

Electoral Integrity and Low Trust in Post-1999 Democratizations Elections in Nigeria.

Abiodun Fatai, PhD.

Political Science, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria

Received: 09 March 2023; Accepted: 22 March 2023; Published: 20 April 2023

ABSTRACT

The poor quality of elections has tainted the regime changes that have occurred in the post-third wave of democratization since the end of the cold war. Despite the fact that the consistency of elections has been recognised as a positive development in the ongoing democratization process, controversial elections muddied by the toolkit of fraud and manipulation have undermined the integrity of the electoral system, which has, in turn, led to low trust and perception of post-1999 democratization in Nigeria. The study examines Nigerian democratisation elections since 1999 and their electoral integrity. Using a quantitative method to collect and analyse its data, the study contends that post-1999 democratization elections failed to strengthen democracy because they lacked integrity and credibility, which are essential for the institutionalization of democracy. The results of this study showed that widespread electoral fraud and manipulation which have characterises Nigeria's elections is the root causes of the electorate rising mistrust in its electoral system. This adds to the theory and practice supporting the main cause of democratic retrogression in many African nations whose elections have shown flaws. I advocate the necessity for increased reform of the Nigeria's electoral process to enhance the ability of the electoral management body, institutionalisation of political parties and political culture that drives the inroad towards democratic deepening.

Keywords: Electoral integrity, democratisation, elections, democracy and electoral fraud

INTRODUCTION

Electoral integrity is the basis upon which trust is established in elections. Understanding the integrity of an election, therefore, is a principal rudiment for entrenching an accountable electoral process (Alistair, 2016). An array of growing electoral fraud and manipulations in many democracies has led to the development of electoral integrity not as a new frontier of knowledge in political science, but also as a mechanism for ensuring elections meet the integrity benchmark (Norris, 2013a). While election regularity is important for strengthening democracy, electoral integrity is essential for developing the quality of the electoral process and, consequently, for securing democracy (Alistair, 2016).

Nigeria's experience with integrity of elections has been irregular due to the epileptic battle of the democratisation process before 1999. This battle is characterised by long years of military and authoritarian history. With the rebirth of democracy in 1999, the country has undergone 6 cycles of elections. Despite the regularity of these elections, the controversies that surround them have led to heated disputes about them. Every subsequent election since Nigeria's democratization in 1999 has faced significant academic and stakeholder concern, with the exception of the 2015 general elections, which obtained a high rating and measure of integrity due to the peaceful transfer of power from the incumbent to the opposition (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2016). Joseph's (2008: 2), every other elections in the post 1999 transition has been characterised by fraud and irregularities. Following this, Joseph's (2008: 2) has disparaged the country that Nigerian elections are "successively less free and fair, and less credible". In fact, actual evidence demonstrates that the elections in 2003 and 2007 were the shadiest and most dishonest of any of them (Fatai, 2018, Omotola, 2010). The widespread practice of huge election cheating, violence, intimidation, money in

politics, and vote-buying are a few of the elements that have tainted the results in Nigeria. The majority of Nigerians are inclined to denounce and disapprove of elections compromised by fraud and manipulation (Norris, 2019, Mauk, 2020).

The low quality of elections in Nigeria is a manifestation of the crisis of electoral administration since 1999 which is defined by the INEC's lack of autonomy and capacity to administer a successful electoral process devoid of disputes. The incapacity of INEC to ensure a functional electoral process which involves voter registration, political campaigning, voting and voter rules often results in low-quality elections. Many of these process have proven quite controversial and subject to manipulations. As highlighted by Ogunsanwo (2003:15) INEC is not always actually in charge of the activities of elections. The outcome of many of the elections that INEC held was decided by extra-INEC forces, who frequently collaborated with INEC officials.

The weakness of INEC is further worsened by the lack of internal democracy and party discipline in political parties which is detrimental to democracy. Trust in elections is a positive manifestation of electoral integrity and by extension a strong faith in current democratic institutions and leadership. Voters will rather distance themselves from individuals who are not trustworthy and objective when approving the legitimacy of an electoral process conducted under those conditions. In light of this, this study moves forward as follows. After the introduction which is the first portion, the second part explains the concept of electoral integrity in relation to studies on political trust. Election integrity and post-1999 democratization in Nigeria are issue covered in the third section. The fourth analyse electoral integrity and low trust in post-democratisation elections in Nigeria. Finally it conclude, and offers recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Electoral Integrity

Since the introduction of the Perception of Electoral Integrity (PEI), promoted by Pippa Norris and co., there has been a growing body of literature on the idea of electoral integrity (Norris, Frank & Comma, 2014; Alistair, 2016; Norris, 2013). Some of these in-depth research have focused on various angles and dimensions of understanding election integrity. Schaffer is one such case (2007). Similar to Norris (2015), Birch (2007) has examined the factors that contribute to electoral integrity. There have also been national studies on the violation of electoral integrity and voter turnout (Coma & Trinh, 2017; Simpser, 2012), electoral integrity and post-election dispute violence (Norris, 2014) and manipulation of the legal framework (Chernykh, 2014) electoral integrity and legitimacy of government (Fortin-Rittberger, 2014; Norris, 2014). (Fortin-Rittberger, 2014; Norris, 2014). Thus, by attempting to understand how a lack of electoral integrity contributes to low trust in Nigeria's post-1999 democratization elections, this research offers a fresh viewpoint on the literature.

