

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Democracy is widely regarded as a system of government rooted in popular participation, accountability, and the rule of law. Central to any democratic system is the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections through which the people choose their leaders. However, in Nigeria, elections have historically been marred by various forms of electoral malpractice, which continue to undermine the credibility of the democratic process (Adebayo, 2023; Omotola, 2019). Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, successive elections in Nigeria have been characterized by widespread irregularities, including ballot box snatching, vote-buying, underage voting, multiple voting, and intimidation of voters (Ibrahim, 2020).

Electoral malpractice refers to all acts that distort or manipulate the electoral process in order to produce outcomes that do not reflect the true will of the people (Ajayi, 2015). In Nigeria, such practices are often perpetrated by political actors and party agents in collusion with electoral officials and security agencies. These malpractices are not only illegal but also violate democratic norms and contribute to the growing lack of trust in political institutions.

Despite reforms such as the Electoral Act of 2022, and the introduction of technologies like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), electoral malpractice still featured prominently in the 2023 general elections. Observers noted incidents of vote-buying, voter suppression, and delayed transmission of results, all of which raised concerns about the credibility of the election and the legitimacy of the outcome (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). Thus, electoral malpractice remains a persistent threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Understanding its impact is critical to proposing institutional reforms that can restore public confidence in the electoral system and safeguard democratic governance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The persistent occurrence of electoral malpractice in Nigeria poses a serious challenge to democratic development. While elections are meant to reflect the sovereign will of the people, in many instances, Nigerian elections are instead manipulated by political elites to maintain or capture power, often through illegal or unethical means (Olawale, 2023; Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2020). Practices such as vote-buying, ballot stuffing, falsification of results, and the intimidation of voters have become common, particularly during national elections. These malpractices significantly erode public confidence in the electoral process, discourage political participation, and raise questions about the legitimacy of elected officials. Many voters, especially youths and marginalized communities, have grown apathetic, believing that their votes do not count. This undermines one of the foundational principles of democracy: citizen participation and contributes to widespread political disillusionment (CDD, 2023; NDI, 2019).

Furthermore, the consequences of electoral malpractice often go beyond the electoral process itself. They have led to post-election violence, breakdown of law and order, and increased political polarization. For example, reports from the 2023 presidential election documented several cases of electoral violence and the suppression of opposition voices in states such as Lagos, Rivers, and Kano (EU EOM, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023).

Although electoral reforms have attempted to address these challenges through legal and technological innovations, structural and institutional weaknesses continue to enable malpractice. The inefficiency of electoral tribunals, the complicity of security agencies, and the lack of internal democracy within political parties have made accountability difficult to achieve (Omotola, 2019; Adebayo, 2023). Hence, there is a need to critically examine the ongoing effects of electoral malpractice on Nigeria's democratic process and to identify measures that can mitigate its impact and foster more credible, transparent, and inclusive elections.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- i. Examine the various forms and manifestations of electoral malpractice in Nigeria's democratic elections.
- ii. Analyze the effects of electoral malpractice on public trust and political participation in democratic governance.
- iii. Evaluate the role of institutions in preventing or perpetuating electoral malpractice.
- iv. Assess the effectiveness of electoral reforms in curbing malpractice.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What are the major types and patterns of electoral malpractice observed in Nigerian elections?
- ii. How has electoral malpractice affected public trust and voter turnout in Nigeria's democratic process?
- iii. What roles have INEC, political parties, and security agencies played in either enabling or combating electoral malpractice?
- iv. To what extent have technological innovations improved electoral integrity in Nigeria?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in understanding the impact of electoral malpractice on Nigeria's democratic process, particularly in the context of the 2023 presidential election. Electoral malpractice, such as vote-buying, electoral violence, and result manipulation, undermines the credibility of the electoral system, distorts the political landscape, and erodes public trust in democratic institutions.

