CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Democracy as a system of government, is sustained by the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections that empower citizens to choose their leaders and participate actively in governance. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and one of its largest democracies, ties the promise of democracy closely to the integrity of its electoral systems. Since transitioning to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria's elections have been a key indicator of its democratic progress, showcasing both its successes and ongoing challenges. Electoral integrity plays a vital role in this process, ensuring the legitimacy of elected officials and fostering public trust in the democratic system. The 2023 presidential election marked a pivotal point in the country's political development, occurring at a time when citizens and stakeholders were calling for greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Held in a politically charged atmosphere marked by rising youth activism, economic difficulties, and security concerns, the election added layers of complexity to the process, subjecting the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other institutions to heightened scrutiny.

A notable feature of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election was the implementation of technological innovations mandated by the Electoral Act of 2022. Among the key reforms were the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results, designed to reduce electoral fraud, improve credibility, and ensure that election outcomes accurately reflected the will of the people (INEC, 2022).

However, despite these advancements, the election encountered significant challenges, including allegations of vote-buying, irregularities in result collation, logistical failures, and disputes over the outcomes. The election also ignited national debates surrounding issues of inclusivity, voter turnout, and the influence of political parties on election results. A third-force political movement emerged, disrupting the traditional two-party system and signaling a shift in voter behavior and expectations for transformative leadership. In light of these developments, questions regarding the strength and independence of Nigeria's democratic institutions, the rule of law, and the resilience of its democratic culture have come into sharp focus. This study critically assesses the extent to which the 2023 presidential election adhered to electoral integrity principles and its broader implications for the country's democratic consolidation.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, serving as a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power and an instrument for reflecting the collective will of the people. However, the integrity of electoral processes remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, often undermined by logistical inefficiencies, voter suppression, electoral malpractice, and political interference. Despite the enactment of the Electoral Act of 2022, which introduced reforms such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic transmission of results, concerns about the credibility of elections persist. The 2023 presidential election was anticipated to be a turning point for Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

However, it was marred by various allegations of irregularities. Observers reported incidents of vote-buying, with evidence of financial inducement to voters in several states, undermining the principle of free choice (Premium Times, 2023). There were also cases of disruptions at polling units, including violence and the destruction of electoral materials in parts of Lagos and Rivers States, which disenfranchised voters (Punch, 2023). Additionally, delays in the electronic transmission of results led to widespread skepticism about the credibility of the process, with opposition parties and civil society groups questioning the transparency of the collation process (Channels TV, 2023).

Voter turnout in the 2023 election was reported at just 29%, one of the lowest in Nigeria's democratic history, despite an increase in voter registration and heightened political awareness before the election (INEC, 2023). This paradox highlights deep-seated issues such as disenfranchisement, a lack of trust in the electoral system, and barriers to inclusivity, particularly for women and marginalized groups. Moreover, the emergence of a third-force political movement, represented by candidates outside the dominant two-party system, revealed growing voter disillusionment with traditional political structures. \

However, it also exposed the vulnerabilities of an electorate grappling with polarization and the challenges of navigating a complex political landscape (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023). The recurring deficits in electoral integrity threaten Nigeria's democratic stability and the legitimacy of its governance. These challenges not only undermine the credibility of elected officials but also erode public trust in the democratic process, potentially discouraging future participation. If unresolved, these issues could exacerbate political tensions, as evidenced by post-election protests and legal disputes challenging the declared results (BBC News, 2023).

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to assess the extent to which the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria adhered to principles of electoral integrity and its implications for the country's democratic consolidation. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

i. To analyze the role and effectiveness of the Electoral Act of 2022.
ii. To assess the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in managing the 2023 election.
iii. To investigate the challenges encountered during the election.
iv. To explore the impact of emerging political movements and public perceptions of electoral fairness on the legitimacy of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

1.4. Research Questions

i. How effective were the Electoral Act of 2022 reforms?
ii. How did the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) perform in managing the 2023 election?
iii. What were the challenges encountered during the 2023 presidential election?
iv. How did emerging political movements and public perceptions of electoral fairness influence the legitimacy of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study is significant for its potential to advance understanding and improvement of Nigeria's democratic processes. By critically evaluating the effectiveness of the Electoral Act of 2022, including innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic result transmission, the study will provide insights into the successes and gaps in the implementation of these reforms. It highlights the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), identifying strengths and weaknesses that can guide efforts to enhance the capacity, independence, and transparency of Nigeria's electoral institutions.

