26, 2011, in Nigeria's 2011 general elections. Nigerian voters generally believed that their votes would not be counted. According to Sulaiman (2019), "winners" must be determined by "politicks Nigeria style," regardless of whether they cast ballots or not. The development of Nigeria's democracy is at risk due to this trend.

Second, politicians frequently use electoral fraud to win elections in democratizing nations like Nigeria, which undermines the purpose of elections as a means of establishing legitimacy for political office, as well as the accompanying use of political authority and influence. For example, elected officials that were elected by election tampering will be slack in their commitment to answerability to voters or the electorate. This indifference stems from the belief that they were not elected to office and instead bought their way in. This trend demonstrates why "the much anticipated "democracy dividend," whether interpreted as advancements in economic welfare, stability, or governance, has not materialized" since 1999 (Lewis 2019, p. 131). Undoubtedly, Nigerians have been vocally complaining about the performance of their elected public officials, as demonstrated by the large-scale protest on January 9, 2012, against the increase in petrol prices by the administration of President Jonathan Abalaka (2023).

Thirdly, the experience of Nigeria has demonstrated that there is a propensity for increased thievery from the public treasury when politicians' campaigns for political office are viewed as investments, the profits of which must be recovered after they are elected and take office (Ilo 2014, p. 25). Because funds intended for public projects are diverted into private wallets as rentals, pre-bends, and rewards to the "godfathers" who supported the public office-holders, it follows that democracy dividends can never be distributed to the electorate. Without a doubt, this trend would endanger Nigeria's efforts to establish a strong democratic legacy (Ajiteru, 2023).

Table 1 below shows how corruption has increased in Nigeria after 1999, as seen by the looting of the public treasury. Nigeria's Transparency International (TI) rating indicates that the nation's standing on the TI ratings has deteriorated between 1999 and 2012 (Table 1). Nigeria was ranked higher in 1999 than in 2012, but due to the rise in public corruption, the nation's TI rankings declined significantly after 1999. However, Nigeria's TI rating has significantly improved since 2015, presumably as a result of President Muhammadu Buhari's new administration's anti-corruption campaign.

Table 1: Transparency International's 5-year perception index and ranking of Nigeria

Year	Position Occupied by Nigeria	No. of Countries Surveyed	Score
2003	98	99	1.6
2007	132	133	1.4
2011	147	179	2.2
2015	143	183	2.4
2019	139	176	2.7

Sources: Compiled from the following Transparency International websites:

<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2011/results> <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>
<http://www.transparency.org/research/>

Fourth, political protests can be sparked by an ongoing dependence on unethical tactics like election manipulation, violence, and intimidation to win elections. Such demonstrations have the potential to quickly or gradually turn into full-fledged anarchy. Following the violent protests in the North following the election on April 18, 2011, the increased degree of terrorism and bloodshed that worsened insecurity in Nigeria in 2012, particularly due to the actions of the Boko Haram sect (Walker 2017), gained pace. Most people in the North believed that the protests were caused by alleged electoral fraud in 2011, which resulted in the victory of former PDP President Jonathan and the Congress for Progressive Party's favorite candidate, retired General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.) CPC, or Change, had lost. Similar to this, the Yoruba in Nigeria's South-West Zone largely believed that the Yoruba were being cheated out of the country's political process when the military junta of General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993, presidential election, which was thought to have been won by Yorubaman Chief MKO Abiola. This resulted in a severe political crisis that endangered Nigeria's unity. According to studies, a nation that is serious about strengthening its democracy prohibits violence, vote buying, corrupt financial practices, and other practices that hinder the transition to a functional democracy (Abalaka, 2023).