Basically, the whole idea of electoral integrity is about adopting a set of criteria that serve as the lens for democratic elections. While the discussion on the need to have a universally understood definition of electoral integrity is not contested worldwide, many debates exist on the exact definition and measurement of electoral integrity (Van Ham, 2015). (Van Ham, 2015). According to Norris (2014:21), a more acceptable definition of electoral integrity is "the agreed-upon international conventions and universal standards about elections reflecting global norms applying to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle". As global and universal principles, accepted protocols and standards to ensure proper and lawful conduct of elections (Norris, et al., 2014), electoral integrity is a forensic and quality check of the electoral cycle to discover irregularities and fraud that may compromise the quality of elections (Levin & Alvarez, 2012) (Levin & Alvarez, 2012). Electoral integrity can vary from a trivial administrative error or insufficient restrictions to a significant endeavor to create an uneven playing field or "menu of manipulation," which is symbolized by the electoral façade before, during, and even after the election (Schedler, 2002). Accordingly,

Diamond stated that elections are administered with integrity when done by a neutral electoral body that is capable of preventing fraud, treating opposing candidates and parties fairly, enforcing media and finance laws, ensuring vote tallies, and establishing an impartial procedure for resolving election-related complaints (Diamond, 2008:25).

Extant literature has revealed that electoral integrity is generally reliant on democratic philosophy or international legal requirements (Norris, 2014). (Norris, 2014). This is why the Ace Project (1998:9) conceive electoral integrity as “the ethical idea and also the legal validity of the electoral processes that are held according to universal values of democratic elections; professional, impartial and transparent in the complete processes of the implementation”. The norms that are frequently combined with specific benchmarks to identify irregularities at various levels of the electoral process, starting from the pre-election legal framework, registration, and campaigning, to the voting day and post-vote counting and adjudication period, are the universal democratic values that the Ace Project alludes to (Munck, 2006 Elklit & Reynolds, 2005; Alejandro, 2022). Recent worldwide principles and methodological standards have emphasized the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Citizens and Liberties as the primary component of free and fair, credible elections from a democratic perspective (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006). These guidelines and regulations are based on how much political competitors are allowed to participate fairly in the pre-election, election, and post-election stage of the electoral cycle (Van Ham, 2015)

Growing scholarship has also highlighted long-term and proximal determinants that affected the motivation of political actors to breach electoral integrity (Norris, 2014). (Norris, 2014). Such aspects include economic and social structure. The economic aspects are driven by economic disparity resulting in poverty and unemployment, while the social factors are frequently reinforced by social fixation and heterogeneity (Birch, 2011; Lehoucq & Kolev, 2013). (Birch, 2011; Lehoucq & Kolev, 2013). Both outline the power dynamics between elites and the general public and how they influence the motivation of electoral actors to trample on electoral integrity. There are additional political factors predicated on the form of institutions, including the electoral management and legislature which determine the rules of the game, as well as the judiciary that ensures compliance with the regulations (Lehoucq & Kolev 2013). The nature and makeup of institutions frequently provide an explanation for the tactical decisions made by political actors to trample on electoral integrity. Electoral actors are motivated by the peculiarities of a particular election contest, which are weak and fragile institutionally. Thus motives to violate electoral integrity are driven by structural-institutional factors which are sometimes difficult to change because they are deeply ingrained as part of the electoral process.

Political Trust

The issue of political trust or trustworthiness is the interface between human psychological activities and institutional relations. It is “the willingness of one party to rely on the other party to keep commitments” (Blind, 2007:21). (Blind, 2007:21). Such commitment in the context of political trust is the confidence in institutions, government or actors for a certain aim (Van der Meer & Zmerli, 2017). Social trust which is the broad faith in individuals for a non-specific purpose or scenario is often reinforced by political trust. People trust an institution or a government because they trust its agents or administrators, alternatively they may deride it because of people controlling it. For instance, the leadership of Nigeria’s electoral administration faces confidence and credibility issues because of the poor management of the 2003 and 2007 elections. While low trust in an institution or its manager regularly constitutes a threat to democratic growth, this spillover effect commonly impacts democratic fortune. Political trust is not stagnant, it is relational and situational and may be decided by particular outcomes. Sometimes, a trust might be lost after the aim for which it was begun has been realised or lost. Trust is more psychological, explaining the operation of a particular process. It can be influenced by several factors including “direct observation of the process or interpretations of trust as reported by media and political elites” (Stewart, 2022: 236). In a democratic society, electorates are more likely to place trust and confidence in the political process when the electoral

cycle supports enclosure, liberty and fairness. Voters' faith in the electoral process and outcome, therefore, is the definition of trust. In other words, the voters lose faith in the voting process when the rules, procedures, and processes are the target of criticism.