By analyzing the scope and patterns of electoral malpractice in Nigeria, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on electoral integrity, providing insights for policymakers, election bodies, and civil society organizations aiming to improve electoral processes and strengthen democratic governance in the country. Furthermore, this research will inform future reforms in Nigeria's electoral system, offering valuable lessons for ensuring free, fair, and credible elections.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to the 2023 Nigerian presidential election and focuses specifically on electoral malpractice, such as vote-buying, electoral violence, and the manipulation of election results. The analysis is based on secondary data derived from election reports, official documents, academic publications, media sources, and policy briefs. While the study provides valuable insights at the national level, it may not capture regional variations or specific local incidents that could provide a more comprehensive view of electoral malpractice across Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study does not address the long-term effects of electoral malpractice on Nigeria's democracy or consider historical trends beyond the 2023 election. The reliance on secondary data also poses challenges, as the data may reflect inherent biases in the original sources and may not always provide a complete picture of the electoral process.

1.7 Definition of Terms:

- i. *Electoral Malpractice*: Any illegal or unethical activity that undermines the integrity of the electoral process, including vote-buying, electoral violence, ballot stuffing, result manipulation, and voter intimidation.

- ii. *Democratic Legitimacy*: The acceptance by the public of the fairness, transparency, and legitimacy of an election, which is essential for the stability and credibility of a democratic system.
- iii. *Vote-Buying*: The practice of offering money, goods, or other incentives to voters in exchange for their votes, undermining the fairness of the electoral process.
- iv. *Electoral Violence*: The use of force or intimidation during elections, including physical violence against voters, election officials, or party members, aimed at influencing the election outcome.
- v. *Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)*: A technological innovation introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance voter accreditation by using both fingerprint and facial recognition technologies.
- vi. *INEC Result Viewing (IREV)*: An online platform introduced by INEC for the real-time transmission of election results from polling units to the central server, intended to improve transparency and reduce the potential for manipulation.
- vii. *Institutional Performance*: The functioning and effectiveness of institutions like INEC, the judiciary, and security agencies in ensuring free, fair, and credible elections, and their role in preventing or facilitating electoral malpractice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature on the nature, causes, and consequences of electoral malpractice in Nigeria, as well as its implications for democratic governance. It explores key concepts such as electoral malpractice, democratic participation, and institutional integrity, and draws insights from empirical studies conducted by scholars, observer missions, and civil society organizations. Furthermore, the chapter is guided by theoretical perspectives that help explain the persistence of electoral irregularities and their impact on Nigeria's democratic development.

The chapter is structured into conceptual clarification, empirical review, and theoretical framework. Through this review, the study establishes a foundational understanding of how electoral malpractice impairs the democratic process, drawing from existing scholarly works and official reports.

2.2 Conceptual Clarifications

- i. *Electoral Malpractice*

Electoral malpractice refers to illegal or unethical interference with the electoral process. This includes voter intimidation, vote-buying, ballot box snatching, falsification of results, and other actions that compromise the fairness, transparency, and legitimacy of elections (Ibeanu, 2007). In Nigeria, such practices have become widespread across many electoral cycles, thereby distorting the democratic process.

ii. *Democratic Process*

The democratic process involves the regular conduct of free and fair elections, where citizens exercise their rights to vote and be voted for, participate in governance, and hold elected officials accountable. According to Diamond (2019), the essence of democracy is undermined when electoral outcomes are influenced by fraud and manipulation.

2.3 Empirical Review

Electoral malpractice in Nigeria has taken various forms and has persisted from the First Republic to the present democratic dispensation. Studies by Omotola (2010) and Onapajo (2014) identified vote-buying, ballot stuffing, and violence as the most common electoral offenses. The 2023 general elections were marred by delayed transmission of results, malfunctioning of the BVAS device, and widespread vote suppression in several areas (EU Election Observation Mission Report, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made reforms over time, such as the introduction of smart card readers and more recently, the BVAS and IReV platforms. However, studies show these technological interventions only partially reduced fraud, especially given logistical constraints and digital illiteracy in rural areas (Olowojolu, 2023; Adebayo, 2023).

Electoral malpractice weakens the legitimacy of elected officials and contributes to voter apathy and political disengagement. According to Ogunnoiki (2018), when elections are manipulated, citizens lose confidence in the system, and the foundation of democratic governance is threatened. The 2023 election saw a decline in voter turnout, with only about 27% participation nationally, partly due to widespread disillusionment caused by pre-election violence and allegations of rigging (INEC, 2023).

