

# Review of: "Government interference in election administration and lethal electoral irregularities in Africa: Evidence from Nigeria"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## Comments:

1. Theoretical Understanding of Illiberal Democracy (Page 3): The concept "illiberal democracy" does not exist as a theoretical term (although it could be construed as a metatheory); hence there is still need for the authors to define the construct in its empirical appeal to the subject matter of this study. Fareed Zacharia's use of the term was more of an "off the curve" commentary than a wholesomely researched indication of a variant of democratic backsliding. [Even the authors of this work made reference to this very point: See this subsection lines 11-12].
2. Conceptual Understanding of Electoral Irregularities and Voter Participation (Page 6): If there were electoral irregularities (as was obviously the case in 2023), why then did the people (the youth) not rise up in protest after the outcome of the result were presented (despite wide public expectation that such uproar (akin to SARS) would be the case? What happened?
3. Methodology (Page 7): "The study adopts key informant interviews." This needs to be explained. Why this approach; and what is an "informant"? Why the low rate of return from the Northeast? Is it tied to the insurgency in the region; if so, then this needs to be explained in comparison to the other regions. On Table 1 (page 7), you need to justify why you used descriptive and content analyses? If by "content analysis," you also need to explain the approach used to establish the hypothesized causal relationship(s) or predictive power?
4. Table 6: "Summarized Trends in Voter Participation." You need to provide explanation for the seemingly voter apathy for 2023 (between registered voters and the total votes cast). Compared from 1999 to 2023 (Table 6), there is a declining or downward trajectory in voter-turnout in Nigeria (from 52.6% to 26.71%). What explains this trend? Economy, security, Fulani herdsmen, corruption, voter intimidation, voter apathy, or what else? This is, if one can argue that whatever may be causing the downward trend is not "unique" to the political and social situation that exist in 2023!
5. Conclusion: This study also raises a "normative" question that has not been addressed: Why concentrate "national elections" at the federal level, instead of at the state level (as most democratic countries do)? Does this structural control arbitrarily enable the federal government and the political party in power (APC) to control and manipulate the election result as it sees fit? Is it such that electoral outcomes could be a function of "institutional control" and how the process itself is "structured and designed" as a prior condition. This is why the centralizing influence of INEC remains

at the center of this electoral manipulation and crisis.

6. Summary/Comments: Yes, much of what has been presented so far seem fairly ok; but there are other equally serious issues raised in the study. To merit publication consideration, the study should establish an “epistemological basis” for its findings? What have we learned so far from this, what does it mean for the past, present, and future of electoral politics in the country, what could we extrapolate from this? It is therefore the “So what” question that is glaringly missing in this! Particularly in the last paragraph, the study claims not to offer a “one-swoop” explanation of the myriad of electoral problems facing democratic operations in developing countries (such as Nigeria); but then what else does the study offer or explain? Why was it undertaken? It could be fine if the authors simply admit that their model offers a “partial explanation” for the trajectory of democratic politics in the country, but then we would understand that the findings could not be used as much for making and “generalization” beyond the specific context of the study. As such, the authors still need to demonstrate (from an epistemological and methodological point of view) the explanatory power and importance (lessons learned) of the study. Need further work on the methodology as well as address the normative and epistemological implications of this work (as suggested above). I recommend “Revise and Resubmit.”