McAllister & White (2015) in their finding revealed that citizen's view about electoral integrity in some post-communist states, meaningfully impact their fulfilment with democracy. Similarly, Norris (2019) found that views of integrity and misconduct are interpenetrated with the degree of satisfaction with democracy across the global system. By implication, a high incidence of election fraud and manipulation expands the winner-loser disparity in voters' satisfaction with the electoral outcome and democracy. Such satisfaction is only restored on the country's level of election integrity. The amount of trust is impacted more by whether the procedure or process was perceived as having been fair than by winner-loser effects, For instance, the failure of INEC to transmit the results of the elections from the polling level in real time is a tenable explanation for the criticism leveled against the 2023 general elections in Nigeria (Fatai, 2023).

The decline in trust could also be attributable to various other issues. Election irregularities and confidence erosion are strongly correlated, according to studies (Van der Meer & Zmerli 2017; Uslaner, 2017). Some have contended about the performance and legitimacy of governance. More crucially, Dalton (2004) suggested that the reduction in trust in government is caused by the changing citizen's values and expectation perception. Personal and public expectations impact citizens' trust in government and institutions.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND ANALYSIS OF POST-1999 DEMOCRATIZATIONS ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA.

From a marginal approach, elections are the barometer of democracy, and the first major phase of democratisation; the process through which a political regime becomes democratic. In Nigeria, however, elections have been a major challenge to the democratisation process. The country's effort at institutionalising democracy has been so alarming, with previous attempts ending in brick-wall (Omotola, 2010). After the collapse of the three previous regimes orchestrated by the prolonged military and authoritarian regimes, the democratisation process commenced in 1999. This change cleared the route for civilian control, and the consolidation of democracy (Osaghae, 1999). In order to bring in a really democratic practice that encourages democratic deepening, elections must be credible. So, in addition to being free, fair, participative, and legitimate, such elections must also pass the test of electoral integrity.

Since democracy was restored in Nigeria in 1999, six electoral cycles have been institutionalized. They are the general elections from 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. Due to the features of these elections, two main strands will be used to analyze them. The first will concentrate on the transitional elections, which included the ones in 1999, 2003, and 2007, and the second will be the consolidated elections, which included those in 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. Whereas transition elections are those "organized by the leaving political power," according to Agbaje & Adejumbi (2006; 37), "the consolidated elections are those arranged by a civilian regime and are meant to consolidate civil rule." A key limitation of their analysis was that the time series for this study only covered 1960-2003.

The study is antiquated, making it inappropriate as a framework of analysis for this investigation. I covered post-1999 democratisation elections (1999-2023). Following this, I applied the transition elections, to capture elections done before the first alternation or transfer of power which occurred in 2015, whilst the consolidation elections are those conducted in the post-alternation or transfer of power era.

Transition Elections 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011

It should be remembered that transition elections frequently feature some level of electoral anomalies because political actors have not yet fully internalized the democratic ethos and values. Nigeria's electoral

process has historically been marred with substantial issues in all the phases of the political cycle. Some of these issues include blatant election-related manipulations and fraud, such as ballot stuffing, vote buying, falsifying results, voter intimidation, and violence (TMG, 1999). According to Jega (2018:6), this electoral misconduct has tarnished the potential of free, fair and credible election and served as the foundation for the erosion of the public's trust and confidence in the electoral process. The reality in Nigeria today is that election does not amount to choosing and that popular votes are not won in Nigeria (Omilusi & Gbenga, 2021). As evidenced in 1999, 2003, and 2007, such mentality is the root cause of the lack of civic engagement and the rising electoral fraud and irregularities. These elections in the eyes of the various elections observers groups were not only characterised by electoral fraud and wanton irregularities in the various stages of the electoral process, but they also lacked integrity and failed the minimal international electoral standard.

For example, the TMG report submitted about the 1999 elections when it noted that, "although the conduct of the 1999 Presidential was successful there were signs of electoral fraud on the elections day, both sides, had committed fraud; it is difficult to say the extent to which the efforts of the two parties cancelled each other (TMG, 1999: 12). The consequent effect of this was the rejection of the election by the opposition party. As noted by Omotola (2010: 543) "there were pockets of protest regarding the credibility of the elections, most notably the litigation filed by the opposition candidate, who challenged the outcome of the election". The failure to confront the electoral perfidy exhibited during the 1999 elections led to irregularities which typified the 2003 elections. In the period leading to the elections. Two significant issues produced tension throughout the pre-election period. The voter's registration and re-ordering of elections. Multiple registrations, registration of minors, and denial of registration to the opposition party were all part of the fabricated voter registration process (Fatai, 2018). In the case of the re-ordering of the election; President Olusegun Obasanjo use the 2001 Electoral Bill to re-order the conduct of the 2003 elections. The incumbent president modified it from Local, State, and Federal elections to Federal, State, and Local elections in contrast to the procedure during the 1999 elections. The essence was an attempt to create an advantage for the President and National Assembly to win their elections. It was also a measure to thwart the control of the state governors in their stronghold (Omotola, 2004). However, it was expected that the PDP candidate would win the 2003 elections by a large majority; he received 24,109,157 votes, or 61.80% of the total, while the ANPP candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari, came in second with 12,495,326 votes.

