



Article

Examining Electoral Irregularities in Nigeria: An In-Depth Analysis Of Malpractices During the 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

This study uses a quantitative method to investigate electoral anomalies in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The study analyses data from 180 respondents in six states. The diverse demographic representation demonstrates a balanced gender distribution and significant youth participation, with a focus on regional variances. Notably, 62% of respondents identified as independent, emphasising the importance of considering a variety of political positions. The findings highlight issues with political influence, security, media, and perceived corruption in the electoral systems. The report makes strategic recommendations to improve openness and credibility in future elections, adding vital insights to the debate over democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper emphasises the necessity of implementing stringent regulatory frameworks and laws to curtail electoral malpractices. Likewise, the paper advocates for the establishment of regulations to address the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and abuse by the media.

Keywords:

Electoral Anomalies, Electoral system, Democratic Consolidation, General Elections, Independent National Electoral Commission.

Introduction

Electoral irregularities and malpractices in Nigeria date back to the period before 1960, prior to Nigeria attaining its independence, and has continued to be a significant issue in the country's democratic history. Even during the colonial period, elections were marred by rigging and malpractices, with the British colonial masters documented to have taken measures to rig the elections they presided over (Yusuf, 2016). This trend continued with the 1964 General elections and has persisted through various political eras, including military rule and civilian regimes. Powerful politicians have been known to engage in electoral rigging and fraud, frustrating the wishes of the people and contributing to political tension, violence and crisis in the country (Yusuf, 2016).

The challenges of electoral malpractices have significantly influenced Nigeria's Fourth Republic governance, leading to insecurity, corruption, weak democratic institutions, lack of internal democracy within political parties and other threats to democratic practices. The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, in particular, stand at the forefront of scholarly scrutiny due to the pervasive electoral irregularities and malpractices that have marred the democratic process. A spectrum of fraudulent activities, ranging from harassment of candidates' agents and voters to result inflation, ballot box snatching, political assassinations, unauthorized result announcements, vote-buying, and election rigging, has dominated the discourse (Abdu-Raheem & Bamgbade, 2023). The tragedy of it all is that these trends no longer come as a surprise since it has become a norm, deeply rooted in the historical background of Nigeria's electoral history since gaining independence. These alarming trends not only undermine the fundamental principles of democracy but also raise critical questions about the integrity of Nigeria's electoral system.

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In examining the background of electoral malpractices, one cannot overlook the intertwined relationship between these issues and the judicial system. The structural conditions of the Nigerian judiciary have been linked to the incidence of electoral fraud, adding a layer of complexity to the challenges faced in ensuring fair and transparent elections (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2014). As the nation grapples with these concerns, the erosion of participatory democracy looms large, necessitating a comprehensive analysis of the malpractices witnessed during the 2023 General Elections (Mbeledogu, Umeh & Nwokoye, 2021).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of electoral malpractices and their far-reaching implications. As previous research has illuminated, the impact of hate speech on election violence, the criminalization of elections, and the broader issues of political leadership failure and corruption have heightened the complexity of the electoral landscape (Obiagu, 2023; Inokoba & Osah, 2019). These factors collectively contribute to an environment where electoral fraud not only threatens the democratic ideals but also challenges the credibility of the electoral process.

The overarching objective of this research is to provide a nuanced understanding of electoral malpractices during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. By delving into the specific forms of malpractices witnessed, the study aims to uncover the underlying factors contributing to their prevalence. In doing so, it seeks to contribute valuable insights into the broader discourse on electoral integrity, democratic consolidation, and governance in Nigeria.

The statement of the problem encapsulates the urgency of addressing these issues. Anomalies in presidential election data, deviations suggesting possible fraud, and the challenges posed by emerging democracies like Nigeria form the backdrop of this study (Tunmibi & Olatokun, 2022; Casimir, Omeh & Ike, 2013). As the nation grapples with questions of security, technological advancements, and the role of civil society, understanding the implications of electoral malpractices becomes imperative for shaping a healthier democratic future (Sassetti, 2019; Chukwuma & Adimiche, 2022). In the same vein, this paper lays the foundation for an in-depth exploration of electoral irregularities in Nigeria during the 2023 General Elections. The significance of the study, coupled with the defined research objectives and statement of the problem, sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis that aims to inform and contribute to the ongoing discourse on electoral integrity and democratic governance in Nigeria.

The study emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive and collaborative measures to resolve electoral irregularities in Nigeria. The diversified strategy should include legal reforms, institutional restructuring, and societal interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Theory in the Context of Electoral Irregularities

In the field of political science and organizational sociology, Institutional Theory stands as a foundational framework for understanding how formal and informal structures, norms, and rules shape the behaviour of individuals and organizations within a specific environment. It emerged in the latter half of the 20th century as scholars sought to comprehend the influence of institutions on various social phenomena. Institutional Theory posits that institutions, encompassing formal laws, regulations, and informal norms, significantly impact the actions and decisions of actors within a given system.

The roots of Institutional Theory can be traced back to the works of early scholars such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, who explored the role of societal structures in shaping individual behaviour. However, the modern development of Institutional Theory gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, with seminal contributions from scholars like Meyer & Rowan (1977), DiMaggio & Powell (1983), and Scott (1987). These scholars focused on how institutions provide stability, legitimacy, and a sense of order to social systems.

In the context of examining electoral irregularities during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, Institutional Theory offers a valuable lens to explore the intricate dynamics of political and organizational structures. This theoretical framework sheds light on how formal and informal rules, norms, and practices within the electoral system shape the behaviour of key actors involved in the electoral process.

Patriotta (2020) underscores the significance of actors within Institutional Theory. In the context of electoral irregularities, this perspective emphasizes the agency of individuals and groups involved in the electoral process. Political parties, electoral officials, and voters are seen as active agents shaping and being shaped by the institutional environment. This lens allows for a detailed exploration of how these actors navigate and influence electoral systems. For instance, the 2023 election was one that many citizens divested themselves of the usual apathy shown towards elections generally in Nigeria. The citizens' active engagement in monitoring the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System capture of results demonstrated agency within the institutional theory framework. Voters utilized the technology to challenge malpractices, albeit to relative success, indicating the shifting balance of power from traditional authorities to engaged citizens.

