

[Open Peer Review on Qeios](#)

Repeated irregularities and contested election outcomes: Explaining Nigeria's seven quadrennial election cycles

Uchenna C. Obiagu¹

¹ University of Nigeria

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

The present study offers an institutional explanation for repeated irregularities that crystalize in contested election outcomes in seven quadrennial election cycles since the commencement of democratic engagement in 1999 in Nigeria. It argues that consistent irregularities are likely to account for the unending contested election outcomes and dwindling voter turnout in Nigeria. It uses detailed evidence (data) from available literature and key informant interviews, embellished with personal experience as active participants in Nigerian elections. The study leverages the propositional trappings of institutional theory to shed light on the recurring cases of irregularities and their eroding effects on the core value of democratic elections. The examination of literature and analysis of interview contents and national election data on lethal electoral violence, litigations, and dwindling voter turnout support our afore-stated argument. The findings suggest the failure of government-driven interventions and the need to explore an alternative reform initiative that allows the led to take the lead.

Uchenna C. Obiagu

Email address: ucobiagu@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-4286-0263

Keywords: electoral irregularities, contested election outcomes, voter turnout, electoral institutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

Elections mediate in society's competing political claims, allow voters to participate in the leadership recruitment process to choose leaders to manage their collective affairs, and afford party candidates the chance to canvass for votes in credible contests (Fjelde & Höglund, 2022; Mbah et al., 2019). Globally, electoral bodies have given voters the freedom to choose their leaders in national elections except for a handful of African, Asian, and Latin American (AALA) countries like

Brunei, China, Eritrea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and South Sudan (Birch et al., 2020). However, elections have needlessly churned out some anomalies like electoral irregularities: a deviation from established electoral standards. Cross-country studies find that this electoral malfeasance affects around a quarter of all electoral contests worldwide and is more worrisome in many new democracies (Deglow & Fjelde, 2023; Straus & Taylor, 2013).

The world has recently witnessed a depletion of the democratic value of elections occasioned by poorly managed polls. Both the high and low nations have recently had their fair share of flawed elections. Recently, States United Action (2023) found that an estimated 12 million American adults support the use of violence as a viable political strategy, with general distrust of the democratic process (Kousser, 2023; Pildes, 2020). The 2020 U.S. presidential poll created an institutional problem that jeopardized the lives of poll workers and made many of them seek government protection in their future electoral engagement (Kleinfield, 2021). Elections in some African countries like Malawi and Benin have witnessed isolated cases of violence, but become deadly in others like Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe (Brosché et al., 2020; Angerbrandt, 2018). Electoral violence can exacerbate in countries already in conflict even though elections have defied all odds to take place despite the conflict (Birch et al., 2020). This has regrettably made electoral contests become contentious, contested, and controversial in some countries and leads to democratic recession in others (Norris et al., 2015a; Mbah et al., 2018; Obiagu et al., 2021).

Additionally, Nguyễn et al. (2023) find that the trio of intergenerational political divides in seeking information, entrenched socio-political traumas of immigration, and language barriers explains the undermining effects of mis/disinformation on Vietnamese Americans and their politics. Scholars who hinge their electoral integrity arguments on the electoral body's formal independence are yet to offer plausible explanations on why elections fail in settings known with strong formal electoral institutions, especially in polarized political communities with entrenched elites. This is the case with the contentious 2019 elections in Thailand, which merely elevated a military junta with the hallowed toga of an elected government (Sawasdee, 2020). The formal independent Electoral Commission of Thailand needlessly created opportunities that finally led to its capture by "actors who wield power outside of formal politics and are unaccountable to public interest" (Birch & van Ham, 2017; Desatova & Alexander, 2021, p. 1).

In Nigeria, many studies specifically emphasize the depressing effects of electoral irregularities variously manifesting as electoral malpractice, vote buying, and electoral violence (e.g., Ashindorbe, 2018; Angerbrandt, 2018, 2020; Onapajo, 2014; Omotola, 2010; Bratton, 2008). Many others appear in relatively unknown publishing outlets with a single case focus or subnational outlook. Some apply the resource curse proposition to explain how abundant mineral resources have failed to translate into economic prosperity in weakly institutionalized settings where citizens are structurally constricted or made unable to hold their leaders accountable for their stewardship through elections (Harvey, 2021; Ko, 2014). Instead of taking the advantage offered by oil minerals in Nigeria for within-country development, the country still depends on rents from oil exports which have been poorly managed to address problems relating to rising rates of poverty, criminal activities, and unemployment (Mbah et al, 2023; Mähler, 2010). Emeh (2013) blamed African underdevelopment on external reliance for support, survival, and growth. Although the institutionalization of electoral democracy in Africa has made gradual progress, the progress is characterized by democratic stagnation and backsliding syndromes, with a few elections facilitating the ousting of incumbents and handing over to oppositions (Carbone & Cassani, 2016). Those at the

political affairs in Nigeria rarely exhibit the culture of allowing established institutions to freely operate based on legal dictates (Omotola, 2010).

These studies demonstrate the dynamics surrounding election management amid troubling cases of irregularities that become comparatively violent and fatal in some countries and otherwise elsewhere. However, scholars know very little about factors that repeatedly trigger these irregularities, lead to unending contestations of election outcomes and result in dwindling public confidence in the electoral process spanning many election cycles in less consolidated democracies like Nigeria. Understanding this underexplored phenomenon lies in appreciating the mediating role of electoral institutions like electoral management bodies (EMBs), the courts, and security agencies. These institutions respectively administer elections, adjudicate election disputes, and secure the electoral process. In this context, at least in principle, elections are expected to create room for voters to freely elect those that will mediate social claims, give creative leadership, allow citizens greater vent to say how they wish to be governed, and provide an alternative to the prevailing use of compelling threats, intimidating utterances, impelling coercion, and life-taking violence.

Regrettably, this expectation has often failed to conform to reality given the fact that these institutions do not have the latitude to freely carry out their functions because their independence is grossly checkmated by political actors who leverage their positions to influence institutional operations. Thus, the present study adopts the institutional theory to explain how a deviation from the laid down rules accounts for the perennial cases of electoral irregularities, contested election outcomes, and voter apathy in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999. It is the single expectation that consistent electoral irregularities are likely to account for the unending contested election outcomes and dwindling voter turnout in Nigeria.

To realize this goal, the study focuses on Nigeria's seven quadrennial election cycles between 1998-9 and 2023, which have shown a consistent pattern of electoral irregularities, contested election outcomes, and voter apathy. Based on the post-2007 election reform implemented during the 2011 elections in Nigeria, the study categorizes the seven election cycles into pre-2011 reform, the 2011 reform implementation, and post-2011 reform periods. This is to enable us to understand the trends in electoral irregularities in the country. It leverages rich available documents, key informant interviews, and personal experience as active participants in Nigerian elections since 1999. We explore a conceptual articulation of the major themes with a subsection on electoral institutions in Nigeria and an exposition of theoretical understanding of the problem. This is followed by sections on methodology, results, and discussion (with a comparative discussion on related political developments in some African countries). It ends with a conclusion.

Existing research on electoral irregularities, contentious elections, and voter participation

Election is the most visible test of the acceptability (popularity) of candidates by voters in any representative democracy. But how to organize elections in such a manner that allows voters to freely choose one or some candidates over others sometimes becomes challenging. In this manner, also, elections are supposed to prevent people with questionable backgrounds from emerging winners. In practice, however, voters have shown preference for such candidates perhaps

because of some primordial considerations like patronage, ethnicity, and religion. In India, political parties have fielded candidates with tainted pasts because they have gargantuan funds to whether the rising election costs and voters prefer them because they do not mask their reputation (Biswas, 2017). Some members of the two U.S. dominant parties have justified the use of threats against opponents to gain some political mileage for their parties (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).¹ Baron et al. (2023) find that voters will likely prefer candidates with shared views to those with opposing views. But there are situations where voters rise above these considerations to choose people with the capacity to perform, character, and competence over others whose background is dubious. For instance, empirical Afro-Asian studies find that voters can withdraw their voting support for candidates who deploy electoral violence to increase their winning odds (see Rossenweig, 2015; Blair et al., 2013; LeBas, 2010). Similarly, a study by Banerjee et al. (2014) reveals that Indian voters in Uttar Pradesh prefer honest non-coethnic candidates to others with corrupt pasts.

There is a global standard set by the United Nations (UN) on which basis credible election or election integrity is measured and assessed. This standard is set in Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHRs), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10th December, 1948. The said Article states that: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures" (the United Nations, 1948). Thus, Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, (2012: 9) follows this global standard to define credible elections from the perspective of integrity. It argues that credible elections give life to rights enshrined in the UDHRs and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These rights include "freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, the right to take part in the government of one's country through freely elected representatives, the right of equal access to public service in one's country, and the recognition that the authority of government derives from the will of the people".