Fifth, in a phony democracy such as the Nigerian one, where elections are rife with irregularities, political parties' worth as Additionally, a peaceful power transfer vehicle is vandalized. This is always the case when there is a powerful ruling party whose political clout makes other opposition groups weaker. Members of these opposition parties eventually defect to the ruling party. Politicians are becoming increasingly less moral in their political behavior as a result of this tendency, as the desire to gain political power in order to illegally accumulate fortune takes precedence over all other factors, such as integrity and reputation. While many members of other opposition parties defected to the ruling PDP in the run-up to the 2007 elections, important PDP members, such as Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the vice president under previous President Obasanjo, joined the Action Congress (AC) party Aluaigba (2019c) has elaborated on the obstacles to achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria, such as the use of violence during elections, the influence of money on election outcomes, godfathers, and so on. It suffices to reiterate that electoral malpractices are antithetical to democratic ethics; they emasculate the very foundation on which democracy is established and diminish the prospects of molding the framework for its workability. This attitude among Nigerian politicians is demeaning to the country's attempt to

stabilize its democracy "In all democratic regimes, the principal officers of government are chosen through competitive elections in which the bulk of the population can participate," as stated by Huntington (2021–92, p. 580). It will be nearly impossible for democracy to exist in the nation without this caliber of election. This is the situation in Nigeria, where intimidation and other various forms of election fraud prevent eligible voters from having the ability to select their leaders (Ajiteru, 2023).

7. Conceptual Structure

In order to explain why electoral malpractice is detrimental to progress, the ethical theory of Androx Fox (2021), sometimes known as moral philosophy, is pertinent. According to this perspective, man is striving for moral obligations, rightness or wrongness, and ideals. The location of According to this idea, every political activity raises the question of whether it is right or wrong. "What is morally wrong can never be politically right," Fox said. Applying this claim effectively means that ethics is a prerequisite for progress. Nicollo Machiavelli and others, on the other hand, believe that politics has no place for ethics. This is because the goal justifies the means, according to Machiavelli and his supporters. Although the concepts of "rightness" and "wrongness" are related to electoral malpractice and should be considered as such, the state exists to encourage desirable political actions that would advance development and enhance citizen welfare, which are under the jurisdiction of morals. This explains why governments around the world, including Nigeria, create laws that outlaw crimes that are deemed immoral, such as kidnapping, murder, and intimidation. Therefore, we may say that politics has a connection to ethics as long as it is focused on the "ought-to-be" question. According to the aforementioned research, a variety of practices are immoral, including ballot snatching, double registration, electoral vote inflation, violence during campaigns, arson, and electoral rigging, which involves killing an opponent to gain an electoral advantage. Therefore, traits that are morally just, accepted, and able to further a country's growth are equity, fair play, transparency, and openness (Sulaiman, 2023).

a. The Reasons for Election Fraud

Motives are the push and pull factors that make politicians more likely to engage in political misconduct. Political scientists and psychologists have investigated the causes of this, and the following support their findings. One of these is a desire for power. Power is sweet, and almost every politician aspires to have it, claims Adeola (2017). As a result, many politicians who hold elected office would prefer to keep it and may use unethical tactics to do so. Some new politicians frequently share the desire to gain power and would stop at nothing to do it, including looking into vote fraud. The manner that almost everything in Nigeria is turning "political" is not unrelated to the desire for power. For this reason, people also desire to be relevant in the grand scheme of things involving the accumulation of national wealth as a result of electoral success. These politicians then employ whatever strategy to get power, regardless of how strange it may seem. Abalaka (2023).

Finally, some Nigerians already have a pessimistic outlook that justice and fairness will always remain a pipe dream. It is instructive to notice that many aspiring politicians believe that electoral procedures must remain crude since they have not witnessed "crooks" being imprisoned. It is difficult for politicians who have risen to high elected positions through unethical means to oppose the flawed process that brought them there. Many people who have amassed wealth by fraudulently holding elective office seem like ideal role models for the younger generation. They are much praised and for this reason, young Nigerians struggle to eradicate electoral malpractice (Ajiteru, 2023).