A likely reason for the electoral domination is the incumbent influence which lends state support to the PDP candidates at the behest of other candidates; through access to state apparatuses, "including treasury, mass media, INEC and security forces" (Omotola, 2010: 546). An unlevel playing field ensures the PDP "captured 5 out of the 6 states in the South-west in 2003" (Omotola, 2010: 546). That stratagem is what the TMG identified as "a civilian equivalent of a coup d'état" (TMG, 2003:9). (TMG, 2003:9). The PDP's hegemonic dominion did not stop in 2003 having boasted by Vincent Ogbulafor, the chairman of PDP that the party will govern for 60 years (Suberu, 2007). This outburst was followed by President Olusegun Obasanjo contemptuous public proclamation that "for him and the PDP, the 2007 elections was a do or die affairs" (Adejumobi, 2007: 8). As an imperial presidency, Olusegun Obasanjo and the PDP, relied on state power and instrumentality of violence to manipulate the 2007 elections. The elections saw a level of electoral violence and meddling that had never been seen before. INEC's mandate was damaged, it became strongly politicized and architect of fraudulent electoral process.

The Chairman of INEC, Professor Maurice Iwu was the weapon of democratic disruption who was frequently utilised to hatch the electoral deceit of the ruling party. One of such instance is the attempt to have Alhaji Atiku Abubakar—at the time the vice president and candidate for president of the Action Congress (AC) in the 2007 elections—disqualified. Despite meeting all prerequisites, INEC disqualified him but was later reinstated by the Supreme Court. Through the support of INEC, political parties, especially the PDP imposed and substituted party candidates from the final INEC list of candidates for elections (Omotola, 2010). The most prominent was the case of the gubernatorial candidate Governor Rotimi Amaechi and Mr. Ifeanyi Ararume, a senatorial candidate of the PDP. Both candidates won their

primary but the party decided to substitute them and replaced them with another candidate. Ararume went to court and won his case; however, the PDP expelled him on the grounds that he had engaged in anti-party activities and that it was wrong of him to approach the court (Fatai, 2017). For the PDP, the issue was a family affairs (Fatai, 2017)

It was therefore not surprising that, during the 2007 election, the PDP candidate Umaru Musa Yaradua won 69.82% per cent of the valid votes, while Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigerian People Party (ANPP) secured 18.72% and Alhaji Atiku, the AC candidate scored 7.45% of the valid votes. How the PDP garnered these votes was extraordinary because of the high degree of electoral manipulation, fabrication of results, voters bullying and ballot grabbing among others (Omotola, 2007). The fraud and electoral irregularities which enveloped the 2007 elections were the reason why the broad spectrum of the political elites and the mass, and elections observer groups called for the cancellation of these elections. Consequently, the TMG concluded in its report that “based on the pervasive and far-reaching nature of these failures, anomalies and electoral malpractices, we have found that on the whole, the elections were a sham and did not fulfill the minimal criteria required for democratic elections. We, therefore, reject the elections and call for their cancellation” (TMG, 2007: 1-2). Given the election-related public uproar which sparked from the 2007 election, there were reform-related agitation. Former President Yaradua, who also happened to be a victim of the election fraud, recognized the flaws in the system and established an Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) headed by former Supreme Court Justice; Muhammadu Lawal Uwais. Sadly, none of the recommendations made in this committee report were carried out.

Instead of promoting the prospect of democratic consolidation, the 2007 general elections constituted a significant source of concern for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria due to their poor administration and outcome. The acrimonious dispute and electoral petition that followed the results also demonstrate the significant irregularities that were known to have occurred in the 2003 and 2007 elections. For example, while 2003 recorded 600 electoral petitions, 2007 received 1250 (Aiyede, 2007). This suggests that the opposing political parties have not accepted the results of the elections. The outcome of these litigations were decided through declarations by the court or rerun elections, denying the electorates their right to determine who governs them.

While there were improvements in the 2011 general election in terms of organisation and administration in the opinions of many Nigerians and when compared to the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, ethno-religion and post-election violence which rocked the poll negated its commendation. The EU EOM report (2011:2) asserts that “the election days were mainly calm, though not without minor electoral difficulties; the violence in the North and Middle Belt following the outcome of the presidential election, must be denounced and all culprits brought to justice.” The loss of life and properties in various states in the Northern part of Nigeria mainly churches and businesses, with opposition people as the principal targets, were major impediments to the election (USIP, 2011). In a worrying assessment by Suleiman (2011: 54-55) “over 65, 000 precious lives were displaced, with property estimated to be in the area of several millions of Naira lost in the course of the violence” (Suleiman, 2011: 54-55). (Suleiman, 2011: 54-55).

Consolidated Elections 2015, 2019 and 2023

As indicated above, the consolidated elections are those elections conducted after 2015 when the first peaceful alternation of power happened from the incumbent to the opposition candidate in Nigeria. These elections encompassed 2015, 2019 and 2023. After the electoral crisis in Nigeria, Prof. Attahiru Jega, the INEC chairman, instituted some restructuring, including structural reform intended to address INEC’s autonomy. The policy change intended to improve the quality of elections, and planning reform which is related to preparation and logistics (Jega, 2018:6).