Impliedly, any form of deviation from this standard with the intent to sway the electoral process and favourably determine its outcome amounts to electoral irregularity. These irregularities are central to the manifestation of other forms of deviation from the electoral standards like electoral malpractice, vote suppression, and violence; and can lead to contested election outcomes, voter apathy, and fatal electoral violence (see Figure 1). In light of the above, available literature sees electoral irregularities and their various manifestations as a thorn in the flesh of clean and credible elections worldwide (von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020; Gutiérrez-Romero & LeBas, 2020; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014). In this context, electoral irregularities can puncture the democratic value of elections and replace voter's freedom to choose with coercive choice. They represent the existence of a warped democratic value and faulty democratic institutions. They can reverse years of achievements and cause a civil war, with a casualty rate that can match that of a civil war (Birch et al., 2020).

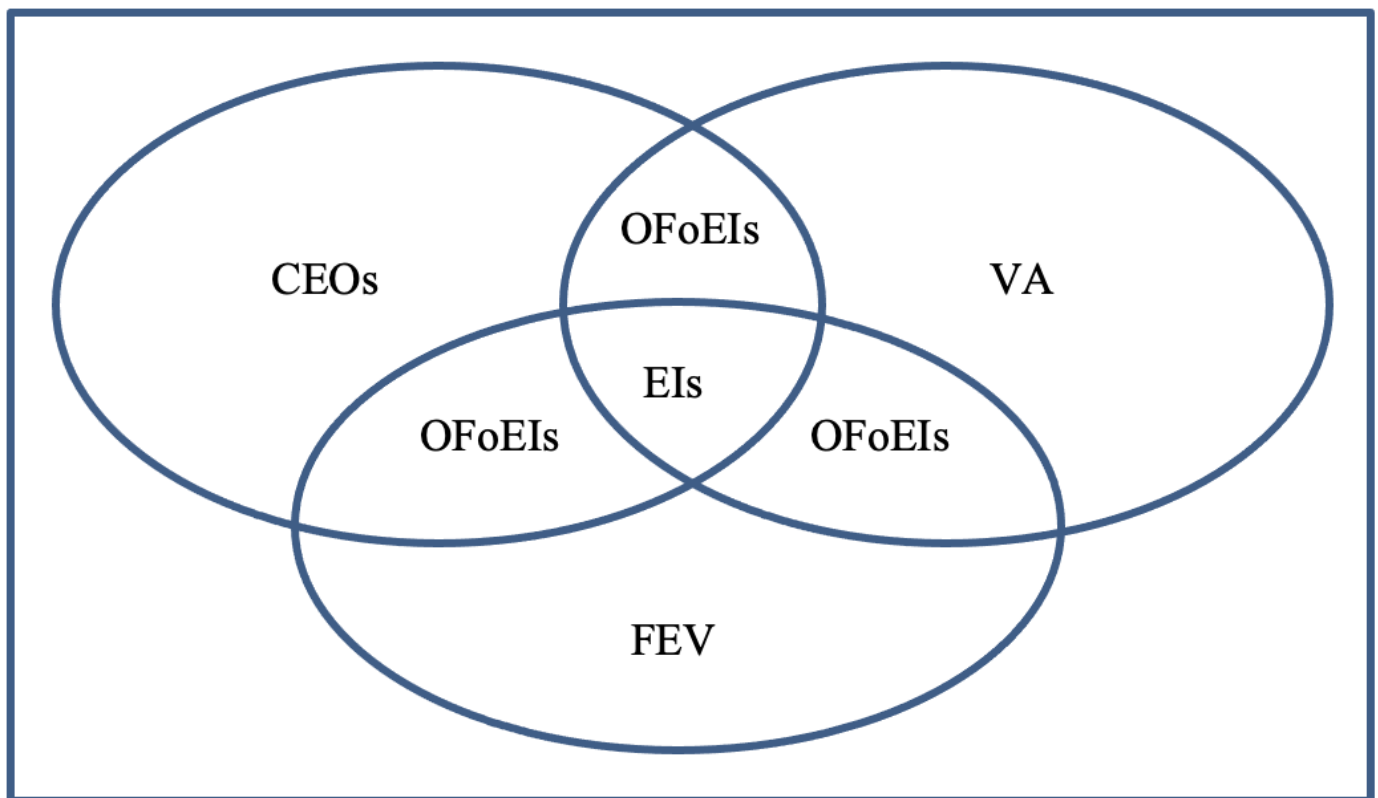


Figure 1. The centrality of electoral irregularities

Note: *EIs*—electoral irregularities, *CEOs*—contested election outcomes, *OFoEIs*—other forms of electoral irregularities, *VA*—voter apathy, *FEV*—fatal electoral violence.

Additionally, theoretical studies find that contentious elections have complex deleterious consequences on voter participation (Mbah et al., 2019; Nikolayenko, 2015). They can equally trigger mass protest (Sedziaka & Rose, 2015), explain why violence occurs during elections or why violence can serve as an election-rigging tool in countries with challenging institutional capacity to “mediate conflict over political power and ensure a level playing field among candidates” (Kuhn, 2015: 89), and can dethrone an illegitimate autocratic government (Higashijima, 2015).

Considerable cross-national research shows that challenges surrounding electoral irregularities and contentious elections with their depressive effects on voter turnout can be effectively addressed using voter education or sensitization programmes to enlighten and inform voters, candidates, and other election stakeholders against the use of clandestine means and violence as a strategy to win elections. Hence, while it is well documented in extant literature that less informed voters will likely consider candidate’s ethnicity, patronage, and pecuniary welfare packages in their voting preferences (Fjelde & Höglund, 2014; Posner, 2005; Chandra, 2004), further cross-national studies suggest that this argument may not be entirely true in climes where voters are much more informed (von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020; Vincent, 2014; Banerjee et al., 2011).

The latter argument holds that when uninformed voters are exposed to voter education or sensitization campaigns, they will not tow their voting paths along ethnic lines and will not likely exchange their votes for money, even though they (successfully exposed/informed voters) face a higher risk of electoral violence because using alternative campaign

strategies to sway them will be harder (von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020). Some analysis has proven that sensitization campaigns can decrease the potency of using money to buy voters, increase turnout, and widen the incumbent's winning chances. Knowledgeable voters can effectively apply a candidate's performance information to arrive at an informed election decision unlike less knowledgeable ones (cf. Vincent, 2014). There is a dimension of electoral irregularities in Nigeria in which ongoing elections are delayed through the instrumentality of inconclusive elections to pave the way for election manipulation (Obiagu et al., 2022; Obiagu et al., 2021). As an umbrella word, electoral irregularities represent actions that prevent eligible citizens from freely participating in elections as voters or candidates or actions that allow ineligible individuals to participate in elections.

In this manner, electoral irregularities in Nigeria can be clandestine or manipulative such as electoral malpractice, falsification of election results, suppression of votes/voters, vote buying, unreliable voter register, and electoral sabotage. They can also be compelling, intimidating, and threatening, and, in the worst case, can be coercive, violent and fatal, with their suppressing effects on voter participation. Thus, electoral institutions and the environment under which they function can widen the chances in which electoral violence is deployed by politicians to manipulate the process and outcome of elections against the democratic requirement of credible and peaceful contests (Fjelde & Höglund, 2014). The tranquil environment helps parties and their candidates to canvas for votes without threat, enables voters to vote without fear, and provides the atmosphere for wider election observation coverage by observers without intimidation.

Electoral irregularities can be expressed in contentious elections and can undermine voter participation. In this direction, Norris et al. (2015b) offer a classical guiding explanation of contentious elections. They use a three-dimension (authority, procedures, and outcomes) analysis to provide insights into three manifestations of contentious elections. These are when:

- Disputes over the authority of electoral actors like when EMB's impartiality, authority, and independence are questionable,
- Disputes over the fairness of electoral process procedures in the entire electoral cycle like challenges on the implementation of electoral laws, constituency delimitation, registration and regulation of voters and parties, allocation of elected seats, regulation of campaigns and result management, and
- Disputes over the legitimacy of election outcomes.

The mechanism to settle these disputes is consensual legitimate elections organized in “an orderly and peaceful manner, where contests channel democratic competition among rival visions of society, leaders, and political parties”. In the absence of this mechanism, leaders can govern through alternative mechanisms such as rewards and sanctions or what Svulik (2012) refers to as carrots and sticks. In contrast to these consensual legitimate elections, Norris et al. (2015b: 134) define contentious elections as “contests involving major challenges, with different degrees of severity, to the legitimacy of electoral actors, procedures, or outcomes”.