Furthermore, the study addresses systemic issues such as vote-buying, violence, and logistical failures, offering solutions to restore public confidence in the electoral process and strengthen democratic participation. By focusing on voter turnout and inclusivity, particularly among youth, women, and marginalized groups, the research identifies barriers to participation and proposes strategies to foster a more representative and accessible electoral process. Additionally, it examines the role of emerging political movements and their impact on voter behavior, providing valuable insights into Nigeria's evolving political dynamics and their implications for democratic consolidation.

Given Nigeria's influential position in African politics, the study's findings have regional significance, offering lessons for other emerging democracies on addressing challenges to electoral integrity and stability. The research also provides actionable recommendations for stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and international observers, to enhance the credibility, inclusivity, and transparency of elections. Academically, it contributes to the literature on democracy and electoral integrity, serving as a valuable resource for scholars, researchers, and students. Ultimately, the study seeks to strengthen Nigeria's democratic foundations by addressing electoral deficiencies and fostering a fair, inclusive, and transparent electoral system.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on evaluating the state of democracy and the level of electoral integrity in Nigeria, using the 2023 presidential election as a case study. It specifically aims to examine the conduct of the election in relation to international standards of free, fair, and credible elections. The study also analyzes the roles played by key stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, the media, and civil society organizations.

In addition, it investigates reports of irregularities, voter suppression, and technological failures particularly issues surrounding the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal. Public perception of the electoral process will be assessed through data gathered from election observers, monitors, and surveys. Geographically, the study adopts a national perspective, though it

may draw specific examples from selected states or regions to highlight observable patterns. Temporally, it is limited to events spanning from the pre-election period in late 2022, the election day on 25th February 2023, and the immediate post-election reactions up to April 2023.

However, certain limitations are acknowledged in the course of this research. One major constraint is data accessibility, as limited access to official documents or internal reports from INEC or security agencies may hinder detailed institutional analysis. Moreover, media and observer reports could carry bias, potentially affecting the objectivity of secondary data. The study is also temporally constrained, focusing only on a short window around the 2023 election and not covering longer-term developments or reforms. Although designed as a national study, practical challenges may limit comprehensive data collection across all six geopolitical zones. Furthermore, due to the political sensitivity of electoral matters in Nigeria, some respondents may be reluctant to provide honest or complete information.

1.7 Definition of Terms

i. *Democracy:* A system of government in which power is vested in the people and exercised either directly or through elected representatives. In this study, it refers to Nigeria's democratic framework and processes.

ii. *Electoral Integrity:* The adherence of electoral processes to democratic principles, including transparency, fairness, inclusivity, and accountability. It encompasses the conduct of elections, the behavior of stakeholders, and public trust in the system.

iii. *Presidential Election:* A national electoral process in which citizens vote to elect the President. The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria involved major political parties and was conducted by INEC on 25th February 2023.

iv. *INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission):* The federal body responsible for organizing elections in Nigeria. INEC's role in the 2023 election is central to this study.

v. *BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System):* A device introduced by INEC for biometric verification of voters and electronic transmission of results. Its performance in 2023 has been widely debated.

vi. *IReV Portal:* INEC's Result Viewing platform that was meant to display real-time results from polling units to ensure transparency.

vii. *Election Malpractice*: Any action that violates the electoral laws and undermines the credibility of elections, such as vote buying, ballot box snatching, or falsification of results.

viii. *Observer Mission:* Local or international groups that monitor elections and provide reports on their conduct and fairness. Examples include the EU, ECOWAS, and local CSOs.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature on the concepts of democracy and electoral integrity, with particular attention to how these concepts apply in the Nigerian context. It explores empirical and theoretical contributions that help situate the 2023 presidential election within broader debates on democratic governance, electoral processes, and institutional performance. The chapter is divided into thematic sections that cover the conceptual framework, empirical literature, and theoretical perspectives underpinning the study.

2.2. Conceptual clarification

2.2.1 Democracy

Democracy is widely regarded as a system of governance where the power lies with the people, who exercise it directly or through elected representatives. It emphasizes the principles of equality, participation, accountability, and the rule of law. A core element of democracy is electoral competition, which ensures that leadership and policies reflect the will of the majority while safeguarding minority rights (Britannica, 2024; V-Dem, 2024). Democracy is a system of governance where leaders are chosen through elections, with the aim of ensuring that governmental policies reflect and address the preferences of the public (Amin and Ambali, 2020). It is characterized by mechanisms that allow citizens to influence policy decisions, either directly or through elected representatives. The concept emphasizes responsiveness to public opinion n and the protection of individual freedoms, making it a foundational pillar of participatory governance (Przeworski et al., 2000; Norris, 2014). Yio (2012) sees democracy as "a system of government based on the acquisition of authority from the people, institutionalization of the rule of law, emphasis on the legitimacy of rules, availability of choices and cherished values as well as accountability in governance. Ukase (2014) sees democracy as a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a competitive struggle for the votes of citizens. It is a situation in which people have the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the men who are to rule them.