b. The Causes of Nigeria's High Rate of Electoral Malpractice

One of the elements that contributes to election malpractice is endemic poverty. According to Abalaka (2023), over 50% of those who commit the bad deed struggle to live in a home they like, dress nicely, or eat the foods they enjoy. Their financial situation makes it tough for them to meet almost all of life's necessities. In order to survive, they thus turn into ready-made tools that can be utilized for any dreadful task, regardless of how awful, delicate, or illegal it may be. They are also unconcerned with the harm that such an act could do to Nigeria's progress. Extremely impoverished youngsters occasionally want to please their master by doing the "uncommon" (continuing electoral malpractice) as a "good" kid when their services are not requested. Approximately 68.7% of Nigerian graduates are unemployed as of 2019, and more than 50% have below-average financial well-being, according to Sulaiman (2023). Therefore, it is conceivable that these unemployed and impoverished Nigerians might readily accept the risky choice of election tampering in order to survive. Election misconduct can also be a result of poor planning. This occurs when candidates or political parties don't adequately prepare for elections. When a party or candidate's manifesto sales are not sufficiently prepared. Additionally, it can be in the form of poor campaign funding allocation and overt actions that can garner votes. Therefore, in order to outperform others without fixing the areas of shortcomings or lapses, such a party or candidate would try to manipulate the electoral process. The majority of political party members in Nigeria are "floating," meaning they only participate in campaigns or go to party rallies in order to profit. When their expectations are not fulfilled, these uncommitted members are typically willing to go above and above. Others want to give the party or candidate who mobilized them the idea that they are devoted followers, but they retain all the resources intended to mobilize voters before elections. What they are doing in such a situation is to use any kind of rigging to make up for the material items that were previously gathered. The proposal to rig the election as a cover-up for Ajiteru is the result of the outburst (2023).

Suspicion and misconduct are equally fostered by a lack of faith in the system. Political groups in Nigeria are constantly suspicious of one another. This keeps the political climate volatile and open to manipulation. When an electoral umpire is perceived as not being impartial, this is not unusual. All political parties would desire to overthrow one another in this situation in order to get control of the government. It has been argued on multiple occasions in Nigeria that the ruling party or incumbent benefits from the electoral management body. Consequently, opposition parties believe that when an election is approaching, the ruling political party will "in a way" benefit from the electoral umpire's efforts. Because of this, they occasionally plan to tamper with the electoral procedures in order to obtain unfair favors.

c. The Effects of Election Fraud on Nigeria's Development

The gerrymandering process, ballot stuffing, thuggery, hooliganism, and other malpractices have an impact on Nigeria's progress. When voters believe they were defrauded during the election process, chaos, bloodshed, and anarchy may break out in the political environment. This position was supported by the post-election crises in Osun, Ondo, Oyo, Kano, Bauchi, and a few other states in 2007 and 2011, according to Abalaka (2023). Millions of naira worth of assets are destroyed and lives are lost during political unrest connected to vote fraud are demolished. In addition, there may be family relocation, looting, arson, and unrest among the populace. It is possible for people of the same blood to view one another as enemies. Over time, all of them have the potential to pull a state back from its desired growth and development plan. Additionally, voting materials can be destroyed, including ballot boxes, polling booths, voter registration forms, and ballot papers. They can be destroyed by burning them completely or by violently shredding them to pieces. According to reports, thugs in numerous voting places in Lagos State vandalized a variety of election materials during the 2019 gubernatorial and National Assembly elections. Unused ballot papers and forms, ballot boxes, tables, and votes that had already been cast were all

burned during the procedure. This, As those materials would need to be replenished for future usage, it is unquestionably a waste of the national budget (Sulaiman, 2019).

The establishment of a stable constitutional democracy in Nigeria is hampered by electoral fraud. The hooligans and thugs who are enlisted for election malpractice might use their guns for other crimes, like arm robbery, which has led to banditry and terrorism. All of these impede growth since an environment of instability and violence is not conducive to development. It is implied that violence is deeply embedded in Nigerians' psyche, which has a backward effect on the country's progress. It is detrimental to Nigeria's growth, development, unity, and peaceful coexistence to use its youth for thuggery and hooliganism. In certain regions of Nigeria, it is not an understatement to say that recruitment for election malfeasance is closely associated with terrorism, militias, and insurgencies. The nation's financial resources and foreign reserves have been depleted in the fight against vices (Ajiteru, 2023).