Ultimately, electoral irregularities that crystalize in contentious elections have deflating implications on voter participation empirically expressed in voter turnout. But because of the changing value of voter turnout, arriving at its understanding, predictor, and/or measurement with substantive importance has become challenging for scholars. For instance, Geys'

(2006) aggregate research on 83 articles attempts to explain 14 predictors of turnout, but discovers many others in the course of the analysis. A decade later, Cancela and Geys (2016) meta-analysis of 102 journal articles ends up revealing similar unanticipated predictors that pose measurement challenges and affirm possible difficulty in empirical certainty. Similarly, Stockemer's (2017: 698) meta-analysis involving 130 publications with over a hundred turnout predictors in which the analysis reveals that "turnout is higher under compulsory voting, if the election is important ... or held in a small country". Recently, Frank and i Coma (2021: 607) identify 44 articles on turnout from 1986 to 2017 with over 127 potential turnout predictors. Data on 70 variables robustly related to turnout in 579 elections between 1945 and 2014 in 80 electoral democracies. The findings associate 22 variables with the turnout and they include "compulsory voting, concurrent elections, competitive elections, inflation, previous turnout, and economic globalization".

Despite the unending argument, there is a consensus among scholars that voter turnout is measured by the percentage of all votes cast during elections (Stockemer, 2017; Solijonov, 2016). Drawing from this consensus, the present study maintains that voter turnout is one of the visible parameters to assess how citizens (candidates/voters) participate in the electoral process of their country. Higher voter turnout mostly represents the vitality of electoral democracy as its reverse is a sign of voter apathy (Solijonov, 2016; Mahmud, 2015; Dettrey & Schwindt-Bayer, 2009).

Electoral institutions in Nigeria

The management of elections in Nigeria is underpinned by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN), 1999 (as amended) and other formal legislations that emanate from the CFRN as Nigeria's *grundnorm*. These other legislations include the electoral law, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) regulations and guidelines, INEC decision extracts, and manuals for election officials. Again, election management is a very complex function and, as such, many stakeholders take part in the entire election administration cycle. Thus, the success of any election around the world in modern times depends on multi-stakeholder responsibility. In specific terms, election stakeholders in Nigeria are the INEC, the judiciary, the security agency, political parties, party candidates, eligible voters, the media, and election observer groups (see Figure 2). Among these, three are very strategic and they play key roles in election management. Contextually, this sub-section of the review focuses on three key Nigerian electoral institutions: the electoral umpire (INEC), the courts, and the security agency.

The INEC is one of the federal executive bodies constitutionally established by virtue of Section 153 of the 1999 CFRN. By their status as statutory federal institutions, Section 158 of the 1999 CFRN provides that they (including INEC) "shall not be subject to any other authority or person" in the course of discharging their duties in accordance with the CFRN. These institutions are established as body corporate with perpetual succession and with powers to sue and be sued in their corporate names. By extension and given the centrality of elections in democratic operations, this constitutional provision recognizes INEC as an independent electoral body in Nigeria with constitutional guarantee. The 1999 CFRN and Electoral Act empower INEC to initiate any working strategy that will ensure credible management of elections in the country.



Figure 2. Hierarchy (pyramid) of election stakeholders in Nigeria

Source: Authors' design

Note: EOGs means election observer groups .

Instructively, like Nigeria's federal system, INEC is a highly centralized election management authority charged with all matters relating to election management, be they constituency delimitation, registration and regulation of political parties, determination of eligibility of voters, recruitment of election officials, administration of voting on election day, result management, and declaration of winners. Again, in the hierarchy (pyramid) of eight election stakeholders in Nigeria, INEC ranks first, occupies a larger space, and plays a role in election administration that other stakeholders are not empowered to play by law. Given Catt et al.'s (2014: 5) definition of EMBs as organizations responsible for "managing some or all the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections", INEC sits at the driver's seat in the vehicle of election administration and all others are the passengers.

Like in other democracies based on Montesquieu's tripartite separation of powers, the Nigerian judiciary is a branch of government constitutionally concerned with law interpretation and dispute adjudication, with oversight functions over other branches (legislature and executive, including agencies under them) (see Chapter VII of the CFRN, 1999).² Accordingly, the judiciary plays a key role in election management by ensuring strict adherence to legal stipulations. It has constitutional powers to interpret the contents of the 1999 CFRN, the Electoral Act, and other ancillary laws. It solely adjudicates election-related disputes and ensures the observance of the fundamental rights of every Nigerian as contained in Chapter IV of the 1999 CFRN. The final power to validate election outcomes resides with the Nigerian judiciary.

The security agencies have the constitutional responsibility to protect the electoral process, voters, poll officials, and election materials during elections. They also make the election environment conducive and peaceful. Of the three electoral institutions that are of concern to this study, the security architecture in Nigeria is the most hierarchically centralized and strictly follows a central directive by the president as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The Electoral Act of 2022 empowers the Commission to consult with relevant security agencies like the police, the military, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps to request for the deployment of relevant security personnel to provide adequate security for election management purposes like political campaign rallies, distribution and delivery of election materials, and protection of election officials (see Sections 27 and 91 of the 2022 Electoral Act).

Understanding the problem from an institutional lens

Institutionalism as espoused by Meyer and Rowan in 1977 provides theoretical insight on how institutions are influenced by normative pressures that partly emanate either from external sources like the society or within the institution itself. These pressures force the institution to be guided by legitimated rationalized elements that range from standard operating procedures to professional certification and state requirements. The incorporation of these elements leads to isomorphism with the institutional environment and increases the probability of institutional survival. Institutionalism flourished with scholarly works across the social sciences like sociology (like DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), economics (like North, 1999), and political science (like March & Olsen, 1984; Peters, 2019), compressed in old (driven by laws) and new (driven by norms, beliefs, and practices) traditions/schools.

From Peters' (2019) institutionalism and de-institutionalism or formal and informal institutional perspective, institutionalism shapes the predictable pattern of relationship between institutions, society, and actors, and how institutions change to produce (or fail to produce) the desired actions. To Meyer and Rowan (1977), institutionalization involves the elevation of "social processes, obligations, or actualities" to an impersonal "rulelike status" above individuals, groups, and organizations, as well as their preferences. They identified an inseparable correlation between organizational departments, offices, and programmes (institutional structures), legal stipulations (institutional rules), and social norms, practices, and procedures (institutional myths). Rationalized institutional rules are a reflection of institutional myths, which also shape the institutional structures and channel them towards the effective and efficient realization of organizational goals. They further proposed that, as rationalized institutional rules emerge within the domain of work activity, formal organizations form and expand by incorporating these rules as socio-structurally legitimated rationalized elements. Organizations that successfully adopt these elements in their formal structures will optimally widen their legitimacy and ultimately increase effectiveness, efficiency, and survival capabilities. When these organizations become isomorphic with their myths to reflect the institutional environment, they decrease internal coordination and control to maintain legitimacy.

In this way, any attempt to control organizational activities in institutionalized organizations will trigger conflicts and even lead to loss of legitimacy (cf. Libson, 2016). Issues that enhance confidence, satisfaction, and good faith reflect organizational structures subsumed or entrenched in institutional myths, not in ethno-religious, regional, or any other primordial lines. If the modern institutional reality is that the functionality of informal institutions depends on the role and

strength of formal ones, then what becomes of a setting with formal institutional arrangements that exist in the breach? In this case, the institutions exist based on legal stipulations domesticated in the legal documents with clearly designated rules and regulations, executable specific functions, and what it takes in terms of power (man and material) to achieve their assigned responsibilities, but do not reflect the yearnings of the governed. This explains the Nigerian situation in relation to the challenging realities of its electoral institutions.

To begin with, the 1999 CFRN recognizes three tiers (federal, state, and local) of government and shares power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to ensure the smooth running of the state. In practice, the CFRN entrusts enormous powers to the executive with which it controls other government institutions. Those designated as statutory bodies remain so in the constitution but not so in reality as the head of the executive arm of government takes advantage offered by the power to hire and fire members of these bodies to interfere in their operations (cf. Omotola, 2010). Other branches of government and their ancillary institutions are what the president makes of them, as opposed to the practice in other systems like South Africa where governments support institutions (not interfere) to freely do their statutory jobs (cf. Libson, 2016). Worse still, the various institutional and electoral reforms and the politics surrounding the amendment of electoral laws have not demonstrated confidence and raised questions about their efficacy in guaranteeing a credible electoral process in Nigeria (Adebiyi & Olowa, 2022).