Furthermore, electoral fraud can fuel political instability and post-election violence. The 2011 post-election crisis, which resulted in the deaths of over 800 people, was largely linked to disputed election results (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The inability of the legal system to effectively prosecute electoral offenders has also contributed to a culture of impunity (Adejumobi, 2020).

INEC has constitutional responsibility to conduct credible elections in Nigeria. While it has improved in some areas, criticisms persist regarding its independence and capacity. Security agencies are also often accused of partisanship and complicity in electoral misconduct (Ajayi, 2019). Political parties, instead of promoting democratic values, often serve as vehicles for elite capture of power through patronage and malpractice (Omotosho, 2014). Civil society organizations such as CDD and YIAGA Africa have played an important role in observing elections and reporting irregularities, but their efforts are often constrained by inadequate funding and security threats (CDD, 2023).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

i. **Democratic Theory**

Democratic Theory serves as a vital framework for understanding the relationship between electoral integrity and the strength of democratic governance. Central to this theory is the idea that democracy is sustained through regular, free, fair, and credible elections where citizens are empowered to choose their leaders without coercion. Joseph Schumpeter's (1942) competitive model of democracy is particularly influential in this regard, emphasizing that democracy operates effectively when elections are competitive and voters can freely select among alternatives.

This model assumes that political equality, active participation, institutional independence, and electoral transparency are present conditions that are often compromised in the Nigerian context. In situations where electoral malpractice such as vote-buying, violence, ballot manipulation, and result falsification occur, the legitimacy of the democratic process is significantly weakened, and public trust in democratic institutions declines.

Democratic Theory is highly relevant to this study, as it provides a lens through which to examine how the integrity of electoral processes in Nigeria particularly during the 2023 presidential election affects broader democratic development. The theory underscores that electoral malpractice not only skews outcomes but also undermines the principle of political representation, discourages voter participation, and contributes to public disillusionment. However, the theory is not without criticism. Scholars such as Hyden (2006) and Held (2006) argue that it tends to idealize democratic processes, assuming conditions that are rarely met in emerging democracies. They contend that the theory focuses too narrowly on electoral competition and fails to consider deeper structural issues like weak institutions, patronage politics, and systemic corruption, which are prevalent in countries like Nigeria.

Despite these criticisms, Democratic Theory remains applicable to the Nigerian context because it provides a clear benchmark for evaluating the gap between democratic ideals and electoral realities. It helps to explain why flawed elections erode legitimacy and can destabilize democratic governance. In essence, this theory supports the central argument of this study: that the persistence of electoral malpractice in Nigeria poses a significant threat to the consolidation of democracy and the credibility of the electoral process. Therefore, Democratic Theory offers both a conceptual and analytical tool for interrogating how malpractice impacts democratic outcomes in Nigeria.

ii. Structural Functionalism

Structural Functionalism offers a valuable perspective on how the stability and effectiveness of democratic systems depend on the proper functioning of key institutions. This theory, primarily developed by scholars like Talcott Parsons and Gabriel Almond, argues that for any political system to function smoothly and remain stable, its institutions must perform their respective roles effectively. In the context of Nigeria, key institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the judiciary, and security agencies are central to ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and maintaining democratic legitimacy.

Structural Functionalism posits that when these institutions fail to act impartially or efficiently, the entire system becomes dysfunctional, leading to instability and undermining democratic consolidation. For instance, if INEC is compromised in overseeing free and fair elections or if security agencies fail to prevent electoral violence, the legitimacy of the democratic process is called into question, as seen in Nigeria's history of electoral malpractices.

The relevance of Structural Functionalism to this study lies in its ability to illuminate how institutional failures directly contribute to electoral malpractice and the erosion of democratic trust in Nigeria. The theory highlights that if the electoral institutions (like INEC), law enforcement bodies, or the judiciary act in a partisan manner or are ineffectively managed, the entire political system risks destabilization, creating conditions for electoral fraud and disenfranchisement. In Nigeria, where corruption, political patronage, and institutional weaknesses persist, the functional performance of these institutions is often compromised, leading to the persistence of electoral malpractice.