From the structural reform, INEC reinforced its administrative organization and funding; the policy reform incorporated digital technologies to increase the credibility of elections. The technologies include Automatic

Finger Integrated System (AFIS), the Direct Data Capture Machines (DDCM) and Biometric Technology (BT) in 2011. In 2015 and 2019, the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) were added to these. The PCV is an electronic voter's card which includes an integrated chip, whereas the SCR is the reading machine which authenticates the PVC. In 2023, INEC introduced three key technologies, INEC Voter's Enrollment Device (IVED) for continuous electronic voters registration, Bimodal Verification System (B-VAS) to read PVC and authenticate voters to vote and INEC Result Viewing Portal (IRev) to transmit results from the polling unit to the INEC portal in real-time. The goal of these technologies is to reduce electoral manipulations and guarantee a credible electoral process (Fatai, 2022).

It should be emphasized that the adoption of electoral technology minimised multiple registrations, and manipulation of results and increase the legitimacy of the election process. The consolidated elections when compared to the transitions elections were more organised and coordinated. For example, the AU EOM (2015:12) concluded concerning the 2015 elections that "in view of the observations and findings, the 28 March 2015 elections were conducted in a largely transparent and peaceful manner and within a framework that satisfactorily meets continental and international principles of democratic elections" (AU-EOM, 2015). Specifically, the 2015 election was significant because it was the first democratic election that led to a genuine electoral turnover, where an incumbent president peacefully transferred power to the opposition candidate (Fatai, 2018). However, these elections were not entirely free and fair, without their flaws considering the irregularities which greeted them. For example, the last-minute postponement of elections which occurred in 2011, 2015 and 2019 raises trust and credibility issues about the electoral body. Though, despite justification by INEC, logistic hitch and technical challenges which occurred during these elections owing to the failure of SCR in 2015 and 2019 undermined the integrity of the elections. The shoddy preparation of INEC also reflected on the backdrop of the elections. For example, in 2015 and 2019, there were reported cases of delay in the commencement of the voting process. The failure of the B-VAS to authenticate some voters during the elections and the inability of INEC to transmit results from the polling units in real-time raises questions about the credibility of the election 2023 general elections (Fatai, 2023).

There were also alleged incidences of electoral manipulation and violence during the 2019 elections which resulted to the nullification of the vote outcome. Cases of rescheduling and additional polls in various states mainly in Kano, Benue, Rivers and Gombe (Onapajo & Babalola, 2020) were also reported to have dented the improvement in the election. (Onapajo & Babalola, 2020). The manipulation and violence, are the consequence of the attitude of the state security services, particularly the Police and Nigerian Army who were claimed of partisanship, intimidation, violence and intervention in the electoral process (Fatai, 2020). (Fatai, 2020). Political elites in Nigeria regularly break the electoral law, raising serious concerns about adherence to the laws and regulations governing election administration. Party primaries were inundated with manipulation, imposition and substitution of candidates who neither won nor participate in the primary election. The EU EOM stated that "For the 2019 elections, the APC only release its guidelines when the party primaries had begun" (2019:35). Party primaries held all over the nation reveal the weakness of internal party democracy in Nigeria.

In 2019 and 2023, the process was marked by violence and irregularities in addition to flagrant manipulation of the party primaries. Political parties also frequently demonstrated unwarranted spending and a lack of financial control in their campaign activities against the Election law. For example, "14 of 29 main parties broke the funding rule when running for state governorship campaign in 2019, 11 states which violated the financial law were APC, 5 of the states were PDP. The All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Accord Alliance (AA) violated the financial regulation in their states respectively (Premium Times, 1 October 2022).

This growing phenomenon of electoral treachery in Nigeria since 1999 is the basis for why elections have suffered from the crisis of legitimacy and integrity. Political trust cannot be built on managers or institutions when the citizens lack the motivation to believe that institutions or government is working in their interest. Trust and confidence are inversely proportional to the credibility of the electoral process and the lack of it is responsible for the low level of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND TRUST IN NIGERIA’S ELECTIONS.

The durability of a democratic society depends on how well elections are conducted. This is so because elections are breakthroughs to democratic consolidation. An election must not only be viewed to be free and fair, but it must also be credible and acceptable to all main stakeholders in the electoral process. This is the bedrock upon which electoral integrity and trust are formed in government and political institutions. So, one of the key requirements for a legitimate and responsible democratic process is an understanding of election integrity. Nigeria is struggling with trust and confidence in the electoral process because her elections have been riddled with electoral anomalies and scams. Except for 2015 which recorded wide acceptance and legitimacy from foreign and domestic election observers (NDI, 2015), every other election as stated above has suffered from one type of criticism or the other. The most notable examples are the general elections of 2003 and 2007, which not only revealed a high degree of fraud but also diminished the democratic optimism of 1999. Indeed both elections have been characterised as the worst in the democratic growth of the country.

Some of the manifestations of electoral fraud and irregularities in Nigeria’s elections include poor management of elections by INEC, lack of internal democracy among parties, voter intimidation and widespread violence, violation of the electoral Act and INEC regulation, corrupt electoral officials, vote buying and manipulation among others. The consequence of this is a low degree of confidence in political institutions and the electoral process. The majority of voters have abstained from voting because of problems with trust. This is evinced by the degree of voter indifference and turnout which have marked the political process since 1999.