Furthermore, the electoral institutions in Nigeria are statutory and independent on paper but not so in operations. For illustration, since its inception in 1999, Nigeria's electoral body has thrown up ethically challenged leaders who have undermined its institutional independence through interference in its membership (Omotola, 2010). The head of the executive branch of the federal government has, with impunity, abused the privileges associated with the office to undermine the judicial branch through the arbitrary sacking of principal judicial officers for spurious reasons. Lawyers engaged to defend these officers by the 1999 CFRN were threatened out of the way (see Nigeria Civil Society [NCS] Situation Room, 2019; Garcia-Sayán, 2019). These officers serving at various election tribunals are currently under presidential intimidation, blackmail, or threat (Ramalan, 2023; Thisday, 2023). The security agencies, which are under the control of the president, have acted in a partisan manner and arbitrarily abused their rules of engagement on election duties (NCS Situation Room, 2019).

There are cases where Nigerian courts look the other way to declare some corrupt Nigerian leaders innocent, but the same leaders are convicted abroad, which has implication for institutional functionality and makes a mockery of institutions in Nigeria. Instead of rising above individuals and groups to restrain their excesses, the reverse is the case in the country. When all these happen without commensurate consequences, they tend to embolden the perpetrators. It is Kleinfeld's (2021) argument that when groups believe that they can use any means outside the law (including violence) to sway the electoral process without consequences, they are more likely to do so. Impliedly, when Nigerian leaders abuse the privileges of their offices without consequences, it becomes an incentive for future violations of the law. This explains the problem with flawed Nigerian elections arising from institutional failures.

To further the study, the next section deals with methodological issues that underpin the study. It addresses concerns about how materials are sourced and analyzed.

Methodology

The materials for this study are sourced from rich available literature, key informant interviews, and personal experience as active participants in Nigerian elections. The key informants are mainly people (adults from 18 years) who are very knowledgeable about political happenings in Nigeria by virtue of their knowledge and active participation in Nigerian elections. They are selected from election officials, key party members/candidates, informed voters, and election observers. We set an average benchmark for response rate.

For convenience in execution, we adopted a non-probability sampling method and purposively selected three key informants each from 12 states. The state selection is based on the six geo-political zones in Nigeria (i.e., two states from each zone). To ensure equal selection opportunity, a simple random sampling technique was adopted to extract the views of the cumulative 36 informants. However, 24 interviews were successfully conducted. These are satisfactory and represent an average of 66.67 percent response rate (see Table 1). We recorded the lowest response rate from the northeast geo-political zone and the southeast recorded the highest response rate, all within our benchmark. We used a combination of face-to-face and phone interviews, and interview schedules, conveniently interfaced with research assistants and the use of relevant social media instruments. Subsequently, references will be made to these interviews based on the serial numbers in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviews and Interview Schedule Administration and Collection

S/№	G-p Zone	State	Medium	№ of SI	ZT (№)	ZRR (%)
1.	North-central	Benue	ISTRA/PC	3		
2.	North-central	Niger	ISTRA/WhatsApp	1	4	66.7
3.	North-east	Adamawa	ISTRA/PC/WhatsApp	1		
4.	North-east	Taraba	ISTRA/PC/WhatsApp	2	3	50.0
5.	North-west	Kaduna	ISTRA/PC/WhatsApp	2		
6.	North-west	Kano	ISTRA/PC/WhatsApp	2	4	66.7
7.	South-east	Enugu	FTF/PC/WhatsApp	2		
8.	South-east	Imo	FTF/PC/WhatsApp	3	5	83.3
9.	South-south	C/River	ISTRA/PC/Gmail	2		
10.	South-south	Rivers	ISTRA/PC/WhatsApp	2	4	66.7
11.	South-west	Lagos	ISTRA/PC/WhatsApp	2		
12.	South-west	Oyo	ISTRA/PC/Gmail	2	4	66.7
Total				24	24	

Note: G-p means geo-political, SI means successful interview, ZT means zonal total, ZRR means zonal response rate, ISTRA means interview schedule through research assistant, and PC means phone call. Computation for ZRR is based on 3 interviews from two selected states in each geo-political zone.

National election data on fatal election violence, contested election outcomes, and voter turnout, as well as textual contents of available documents and informant interviews were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics and content analysis. The descriptive statistical tools adopted include charts and simple percentages. The study is expressed in nominal variables in which we applied chi-square ($\chi^2 = \sum(O-E)^2/E$) to ascertain nominal variable association.³ We used Cramer's V [$\sqrt{(\chi^2/n)/(df)}$] to calculate the direction (whether positive or negative) and strength (whether weak, moderate, strong, or perfect) of the variable association.⁴ We also used an alpha (α) value of 0.05 (a margin of error of 5%), which suggests a 95 percent confidence in our decision.

Study area

Nigeria is a federation that comprises northern and southern blocs, divided into six geopolitical zones with a total of 36 federating states and a Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. 774 local government areas make up Nigeria's electoral constituencies, with 176,846 polling units spread across 8,809 INEC-created registration areas/wards for election management in the federation.

Since Nigeria's commencement of the fourth republic in 1999, the 2007 elections heralded a lot of controversy owing to unprecedented cases of irregularities, a reality that was acknowledged by the highest beneficiary of the elections – late former President M.U. Yar'Adua. On the strength of this reality, he immediately commenced a comprehensive post-2007 electoral reform and set up an Electoral Reform Committee headed by an emeritus Justice Mohammed Uwais. The Committee broadly reviewed Nigeria's electoral system and submitted its recommendations in 2008. The implementation of the recommendations during the 2011 elections laid the foundation for the introduction of digital technology for the automation of voter fingerprints and marked a watershed in Nigeria's electoral history. Hence, based on this significant date, the study divided the seven quadrennial election cycles into three: (i) the pre-2011 reform period (comprising 1998-9, 2003, and 2007 election cycles), (ii) the 2011 reform implementation period, and (iii) post-2011 reform period (comprising 2015, 2019, and 2023 election cycles).

Results

This section presents the world of reality (data) about our expectation. Accordingly, the section is organized under two sub-sections: available literature and results from key informants, embellished with personal experience in Nigerian elections. The section ends with a subheading on descriptive statistics.

Results from available literature

Independent reports of NCS Situation Room (2019) and European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM), as well as studies by Mbah et al. (2020), Onuoha et al. (2020), Onapajo and Babalola (2020), Angerbrandt (2018), and Omotola

(20010) reveal a situation of challenging elections in Nigeria.

Figure 3 contains a progression of statistical data on the number of deaths arising from repeated irregularities that turn violent and fatal in Nigeria with a total of 2,444 deaths reported between 1998-9 and 2023. The statistics indicate that, in the last 24 years, every election season in Nigeria is characterized by violence and leads to a loss of human lives. During the transition (founding) elections of 1998-9, 80 Nigerians paid the supreme price on account of election-related violence. The figure increased to 100 and 300 in 2003 and 2007 respectively and peaked in 2011 with 965 reported deaths. It dropped to 106 in 2015 and increased to 756 in 2019 with 137 in 2023. Northern Nigeria has always been the worst hit. For instance, out of 756 deaths recorded in 163 incidents in 2019 election year, northern Nigeria appropriates 570 (75.40%) deaths in 61 (37.42%) incidents, while 186 (24.60%) deaths in 102 (62.58%) incidents were recorded in the southern part of the country. This partly has consequences on election disputes and participation.