d. The Effects of Election Fraud on the State of Nigeria

It is crucial that this study makes the conclusions in order to identify a means of escaping the threat, considering the nature of party politics throughout Nigerian election cycles, the desire for power, and the degree of poverty, insecurity, and unemployment. With almost 67.3% of its population living in extreme poverty, Nigeria is currently grappling with poverty (Adelley, 2023). At the moment, the present wave of poverty affecting people of all ages in Nigeria is concerning and demands that the government make a financial commitment. This suggests that in order to prevent election administration from being duplicated, the nation must shut all avenues. Overall, national resources (profits) might then be allocated to projects that improve Nigerians' quality of life. It is imperative that any possible means of interfering with the electoral process be avoided. The nation's efforts to eradicate poverty could be funded with funds that would otherwise be diverted for the conduct of other elections brought on by irregularities. The problem of unemployment is connected to the aforementioned. Given that almost two-thirds of Nigeria's population is unemployed and that the country's current population is estimated to be close to 180 million, it is not it makes sense to keep squandering a Nigerian kobo. Therefore, funds that are expected to be allocated for such an exercise could be used to provide menial jobs if efforts are taken to stop the intentional method of calling for reelection. This is conceivable given Shortall's (2019) assertion that not all jobless individuals in every country in the world require substantial financial resources to survive (Abalaka, 2023).

In a sense, the problem of electoral fraud continues to suggest the vulnerability of the state. When it comes to combating electoral misconduct, the Nigerian government slashes spending on protecting Nigerians' lives and property. The implication is that the check should be preventive rather than corrective. Osetelu (2019) noted that reasonable armament that the Nigerian in the past, government that was deployed for consecutive elections unintentionally ended up in the wrong hands. Many desperate Nigerians compete for weapons in order to manipulate elections. According to the aforementioned viewpoint, efforts made to address election-related security are equivalent to providing state amours with weapons and ammo for thugs. In any case, it is time for the Nigerian government to prepare to stop any kind of electoral manipulation. In this sense, stakeholders—including partisan politicians and the electorate—need to set a clear and positive example. If by 2023, when the next general election is approaching, Nigeria is still debating what measures to take to prevent electoral failure, the state will be in motion but not moving malpractice. It would be a graphic story. Ajiteru, (2023).

8. Suggestions

Since it has been demonstrated that electoral malpractice is widespread and impedes Nigeria's progress, the following suggestions are made in an effort to minimize the detrimental effects of the problem. First, both voters and politicians need to be better educated about politics. The

Independent National Election Commission, or INEC, must raise awareness of the need to eradicate election malpractice by educating the public through the media and other channels. INEC should focus more on the turmoil, premature deaths, property and life devastation, and several other negative effects that Nigerians have suffered as a result of electoral malpractice. Similar to how it has been debated elsewhere, Nigeria has to set up electoral courts where only issues pertaining to elections are decided. To harm others, politicians who commit election malpractice risk being outlawed or imprisoned. In order to empower them, electoral courts need be established and granted the required legislative sanction. In carrying out its responsibilities, the judiciary need to make an effort to be more open and truthful. It is important to show judges who have been discovered to be politically biased the way out. It is necessary to establish a system for recognizing deserving and respectable judges who carry out their responsibilities with justice, equity, and a fear of God (Sulaiman, 2023).

There should be more enforcement of the 2010 Electoral Act, as modified, which requires nonpartisan electoral officials. The manner in which those that were found guilty of electioneering misconduct in the general elections of 2015 and 2019 is a good place for INEC to start. There is more the commission could do. Regretfully, cases involving the ruling party are frequently handled carelessly. Any elected official who is discovered to have accepted a bribe, reward, or other inducement from a politician should face a fair trial and be duly imprisoned. It is promising and must be maintained that INEC officials who were accused of accepting bribes to sabotage the Nigerian election process in various states were turned over to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission for trial in such an open manner (Ajiteru, 2023).