2.2.2 Election

Diamond (2020) describes elections as the primary method by which a polity expresses its democratic will, with citizens' preferences being translated into political leadership and public policy. He emphasizes that for elections to strengthen democracy, they must be conducted with integrity to prevent manipulation and ensure outcomes reflect the people's will. Przeworski,, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi, (2000) define elections as a formal method of selecting individuals for political office. They argue that elections function as a peaceful means for resolving political conflicts, allowing for a legitimate transfer of power, provided they are free and fair.

Huntington (1991) views elections as essential for ensuring political stability and legitimacy within a democratic system. He suggests that elections are not only about choosing representatives but also about maintaining peaceful governance and allowing leaders to remain accountable to the electorate. Dahl (1998) defines an election as a process where citizens choose their leaders through free and fair competition. He argues that elections are fundamental to democracy, as they offer mechanisms for government accountability and public participation in decision-making processes.

2.2.3 Integrity

Larrabee (2016) defines integrity as "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles." In this context, integrity involves adhering to ethical standards and being consistent in one's actions, ensuring alignment between one's words and deeds. McCracken (2012) describes integrity as the adherence to ethical guidelines and the transparent operation of institutions. Integrity in organizations ensures that decisions and actions are aligned with core values, fostering trust and accountability. Integrity involves an individual's internal alignment between their ethical

beliefs and actions. It is not just a matter of external conduct, but also of the inner conviction to do what is right, regardless of external pressures (Williams, 2010). Mill (1863) posits that integrity is intrinsic to personal well-being and societal trust.

2.2.4 Electoral Integrity

Norris (2014) defines electoral integrity as the "absence of serious flaws in the electoral process" and highlights that elections should be free, fair, competitive, and transparent. She emphasizes that it also involves a broader context of legal and procedural norms that ensure elections are conducted in a way that the public trusts and respects the outcome. Reynolds (2010) defines electoral integrity as the degree to which an election is free from fraud, manipulation, and bias. He emphasizes that electoral processes must reflect the true preferences of voters and be conducted in a way that upholds democratic norms and values.

Ziblatt (2006) connects electoral integrity to the consolidation of democracy. He defines it as the adherence to rules that ensure elections are competitive, inclusive, and allow for political pluralism. He notes that the legitimacy of elections is based on the degree to which they are conducted with fairness and without disenfranchisement. Wattenberg (2015) defines electoral integrity as the quality of elections in terms of both technical aspects (such as vote counting and transparency) and political factors (such as the fairness of campaigns and the freedom of the press). He also notes that public perception plays a crucial role in determining the integrity of elections.

Diamond (2008) views electoral integrity as the quality of electoral processes that contribute to the legitimacy of democratic governance. He argues that electoral integrity must be supported by strong legal frameworks, the protection of civil liberties, and the absence of political violence or coercion. Dahl (1971) refers to electoral integrity within the broader context of "polyarchy" or the ideal of democracy. He defines it as a system in which elections are competitive, inclusive, and fair, without restrictions or manipulations that compromise the legitimacy of the electoral process.

2.3 Empirical Review

Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, and Okeke (2023) conducted an analysis of democracy and Nigeria's 2023 general elections, considering a wide range of factors that influenced both the process and outcome. The 2023 election posed a critical test for Nigeria's democratic progress, as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced new technologies like the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) to enhance the election process. The Electoral Act 2022 also introduced reforms intended to improve electoral organization and increase transparency in result reporting. However, despite these innovations, the election was conducted under a tense and disputed atmosphere, marked by insecurity and controversial government policies Using a qualitative approach, based on secondary data and historical analysis, the study found that the 2023 election failed to meet Nigerians' reasonable expectations. Numerous election observation groups reported significant issues, including delays in distributing Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), malfunctioning election technology, vote manipulation, political violence, and a lack of transparency in result collation and declaration.

The election was further hindered by Nigeria's broader issues of poverty, corruption, insecurity, and inadequate electoral infrastructure, which have historically affected voter participation. The study recommended strengthening the independence of the electoral body, introducing measures to prevent fraud and manipulation, and ensuring that future elections genuinely reflect the will of the people. By addressing these concerns, Nigeria's future general elections could achieve greater success, improving both the democratic process and post-election stability.