Critics of Structural Functionalism argue that the theory is overly deterministic and assumes that the equilibrium of a system can always be restored after dysfunction. Some scholars, such as Giddens (2006), argue that this theory overlooks the power dynamics and conflicts that can exist within institutions, particularly in politically volatile contexts like Nigeria. Furthermore, the theory is critiqued for its neglect of historical and cultural factors that shape how institutions operate. Despite these criticisms, Structural Functionalism remains applicable to the Nigerian electoral context, as it helps to explain the critical role of institutional integrity in ensuring the success of democratic processes. It also highlights the importance of strengthening institutional capacity to address electoral malpractices and foster trust in the democratic system.

iii. Elite Theory

Elite Theory provides a critical lens through which to understand how power dynamics within a society can influence the democratic process. The core idea of Elite Theory is that political decisions, including electoral processes, are largely controlled by a small, powerful group of elites, who use their resources and influence to maintain power and control over the political system.

According to Pareto (1968) and Mosca (1939), political elites shape the direction of governance by manipulating key institutions, including the electoral process, to perpetuate their dominance. In the context of Nigeria, this theory is particularly relevant, as political elites often manipulate the electoral system, control political parties, and exploit institutional weaknesses to secure electoral victories. These elites may engage in various forms of electoral malpractice, including vote-buying, rigging, and using state resources for political gain, all of which undermine the integrity of elections and erode public trust in the democratic system.

The relevance of Elite Theory to this study lies in its explanation of how electoral malpractice in Nigeria is often driven by the strategic actions of powerful individuals and groups who seek to maintain their control over political and economic resources. These elites may collude with other state actors, such as security forces, to suppress opposition, intimidate voters, or manipulate election results. Elite-driven electoral malpractice in Nigeria has been a persistent problem, where elites use their influence to perpetuate corrupt practices and ensure favorable outcomes for their parties. This dynamic results in an unequal political playing field, which severely impacts the fairness and credibility of elections.

Critics of Elite Theory argue that it overly simplifies complex political systems by assuming that power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, thereby ignoring the broader social and structural factors that influence political processes. Some scholars, like C. Wright Mills (1956), have pointed out that power is not just held by elites but also distributed among various social groups, institutions, and civil society actors. Despite these criticisms, Elite Theory remains applicable in the Nigerian context, where a history of political manipulation by elites has been a factor contributing to electoral malpractice and political instability.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approach used to explore the impact of electoral malpractice on the democratic process in Nigeria, particularly focusing on the 2023 presidential election. It also discusses the sampling techniques and data sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research approach used to gather and analyze secondary data.

3.2 Research Design

The research adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, aimed at understanding the extent of electoral malpractice and its effects on democratic governance in Nigeria. The descriptive approach helps to examine the existing state of electoral practices, while the analytical aspect critically assesses how these practices influence the legitimacy and functioning of democracy in Nigeria. This research relies on secondary data obtained from existing literature, government reports, media articles, and academic publications.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The study primarily relies on secondary data due to its relevance and accessibility. The data were gathered from several sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis. First, Reports from Election Observer Missions were collected, including those from international bodies such as the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and ECOWAS, as well as local civil society organizations like YIAGA Africa and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). These reports provided in-depth analysis and observations on the 2023 Nigerian election process. Second, Official Documents from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), including official statements, election results, and performance evaluations, were examined, particularly with a focus on the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal.

Third, academic publications and scholarly articles contributed insights into the theoretical frameworks related to electoral malpractice, democracy, and governance in Nigeria, shedding light on the causes and consequences of electoral malpractice. Fourth, Newspapers and Media Reports from credible outlets provided detailed coverage and analyses of the election events, offering insights into the electoral challenges and public perception. Lastly, policy briefs and reports from research institutions, such as those from the Electoral Institute, NDI, and International IDEA, offered policy analysis and recommendations aimed at improving electoral practices and democratic processes in Nigeria. These sources were critical in building a thorough understanding of the issues surrounding electoral malpractice and its impact on the democratic process.