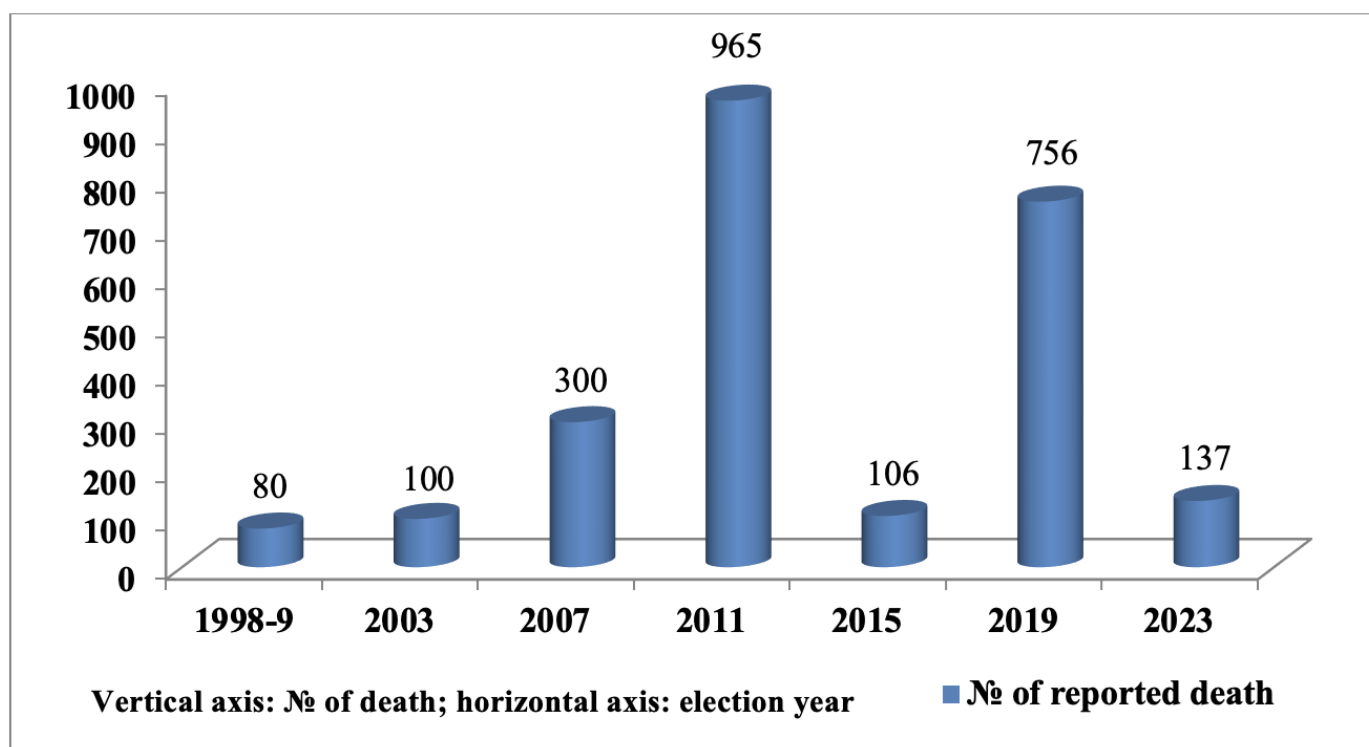


Figure 3. Summary of reported deaths during Nigerian elections between 1998-9 and 2023

Source: compiled by authors with data from Obiagu (2023)

The transition elections recorded only 2 election-related litigations. The litigation figure astronomically increased from two in 1998-9 to 574 and 1,291 in 2003 and 2007 elections respectively. Although the figure decreased in 2011 and 2015 election cycles with 732 and 611 respectively due to attempts to reform the electoral system, contested election outcomes did not leave the Nigerian electoral space. The situation was exacerbated with 1,697 and 1,996 election-related litigations during the 2019 and just concluded 2023 elections (Figure 4). The characterization of Nigerian elections by killings and fraud-instigating litigations consequently informs the depleting public confidence in Nigeria's electoral institutions, election management, and/or electoral process (EU-EOM, 2023, 2015; Mbah et al., 2020; NCS Situation Room, 2019;

Angerbrandt, 2018).

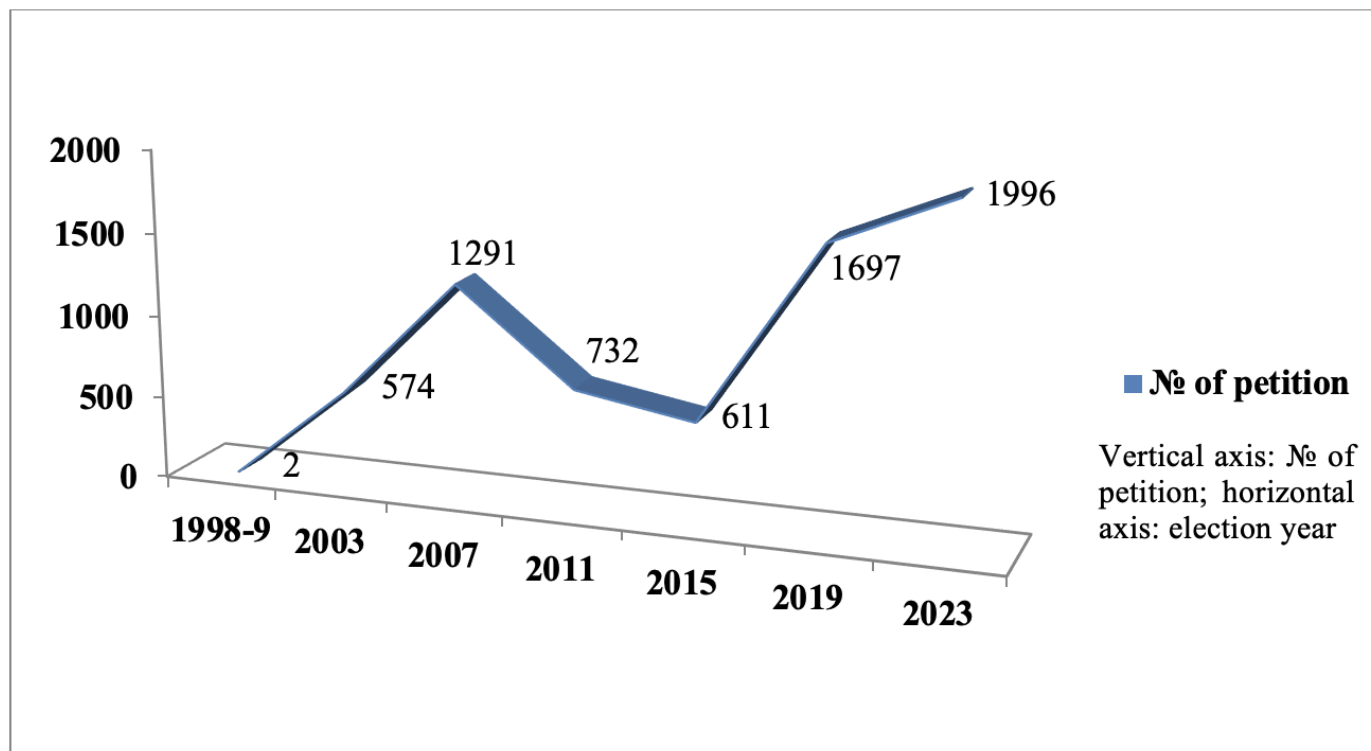


Figure 4. Summary of reported election petitions in Nigeria between 1998-9 and 2023

Source: compiled by authors with data from Obiagu (2023)

Accordingly, statistics in Table 2 depict a voter participation trend, which began with 52.26 percent during the transition elections and peaked in 2003 at 69.08 but declined by 18.31 percent from 69.08 percent in 2003 to 57.49 percent in 2007. Since 2007, turnout has consistently declined to 26.71 percent during the 2023 elections owing to cases of irregularities and unsatisfactory judicial decisions on elections in which votes cast do not freely align with election outcomes.

Table 2. Summary of trend in voter participation in Nigeria, 1999–2023

Election year	Total registered voters	Total valid votes	Voter turnout (%)
1999	57,938,945	30,280,052	52.26
2003	60,823,022	42,018,735	69.08
2007	61,567,036	35,397,517	57.49
2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.68
2015	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.65
2019	82,344,107	28,614,190	34.75
2023	93,469,009	24,965,572	26.71

Source: International IDEA (2023)

Results from key informants

The foregoing variously aligns with our evidence from key informants. We sought their informed views on specific issues relating to electoral irregularities and how free electoral institutions are in the discharge of their functions. The informants provided clear accounts of their participation in Nigerian elections, their experience, and the various ways power brokers, megalomaniac politicians, and political gladiators sway the electoral process to determine its outcomes either for themselves or for their preferred candidates (Interview S/Ns 1, 2, 8, 10, and 11). In some cases, this leads to violent bloodshed and death. Generally, a majority of them (19 informants [79.17%] out of 24) expressed the view that the activities of these political actors in connivance with electoral institutions account for the repeated cases of electoral irregularities in Nigeria; only two (8.33%) negate this view; and three remained silent with a note that suggests their loss of interest in the electoral process owing to their previous experience with flawed elections in Nigeria.

Similarly, many of these informants (20 [83.33%]) submitted that Nigerian leaders rarely allowed the electoral institutions, particularly the INEC and courts to freely do their work in accordance with the law. They argued that the problem was a reflection of the official corruption ravaging the country today in which leaders of the executive branch of government have flagrantly disobeyed court orders and judgements without consequences. Only one (4.17%) disagreed with this submission because the informant believed that the CFRN considers the president and governors as all-and-all political leaders and because they are empowered by the CFRN to operate the way they like. Finally, three (12.5%) remained silent to register their distrust with the Nigerian elections.