Security personnel assigned to the election commission should be dependable, truthful, and equitable to everyone parties in carrying out their duties. They ought to learn how to use firearms, tear gas, or any other weapon they have access to in a civil manner. In order to prevent politicians from using them for their own gain, they should cease working as political assistants as soon as feasible in the weeks leading up to the election date or dates. Any security personnel or politician who disobeys such an order should face harsh penalties. Every level of government should work to give the election commission more independence. This ought to apply to accountability, recruitment, and finance. The electoral commission should have sufficient funding to enable it to carry out its duties with ease. Politicians shouldn't have any say in hiring ad hoc employees with the relevant laws, including the implementation of current ones. It is commendable that INEC is currently using employees of public colleges as collation and returning officers, and this practice ought to be reinforced. It should be adapted for use in elections at a lower level. It is not appropriate to spare returning officers who were accused of collecting money during the 2019 general elections. Social media platforms that regularly publish unconfirmed findings ought to be prohibited by law. Governments at all levels must work together to confront unemployment, poverty, and corruption if voting fraud is to be effectively handled. The trio's malignancy is extremely severe and detrimental to electoral fraud. No progress is likely to be made until corruption is addressed severely. Being poor makes People must be challenged honestly and are willing to do anything, including engaging in election malpractice.

People who are hungry may act irrationally and misbehave. Nigeria must start creating jobs in order to combat unemployment. The Nigerian federal government is actively advocating for school curricula that will develop people's skills, and these should be vigorously pursued. The government must allocate sufficient cash to its programs aimed at eliminating poverty.

9. FINAL COMMENT

Malpractice in elections is detrimental to Nigeria's progress. Even though numerous attempts have been made at all levels to remedy the unpleasant situation, the fight is still ongoing. Politicians, voters, all tiers of government, civil society organizations, the media, and religious organizations must thus more and collaborate to make sure the problem is solved. If public trust in Nigeria's

electoral systems is maintained, the country has a lot of opportunities. Despite the associated socio-political setbacks that frequently accompany the democratization process, there is no denying that holding free and fair elections signifies a turning point in a nation's journey toward democratic consolidation. Given the deluge of electoral fraud covered above, Nigerian elections since 1999 have consistently been a farce. Nonetheless, the slight improvements shown in the 2011 and 2015 elections show that, with the necessary reforms, particularly with regard to INEC and the reorientation of Nigerians' mindset toward elections. It is important to remember Schumpeter's remark (quoted in Adejumobi 2023) that democracy is only significant when a society has the capacity to accept or reject those who wish to rule it. Only via elections can that acceptance or rejection become a reality. For this reason, elections are unavoidable in liberal democracies. Nigeria must take decisive action to completely restructure the electoral process in order to overcome the obstacles preventing free and fair elections from being conducted there due to the monstrous problem of electoral malpractice. It is necessary to shift Nigerians' perspectives on elections in order to make up for previous setbacks that have caused them to become anxious about politics.

First, the numerous reports on Nigerian elections make it very evident that elections are typically manipulated when election results are being tallied. INEC should work with well-known and respected civil society groups in Nigeria, like the Transition Monitoring Group, Electoral Reform Network, Alliance for Credible Elections, and Transparency International in Nigeria, to support polling observation and monitoring on election days in order to reduce the manipulation of results at collation centers. This would assist in dispelling potential rigging agents, whether they are INEC staff or party operatives. Second, in order to address institutional shortcomings, INEC should work with the National Assembly to obtain additional institutional authority and financial autonomy from the executive. This would allow the Chairman of the Commission to designate Resident Electoral Commissioners with the National Assembly's consent. By doing this, the INEC's true independence will be guaranteed. Third, INEC and the judiciary should vigorously enforce the 1999 Constitution's and the Amended election Act 2011's sanctions for election misconduct and malpractices. Those who commit electoral fraud must be punished in accordance with the laws. Fourth, stringent regulation of political parties' and politicians' finances is necessary to reduce the widespread misuse of funds during elections.

Lastly, it's critical to address the underlying causes of violence in order to prevent it during elections. For example, macro-level initiatives like boosting the energy supply and addressing unemployment by reorganizing the agriculture sector will assist lower the number of young people participating in election-related violence. Given the extent of electoral fraud that has taken place in Nigerian elections, does not deteriorate in upcoming elections, the nation's democratic consolidation may as well have been postponed till a later period of political history. The foresight of key players in Nigeria's electoral process will determine the time frame at which elections will represent the preferences of Nigerians. The Nigerian voters, political parties, INEC, and the government must all acknowledge the need to strengthen democracy in the nation and diligently strive toward it.

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