3.4 Population and Sampling

Since this study relies on secondary data, there is no specific population for data collection. Instead, the focus is on secondary sources related to the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The sample for analysis includes a variety of sources that offer valuable insights into the electoral process and its challenges. These include election reports from observer missions and civil society organizations, which provide independent evaluations of the election's conduct, highlighting key issues such as voter participation, electoral violence, and transparency.

Additionally, documents published by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), such as official statements, election results, and reports on reforms, particularly the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, form an important part of the analysis. Finally, academic and policy papers discussing the impact of electoral malpractice, its root causes, and its broader implications on democratic processes in Nigeria contribute theoretical and empirical insights into the study. Together, these secondary sources provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the dynamics of electoral malpractice and its impact on Nigeria's democracy.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected will be analyzed using qualitative content analysis, a method that will help identify themes, patterns, and trends related to electoral malpractice in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. First, the patterns of electoral malpractice, including issues such as vote-buying, electoral violence, and manipulation of election results. Secondly, the impact of electoral malpractice on democratic legitimacy will be examined, with a particular focus on how these practices erode public trust and undermine the credibility of the electoral process.

Thirdly, the study will assess the performance of institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the judiciary in either preventing or facilitating electoral malpractice. Lastly, the public's perception of the fairness and transparency of the election process will be evaluated, considering the views of both ordinary citizens and political analysts. The data will be organized thematically, allowing for a structured analysis that will identify the findings and emerging trends from the secondary sources.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Since this study relies solely on secondary data, ethical concerns related to primary data collection, such as informed consent or privacy, do not directly apply. However, the researcher ensures that all secondary sources are properly cited and that the findings are presented without misrepresentation. Efforts will be made to maintain the integrity of the sources and to avoid biased interpretations of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of secondary data collected to investigate the impact of electoral malpractice on the democratic process in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the 2023 presidential election. The data, derived from various sources such as election observer reports, INEC documents, academic publications, media reports, and policy briefs, are analyzed to identify the patterns of electoral malpractice and their effects on the legitimacy of the electoral process. The chapter is structured to address the themes identified in the research objectives: the prevalence of electoral malpractice, the role of institutions in preventing or facilitating malpractice, the public perception of the election, and the broader implications for Nigeria's democratic process.

4.2 Results and Discussion

i. Forms and manifestations of electoral malpractice in Nigeria's democratic elections.

Electoral malpractice in Nigeria's democratic elections manifests in several forms, each of which undermines the integrity and credibility of the electoral process. One of the most common forms is vote-buying, where candidates or their agents offer financial incentives or material gifts to voters in exchange for their votes. This practice distorts the electoral process by coercing voters into casting ballots based on financial gain rather than informed political choice, which ultimately impacts the legitimacy of the election (Adebayo, 2023). Electoral violence is another significant manifestation, often carried out by political thugs who intimidate voters, disrupt polling stations, or target political opponents and election officials. This creates an atmosphere of fear that discourages voter participation and erodes confidence in the electoral process.

The 2023 elections saw incidents of violence, particularly in volatile regions, which affected voter turnout and the smooth conduct of the elections (Omoruyi, 2023). Furthermore, voter impersonation and multiple voting have also plagued Nigerian elections, especially before the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). In the past, political agents would facilitate multiple voting by individuals using falsified documents, undermining the accuracy of election results (Olawale, 2023). Manipulation of election results is another form of electoral malpractice, with reports of election results being altered during the collation process, often through the influence of political elites or corrupt officials. The introduction of the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal in 2023 was aimed at reducing such manipulation, yet concerns about technical failures and delays in transmission persisted, leading to doubts about the transparency of the results (Adebayo, 2023).

Inadequate voter education and disenfranchisement are also significant concerns. Many Nigerians, particularly in rural areas, lack sufficient understanding of the electoral process, leading to invalid votes and disenfranchisement. Additionally, logistical issues, such as delays in election material delivery, have also hindered voter participation, contributing to the systemic challenges in conducting free and fair elections (Omoruyi, 2023). Lastly, the use of state resources for campaigning has been a recurrent issue in Nigerian elections. Political incumbents often misuse public funds, government vehicles, and personnel for electioneering purposes, giving them an unfair advantage over their rivals, thus compromising the principle of equal opportunity in the electoral process.