Abumbe and Owa (2024) conducted a study on democracy and electoral integrity in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, examining the complex factors that influenced both the election process and its outcome. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study drew data from secondary sources, including textbooks, journals, internet resources, the official INEC website, and over 26 Nigerian daily newspapers. These materials were contextually analyzed within the context of the topic. The findings revealed that, despite the optimism generated by INEC's introduction of improved electoral technologies, such as the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV), the 2023 elections were conducted in a difficult environment marked by widespread insecurity, uncertain government policies, logistical and operational challenges, malfunctioning technologies, violence, voter intimidation, electoral fraud, and a lack of transparency in result collation and communication. The study recommended strengthening INEC's independence to ensure a fraud-free election that reflects the true will of Nigerians, thus bolstering democracy and promoting more stable future elections.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts Electoral Systems Theory**,** developed primarily by Arend Lijphart (1984) and Robert A. Dahl (1989), explores how the design of an electoral system affects democratic outcomes, political representation, and electoral integrity. The theory argues that the structure of the electoral system whether majoritarian, proportional, or mixed shapes party systems, voter behavior, and the overall quality of democracy. One key assumption of the theory is that the electoral system influences how well election outcomes reflect the preferences of the electorate. For instance, proportional representation systems tend to provide more inclusive and accurate representation of political parties, while majoritarian systems, such as first-past-the-post, often result in a "winner-takes-all" outcome that can marginalize minority voices (Lijphart, 1984; Dahl, 1989).

The theory also emphasizes electoral integrity, assuming that the design of the system can either enhance or undermine the transparency and fairness of elections. Systems with clear procedures for vote counting, result collation, and fraud prevention are thought to bolster electoral legitimacy. In the case of Nigeria's 2023 general election, the introduction of technologies such as Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV) aimed to enhance transparency and reduce electoral fraud.

However, despite these technological advances, the election faced numerous challenges, such as insecurity, violence, and malfunctioning technology, which compromised its integrity. According to Electoral Systems Theory, while reforms like BVAS and IREV were designed to improve transparency, their success depended on effective implementation and the broader institutional capacity to uphold fairness and prevent fraud (Abumbe & Owa, 2024; Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, & Okeke, 2023).

The theory also assumes that the electoral system influences voter behavior and participation. Fairer, more transparent systems are assumed to encourage greater voter engagement and trust in the election process. In Nigeria's 2023 elections, despite technological reforms, issues like political violence and logistical failures led to decreased voter confidence and turnout. Electoral Systems Theory thus underscores the importance of a well-designed system in ensuring both electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy (Lijphart, 1984; Dahl, 1989).

The Critics of Electoral Systems Theory argue that the theory overemphasizes the role of electoral system design in shaping democratic outcomes and electoral integrity, often neglecting other important factors. One criticism is that the theory places too much focus on structural design, such as whether an electoral system is majoritarian, proportional, or mixed, as the primary determinant of election outcomes and democratic functioning. While system design is certainly important, critics like Hayek (1988) and Reed (1997) point out that factors such as political culture, socioeconomic conditions, historical legacies of authoritarianism, and the strength of political institutions also play significant roles in shaping electoral integrity. In countries like Nigeria, these factors often complicate the effectiveness of electoral reforms, such as those implemented in the 2023 elections, where despite technological improvements, challenges like violence, insecurity, and political manipulation persisted.

Another major critique is the limited consideration of political context in the theory. Critics argue that Electoral Systems Theory fails to account for the broader political environment, including issues such as ethnic divisions, the role of political parties, and the legacies of past regimes. This is particularly pertinent in developing democracies, where the design of an electoral system alone may not be sufficient to ensure free and fair elections. Scholars like Norris (2014) contend that political factors such as media influence, political polarization, and the level of voter education play a crucial role in determining voter behavior and participation, which the theory overlooks.

Furthermore, the theory has been criticized for oversimplifying voter behavior**.** It assumes that more proportional or transparent systems automatically lead to better voter engagement and higher participation. However, critics argue that social and political factors, such as media coverage, political violence, and institutional trust, are often more decisive in shaping how voters behave and whether they turn out to vote. In Nigeria's 2023 elections, for example, despite technological reforms designed to enhance transparency, issues like low voter turnout and widespread violence highlighted the limitations of focusing solely on electoral system design. Finally, technological reliance is another point of critique.

While the theory assumes that technological reforms like BVAS and IREV will significantly enhance electoral integrity, critics like Farrell (2001) argue that these tools alone cannot guarantee fair elections in weak institutional environments. In countries with fragile institutions, such as Nigeria, electoral reforms may be undermined by issues like corruption, lack of political will, and logistical challenges. Therefore, critics maintain that Electoral Systems Theory oversimplifies the complexities of ensuring electoral integrity, relying too heavily on system design and technology without fully considering the broader political and institutional factors that shape election outcomes.