Table 1: Voter Turnout for Nigerian Elections (Presidential-1999 to 2023)

Year	Voter Turnout (%)	Total Votes	Registration	VAP Turnout (%)	Voting Age Population
1999	52.26	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781
2003	69.08	42018735	60823022	65.33	64319246
2007	57.49	35397517	61567036	49.85	71004507
2011	53.68	39469484	73528040	48.32	81691751
2015	43.65	29432083	67422005	32.11	91669312
2019	34.75	28614190	82344107	26.87	106490312
2023	29.0	24562379	93.40	18.23	115347628

Source: See; International IDEA Data Base, 1999- 2019, Premium Times, 2023.

As demonstrated in the table, study of the voter turnout show that there has been a reduction in voter turnout since 1999. Of the 57,938,945 registered voters in 1999, 30,280,052 cast valid ballots, representing a 52.26% turnout (Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019). In 2003 there was an increase in the voter turnout which was 69.08% because of a corresponding increment in the registered voters that was 60,823,033; resultantly this attracted 42018735 valid votes in the election. From the 2007 elections, the irregularities that the electoral process saw plunged voter turnout as the increase observed in the 2003 elections decreased to 57.49 voter turnout despite a minor increase in the registered voters that produced 35397517 legal votes (IDEA, 2015). (IDEA, 2015).

In 2011, notwithstanding that registered voters climbed to 73,528,040, only a tiny improvement of 39469484 qualified voters who voted during the elections, representing 53.68%. The voter turnout decreased by 3.81% when equated with the 2007 elections. The registered voters for the 2015 elections usually declined to 67422,005 from the 73528040 recorded in 2011. The total votes cast during the election was only 29,432,083 which is around 43.65%. By implication, this is half of the number of voters that registered for the 2015 general elections, resulting in a 10.3% decline when comparing to the 2011 elections (Igiebor, 2022). Despite a rise in the number of registered voters (82344107) for the general elections of 2019, voter turnout fell significantly to 28614190, or 34.75%.

In the last 2023 election, though reports are still hazy, out of the 93.40 million voters registered by INEC only 24.9 million of them voted. This was a meager 29.0% voting turnout (Premium Times, 2023). The country's democratic election history and the lowest in all of Africa. Since 1999, low voter turnout has been a sign of citizens' disinterest in the nation's electoral system. The sharp decline following the 2003 general elections was largely caused by the escalating irregularities and manipulations as well as the extensive violence that has frequently marked elections. Citizens' dissatisfaction with how elections have been conducted since 1999 is evidently the driving force behind apolitical or restricted political behavior. Under the scenario that election is regarded to be free and fair and legitimate, voters are likely to demonstrate trust in the government. Yet, if they suffer voting anomalies like the 2003 and 2007 elections proved, they are more prone to doubt the political process. As a result, the level of electoral fraud and violations that actually occur during an election cycle determines the voters' level of trust.

Nigerians continue to struggle with faith in the voting process despite improvements in the 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections brought about by the introduction of technology, electoral anomalies continue to be on the increase in Nigeria. Even the commendation of the 2011 electoral administration, the rejection of the electoral outcomes and the post-election violence which marred the elections, hampered its acknowledgement. For as long as Nigeria's political elites continue to find reason for electoral manipulation, the integrity of electoral system will continue to be elusive. While electoral integrity has increased trust and contentment with democracy in countries like Ghana, Senegal, and Cape Verde and has garnered excellent democratic ratings, problematic elections have weakened trust and confidence in Nigeria's elections (Lewis & Alemika 2005). There is a low level of conviction that the Nigerian state can hold genuine elections because individuals in charge of state affairs are benefactors of the warped electoral process. The integrity of the elections that installed the current regime is a determinant of public trust and sense of legitimacy in the state and government. The legitimacy of the electoral process, therefore, is reliant on the citizen's opinion that the election has been conducted in a way that the process is a reflection of the outcome (Rakner & Svasand, 2013).

Hence, accepting that the outcome of an election is unpredictable naturally encourages real "non-instrumental and intrinsic support for democracy." (Omotola, 2010). This frequently spurs the conviction of the people that democracy is the only game in town and that no alternative to democratic administration. The loss of trust in democracy owing to the subversion of the electoral process has intensified the crisis of democracy in Nigeria. Citizens are prone to rejecting electoral decisions due to trust concerns, as evidenced by the fact that no election in Nigeria since 1999 has been free from controversy. The absence of electoral integrity has seriously represented a threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined electoral integrity and low trust in post-1999 democratisation elections. Findings indicated that post-1999 democratisation elections lacked integrity due to the high degree of electoral manipulations and anomalies. The most affected by integrity and credibility crises are the transition elections which include 1999, 2003 and 2007. The 2007 elections in particular have been dubbed the worst in the nation's democratic history. Notwithstanding the improvement in the consolidated elections; in 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, due to the adoption of electoral technology, contentious elections have been the bane of Nigeria's electoral crisis since 1999. As a consequence, there is a rising mistrust of both Nigeria's electoral system and its administration. According to the findings of the study, there has been a decline in voter apathy, a sign of the public's disinterest in the election process. When citizens have the perception that their votes do not count, the consequence is apathy or poor engagement in the political process. To maintain the integrity of elections, INEC must be entirely independent to increase its capacity in the management of elections. Greater efforts should be intensified to institutionalise electoral technology to affect trust through the reduction of manipulation and fraud. Empirical evidence across the world suggests that the credibility of elections may be improved by technological advancements. A democratic mindset and ethos must also be ingrained in political elites, candidates, and political parties to ensure that they play by democratic rules and accept electoral outcome and democracy as the only viable option.