Stoltz, Taylor and Lizadro (2019) advocate for a conceptual shift in Institutional Theory, focusing on "institutionalization" as a process rather than substantive "institutions." This perspective is particularly relevant when analysing electoral malpractices. By directing attention to the processes through which norms, rules, and practices become established, it illuminates the dynamic nature of the institutional environment and its influence on behaviour within the electoral system. The failure of the digital systems put in place in order to achieve a free and fair 2023 election exemplifies the relevance of Stoltz's et al conceptual shift. The challenges faced with the Independent National Electoral Commission Result Viewing portal indicate that it is not just about having substantive "institutions" like the portal itself but understanding the ongoing process of how these tools become established and operational within the electoral system. The portal's failures emphasize the importance of examining the continuous development and reinforcement of norms, rules and practices rather than merely focusing on the existence of specific institutional structures.

Also, Sandhu (2018) introduces Neo-Institutional Theory, offering a distinctive level for empirical analysis situated between individual organizations and broader organizational populations. In the context of electoral irregularities, this approach provides a lens to examine the interplay between electoral institutions, political organizations, and the broader societal context. It sheds light on systemic factors contributing to malpractices, revealing the intricate connections and dependencies within the electoral landscape. The unequal distribution of broadband access across the country affecting the Independent National Electoral Commission Result Viewing portal underscores this fact.

The feelings of voters and their subsequent reactions of outrage empowered by the flawed deployment of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System technology in an election which many believe was rigged contributes to the broader discourse on electoral integrity by highlighting the impact of voluntary actors on shaping and challenging institutional norms. Many of the Nigerian youths, still eager and desperate to salvage the disappointing election results announcement reported that several thugs were hired to disrupt the elections in polling stations where Peter Obi, the youths' favourite candidate was likely to win (Nwonwu, 2023). Furthermore, complaints about suspicious voter registration were raised with claims that digital sleuths uncovered voter cards on the digital electoral register that appeared to have pictures of children under the voting age (18) on them and that many PVCs shared the same names (Nwonwu, 2023). Many demanded to make public protest, demanding that the election results be rescinded and fresh elections conducted.

In essence, the conceptual analysis of Institutional Theory within the context of electoral irregularities in Nigeria provides a rich framework that encompasses the agency of actors, the dynamic processes of institutionalization, interplay within societal structures, information dynamics, roles of voluntary

organizations, and the socio-cultural meanings that underpin institutional behaviour. Applying these insights will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding electoral malpractices during the 2023 General Elections.

Empirical Review

The empirical review on electoral violence and malpractices in Nigeria highlights the various ways in which these issues have manifested in the country. A study conducted by Ukpong et al. (2023) revealed that the lack of credibility in elections has led to voter apathy, with many people believing that their votes do not count. Ukpong et al., (2023) also opine that electoral malpractices in Nigeria often degenerates into mass violence and The study cites the example of former president, Muhammadu Buhari, who, during the 2011 Presidential Election, accused the opposition of denying supporters of his party the access to vote in the Southern part of Nigeria, thereby, sparking post-election riots in Northern Nigeria. This situation resulted in the loss of many lives, including National Youth Service Corps Members (Ukpong et al., 2023). Furthermore, the study also discusses the consistent pattern of violence in past elections, including the killing of candidates, intimidation of voters and harassment of politicians. It criticizes security officers and the police for their failure to protect voters, abuse of human rights and complicity in election disruption, violence and vote rigging (Ukpong et al., 2023).

Another study conducted by Saleh and Abimiku (2023) adopted a qualitative approach to analyse the issue of electoral violence and irregularities in Nigeria from 1999 till 2023. The study aimed to define and clarify the concepts of electoral violence, pluralist theory, relative deprivation theory and realist theory which served as frameworks for the study.

Saleh and Abimiku (2023) further indicates that electoral violence has been on the increase from 1999 to 2019, with a total of 1,360 electoral violence incidences recorded during the six general elections held in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019. The study further established that 1,324 electoral fatalities have been recorded from 400 electoral incidences for the 2011 general elections alone, making it highest since the enthronement of civil democratic rule of the Fourth Republic in the country. Hence, the study emphasizes the need for a realistic constitutional review and amendment to expunge the immunity clause and impose capital punishment for corruption and mismanagement of public resources. The absence of constitutional provisions for capital punishment was identified as contributing to electoral and political violence in Nigeria. The study suggests that pragmatic actions are needed from civil society groups, intellectuals, journalists and right-thinking Nigerians to advocate for the realistic revision of the Nigerian constitution while also warning that without urgent action, Nigeria's civil democratic rule is at risk of dangerous instability (Saleh & Abimiku, 2023).

Idowu's (2022) research on electoral malpractices in Nigeria revealed the extent of the problem, the different form it takes and the factors driving these malpractices. Idowu asserts that electoral malpractices in Nigeria have been huge and rampant with a variety of dimensions and trends. Some of these include vote buying, campaign on election day, tampering with election results, electoral violence and voters' oppression and intimidation. The study also revealed that electoral malpractices vary significantly depending on the region or state of the country where they occur and they have taken diverse trends and patterns over the years.

Idowu (2022) also shed light on the factors driving malpractices in the country including poverty, lack of patriotism and the spirit of nationalism, the greedy nature of Nigerian politicians, the winner takes all mentality and inadequate awareness on the part of citizens. Some interviewees responding to the researcher suggested that Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties are spearheading these malpractices and that if the Independent National Electoral Commission would check the activities of political parties, electoral malpractices would be minimized drastically.

Furthermore, a study by Obiagu and Abada (2023) examines the impact of government interference in election administration on electoral irregularities in Nigeria. The researchers argue that Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria has not been able to assert its independence due to government interference, which has led to recurring electoral irregularities and a decline in public confidence in the electoral process. The study employs a micro-level analysis, leveraging key informant interviews, available documents and personal experiences while adopting quota stratified random sampling techniques.