Electoral Systems Theory remains highly relevant for analyzing democratic processes, particularly in the context of understanding electoral integrity and outcomes. The theory provides a framework for examining how the design of electoral systems impacts political representation, party dynamics, and the transparency of elections, all of which are crucial for evaluating the integrity of an election process. As Lijphart (1984) and Dahl (1989) argue, the electoral system shapes the relationship between voters and political parties, influencing the legitimacy of electoral results and democratic outcomes. This makes the theory essential for understanding the mechanisms through which electoral systems can either promote or hinder democratic consolidation, particularly in developing democracies like Nigeria.

In the context of the 2023 Nigerian general elections**,** the theory offers insights into how electoral reforms, such as the introduction of Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV), could potentially enhance transparency and reduce fraud. Despite these technological innovations, the challenges faced—such as political violence, insecurity, and malfunctioning technologies underscore the relevance of the theory, as it emphasizes that electoral system design alone is insufficient without strong institutions, political will, and a stable political environment (Abumbe & Owa, 2024; Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, & Okeke, 2023).

Moreover, the theory's focus on the relationship between electoral systems and voter behavior is particularly relevant in contexts where voter engagement is shaped by factors beyond system design, such as political polarization and social divisions. For instance, Norris (2014) highlights that despite a well-designed electoral system, electoral integrity can still be compromised by issues such as voter disenfranchisement, apathy, or manipulation factors often present in Nigerian elections.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the study titled "Democracy and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria: An Assessment of the 2023 Presidential Election." The study relies solely on secondary data, and this chapter explains the research design, sources of data, methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the ethical considerations involved in handling publicly available data.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative content analysis design based entirely on secondary data sources. This approach is suitable for evaluating documented evidence, reports, and analyses that relate to the conduct and credibility of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The design allows for the systematic interpretation of textual information to identify patterns and draw conclusions about electoral integrity and democratic performance.

3.3 Sources of Data

The data for this study were obtained from a wide range of secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Key among these sources were reports from international and local election observer missions, including the European Union (EU), African Union (AU), ECOWAS, YIAGA Africa, and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), which provided detailed evaluations of the electoral process. Additionally, official documents and statements from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were consulted, such as election result summaries, press releases, and assessments of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal.

Academic publications and peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on democracy, electoral governance, and Nigeria's political system also contributed to the depth of the study. Furthermore, newspaper articles and credible media outlets were analyzed for their coverage of events before, during, and after the election. Lastly, policy briefs and working papers published by think tanks, advocacy organizations, and research institutions such as the Electoral Institute, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and International IDEA were reviewed to provide additional insights and expert opinions on the credibility and integrity of the electoral process.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The secondary data were gathered through a systematic review of literature and document analysis. Key search terms such as "2023 Nigeria Presidential Election," "INEC performance," "BVAS and IReV in Nigeria," "electoral malpractice," and "observer reports on Nigerian elections" were used to locate relevant materials. Documents were selected based on their credibility, relevance, and publication within the 2015–2024 timeframe.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis. The collected documents were coded and examined to identify recurring themes such as transparency, voter suppression, technology performance, credibility of results, institutional roles, and public perception. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Emphasis was placed on comparing different perspectives and corroborating findings across multiple sources.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Although primary data were not collected, ethical standards were still observed in the use of secondary data. All sources were properly cited and referenced to give credit to the original authors. Only publicly available and verifiable documents were used, and care was taken to ensure that interpretations remained objective, fair, and academically sound.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the data gathered from secondary sources to evaluate the state of democracy and the level of electoral integrity in Nigeria, with a focus on the 2023 presidential election. The analysis is structured thematically, drawing on credible observer reports, INEC official documents, academic literature, media coverage, and policy briefs. Emphasis is placed on key issues such as the conduct of the election, the performance of electoral technologies, the role of major stakeholders, reported irregularities, and public perception of the electoral process.

4.2 Results and Discussion

The Electoral Act of 2022 introduced crucial reforms designed to enhance the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process, particularly through the adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results. The BVAS was intended to combine fingerprint and facial recognition technology for voter accreditation, ensuring that only eligible voters participated in the election. This system was aimed at addressing issues such as voter impersonation and multiple voting, which had marred previous elections. The BVAS proved effective in largely preventing voter fraud and streamlining the accreditation process.

However, there were occasional technical glitches and delays, especially in remote areas, which hindered its full potential (Omoruyi, 2023). Alongside BVAS, the reform also introduced the electronic transmission of results through the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). This innovation allowed for the direct upload of polling unit results to a central server in real time, improving transparency and reducing opportunities for manipulation during result collation. The electronic system played a key role in building public trust by enabling voters and stakeholders to track results as they were reported from polling units.

However, challenges such as poor internet connectivity in some areas led to delays in real-time transmission (Olawale, 2023). Additionally, concerns about the security and reliability of the IReV platform emerged, as some results were delayed in being uploaded, raising questions about the overall transparency of the process (Adebayo, 2023).

The performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in overseeing the 2023 presidential election was a pivotal element in the overall success of the election, particularly in terms of its logistical preparedness, result collation, and transparency. INEC made significant efforts to ensure the timely delivery of election materials, with most ballot papers, polling booths, and voting machines arriving as scheduled. However, logistical challenges persisted, especially in remote and rural areas, leading to delays at some polling units (Adebayo, 2023). Despite these setbacks, INEC's ability to manage the complex logistics of such a large-scale election was largely praised.

Regarding result collation, the introduction of electronic result transmission through the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) and the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) were key reforms designed to enhance transparency and minimize fraud. These technological innovations allowed for the real-time upload of results from polling units, providing the public and stakeholders with immediate access to election data. While these measures improved transparency, challenges remained. Some regions experienced delays in result transmission due to poor internet connectivity or technical issues with the IReV platform, and there were reports of malfunctioning BVAS machines (Olawale, 2023). These delays and technical problems created an atmosphere of uncertainty, with some stakeholders questioning the reliability of the results and the overall transparency of the election process.

Despite these concerns, the adoption of BVAS and electronic result transmission marked a significant advancement in ensuring greater accountability and fostering public trust in the electoral process. Nevertheless, allegations of irregularities and discrepancies in the result collation process in certain regions raised doubts about the full effectiveness of the system (Omoruyi, 2023).

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was marred by several challenges that affected voter participation and public confidence, despite significant reforms implemented by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These challenges included vote-buying, electoral violence, logistical failures, and other irregularities, all of which undermined the integrity of the election and created an atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust. One of the most pervasive issues during the election was vote-buying, which remained a significant challenge despite efforts to curb it.

In various regions, particularly in the South-South and South-East, reports indicated that political parties and candidates resorted to paying voters in exchange for their votes. For example, in some areas of Lagos and Rivers states, voters were allegedly offered cash, food, and other incentives to vote for specific candidates. This practice not only undermined the fairness of the election but also discouraged many eligible voters from participating, as it created a sense of disillusionment and a belief that the electoral process could be easily manipulated. Vote-buying contributed to the perception that the election was not a true reflection of the people's will, negatively impacting voter turnout and confidence (Adebayo, 2023).

Electoral violence was another significant challenge that disrupted the election process in 2023. There were numerous reports of violent clashes between political party supporters, as well as attacks on INEC officials and election observers. For instance, in Ogun and Enugu states, armed thugs reportedly attacked polling stations, vandalized voting equipment, and intimidated voters. In Lagos, there were also incidents where political loyalists clashed with opposing supporters, leading to injuries and the disruption of voting in some areas. In certain parts of the North, particularly in Kano and Katsina, violence escalated to the point where voters and election staff were forced to flee polling units, preventing the completion of voting procedures. This violence not only disrupted voting in several polling units but also caused some voters to abstain out of fear for their safety.

The widespread violence in regions like Rivers and Bayelsa further diminished public confidence in the election's integrity, casting doubt on its ability to provide a peaceful and fair environment for democratic participation (Olawale, 2023). Logistical failures also played a key role in undermining the credibility of the election. Despite INEC's efforts to distribute election materials on time, there were delays in the arrival of materials at polling units, particularly in rural areas.

For example, in rural regions of Kaduna and Benue, election materials did not reach polling units until several hours after the scheduled start of voting, causing delays in polling station openings and long waiting times for voters. In some locations, technical issues with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) further delayed voter accreditation. In places like Akwa Ibom and Kogi, malfunctioning BVAS machines contributed to longer waiting periods, frustrating many voters and discouraging them from casting their ballots. These logistical problems created confusion and dissatisfaction, negatively affecting voter turnout and participation, particularly among those who were unable to vote due to delays (Omoruyi, 2023).

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election saw the rise of emerging political movements that had a significant impact on public perceptions of electoral fairness and the legitimacy of the electoral process. These movements, largely driven by younger voters and civil society groups, raised profound concerns about the state of democracy and the perceived integrity of the electoral system. Their influence was multifaceted, reflecting a push for greater political inclusion and a challenge to the established political order. Notably, movements like #EndSARS and various youth led advocacy groups played a crucial role in mobilizing voters, particularly among younger Nigerians.

For example, the #EndSARS movement, initially sparked by protests against police brutality, quickly expanded to address broader issues of governance, corruption, and youth disenfranchisement. The movement, along with other grassroots efforts, used social media platforms and on-the-ground campaigns to call for electoral reform and greater accountability from political leaders. Their efforts were viewed as a challenge to the political establishment, demanding not only a change in leadership but also in the way elections were conducted, particularly calling for more transparency, fairness, and a reduction in electoral malpractices such as vote-buying and rigging (Adebayo, 2023).