Descriptive measures of association

The summarized national election data (NED) vis-à-vis the three major periods under investigation, presented in Table 3, reveal that incidents of lethal electoral violence, election litigations, and voter apathy are more prominent in post-2011 period than the situation in pre-2011 and 2011 periods in Nigeria. Statistically, out of a total of 2,444 deaths recorded in seven election cycles, pre-2011 period recorded 480 deaths (19.64% of the total), the 2011 period appropriated 965 deaths (39.48%) just as the post-2011 period claimed 999 lives (40.88%). The table equally shows that election litigations exacerbate in the post-2011 period with 4,304 petitions against 1,867 and 732 petitions respectively recorded in the pre-2011 and 2011 periods. Finally, voter apathy moved in the direction of lethal electoral violence and election litigations with a 59.61 percent turnout recorded in the pre-2011 period, 53.68 percent achieved during the 2011 period, and a grossly low turnout of 35.04 percent in the post-2011 period.

Table 3. Summaries of statistical data on Figures 3 and 4 and Table 2

A. Summary of trend in bloody Nigerian elections between 1998-9 and 2023							
Pre-2011 electoral reform period (1998/9-2007)			Reform implementation period (2011)		Post-2011 electoral reform period (2015-2023)		
Election year	Nº of death		Election year	Nº of death	Election year	Nº of death	
1998-9	80				2015	106	
2003	100	X	2011	965	X	2019	756
2007	300				2023	137	
Total	480			965		999	

B. Summary of trend in election petitions in Nigeria between 1998-9 and 2023							
Pre-2011 electoral reform period (1998/9-2007)			Reform implementation period (2011)		Post-2011 electoral reform period (2015-2023)		
Election year	Nº of petition		Election year	Nº of petition	Election year	Nº of petition	
1998-9	2				2015	611	
2003	574	X	2011	732	X	2019	1,697
2007	1,291				2023	1,996	
Total	1,867			732		4,304	

C. Summary of trend in voter turnout in Nigeria between 1998-9 and 2023							
Pre-2011 electoral reform period (1998/9-2007)			Reform implementation period (2011)		Post-2011 electoral reform period (2015-2023)		
Election year	Voter turnout (%)		Election year	Voter turnout (%)	Election year	Voter turnout (%)	
1998-9	52.26				2015	42.4	
2003	69.08	X	2011	55.4	X	2019	35.7
2007	57.49				2023	26.7	
Average (%)	59.61			53.68		35.04	

Source: Authors' computation and compilation

Table 4. Cross-tabulation of summary totals on Table 3 for chi-square statistics

	Pre-2011 reform implementation period	The 2011 reform implementation period	Post-2011 reform implementation period	Row Totals
Election-related death	480 (619.49) [31.41]	965 (450.66) [587.03]	999 (1373.85) [102.28]	2444
Election petition	1867 (1749.74) [7.86]	732 (1272.87) [229.83]	4304 (3880.39) [46.24]	6903
Voter turnout (%)	60 (37.77) [13.09]	54 (27.47) [25.61]	35 (83.76) [28.38]	149
Column Totals	2407	1751	5338	9496 (GTs)

Note: GTs=grand totals.

Table 5. Summary of association statistics based on data in Tables 3 and 4

Sample size (n)	Degree of freedom (df)	Confidence level (α)	P-value	Cal. chi-square (χ^2)	Crit. chi-square (χ^2)	Cramer's V coefficient
9496*	4	<0.05	<0.0001	1071.72	7.815	0.2376

Note: *see grand total in Table 8, cal.=calculated, crit.=critical (calculated from chi-square distribution table)

Table 6. Interpretation of strengths of association

S/No	Correlation coefficient (values)	Strength of association
1.	0.00–0.04	No association
2.	0.05–0.19	Very weak
3.	0.20–0.29	Weak
4.	0.30–0.50	Moderate
5.	0.51–0.60	Moderate strong
6.	0.61–0.79	Strong
7.	0.80-1	Very strong
8.	± 1	Perfect

Source: Unanka (2002)

We also used the summarized NED in Table 3 for chi-square (Tables 4 and 5) and Cramer's V (Table 5) statistics for variable association and its direction and strength. From statistics in Table 5, the link between the nominal variables shows a positive association even though the computation reported a weak association with Cramer's V coefficient of 0.2376 within the 95 percent confidence level.

Discussion

There is no doubt the present election administration with the introduction of innovative biometric tools like bimodal voter accreditation system and INEC result viewing portal in a real-time situation has comparatively improved the quality of Nigerian elections (Itodo, 2022). However, when vote buying, the use of thugs, ethno-religious considerations, official corruption, and bloodshed creep into the electoral process, something is fundamentally amiss with the process and its outcomes (Nwagwu et al., 2022; Amao, 2020; Onapajo & Babalola, 2020; Onapajo et al., 2015). Again, the criminalization of Nigerian elections (by which criminals gain entry into the political space with unrestrained use of clandestine means to sway the electoral process, persons with criminal charges occupying key public positions, and security agencies becoming suppressive instruments against oppositions) erodes the core value of democratic elections in Nigeria (Bribena, 2020). Thus, Omotola (2010: 535) stated that the essence of democratic elections lies in their being "free, fair, participatory, competitive, and legitimate".

Omotola (2010) further submitted that the democratic qualities of Nigerian elections since the re-democratization process began in 1999 have consistently dwindled every successive election season, occasioned by (i) ineffective election governance, (ii) institutional weaknesses, and (iii) character of the Nigerian state that has a penchant for disrespecting the rule of law and interfering in the operations of election administration agencies. These agencies, particularly the electoral body lack independence and the required professionalism for proper management of elections in Nigeria. Inductively, one can convincingly argue that election administration in Nigeria has witnessed some rather disturbing outcomes that deviate from the democratic norms of credibility, transparency, and competitiveness. The absence of these norms manifests in a loss of lives and destruction of property, as well as legal disputes surrounding election outcomes in the country.

The consequence of these disturbing election outcomes is public distrust in the electoral process evidenced in the unending low voter turnout, which began in 2007. Interestingly, the optimism of many Nigerians to be governed under a democratic system defined the 52.26 recorded during the 1998-9 transition elections and the phenomenal 69.08 percent turnout in the 2003 elections, before the consistent downward trend in voter participation since 2007.

In another dimension, a general perception of the majority of the informants during our informal interaction is that Nigeria's voter register is unreliable because it is filled with names of ineligible voters like underage, late, and foreign registrants is partly responsible for the dwindling voter participation in the country. This is because ghost registrants will find it very difficult to scale through the accreditation process currently governed by digital technology when it is strictly implemented. Some of the respondents equate election rigging with military putsch and that, despite the introduction of novel technological devices touted for their efficacy in curbing electoral fraud, Nigerian elections have not truly reflected the standards of clean elections (Interview S/Ns 4, 7, 10, 13-15).

Undoubtedly, the Nigerian courts have annulled INEC election declarations due to incontrovertible irregularities, ordered rerun, and even determined winners of governorship and legislative elections in Nigeria since 1999. However, there are unrefuted claims that some principal judicial officers have considerably looked out for politicians with 'fat briefcases', delivered favourable election judgements to them, and immediately retired with huge funds to evade National Judicial Council's sanctions (Jega, 2021). This not only suffocates the administration of electoral justice, but also jeopardizes the enthronement of a viable electoral system in Nigeria (Interview S/Ns 1, 4, 6). This, ultimately, finds expression in unrestrained violation of electoral laws in the country as witnessed in 2015 when INEC violated its set rules (Iwuoha, 2018) and abandoned its regulations for electronic transmission of results during the just concluded 2023 elections.

Comparative discussion of findings in African elections

The 2007 elections in Kenya and Nigeria claimed hundreds of human lives with thousands of displaced and injured persons, as well as various cases of sexual and gender-based abuses (Kingsland, 2016; Obiagu, 2023). While Kingsland (2016) identified a lack of public oversight of electoral actors and processes as a major problem with Kenyan elections which was relatively addressed through post-2007 electoral reforms, such reforms exist in Nigeria but are mostly active in legal tomes. Thus, the electoral problem and its solution remained a tall order in Nigeria.

Similarly, while judicial systems in Kenya and Malawi have demonstrated confidence with their phenomenal judgements that invalidated, voided and annulled the 2017 and 2020 presidential elections respectively in these countries due to irregularities amid validation by election observers, such a landmark feat mainly exists in the imaginative minds of Nigerian voters. Similar feat was recorded in 2022 when the Kenyan Supreme Court validated Ruto's victory despite presidential support for another candidate, which relatively depicts an improvement in election management (Lynch, 2022). As members of the judiciary in some African countries make concerted efforts to improve the qualities of their electoral governance through renewed institutionalization, some key Nigerian judicial officers are busy chasing political actors with huge briefcases to deliver to them favourable election judgements.

The practice that guarantees the security of tenure to the head of Ghana's electoral body and the two deputies is still strange to many African countries like Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. In the former case, the principal electoral officers "enjoy the same terms and conditions of service as Justices of the Court of Appeal and cannot be removed arbitrarily until retirement at age 70"; in the latter case, the officers statutorily serve five-year tenure, renewable for another term, but can be removed by the President on flimsy grounds (Omotola, 2010: 541). According to the National Academy of Sciences (2018), rising to power through an illegitimate process has serious undermining effects on the quality of leadership. Impliedly, it affects government performance and sometimes leads to democratic breakdown.