Also, the study comprises detailed information derived from nationally represented 12 Nigerian states. The researchers conducted 21 interviews. The findings of these interviews suggest that a majority of the respondents blame Independent National Electoral Commission's poor performance on the appointment of its key officers by the president. The study also highlights that the appointment of key officers plays a catalytic role in the policy direction of Independent National Electoral Commission and has taken an ethno-religious dimension which undermines meritocracy and leads to poor performance in implementing policies ensuring credible elections. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for voter-driven electoral reforms as the government-determined reforms have not addressed the fundamental problems with the electoral system in Nigeria. The study acknowledges that it does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the electoral problems facing democratic operations in developing countries but calls for further research to explore other factors and why legislative reforms have failed to address fundamental problems related to the independence of election management bodies.

Additionally, Chironda (2023) in his study focused on the irregularities of the 2023 Presidential elections. According to the researcher, the International Observers were appalled by the gross misconduct of the election and the Independent National Electoral Commission chairman declared a winner without meeting the conditions stipulated in the constitution, leading to a division among senior lawyers and nationwide protests. The paper also delved into alleged bribery of the Independent National Electoral Commission chairman and the conspiracy theory of Islamization of the country by some Northern politicians. Additionally, it discusses the issue of drug trafficking involving the declared winner and his cohorts, with references to the United States' verified complaint of forfeiture and a directive to forfeit a significant amount of money to the US government in a settlement order, all pointing to the fact that the candidate who was later declared winner of the election, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, was ineligible to contest and be declared president.

An Overview of Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria

The electoral process in Nigeria has been fraught with challenges, including electoral malpractices since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999. These malpractices have taken diverse trends and patterns, such as the use of violence and thuggery, vote buying, padded voter registration, polling units purchase, arbitrary and controversial dismissal of critical electoral appointees and altering of election results, among others. The practice of electoral malpractice permeates all aspects of the electoral process and varies significantly depending on the region or state of the country where such malpractices are being carried out.

Corruption and electoral malpractices have plagued the electoral process in Nigeria. The glaring corruption and rot in the political space has raised concerns about the legitimacy of election outcomes and has eroded public trust in the electoral system (Sule, Sani & Matt, 2018). Similarly, electoral misconduct, including the abuse of power and wrong usage of incumbency has been identified as a significant issue affecting the electoral process in Nigeria. This misconduct has been linked to the enrichment of a few political office holders at the expense of the broader citizenry, exacerbating poverty and inequality.

Thus, the integrity of the electoral process utilized throughout the country's democratic era, especially its Fourth republic phase, has been called into question, with anomalies on election data often raising

concerns about the credibility of election results. The need for credible electoral processes and improvements in the conduct of elections has been emphasized, highlighting the importance between Independent National Electoral Commission and the government to ensure transparency and accountability.

Electoral violence, on the other hand, has been a persistent challenge in Nigeria, particularly during elections, with implications for the prospect of democracy and public attitudes towards the democratic process. The impact of political violence on the electoral process and its implications for democracy has been a subject of study, highlighting the need to address violence as a barrier to democratic consolidation. Hence, curbing electoral violence and promoting peacebuilding has been identified as imperative for consolidating democracy in the country and curbing menaces experienced during elections. According to Olaifa (2017), political education and peacebuilding initiatives have a crucial role in addressing violent extremism and fostering sustainable development in the country.

Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria: A Case Study of the 2023 General Elections

Before the 2023 general elections were held, the ex-president, Muhammadu Buhari together with the Independent National Electoral Commission chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu assured Nigerians that the elections will be free, fair and credible. The sum of N355.2 billion was budgeted by the umpire body, Independent National Electoral Commission to take care of the logistical expenses and the deployment of the innovations Bimodal Voter Accreditation System and the Independent National Electoral Commission Result Viewing portal (Ezeador, 2023). N15 billion was reserved specifically for security. This was to ensure that the elections would be peaceful, devoid of manipulation and rigging. Prof. Mahmood repeatedly assured Nigerians that the introduction of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System would help reduce drastically all forms of electoral malpractices during the elections (Ezeador, 2023).

According to Uzoanya (2023), the 2023 general elections were anticipated by many Nigerians for many reasons. First, the competition for the presidential office was not the traditional two-horse race. There were also the repeated assurances from Independent National Electoral Commission that the signing of the 2022 Electoral Act which contained the deployment of technology would effectively curb the menace of electoral malpractices.

The need to make Nigeria elections more credible and transparent made Independent National Electoral Commission introduce the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System. The device, which was first used in the Isoko South Constituency Bye-election in Delta State on 10 September, 2021 to much success, was deployed to combat the cases of manipulation of figures prevalent during elections (Ezeador, 2023). Unfortunately, the device failed woefully despite the assurances made by the government and Independent National Electoral Commission that all the results collated from the polls would be uploaded immediately to the Independent National Electoral Commission Result Viewing portal during the accreditation and voting processes (Ezeador, 2023).

Nigerians on February 25, 2023, came out en masse, unlike in other elections with all the passion and enthusiasm under the sun to cast their votes believing that those election malpractices that characterized the former elections won't be noticed again (Ezeador, 2023). According to Ezeador (2023), there was a massive turnout. Some people were at the polling units as early as 6am. Some even slept at the polling units; some even donated their generators to ensure that there was no manipulation of any kind (Ezeador, 2023). All these efforts were to ensure that the votes count and the results were uploaded to the Independent National Electoral Commission Result Viewing portal as promised by the electoral body.

Nigerians were eager to see in practice those promises and assurances made to them. However, the reverse was the case. They witnessed disappointment, deception, intimidation and failure. The February 25, 2023 elections were marred by factors Nigerians thought they had overcome (Ezeador, 2023). Uzoanya (2023) asserts that the 2023 election was marred by irregularities, ranging from voter

suppression, intimidation, raw violence, sporadic shootings, snatching of ballot papers and vote buying, among others. Uzoanya (2023) maintained that both international and local observers attested to the fact that the election was grossly below standard.

There was also the issue of violence which occurred across states in the country, particularly, Lagos, Rivers, Kano and Adamawa (Ezeador, 2023). As confirmed by reports of local and international observers, there were many problems associated with the 2023 elections. In the area of logistics, Independent National Electoral Commission failed to provide enough vehicles that will convey ad-hoc staff and sensible materials to some places (Ezeador, 2023). This resulted in the disenfranchisement of many eligible voters in some states. Also, the collation and announcement of results were so slow, this created worries and tension among the electorate.