However, despite the significant efforts of these movements to push for electoral reforms and greater political participation, public perceptions of electoral fairness remained a persistent issue. Many Nigerians, especially youth, expressed deep skepticism about the integrity of the 2023 presidential election. Concerns over vote-buying, electoral violence, and delayed result transmission were widespread. For instance, reports from Lagos and Rivers states indicated that vote-buying was rampant, while violence in parts of Kano and Imo led to the disruption of voting in some polling stations. The introduction of technological reforms like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic result transmission system were initially viewed as promising steps toward ensuring transparency.

However, issues such as malfunctioning BVAS machines in Ekiti and the delayed transmission of results from certain polling units in Ogun raised doubts about the process's fairness (Olawale, 2023). These challenges, combined with ongoing allegations of electoral fraud, significantly impacted the perceived legitimacy of the election in the eyes of many Nigerians.

The public's perception of electoral fairness significantly impacted the legitimacy of the 2023 presidential election and broader democratic governance in Nigeria. For many Nigerians, the election was viewed not as a genuine reflection of the people's will, but as yet another example of manipulation by entrenched political interests seeking to maintain power. Reports from various states, including Rivers and Ebonyi, highlighted widespread concerns over vote-buying and electoral violence, which only fueled perceptions that the election was rigged. In particular, accusations of vote-buying in Lagos, where voters were allegedly offered cash in exchange for their votes, and in Kwara, where reports suggested that political thugs intimidated voters, contributed to the belief that the election outcome was influenced by non-democratic means. As a result, voter confidence in the electoral system was severely undermined, with many Nigerians questioning whether future elections could truly reflect the democratic will.

The delayed transmission of results, especially in states like Ogun and Benue, and reports of BVAS malfunctions in areas such as Akwa Ibom, further compounded these concerns. This erosion of trust in the electoral process is especially troubling for the long-term health of Nigerian democracy. If elections are perceived as fraudulent or manipulated, it can lead to a disillusioned electorate, lower voter turnout, and, ultimately, undermine the democratic principles of free and fair elections (Omoruyi, 2023).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study revealed that the Electoral Act of 2022 introduced key reforms aimed at improving electoral integrity in Nigeria, particularly through the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). BVAS proved instrumental in reducing incidents of voter fraud and streamlining the accreditation process, while the IReV enhanced transparency by allowing real-time result uploads. However, both technologies faced technical and infrastructural challenges, including internet connectivity issues and delayed result transmission, which undermined their full effectiveness. The performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was marked by significant logistical preparations, but its efforts were hampered in certain areas by delayed delivery of materials, technical glitches, and poor communication. These shortcomings affected the efficiency of the voting and collation processes, especially in rural and underserved regions.

The 2023 presidential election was also significantly affected by non-technical issues such as vote-buying, electoral violence, and logistical failures. Reports of monetary and material inducements in states like Lagos and Rivers, as well as violent disruptions in Ogun, Enugu, and parts of Northern Nigeria, eroded public confidence in the process. These irregularities contributed to voter apathy and perceptions of a compromised election.

Emerging political movements, particularly those driven by youth and civil society actors such as #EndSARS, played a visible role in mobilizing voters and demanding accountability. However, despite their efforts, widespread skepticism remained about the fairness and legitimacy

of the election, especially among younger Nigerians. Allegations of manipulation, vote suppression, and poor handling of result collation further reinforced distrust in the electoral system. Ultimately, the findings indicate that while the 2023 presidential election introduced meaningful reforms and showed signs of progress in technological integration, systemic challenges such as electoral malpractice, violence, and public distrust continued to hinder Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

5.2 Conclusion

The paper examined the 2023 Nigerian presidential election highlighted both advancements and challenges in the country's democratic process. Innovations like BVAS and electronic result transmission showed promise for improving electoral integrity, but issues such as logistical failures, vote-buying, and violence undermined trust in the system. Public perception of fairness was compromised by technical glitches and malpractices, while emerging political movements pushed for greater transparency. However, low voter turnout, especially among marginalized groups, reflected widespread disenchantment with the political system.

5.3 Recommendations

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should prioritize enhancing electoral technology, specifically by improving the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). INEC can establish a dedicated technical support team to provide training to election staff, ensure better equipment functionality, and address connectivity issues in remote polling areas. Additionally, the National Communications Commission (NCC) can collaborate with INEC to improve internet infrastructure in election areas, ensuring smooth transmission of results. To strengthen the voter registration process, INEC should introduce more accessible mobile and online registration systems, making it easier for citizens, especially those in rural areas and marginalized communities, to participate in the electoral process.