In the last three years between August 2020 and July 2023, six African countries: Mali, Chad, Guinea, Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Niger, have experienced democratic breakdown and this raises the fear of regional destabilization (Olajide, 2023). In these countries, the elected governments are accused of failing to deliver on democratic dividends and their election promises to the people. In some cases, the coups receive civilian support and open celebration of the fall of democracy in their countries (Rivero, 2023).

When elections are manipulated, they can trigger and/or heighten fierce partisan competitions, can engineer citizen demonstrations, can represent the substitution of free choice with coercive intimidation without recourse to its suppressive effects on participation (Birch et al., 2020; Norris et al., 2015). All these raise questions of electoral legitimacy regarding elected authorities.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the ongoing debate on electoral irregularities, contested election outcomes, and dwindling voter turnout. The examination of literature and analysis of interview contents and the NED on lethal electoral violence, litigations, and dwindling voter turnout show a correlation between the afore-stated themes in the context of Nigeria. They further reveal that Nigeria's electoral institutions, which are expected to mold and shape the excesses of political actors and mediate their competing interests, are largely under the predatory control of the actors and, as such, have not adequately demonstrated effectiveness in strengthening the electoral process in the country. The mediating role of electoral institutions in Nigeria is either rarely felt or selectively undertaken given our data and their analysis.

Despite these findings, the study discloses that electoral democracy in Nigeria is still evolving in conformity with the age-

long saying that the worst civilian government is far better than the best military junta under putschists. A practical example of this reality is that many Nigerians, at one point or the other, have critically queried government actions and heaven did not fall. These queries are in fulfillment of Section 40 of the 1999 CFRN, which bothers on fundamental human rights as it affects their freedom of expression.

The findings impliedly indicate the need for a paradigm shift from government-determined reforms to one driven by the governed. In this case, people (not the leaders) should take the lead in the reform process with government support (not interference) in which both national and subnational legislatures will approve the decisions to be executed by the executive. Thus, much is expected from the electoral institutions in Nigeria with particular reference to the electoral body, the courts, and the security agencies to ensure free and fair as well as clean and credible elections in Nigeria.

Footnotes

¹ The belief that American politicians have a high spirit of electoral sportsmanship is today being challenged and reexamined in the face of recent electoral events vis-à-vis some candidates who become averse to campaign debates and electoral defeats.

² This is obtainable during the regime of the exited Electoral Acts of 2002, 2006, and 2010, before the enactment of the Electoral Act, 2022.

³ Where Σ =sigma (summation) sign, O=observed frequency, E=expected frequency.

⁴ Where $\sqrt{\quad}$ =square root sign, χ^2 =chi-square, n=sample size, df=degree of freedom.

References

- Adebisi, O.M., & Olowu, J.O. (2022). The politics of the Electoral Act Amendment and the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 10(2), 33-57.
- Amao, O. B. (2020). Nigeria's 2019 general election: what does it mean for the rest of the world? *The Round Table*, 109(4), 429–440.
- Amenta, Edwin and Ramsey, K.M. (2009). Institutional theory. In K.T. Leicht and J.C. Jenkins (eds), *Handbook of politics: State and society in global perspective* (pp.15-39).
- Awoniyi, R.O. (2023). Niger coup: Six African countries currently under military rule. *All News*. <https://allnews.ng/news/niger-coup-six-african-countries-currently-under-military-rule>.
- Banerjee, A., Green, D.P., McManus, J., & Pande, R. (2014). Are poor voters indifferent to whether elected leaders are criminal or corrupt? A vignette experiment in rural India. *Political Communication*, 31(3), 391-407.
- Banerjee, A., Kumar, S., Pande, R., & Su, F. (2011). Do informed voters make better choices? Experimental evidence from urban India. Working paper

(https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/rpande/files/do_informed_voters_make_better_choices.pdf).

- Baron, D., Lauderdale, B., and Sheehy-Skeffington, J. (2023). A leader who sees the world as I do: Voters prefer candidates whose statements reveal matching social-psychological attitudes. *Political Psychology*. doi:10.1111/pops.12891.
- Binet, Laurent. (2022). French election: who are the candidates running against Emmanuel Macron? *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/french-election-who-are-the-candidates-running-against-emmanuel-macron-180719>.
- Birch, S., Daxecker, U. and Höglund, K. (2020). Electoral violence: An introduction. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(1), 3–14.
- Birch, Sarah, & van Ham, C. (2017). Getting away with foul play? The importance of formal and informal oversight institutions for electoral integrity. *European Journal of Political Research* 56(3), 487-511.
- Biswas, Soutik. (2017). Why do Indians vote for 'criminal' politicians? *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-38607255>.
- Blair, G., Fair, C.C., Malhotra, N., & Shapiro, J.N. (2013). Poverty and support for militant politics: Evidence from Pakistan. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(1), 30-48.
- Bratton, Michael. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. *Electoral Studies*, 27(4): 621-632.
- Bribena, Kelvin. (2020). Democratization, litigations and criminalization of elections in Nigeria. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 9, 530-537.
- Brosché, J., Fjelde, H., & Höglund, K. (2020). Electoral violence and the legacy of authoritarian rule in Kenya and Zambia. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(1), 111-125.
- Bulmer, Elliot. (2017). *Federalism: International IDEA constitution-building primer 12* (2nd ed.). stockholm, Sweden: International IDEA.
- Canare, T.A., Mendoza, R.U., & Lopez, M.A. (2018). An empirical analysis of vote buying among the poor: Evidence from elections in the Philippines. *South East Asia Research*, 26(1), 58-84.
- Carbone, Giovanni and Cassani, Andrae. (2016). Nigeria and democratic progress by elections in Africa. *Africa Spectrum*, 3, 33-59.
- Catt, H., Ellis, A., Maley, M., Wall, A. and Wolf, P. (eds.) (2011). *Electoral management design: International IDEA handbook*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Chandra, Kanchan. (2004). *Why ethnic parties succeed: Patronage and ethnic headcount in India* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- David, R., Tolbert, P., & Boghossian, J. (2019, December 23). Institutional Theory in Organization Studies. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. <https://oxfordre.com/business/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.001.0001/acrefore-9780190224851-e-158>.
- Desatova, P., & Alexander, S.T. (2021). Election commissions and non-democratic outcomes: Thailand's contentious 2019 election. *Politics*, 00(0), 1-15. doi:02633957211000978.
- DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. (1991). Introduction. In W.W. Powell and P.J. DiMaggio (eds.), *The new institutionalism in organization analysis* (pp. 1-38), Chicago: UCP.

- Emeh, I.E.J. (2013). Dependency theory and Africa's underdevelopment: A paradigm shift from pseudo-intellectualism: The Nigerian perspective. *International journal of African and Asian studies*, 1(1), 16-128.
- EU Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Nigeria 2023 general elections: Final report*. Abuja: Author.
- Fjelde, H. and Höglund, K. (2016), Electoral institutions and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa. *British Journal of Political Science* 46(2), 297–320.
- Frank, R.W. (2021). Three outcomes of contentious elections. *international Studies Review*, 23(3), 1144-1163.
- Frank, R.W. and i Coma, F.M. (2021). Correlates of voter turnout. *Political Behaviour*, 45, 607-633.
- Garcia-Sayán, D. (2019). Judicial independence under threat in Nigeria, warns UN rights expert. *UN News*. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/judicial-independence-under-threat-nigeria-warns-un-rights-expert>
- Geys, B. (2006). Voter turnout: A review of aggregate-level research. *Electoral Studies*, 25(4), 637-663.
- Gutiérrez-Romero, R. & LeBas, A. (2020). Does electoral violence affect vote choice and willingness to vote? Conjoint analysis of a vignette experiment. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(1), 77-92.
- Gutiérrez-Romero, R. (2014). An inquiry into the use of illegal electoral practices and effects of political violence and vote-buying. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58(8), 1500-1527.
- Harvey, Ross. (2021). How the resource curse has played out in Nigeria and Angola. <https://gga.org/how-the-resource-curse-has-played-out-in-nigeria-and-angola/>.
- Higashijima, Masaaki. (2015). Do contentious elections overthrow leaders? In Pippa Norris, R.W. Frank & F.M. i Coma (eds), *Contentious elections: From ballots to barricades* (pp. 64-88). New York: Routledge.
- Itodo, S. (2022). *Inspiring confidence in the BVAS and electronic transmission of election results: Seven urgent actions for INEC*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Jega, Attahiru. (2021). Some judges sell judgements, retire to avoid NJC sanctions - Jega. *The Punch*. <https://punchng.com/some-judges-sell-judgments-retire-to-escape-njc-sanctions-jega/>.
- Kalmoe, N.P., & Mason, Lilian. (2022). *Radical American partisanship: Mapping violent hostility, its causes, and the consequences for democracy*. Chicago, Illinois: UCP.
- Kingsland, Julie. (2016). *Electoral reform for lasting peace in Kenya* Nairobi: KHRC.
- Kleinfeld, Rachel. (2021). The rise of political violence in the United States. *Journal of Democracy*, 32(4), 160-176.
- Ko, Vanessa. (2014). Nigeria's "resource curse", oil as impediment to true federalism. *E-International relations students*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/20/nigerias-resource-curse-oil-as-impediment-to-true-federalism/>.
- Kousser, Thad. (2023). *What's behind American distrust in elections?* UC San Diego: UCIGCC.
- Kuhn, P.M. (2015). Do contentious elections trigger violence? In Pippa Norris, R.W. Frank & F.M. i Coma (eds), *Contentious elections: From ballots to barricades* (pp. 89-110). New York: Routledge.
- LeBas, Adrienne (2010) Ethnicity and the willingness to sanction violent politicians. Afrobarometer working paper 125.
- Libson, J.L. (2016). Reassessing the institutional legitimacy of the South African Constitutional Court: New evidence, revisited theory. *Politikon*, 43(1), 53-77.
- Lynch, Gabriella. (2022). Kenya's elections are proof of change since 2007 violence, but more reform is needed. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/kenyas-elections-are-proof-of-change-since-2007-violence-but-more-reform-is-needed-190043>.