Overall, these various forms of electoral malpractice, such as vote-buying, electoral violence, result manipulation, and voter disenfranchisement, continue to undermine the integrity of Nigeria's democratic elections, despite attempts at reform. These malpractices erode public trust in the electoral system and pose a significant threat to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Omoruyi, 2023; Adebayo, 2023).

ii. Effects of electoral malpractice on public trust and political participation in democratic governance

Electoral malpractice significantly undermines public trust and weakens political participation, both of which are essential components of democratic governance. In Nigeria, persistent irregularities such as vote-buying, voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, and the manipulation of results have led to growing public disillusionment with the electoral process. According to Adebayo (2023), when elections are perceived as being rigged or manipulated in favor of specific political elites, citizens lose confidence in the system's ability to reflect their will, resulting in voter apathy and reduced turnout. For instance, the 2023 presidential election saw widespread reports of vote-buying and violence, especially in Lagos, Rivers, and Kano states, which created an environment of fear and skepticism among voters (Olawale, 2023).

The credibility of electoral institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is also affected when they are perceived to be complicit or ineffective in curbing malpractice. Omoruyi (2023) argues that the failure to transmit results in real-time using the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) during the 2023 elections, as promised, eroded public trust in INEC's commitment to transparency. This erosion of trust has long-term consequences, as citizens may withdraw from political engagement and civic duties, thereby weakening the foundation of democratic governance.

Moreover, youth-led civil society movements that had mobilized for greater electoral accountability such as those linked to the #EndSARS campaign expressed deep frustration with the perceived failure of reforms like BVAS and IReV to prevent manipulation (CDD, 2023). Consequently, the perception that votes do not count discourages active participation, weakens the legitimacy of elected officials, and fosters a sense of alienation among the electorate. This not only threatens democratic consolidation in Nigeria but also opens the door for political instability, as disenfranchised citizens may seek alternative, sometimes undemocratic, means of expressing their grievances (EU EOM, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023).

iii. Role of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and security agencies in either preventing or perpetuating electoral malpractice

The role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and security agencies in Nigeria's electoral process is central to either curbing or perpetuating electoral malpractice. INEC, as the electoral umpire, is mandated to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. Over the years, INEC has introduced reforms such as the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal to enhance transparency.

However, during the 2023 general elections, INEC faced criticism for the failure to effectively utilize these technologies, particularly in the transmission of presidential election results. This shortcoming undermined public confidence and raised suspicions of deliberate manipulation (YIAGA Africa, 2023; EU EOM, 2023). The inconsistency in the application of election guidelines, as noted by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023), further cast doubt on INEC's neutrality and effectiveness.

Political parties also play a dual role. Ideally, they are vehicles for political mobilization and democratic engagement. However, in practice, many Nigerian political parties are deeply implicated in electoral malpractice. They often sponsor thugs, engage in vote-buying, and manipulate electoral officials to gain undue advantage (Omodia & Egwemi, 2022). The 2023 elections witnessed rampant reports of voter suppression and inducement in strongholds of opposing parties, with major parties accused of orchestrating these malpractices to tilt results in their favor (Olawale, 2023).

Security agencies, including the police and military, are responsible for maintaining order and protecting voters, materials, and electoral officials. While there have been instances of professionalism, there is significant evidence of bias and collusion with politicians. In some regions during the 2023 elections, security forces were accused of either failing to intervene in cases of violence or actively aiding political thugs (CDD, 2023). The selective enforcement of the law, especially in politically sensitive areas, has contributed to a perception that security agencies are not neutral actors but are often tools in the hands of the ruling elite (Omoruyi, 2023).

iv. Effectiveness of Electoral reforms in curbing malpractice.

The effectiveness of recent electoral reforms in Nigeria particularly the deployment of technology such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) has been a subject of intense public and scholarly scrutiny. These reforms were introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance the transparency, credibility, and efficiency of the electoral process, especially in response to long standing issues of voter impersonation, result manipulation, and general electoral fraud.