Despite these disappointments with Independent National Electoral Commission, some improvements were made by Independent National Electoral Commission (Ezeador, 2023). Unlike in the previous elections, the introduction of the use of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System reduced the issues of over-voting, unlike what was prevalent when it was done manually. It was recently, through the help of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System that Nigerians were able to know the number of voters in those areas in the North that always have the high numbers. The level of awareness and participation made the 2023 elections bring about the most diverse political parties: PDP, LP, APC, YPP, NNPC and APGA into office, unlike previous years when it was normally a two-horse race (Ezeador, 2023).

Factors contributing to Electoral Malpractices

Electoral malpractices in Nigeria are influenced by a multitude of factors that have been identified through various studies. The factors responsible for electoral malpractices in the country include the blatant disregard for the electoral act by the Independent National Electoral Commission, vote buying among political parties, undemocratic tendencies, corruption, weak and dependent electoral management bodies, youth unemployment, electoral violence, weak democratic institutions and the influence of the political class. These factors have been found to discourage mass participation in elections and have implications for political, social and economic outcomes (Mbah, Nzeadibe, Nwangwu, Iheanacho, Eze&Ezeibe, 2020; Akokuwebe, 2017; Othman & Yusuf, 2016; Sule et al., 2018; Aluaigba, 2016; Otache, Alfa & Ali, 2020).

According to Kolawole, Wakili and Olukayode (2020), inadequate planning and poor economic conditions are significant factors contributing to electoral malpractice in Nigeria. The researchers opined that poverty-ridden and unemployed individuals may resort to rigging elections in exchange for survival due to their desperate economic circumstances. This aligns with the view of Akokuwebe (2017) who evaluated the nexus between electoral malpractices and youth unemployment in Nigeria, highlighting the relationship between economic factors and electoral malpractices. Additionally, Kolawole et al. (2020) emphasized that inadequate planning by political parties or candidates in terms of campaign finances and readiness for elections can also lead to manipulation of the electoral process. This manipulation may occur in an attempt to compensate for deficiencies and to give the impression of loyalty or support to the party or candidate that mobilized them. This may result in individuals engaging in rigging to cover up their lack of commitment or to fulfil expectations. Similarly, there are many instances where the political class and elites in the country are susceptible to engaging in electoral fraud, electoral violence and favouritism based on ethnicity that are counterproductive and antidemocratic, further exacerbating electoral malpractices (Alfa, Eikojonwa& Ibn-Mohammed, 2020).

More so, the weak institutionalization of democratic architectures, including political parties and electoral management bodies has been identified as a contributing factor to electoral malpractice in Nigeria (Ezeibe, 2020). This is strengthened by the tendency of many citizens to exhibit apathy to voting during election periods, thereby giving corrupt electoral officials the leeway to rig and manipulate elections at their whims. The presence of election observers has been found to increase the probability of enforcement

against electoral misconduct, indicating the potential role of international monitoring in mitigating electoral malpractices (Donno, 2013). Additionally, the neo-patrimonial character of the African state and the political economy have been linked to rising electoral violence in Africa, including Nigeria (Omotola, 2011), thereby leading to increased electoral malpractice.

On this note, Kolawole et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of development in fostering fairness, openness, equity and the rejection of violence and criminalities in the conduct of elections, Development, in this context, denotes the ability to advance the cause of election and its ideals for the mutual benefit of the people. The researchers highlight the ethical theory of Androx Fox (1952) to explain electoral malpractice as unhelpful to development. This theory highlights moral obligations, the rightness or wrongness of actions and the ideals towards which individuals work.

Impact of Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria

Electoral malpractices in Nigeria have had a detrimental effect on the country's democratic consolidation from 1999 till date. The political system has been marred by the manipulation of elections by political elites, resulting in outcomes that do not reflect the wishes of the people. This has hindered the growth and development of Nigeria's democratic process as electoral frauds have become a major obstacle to the country's progress.

The presence of electoral malpractices has been observed to hinder the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, leading to a crisis of legitimacy and governance challenges (Othman and Yusuf, 2016; Aluaigba, 2016). The 2003/2007 general elections were described as the worst ever conducted in the history of the nation (Ebirim, 2014); subsequent elections have not shown significant improvement. This has far-reaching consequences for the country's political stability and the effectiveness of democratic institutions. Likewise, the frequent occurrence of electoral malpractices in Nigeria over the years has accelerated the level of voter apathy in the population. People refrain from voting in subsequent elections if previous or current polls are won through vile means like rigging, false declaration of losers as winners and bribing of electoral officials (Ukpong et al., 2023). This is especially evident in the low voter turnout in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, where the 26th April 2011 Gubernatorial/State House of Assembly had a very low turnout due to the real or perceived duplicity that had taken place in the National Assembly and Presidential elections as citizens felt that whether they voted or not, 'winners' would be announced through corrupt means (Lustig, 2007). Electoral malpractices, therefore, have led to a lack of credibility in elections which has constituted a lack of confidence in the voting system (Ukpong et al., 2023). More so, post-election cases flood the courts as a result of the losing party challenging the outcome of elections, expressing a lack of confidence in the voting system (Ukpong et al., 2023). This has led to violence, intimidation of voters and denial of voting rights which do not bode well for Nigerian democracy.

Also, the impact of electoral malpractices extends beyond the political sphere and affects the socio-economic fabric of the country. It has been noted, for instance, that electoral malpractices contribute to insecurity and corruption which in turn hinder economic growth and development (Othman and Yusuf, 2016). Kolawole et al (2020) views further support the aforementioned notion. The researchers emphasize the connection between electoral malpractice and the prevalence of poverty, insecurity and unemployment. The country is currently grappling with poverty, with more than 67.3% of its citizens living in abject poverty. The poverty facing the people has led to a trade-off of votes when appropriately induced, further undermining the integrity of the electoral process (Ebirim, 2014). Electoral malpractice exacerbates these issues by diverting financial resources that could be used for poverty eradication programmes (Kolawole et al., 2020). Additionally, electoral malpractice has a high tendency to orchestrate violence and hooliganism, leading to a retrogressive effect on the development of the country (Kolawole et al., 2020). The proliferation of small arms, such as hand guns, rifles and grenades, due to electoral malpractice poses a security risk to the country. This phenomenon stresses the fact that the

presence of electoral violence and irregularities has been found to exacerbate social tensions and pose a threat to national security (Steve, Nwocha&Igwe, 2019).