- Mähler, Annegret. (2010). Nigeria: A prime example of the resource curse? Revisiting the oil-violence link in the Niger Delta. GIGA Working Papers No. 120. Hamburg: GIGA.
- March, J.G. and Olsen, J.P. (1984). The new institutionalism: Organizational factors in political life. *American Political Science Review*, 78, 734-749.
- Mbah, P.O., Nzeadibe, T.C., Nwangwu, C., Iheanacho, A.O., Eze, C.O., & Ezeibe, C.C. (2020). Separatist threat, militarization and voter turnout: Exploring the dynamics of the 2017 governorship election in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 55(8), 1093-1107.
- Mbah, P.O., Obiagu, U.C., Nwangwu, Chikodiri, Iwuamadi, C.K., & Udeh, C.O. (2023). Neoliberal state and criminal activities in Nigeria, *Politikon*, 50(2), 159-181.
- Meyer, J.W. and Rowan, Brian. (1977). institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology* 83, 340-63.
- National Academies of Sciences. (2018). *Securing the vote: Protecting American democracy*. NAP.
- Nguyễn, Sarah, Moran, R.E., Nguyen, T-A., & Bui, Linh. (2023). “We never really talked about politics”: Race and ethnicity as foundational forces structuring information disorder within the Vietnamese diaspora. *Political Communication*, 40(4), 415-439.
- Nikolayenko, O. (2015). Do contentious elections depress turnout? In Pippa Norris, R.W. Frank & F.M. i Coma (eds), *Contentious elections: From ballots to barricades* (pp. 25-44). New York: Routledge.
- Norris, Pippa, Frank, R.W., & i Coma, F.M. (2015a). Contentious elections: From votes to violence. In Pippa Norris, R.W. Frank & F.M. i Coma (eds), *Contentious elections: From ballots to barricades* (pp. 1-22). New York: Routledge.
- Norris, Pippa, Frank, R.W., & i Coma, F.M. (2015b). The risks of contentious elections. In Pippa Norris, R.W. Frank & F.M. i Coma (eds), *Contentious elections: From ballots to barricades* (pp. 133-150). New York: Routledge.
- North, D.C. (1999). *Institutions, institutional change, and economic performance*. New York: CUP.
- Nwagwu, E.J., Uwaechie, O.G., Udegbonam, K.C., & Nnamani, Rebecca. (2022). Vote buying during 2015 and 2019 general elections: Manifestation and implications on democratic development in Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1995237. doi:10.1080/23311886.2021.1995237.
- Obiagu, U.C. (2023). *Technology-driven election administration and credibility of elections in Nigeria, 2011-2023* A doctoral thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka in May 2023.
- Obiagu, U.C., Abada, I.M., Mbah, P.O., Ezirim, G.E., Omeh, P.H., Udeh, C.O. (2022). The limiting effects of inconclusive gubernatorial elections towards the democratic consolidation of the Nigerian state. *The African Review*, 1(aop), 1-34.
- Obiagu, U.C., Udeji-Okpalaku, C.O., & Udeh, C.O. (2021). The undermining consequences of inconclusive elections on democratic consolidation in Africa: Interrogating Nigerian Elections, 2011-2019. *African journal of Democracy and Election Research*, 1(2), 7-40.
- Omotola, J.S. (2010). Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the fourth republic. *African Affairs*, 109(437), 535–553.
- Onapajo, H. (2014). Violence and votes in Nigeria: The dominance of incumbents in the use of violence to rig elections. *Africa Spectrum*, 49(2), 27-51.

- Onapajo, H., & Babalola, D. (2020). Nigeria's 2019 general elections – A shattered hope? *The Round Table*, 109(4), 363–367.
- Onapajo, H., Francis, S., & Okeke-Uzodike, U. (2015). Oil corrupts elections: The political economy of vote-buying in Nigeria. *African Studies Quarterly*, 15(2), 1–21.
- Onuoha, F. C., Okafor, J. C., Ojewale, O., & Okoro, C. (2020). Militarisation of the 2019 general elections and electoral integrity in Nigeria, *The Round Table*, 109(4), 406-418.
- Peters, B.G. (2019). *Institutional theory in political science: The new institutionalism* (4th Ed.). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Pildes, R.H. (2022). Election law in an age of distrust. *Stanford Law Review*, 74. <https://www.stanfordlawreview.org/online/election-law-in-an-age-of-distrust/>.
- Posner, Daniel. (2005). *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ramalan, Ibrahim. (2023, June 12). Avoid truncating democracy through illegal orders, Tinubu warns Nigerian judiciary. *Daily Nigerian*. <https://dailynigerian.com/avoid-truncating-democracy/>.
- Rivero, C.G. (2023). Civilian support for military coups is rising in parts of Africa: why the reasons matter. *Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/civilian-support-for-military-coups-is-rising-in-parts-of-africa-why-the-reasons-matter-185448>.
- Rosenzweig, S. C. (2015, May). Dangerous disconnect: How politicians' misperceptions about voters lead to violence in Kenya. Working paper in *Annual Bank Conference on Africa, Berkeley, CA, June* (Vol. 9).
- Sawasdee, S.N. (2019). Electoral integrity and the repercussions of institutional manipulations: The 2019 general election in Thailand. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 5(1), 52-68.
- Sedziaka, Alesia, & Rose, Richard. (2015). Do contentious elections catalyze mass process? In Pippa Norris, R.W. Frank & F.M. i Coma (eds), *Contentious elections: From ballots to barricades* (pp. 45-63). New York: Routledge.
- Solijonov, A. (2016). *Voter turnout trends around the world* Stockholm, Sweden: International IDEA.
- States United Action. (2023). *Americans' views on political violence – Key findings and recommendations* Washington, DC: SUDC.
- Stockemer, D. (2017). What affects voter turnout? A review article/meta-analysis of aggregate research. *Government and Opposition*, 52(4), 698-722.
- Straus, Scott and Taylor, Charlie, (2013). Democratization and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa 1990–2008. In Dorine A Bekoe (ed.), *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 15–38). Washington, DC: USIP Press.
- Svobik, M.W. (2012). *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press.
- The United Nations. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. New York: Author.
- Thisday. (2023, July 16). Tinubu to tribunal: Nullifying presidential election on account of 25% FCT votes could lead to chaos, anarchy. *Thisday Live*. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/07/16/tinubu-to-tribunal-nullifying-presidential-election-on-account-of-25-fct-votes-could-lead-to-chaos-anarchy>.
- Unanka, G.O. (2002). *Statistics for political science, social relations and administration* (2nd ed.). Owerri: All Ages.
- Vicente, Pedro. (2014). Is vote buying effective? Evidence from a field experiment in West Africa *Economic Journal*,

124(574), 356-387.

- Von Borzyskowski, I. & Kuhn, P.M. (2020). Dangerously informed: Voter information and pre-electoral violence in Africa. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(1), 15-29.
- World Data Lab. (2023). *World poverty clock: Nigeria*. Vienna: WDL Publications.
- Zucker, L.G. (1987). Institutional theories of organization. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 13, 443-464.