The BVAS device was designed to perform dual functions: verifying the authenticity of a voter's Permanent Voter Card (PVC) and using biometric data (fingerprints and facial recognition) to accredit voters before casting their ballots. On the other hand, the IReV portal allows for real-time transmission and viewing of results from polling units, thus reducing human interference in the collation process. Both technologies were seen as a significant step toward addressing past malpractices associated with manual accreditation and result manipulation (Adebayo & Oluwole, 2023).

In practice, however, the 2023 general elections revealed a mixed outcome regarding the effectiveness of these technologies. While the BVAS worked effectively in many areas to prevent multiple voting and underage voting, technical and operational challenges persisted. In some polling units, the devices failed to function properly due to connectivity issues, power shortages, or inadequate training of INEC staff (YIAGA Africa, 2023). These operational issues led to delays and, in some cases, the disenfranchisement of voters.

The most significant criticism arose from the inconsistent use of the IReV portal. While INEC had assured Nigerians of real-time result uploads from polling units, especially for the presidential election, many results were either not uploaded promptly or were completely unavailable on the portal during the critical collation phase. This undermined public trust in the credibility of the process and raised allegations of deliberate manipulation (EU EOM, 2023; CDD, 2023). The inability of INEC to offer convincing explanations or corrective measures further weakened confidence in the electoral reforms.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the adoption of BVAS and IReV did yield some positive outcomes. They improved transparency at the polling unit level and discouraged gross over-voting in many places. Civil society organizations and observers agree that, despite the implementation flaws, these technologies represent progress and should be strengthened rather than abandoned (Ajayi & Akinola, 2023).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined the impact of electoral malpractice on Nigeria's democratic process, with a focus on the 2023 presidential election. The findings revealed that electoral malpractice remains pervasive, manifesting in forms such as vote-buying, electoral violence, voter impersonation, result manipulation, disenfranchisement, and abuse of state resources. These practices severely undermine the integrity of elections and compromise democratic legitimacy.

The study also found that electoral malpractice erodes public trust in electoral institutions, reduces political participation, and fosters voter apathy. Institutions such as INEC, political parties, and security agencies were shown to play critical roles in either preventing or facilitating malpractice, depending on their neutrality and operational efficiency. While electoral reforms, particularly the introduction of BVAS and IReV, were steps toward enhancing transparency, their inconsistent implementation during the 2023 elections significantly limited their impact. Public

confidence was particularly shaken by INEC's failure to upload results in real time, undermining the perceived credibility of the reforms.

5.2 Conclusion

Electoral malpractice poses a major threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Despite legal reforms and technological innovations, entrenched political interests and institutional weaknesses continue to facilitate irregularities. As evidenced in the 2023 presidential election, when electoral processes are compromised, the public loses confidence in democratic institutions, leading to disengagement and political instability. While technologies like BVAS and IReV offer promise, their inconsistent application reflects deeper systemic issues, including poor institutional capacity and lack of political will for reform. A sustainable democratic process requires not only technological innovation but also political commitment, institutional integrity, and active civic participation.

5.3 Recommendations

Electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), should be strengthened by improving the technical and logistical capacity of its staff and infrastructure to ensure the consistent and effective use of electoral technologies. Clear communication and transparency in the conduct of electoral activities will further help build public trust. The legal framework guiding elections must be reinforced to ensure the unbiased prosecution of electoral offenders, including politicians and public officials. A robust legal system with enforceable sanctions will serve as a deterrent against future violations. Political parties must be regulated to curtail their role in promoting malpractice. INEC should strictly enforce internal party democracy, ensure transparent candidate selection processes, and monitor campaign financing.

Additionally, security agencies need to be professionalized through training and oversight to guarantee their neutrality and effectiveness during elections. Establishing independent monitoring bodies can help prevent their manipulation for political gain. Moreover, voter education and civic engagement must be expanded, especially in underserved rural communities, to reduce invalid votes and promote informed participation. This should be a joint effort between government agencies and civil society organizations. Technological advancement and infrastructure must also be prioritized, with proper pre-election testing of devices like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and contingency plans to mitigate technical failures. Finally, independent audits and evaluations of electoral reforms and processes after each election cycle are crucial for ensuring accountability and guiding continuous improvements.

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