Methodology

This section describes the methodology employed in undertaking this research work. It consists of reasons for adopting quantitative research as well as an elucidation of the research tools employed such as research design and sampling technique employed in the research.

Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study while utilizing a quantitative survey, allowing for a systematic investigation into electoral irregularities during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This descriptive research design offers a structured approach to examine the prevalence and contributing factors of electoral malpractices. Meanwhile, the quantitative survey was chosen for its ability to provide numerical data, facilitating statistical analysis to uncover patterns and trends within the context of the research objectives.

Population of the Study

The population of this study encompasses citizens from six Nigerian states, strategically selected to represent six geopolitical zones of the country. The states include Anambra in the South East geopolitical zone, Rivers in the South-South geopolitical zone, Lagos in South West geopolitical zone, Adamawa in North East geopolitical zone, Kano in North West geopolitical zone and Plateau in North Central geopolitical zone. This selection ensures a diverse representation of experiences and perceptions, offering valuable insights into holistic variations regarding electoral irregularities.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for this study consists of 180 respondents, drawn from the aforementioned six targeted states from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The questionnaire, structured in three parts with a total of nineteen questions, was distributed among the selected participants. The states were chosen to capture a broad spectrum of electoral dynamics, considering geographical and demographic diversity. The sampling procedure employed quota stratified random sampling, where the population was divided into strata based on states and geopolitical zones. Within each stratum, respondents were randomly selected to ensure representation from various segments of the population. With a commendable 100% response rate, the retrieved data is considered highly representative of each selected population.

Method of Data Analysis

The data gathered are presented in tables displaying frequencies and simple percentages are used to present data analysed. The data analysis methodology serves as a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Presentation of Demographic Data

Table 1.0: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	92	51.1
Female	88	48.9
Total	180	100

Source: Field survey, 2023.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study are diverse, ensuring a well-rounded representation. In terms of gender, the distribution is nearly equal, with 92 (51.1%) male and 88 (48.9%) female respondents, minimizing the potential for gender bias in the study.

Table 1.1: Age Range of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24	65	36.1
25-34	58	32.2
35-44	29	16.1
45-54	16	8.9
55 and above	13	6.7
Total	180	100

Source: Field survey, 2023.

Age-wise, the participants span various groups with 65 (36.1%) respondents falling in the 18-24 category, 58 (32.2%) in the 25-34 range, 29 (16.1%) in the 35-44 range, 16 (8.9%) in the 45-54 range and 13 (6.7%) aged 55 and above.

The high concentration of voters among the younger age groups suggests a substantial participation of youths, reflecting their engagement in the electoral process. The significant involvement of young voters may be indicative of a perceived wake-up call among the youth demographic, who voted en masse during the elections. Likewise, the robust representation of the 18-34 cohort in the study highlights the importance of understanding the perspectives of this demographic. The observed engagement may signify an increased interest and activism among the younger generation, possibly driven by a desire for positive political change or a response to perceived electoral irregularities.

Table 1.3: Geographical Location of Respondents

State of Residence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Adamawa	30	16.6
Anambra	30	16.6
Kano	30	16.6
Plateau	30	16.6
Lagos	30	16.6
Rivers	30	16.6
Total	180	100

Source: Field survey, 2023.

Geographically, respondents were dispersed equally across states, with one representing each of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. This diverse representation allows for insights into regional variations that may impact electoral perceptions and experiences.

Table 1.4: Political Affiliation of Respondents

Political Affiliation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Affiliated with a party	68	38
Independent	112	62
Prefer not to say	0	0
Total	180	100

Source: Field survey, 2023.

Regarding political affiliation, a substantial 112 (62%) respondents identify as independent, indicating a diverse range of political perspectives within the sample. Notably, 68 (38%) of respondents are affiliated with a political party, indicating the need to consider different political leanings when analyzing perceptions of electoral irregularities. Importantly, no respondents chose to withhold information about their political affiliation, enhancing the transparency and reliability of the study.

Table 1.5: Data of First Time Voters

First Time Voter	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	117	65
No	63	35
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2023.

The findings highlight an important component of the electoral terrain: 63% of respondents identified as first-time voters. This discovery has important implications for understanding the dynamics of political engagement, especially among young people. The high percentage of first-time voters indicates a significant infusion of new voices into the election process, possibly motivated by a desire for change or a reaction to perceived anomalies. This influx may indicate a shift in the political environment, as individuals who were previously disengaged or marginalized now actively contribute to influencing democratic debate. It emphasizes the changing nature of political involvement and the significance of taking into account this new cohort's viewpoints and experiences when discussing electoral integrity and democratic growth.

Table 2.0: Factors Contributing to Electoral Malpractices

Variable	SA	A	D	SD	Frequency (Percentage %)
Political Influence	121 (67.3)	23 (12.8)	25 (13.8)	11 (6.1)	180 (100)
Inadequate Security Measures	99 (55)	49 (27.2)	16 (8.9)	16 (8.9)	180 (100)
Weak Regulatory Framework	65 (36)	50 (27.5)	42 (23.5)	23 (13.0)	180 (100)
Voter Intimidation	139 (77.2)	19 (10.5)	12 (6.7)	10 (5.6)	180 (100)
Lack of Voter Education	49 (27.2)	61 (33.7)	39 (21.7)	31 (17.4)	180 (100)
Corruption within Electoral Institutions	106 (58.9)	43 (23.9)	28 (15.6)	3 (1.6)	180 (100)
Media Influence	55 (30.6)	49 (27.2)	61 (33.9)	15 (8.3)	180 (100)
Socio-Economic Factors (e.g. Poverty, Unemployment)	113 (63.0)	59 (32.6)	6 (3.3)	2 (1.1)	180 (100)
Ethnic or Regional Tensions	117 (65.2)	51 (28.3)	8 (4.3)	4 (2.2)	180 (100)
Lack of Civic Engagement	67 (37.0)	55 (30.4)	29 (16.3)	29 (16.3)	180 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2023.