REFERENCES

1. ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (1998), 'Overview of electoral integrity'. Retrieved 5 March 2023 from <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ei/ei10>.
2. Abdallah, N., M., & Krishi, M., A. (2019). Feb 21. How voter turnout shapes Nigeria's elections, Daily Trust, Retrieved on 15 January 2023 from: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/how-voter-turnout-shapes-nigerias-elections.html>
3. Adejumbi, S. (2007). Political Parties in West Africa. Stockholm: International IDEA
4. Agbaje, S. & Adejumbi, A. (2006). Do Votes Count? The Travails of Electoral Politics in Nigeria. *Africa Development* 31(3):25-44.
5. Alejandro, M.C. (2022). "Perception of Electoral Integrity, Trust in Elections, and the Conditional Role of the Understanding of Democracy: Addressing the "Mexican Paradox". *Colombia International* 110: 89-121.
6. Alistair, C. (2017). Identifying the Determinants of Electoral Integrity and Administration. In *Advanced Democracies: The Case Of Britain*. In *European Political Science Review* (2017), 9:3, 471–492.
7. Aiyede, R. (2007). Electoral Laws and the 2007 Elections in Nigeria. In *Journal of African Elections* 6 (2), 50-70.
8. Blind, P. (2007). "Building Trust in Government in the Twenty-First Century: Review of Literature and Emerging Issues." Paper presented at the Seventh Global Forum on Reinventing Government, "Building Trust in Government," Vienna, Austria, June 26–29.
9. Birch, S. (2011) Post-Soviet Electoral Practices in Comparative Perspective, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Taylor & Francis Journals 63(4)703-725.
10. Birch, S. (2007). Electoral System and Electoral Misconduct. *Comparative Political Studies* 40(12)1533-1556
11. Chernykh, S (2014) When Do Political Parties Protest Election Results? *Comparative Political Studies* 47(10), 1359–1383
12. Comma M.F. & Trinh M. (2016). How Electoral Integrity affects Voter Turnout in Democracies. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 23(45)234-262.
13. Dalton, R.J. (2004). *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Diamond, L. (2008). The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State. *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2), 36-48.
15. Elklit, J. & Reynolds, A (2005), 'A framework for the systematic study of election quality', *Democratization* 12 (2): 147–162.
16. European Union Election Observation Mission, (EUEOM) (2011). *Nigeria: Final Report on the General Elections*. Retrieved on 14 January 2023 from http://www.eueom.eu.files/dmfile/final-reportnigeria2011_en.pdf
17. Fatai, A (2023) Nigeria's Election was nearly derailed by Technology – but Biometric Devices weren't the Problem. Retrieved from on the 5 March 2023 from <https://theconversation.com/nigerias-election-was-nearly-derailed-by-technology-but-biometric-devices-werent-the-problem-200936>.
18. Fatai, A. (2018) Significance of Elections in Africa: 2015 Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. In 12 (10); 208-219,
19. Fatai, A. (2022). Digital Technology Can Improve Nigeria's Elections. Retrieved from <http://theconversion.com/Africa>. 14 February 2023.
20. Fatai, A. (2020), "Smart Card Reader and the Quality of 2019 General Elections. In *Nigeria: Successes and Challenges*", the Roundtable: *Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. 109 (4)396-405.