The data on political influence perception reveals a significant sentiment among respondents with 121 (67.3%) of the respondents expressing strong agreement, 23 (12.8%) agreement, 25 (13.8%) disagreement and 11 (6.1%) strong disagreement. This suggests a prevailing concern or acknowledgement of external influences on the electoral process.

The substantial majority, that is 144 respondents (80.1% - SA + A) perceiving political influence implies a widespread belief in its existence, raising questions about the fairness and impartiality of the elections. In the same vein, this perception showcases the credibility and transparency of the democratic system of the nation in negative light, emphasizing the need to address these concerns for a more trustworthy electoral process. Understanding the nature and sources of perceived political influence is crucial for implementing reforms that enhance the integrity of the electoral system.

The data on the perception of inadequate security measures during the elections reveals insights into the respondents' views with 99 (55%) expressing strong agreement, 49 (27.2%) agreement, 25 (13.8%) disagreement and 16 (8.9%) agreement. A notable majority 148 respondents (82.2% – SA + A) perceive inadequacies in security measures during the elections, indicating a significant concern or consensus among respondents. The high percentage of strong agreement (55%) underscores the gravity of the perceived issue, suggesting a widespread belief that security measures were insufficient. Evidently, a negative perception of security will do nothing to improve on the confidence of the electorate in the electoral system. As such, implementing reforms to enhance security protocols may be crucial for building public trust and maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

With regard to weak regulatory framework perception, 65 (36.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 50 (27.5%) agreed, 42 (23.5%) disagreed and 23 (13.0%) strongly disagreed. The relatively high percentage of strong agreement (36.0%) suggests a prevalent belief that the regulatory framework of the electoral commission was ineffective. Thus, this perception underscores the importance of strengthening the regulatory framework to address potential loopholes and enhance the overall integrity of the electoral system.

The data on the perception of voter intimidation during the election offers an interesting insight with 139 (77.2%) of the respondents expressing strong agreement. 19 (10.9%) agreement, 12 (6.7%) disagreement and 10 (5.6%) agreement. The high level of agreement, particularly strong agreement, highlights the critical nature of the issue of voter intimidation and violence in the 2023 elections. Implementing measures to counteract and prevent voter intimidation is paramount for upholding the democratic principles of free and fair elections.

As regards lack of voter education, 49 (27.2%) of the respondents expressed strong agreement, 61 (33.7%) agreed, 19 (21.7%) disagreed and 31 (17.4%) strongly disagreed. While this area does not have an overwhelming negative perception of its prevalence, the data still suggests that a considerable population lack proper voter education, possibly owing to a lack of proper orientation and awareness programmes on the subject. Addressing this issue is essential to ensure an informed electorate and foster active democratic participation.

On the area of corruption within electoral institutions, 106 (58.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 43 (23.9%) agreed, 28 (15.6%) disagreed and 3 (1.6%) strongly disagreed. Evidently, the majority (82.6% - SA + A) perceives corruption within electoral institutions, signalling a significant concern about the credibility of the electoral officials and the accompanying process. The statistics albeit unsurprising, owing to the country's defective history of wide-scale corruption, is not encouraging. Urgent measures are required to address corruption and improve the trustworthiness and reliability of electoral institutions.

Media influence was another area highlighted upon by respondents in the questionnaire. 55 (30.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 49 (27.2%) agreed, 61 (33.7%) disagreed and 15 (8.3%) strongly disagreed. While the view on this tilts more towards neutrality, it is still telling that a majority of the

respondents (57.8% - SA + A) perceive the media as having a major influence during elections, thereby indicating an impact on electoral perceptions. It is often the case that national-owned and state-owned media stations often endorse the candidate of the ruling party, be it the incumbent sitting president or governor or a candidate favoured by the party. Understanding and regulating media influence is crucial to maintaining an unbiased electoral sphere.

Socioeconomic factors, like poverty and unemployment which encompasses such areas like unemployment and poverty level was also highlighted in the questionnaire. 113 (63.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 59 (32.6%) agreed, 6 (3.3%) disagreed and 2 (1.1%) strongly disagreed. With many people living below the poverty line in the nation, voters are susceptible to being bribed with either monetary gifts or in kind in exchange for their votes, thereby undermining the voting process. Addressing these socioeconomic disparities can contribute to a more equitable electoral setting.

With regard to ethnic and regional tensions, 117 (65.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 51 (28.3%) agreed, 8 (4.3%) disagreed while 4 (2.2%) disagreed. It is alarming that such a high proportion (93.5% - SA + A) perceived ethnic or regional tensions as being a huge determinant of electoral irregularities in the country, underscoring the importance of fostering national unity and addressing divisive issues. Historically, Nigeria's ethnic affiliation has been volatile and fragile leading to ethnic bias during elections. Hence, mitigating tensions is essential for ensuring peaceful and fair elections.

Finally, with regard to lack of civic engagement, 67 (37.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 55 (30.4%) agreed, 29 (16.3%) disagreed and 29 (16.3%) strongly disagreed. There is a recognition (67.4% - SA + A) that the lack of civic engagement is detrimental to maintaining credibility in Nigerian elections. Encouraging civic participation through education and awareness campaigns is vital for a robust democratic society.

Table 3: Electoral Irregularities in the 2023 General Elections

Variable	SA	A	D	SD	Frequency (Percentage %)
Vote-Buying	18 (9.8)	35 (19.6)	63 (34.8)	64 (35.8)	180 (100)
Ballot Box Snatching	45 (25.0)	55 (30.6)	55 (30.6)	25 (13.8)	180 (100)
Harassment of Voters	82 (45.7)	53 (29.3)	31 (17.4)	14 (7.6)	180 (100)
Unauthorized Result Announcement	120 (66.3)	31 (17.4)	23 (13.0)	6 (3.3)	180 (100)
Tendency for Voter Apathy in the Next Elections	115 (64.1)	33 (18.5)	18 (9.8)	14 (7.6)	180 (100)
Voting Again (First Time Voters)	20 (17.0)	17 (14.5)	45 (38.5)	35 (30.0)	117 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2023.

Table 3 presents data on respondents' perception of the irregularities that occurred during the 2023 general elections. On the aspect of vote buying, approximately 64 (35.8%) of respondents expressed strong disagreement with the occurrence of vote-buying, indicating a substantial portion of the sample perceives this irregularity as unlikely. However, the combined percentage of those who agreed (SA + A) stands at 29.4%, suggesting that a noteworthy segment of respondents acknowledges the presence of vote-buying. Consequently, the prevalence of agreement (SA + A) might indicate a real concern or perception that vote-buying occurred during the elections, albeit to a lesser degree. Hence, investigative measures and policy interventions could be warranted to address the identified challenges related to vote-buying.

On the issue of ballot box snatching during the elections, a quarter of respondents 45(25.0%) strongly agreed (SA) that ballot box snatching occurred, emphasizing a substantial acknowledgment of this irregularity. The overall agreement (SA + A) reached 55.4%, thereby, stressing the significant concern among citizens regarding the security and integrity of the election process. To that regard, there is need for urgent attention from electoral authorities and law enforcement to prevent the recurrence of such ugly trend in subsequent elections. Likewise, enhancing security measures during elections, especially in vulnerable areas may be crucial for restoring public trust.

Harassment of voters received notable attention, with a substantial 75.0% expressing agreement (SA + A). Addressing this issue is imperative to ensure a free and fair electoral environment. Public awareness campaigns and improved security measures may be instrumental in curbing reported instances of harassment.

The most alarming revelation pertains to unauthorized result announcements, with a staggering 83.7% agreement (SA + A). This demands urgent investigation and the implementation of stringent measures to safeguard result credibility in future elections. The data also points to a pervasive concern about the potential tendency for voter apathy in subsequent elections, with 82.6% expressing agreement (SA + A). This highlights the need for comprehensive reforms aimed at increasing transparency, accountability and citizen engagement.

Finally, the data analysis on first time voters during the 2023 elections voting again brings to light a concerning sentiment among the respondents, with 45 (38.5%) of the respondents expressing disagreement and an additional 35 (30.5%) strongly disagreeing with the prospect of participating in future elections following the perceived electoral irregularities of the 2023 general elections. The significant proportion of respondents expressing strong disagreement suggests a deep-seated disillusionment, potentially fuelled by a perception of compromised integrity in the electoral system. This finding underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and reforms to restore faith in the democratic process. Efforts should focus on addressing the root causes of distrust, enhancing transparency, and implementing measures to rectify the identified irregularities to encourage renewed civic participation and trust in future elections.

Discussion of Findings

The major objective of this study was to provide a detailed understanding on the nuance of electoral malpractices during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, uncovering in the process the underlying factors contributing to their prevalence. The diverse demographic representation in the study, particularly the substantial involvement of the youth demographic, aligns with the objective of providing a nuanced understanding of electoral malpractices. The findings suggest that the younger generation, comprising a significant portion of the electorate, actively participated in the elections, possibly in response to perceived irregularities. This aligns with Tayo's (2023) findings which revealed that the youths made up around 76% of newly registered voters, with 40% of that number identifying as students. The findings made by other studies suggest that the impact of social and economic concerns, as well as the appeal to collective action through electoral participation has contributed to the increased turnout of youth in

elections (Mbah et al., 2020; Collier & Vicente, 2014). More so, this coincides with the current study's findings which discovered that 117 of the respondents, forming a huge 65% of the respondents, made an active participation in elections for the first time in the 2023 General elections. For years the citizens had been in a political slumber with regard to political participation and exercise of their civic duties. Hence, it was truly inspiring to discover the citizens rediscover their yearning for a better Nigeria. It shows that with the right motivation, Nigerians will always attempt to make their yearning for good governance and political excellence work.

Also, the detailed analysis of factors contributing to electoral malpractices such as political influence, inadequate security measures, weak regulatory frameworks and voter intimidation, directly addresses the research objective. Ezeador (2023) asserts that violence and electoral malpractice are rife in Nigeria, including the use of thugs to disrupt elections, threats to election officials and the use of money to influence voters. Ezeador (2023) stresses that these practices have hindered the electoral process in Nigeria and have raised serious concerns about the credibility of the elections. More so, challenges within the electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission, continue to surface with problems such as over-registration of political parties, violation of campaign principles, high cost of running elections and poor funding for Independent National Electoral Commission still occurring. The prevalence of these concerns among respondents, in the current study, underscores the need for a thorough examination of underlying issues affecting electoral integrity in the country. These findings provide a foundation for informed discussions on potential reforms and interventions to enhance the fairness and transparency of the electoral process in Nigeria.

Similarly, the study's exploration of media influence and the recognition of the impact of socioeconomic factors, ethnic tensions and lack of civic engagement directly relates to the acknowledgment of media's role in elections and the understanding of broader societal factors affecting civic participation contributes valuable insights to the discourse on electoral integrity and democratic consolidation. The findings on social media aligns with the Olabanjo et al. (2022) study which states that social media activism is beginning to translate into real-world political participation, as demonstrated during the elections. The media is sometimes also linked with the increase in socio-political tensions arising in the country as evidenced by Hassan (2023) who states that the content of social media also shapes traditional media and exacerbates existing ethnic and religious tensions. More so, social media and traditional news platforms have become a breeding ground for abuse, hate speech and misinformation which can lead to offline harm and violence (Jimada, 2023). Similarly, the use of social media during elections has given rise to the spread of hate, insults and character assassination by political opponents (Anyanwu & Ejem, 2016). On another note, while social media activism has shown potential in spurring political participation, there is still a need for practical action beyond online engagement (Anyanwu & Ejem, 2016). Addressing voter apathy and promoting positive engagement strategies are crucial for enhancing voter turnout and participation in Nigerian elections (Anyanwu & Ejem, 2016). Furthermore, the use of identity politics based on ethnicity and religion shapes voters' preferences and voting patterns (Usman, 2023). Historically, the Nigerian society has fault lines and cleavages built around ethno-religious differences, which become overtly manifested during elections (Oshewolo et al., 2023). This has far-reaching consequences on political discourse and election outcomes, as it can lead to the mobilization of violence and the exclusion of certain groups (Region and Religion will influence Nigerian election, 2022).