21. Fortin-Rittberger, J. (2014). The Role of Infrastructural and Coercive State Capacity in Explaining Different Types of Electoral Fraud. *Democratization* 21(1), 95–117
22. Ham, C.V. & Garnett, A. (2019). Building impartial electoral management? Institutional design, independence and electoral integrity. *International Political Science Review* 40 (3)313-334.
23. Igiebor, G.O (2022) Political Alienation and Electoral Participation in Nigeria’s Democratisation Process: A survey of Voters Behaviour in the 2019 General Elections. *African Journal of Political Science* 10 (2) 22-37.
24. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2006). Free and fair elections. Geneva: IPU.
25. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2015). Voter turnout data for Nigeria, Retrieved on the 20 January 2023 from [http:// www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=168](http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=168)
26. Jega, A. M. (2018). “Towards Elections with Integrity in 2019: Challenges and Prospects”, Guest Lecture, Founders’ Day Lecture, Nigerian Institute for Advanced Legal Studies, Delivered at the National Judicial Institute, Abuja, March 27.
27. Joseph, R. (2008). ‘Challenges of a Frontier Region’ *Journal of Democracy*, 19 (2), 94-108.
28. Lehoucq, F & Kolev, K. (2013). Varying the Un-Varying Social Structure, Electoral Formulae and Ballot Rigging. Paper presented for presentations at the Electoral Integrity Project Annual Workshop on Concepts and Indices of Electoral Integrity, the Weather head Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University, June, 3-4.
29. Levine, I. & Alvarez, R.M. (2017). Introduction to the Virtual Issue: Election Fraud and Electoral Integrity. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
30. Mauk, M. (2020). “Electoral Integrity Matters: How Electoral Process Conditions the Relationship between Political Losing and Political Trust.” *Quality & Quantity*.
31. McAllister, Ian, and Stephen White. 2015. “Electoral Integrity and Support for Democracy in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 25 (1): 78-96.
32. Munck, G.L. (2006). Drawing Boundaries: How to Craft Intermediate Regimes Categories. In Schedler (ed.) *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder: Lynne-Rienner Publisher.
33. National Democratic Institute/Carter Centre, (1999). Observing the 1998/99 Elections (Final Report). Retrieved on 15 January 2023 from <http://www.cartercentre.org/documents/1152.pdf>
34. Norris, Pippa. 2019. “Do Perceptions of Electoral Malpractice Undermine Democratic Satisfaction? The US in Comparative Perspective.” *International Political Science Review* 40 (1): 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512118806783>
35. Norris, P. (2013). ‘The new research agenda studying electoral integrity’, *Electoral Studies* 32(4); 563–575.
36. Norris, P., Frank, R & Martizez Coma (eds). (2014a) Assessing the Quality of Elections. In *Journal of Democracy*, 24, (4); 124-135.
37. Norris, P. (2014b). *Why Electoral Integrity Matters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
38. Norris, P. (2015). *Why Elections Fail*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
39. Ogunsanwo, A, (2003), ‘Keynote Address’, in R. Anifowoshe and T. Babawale, eds., *2003 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
40. Omotola, J.S. (2013). Trapped in Transition? Nigeria’s First Democratic Decade and Beyond. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 9 (2), 171-200.
41. Omotola, J. S. (2010). ‘Elections and Democratic Transition in Nigeria, 1999-2003’. *African Affairs*, 109 (437), 535-553.
42. Omotola, J.S. (2009) Garrison Democracy in Nigeria: The 2007 General Elections and the Prospects for Democratic Consolidation. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47(2). 194-220.
43. Omotola, J.S. (2007). Godfathers and the 2007 Nigerian General Elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 6 (2), 134-154.
44. Onapajo, H. & Babalola, H. (2020) Nigeria’s 2019 general elections – a shattered hope? *The Round Table, Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*. 109(4); 363-367.

45. Premium Times (1 October 2022) Campaign Finance: INEC fails to sanction APC, PDP, and others for violating Nigeria's laws. Accessed from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/556940-campaign-finance-inec-fails-to-sanction-apc-pdp-others-for-violating-nigerias-laws.html?tztc=115> February 2023.
46. Premium Times (2023). Analysis: Trends of Lower Voters turnout Continues in Nigerian Elections. Retrieved on 2 March 2023 from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/586193-analysis-trend-of-low-voter-turnout-continues-in-nigerian-elections.html>
47. Stewart, C (2022) Trust in Elections. In *American Academy of Arts and Social Sciences* 151(4); 234-255
48. Simpson, A. (2013). *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections. Theory, practice and Implications*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
49. Schedler, A. (2002). The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 36–50.
50. Schaffer, F.C. (2007). *Elections for Sale: The Causes and Consequence of Vote-Buying*. London: Lynne Rienner Publisher.
51. Suleiman, T. (2011). Rages of Buhari's Army, *Tell magazine* April 27. Retrieved on 29 January 2023 from http://www.telling.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id+item212:rage-of-buhari%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98army%E2%80%99
52. Transition Monitoring Group, (TMG). (2007). *An Election Programme to Fail (Final Report of the April 2007 General Elections in Nigeria)* Retrieved on 15 January 2023 from <http://www.wmd.org/documents/may07demnews13.pdf>.
53. Transition Monitoring Group, (TMG). (2003). *Do Votes Counts? Final Report of the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria*. Lagos: TMG.
54. Transition Monitoring Group, (TMG). (1999). *Interim Report of the Transition Monitoring Group on the Presidential Elections on 27 February 1999*. Retrieved on 15 January 2023 from http://nigeriaworld.com/focus/politics/tmg_report1.html.
55. United State Institute for Peace. (USIP). (2011). *Nigeria's 2011 Elections: 'Best Run, But Most Violent'*. PEACE Briefs 103 August 15. Retrieved on 20 January 2023 from <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB%20103.pdf>
56. Uslaner, E. M. (2002). *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
57. Van Ham, C. (2015). Getting elections right? Measuring electoral integrity. *Democratization*, 22(4); 714-737.
58. Van der Meer, W.G. & Zmerli, S. (2017). "The Deeply Rooted Concern with Political Trust." In *Handbook on Political Trust*, (eds), W.G. Van der Meer, & S. Zmerli, 1-18. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
59. Yagboyaju, D.A. (2011). Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the Challenge of a Faltering Democratization. *African Studies Quarterly* 12(3), 93-106.