More so, the substantial perception of corruption within electoral institutions aligns with the research objective by highlighting a crucial concern that directly impacts the credibility of the electoral process. This aligns with the view of Tinuoye (2023) who states the presence of corruption affects all facets and sectors of human and state activities in the country. In fact, corruption has been identified as the main cause of Nigeria's socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, inequalities and crime (Oshewolo et al., 2023). The findings emphasize the urgent need for measures to address corruption and enhance the trustworthiness of electoral institutions. This aligns with the broader discourse on governance, as corrupt practices within electoral bodies can erode public trust in democratic processes.

The detailed examination of specific electoral irregularities, such as vote-buying, ballot box snatching, harassment of voters, unauthorized result announcements and the potential for voter apathy, directly addresses the research objective. This aligns with findings made by previous studies on the subject theme. For instance, Kusugh & Okonkwo (2023) opined the use of money during elections, as observed in the 2019 general elections, has affected the outcome and hindered the development of democracy. Also, electoral violence, instigated by youth, has been a major factor affecting the democratic regime in Nigeria, leading to socio-political and economic disruptions. Furthermore, (Ogeze & David, 2023) opine that the delegate system in Nigeria's electoral processes has been marred by the influx of foreign currency, compromising the integrity of the primary elections and candidate selection. The urgency expressed in the need for investigation and reforms aligns with the objective of uncovering underlying factors contributing to the prevalence of malpractices.

Finally, a notable erosion of trust in the electoral process, possibly influenced by the observed malpractices during the elections is observed with the high percentage of respondents asserting that they will not be voting in future elections. Empirical evidence supports the idea that trust in electoral processes is crucial for the sustainability of democratic systems (James et al., 2022; Omilusi, 2022). These studies have highlighted the relationship between perceived irregularities, trust in institutions, and voter turnout. The substantial proportion of respondents expressing reluctance to participate again aligns with the notion that electoral integrity significantly impacts citizens' willingness to engage in future electoral activities (Omilusi, 2022). Moreover, this finding resonates with research on the consequences of electoral malpractices on democratic legitimacy (James et al., 2022). When citizens perceive elections as marred by irregularities, it undermines the legitimacy of the entire democratic system (Omilusi, 2022). The observed reluctance to participate again reflects a potential threat to the democratic consolidation process in Nigeria. Addressing these concerns is paramount for sustaining a robust democratic system. It is important to work towards restoring confidence through comprehensive electoral reforms. Such reforms should target the root causes of perceived irregularities, enhancing transparency and accountability within the electoral process.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The study on electoral irregularities during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria elucidates critical issues that demand immediate attention and concerted efforts. A key observation is the active participation of the youth demographic, possibly driven by perceived irregularities. To harness this enthusiasm constructively, strategies should be devised to address the underlying social and economic concerns affecting the youth, redirecting their energy towards positive civic engagement.

Also, the influence of political actors and inadequate security measures emerged as significant contributors to electoral malpractices. It is imperative to implement stringent regulatory frameworks to curb these malpractices, including the use of violence, threats and monetary incentives to influence voters. Concurrently, reforms within the electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission, are essential, encompassing aspects like the over-registration of political parties, violation of campaign principles and the need for improved funding to ensure the integrity and transparency of the electoral process.

With regard to the media, especially social media, which plays a pivotal role in shaping narratives and political discourse during elections, caution is pertinent. While recognizing its impact, regulations must be established to address the spread of misinformation, hate speech and abuse on the platforms. Emphasizing responsible reporting by traditional and social media outlets is crucial to fostering a positive information environment and preventing the exacerbation of existing societal tensions. Likewise, ethnic and religious considerations, deeply ingrained in Nigerian society, significantly influences voter preferences and patterns. Mitigating the negative impact of identity politics on elections requires strategic

interventions that promote inclusivity and discourage the mobilization of violence along ethnic and religious lines.

Furthermore, the perception of corruption within electoral institutions poses a severe threat to the credibility of the electoral process. To counter this, measures must be implemented to address corruption at all levels, promoting transparent and accountable governance practices. This aligns with the broader discourse on governance, emphasizing the role of corruption in perpetuating socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, inequalities and crime.

The study also highlighted specific electoral irregularities such as vote-buying, ballot box snatching, harassment of voters and unauthorized result announcements. These issues demand immediate attention, with a focus on investigating and rectifying problems associated with the delegate system, including the influx of foreign currency compromising the integrity of primary elections and candidate selection.

Strong civic awareness campaigns may provide voters with the knowledge they require to comprehend the electoral process, understand their rights, and detect irregularities, providing renewed trust and active engagement in future elections. Furthermore, strengthening the authority of the Independent National Electoral Commission is critical to ensuring the integrity of electoral processes. Comprehensive reforms addressing internal issues at Independent National Electoral Commission, such as over-registration of political parties and campaign breaches, are required. Strengthening Independent National Electoral Commission's independence reduces extraneous pressures, allowing for transparent and impartial execution of its electoral mandate.

A major revamp of the security infrastructure is another crucial issue to consider in reducing electoral irregularities. Reforming security measures entails a thorough examination of protocols, technological updates, and better personnel training. Adequate preparation and deployment of security forces are required to successfully discourage and respond to potential disruptions during elections. Most importantly, security forces must maintain political impartiality. Depoliticizing security agencies by clear norms and codes of behaviour is critical to preventing partisan exploitation and restoring public trust.

Equally important is the necessity for an independent court to resolve electoral disputes while upholding the rule of law. Judicial reforms that prioritize efficiency, transparency, and impartiality will improve the judiciary's ability to resolve electoral cases quickly. A strong and impartial judicial system is essential for fair adjudication and maintaining public trust in the electoral process.

Continuous research and monitoring of electoral processes is required. Regular assessments enable the detection of emerging difficulties, allowing for appropriate modifications and improvements. Collaboration among researchers, civil society organizations, and government agencies will help to create a dynamic and adaptive election system.

In summation, the findings of this study stress the need for comprehensive and collaborative efforts to address electoral irregularities in Nigeria. The diverse approach should involve legal reforms, institutional restructuring and societal interventions. As stakeholders come together, including the government, electoral bodies, media and civil society, the goal should be to strengthen democratic practices, uphold the integrity of the electoral system and restore public trust in the democratic process.

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