In addressing electoral violence, the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies should coordinate with INEC to deploy sufficient security personnel to vulnerable areas before, during, and after the election. The National Security Adviser (NSA) should be involved in designing security protocols specifically tailored to protect voters and election officials, while local communities should be engaged in monitoring election violence through civil society groups. Local government councils can partner with INEC to ensure that adequate security personnel are stationed at all polling units to prevent intimidation and violence. Moreover, the National Assembly should pass legislation that enforces harsher penalties for vote-buying, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should be empowered to investigate and prosecute electoral fraud.

To enhance transparency and combat electoral malpractices, INEC should expand the involvement of domestic and international election observers throughout the election process. INEC can work closely with the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to ensure that election observers are given full access to monitor accreditation, voting, result collation, and the final announcement of results. The Judiciary should also be empowered to expedite the resolution of electoral disputes. This can be achieved by establishing specialized election tribunals with the capacity to handle disputes in a timely manner. Furthermore, INEC should work with the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) to ensure that all electoral cases are handled transparently, and the public should be given access to tribunal decisions to reinforce the public's trust in the judicial system.

Promoting political inclusivity is critical, especially for women, youth, and marginalized groups. The National Women's Commission and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) can collaborate with INEC to run targeted voter education campaigns, focusing on the importance of political participation among these groups. The National Assembly can introduce legislation that encourages greater political participation by women, including financial incentives for female candidates and implementing gender quotas for political office.

REFERENCES

Abumbe, G. T., & Owa, E. E. (2024). Democracy and electoral integrity in the Nigerian 2023 general elections: An assessment. *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 23(1). https://doi.org/10.4314/gjss.v23i1.10

Adebayo, S. (2023). *Challenges in the 2023 Presidential Election: Vote-Buying and Electoral Violence*. Nigerian Electoral Review, 19(2), 56-75.

Adebayo, S. (2023). *Youth Movements and Electoral Reform in Nigeria: The Case of the 2023 Presidential Election*. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science, 21*(3), 62-80.

Amin, A. & Ambali, R. (2020) Impact of democratic governance on social amenities in Nigeria: A case of Bode-Saadu, Kwara State, *Lapai International Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, *12*(1), 239-250. ISSN: 2006-6473.

BBC News (2023). "Post-election protests and legal challenges in Nigeria."

Britannica. (2024). Democracy. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy

Channels TV (2023). "INEC faces backlash over result transmission delays."

Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. Yale University Press.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. Yale University Press.

Diamond, L. (2008). *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World*. Times Books.

Diamond, L. (2020). *Ill Winds: Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Age of Trump*. The Brookings Institution Press.

Farrell, D. M. (2001). *Electoral systems: A comparative introduction*. Palgrave. Lijphart, A. (1984). *Democracy in plural societies: A comparative exploration*. Yale University Press.

Hayek, F. A. (1988). *The fatal conceit: The errors of socialism*. University of Chicago Press.

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press.

INEC (2023). Post-election report on voter turnout in 2023.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2022). *Electoral Act 2022 and reforms*.

Larrabee, C. F. (2016). *Integrity and the nature of moral character*. Routledge.

Lijphart, A. (1984). *Democracy in plural societies: A comparative exploration*. Yale University Press.

McCracken, D. (2012). *Organizational integrity: Managing ethical risk and compliance*. Springer.

Mill, J. S. (1863). *Utilitarianism*. Parker, Son, and Bourn.

Norris, P. (2014). *Why democracy?* Cambridge University Press.

Ojukwu, U. G., Umeifekwem, U. T., & Okeke, V. O.S.(2023). Democracy and 2023 General Elections in Nigeria: Retrospect and Prospects. Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies, 11(4), 54-66. https://doi.org/10.26765/DRJSSES918734361

Olawale, J. (2023). *Electoral Violence and Its Impact on Voter Participation in Nigeria's 2023 Elections*. African Political Science Journal, 22(3), 103-118.

Omoruyi, A. (2023). *Assessing INEC's Transparency in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election*. Nigerian Electoral Journal, 11(4), 51-70.

Premium Times (2023). "Vote-buying persists in Nigeria's elections."

Przeworski, A., Alvarez, M. E., Cheibub, J. A., & Limongi, F. (2000). *Democracy and development: Political institutions and well-being in the world, 1950-1990*. Cambridge University Press.

Punch (2023). Electoral violence in Lagos and Rivers States: A recurring issue.

Reed, S. R. (1997). *The politics of electoral systems*. Oxford University Press.

Reynolds, A. (2010). *Electoral Systems and the Balance of Political Power*. Oxford University Press.

Rothstein, B. (2011). *The quality of government: Corruption, social trust, and inequality in international perspective*. University of Chicago Press.

The Guardian Nigeria (2023). "The third-force phenomenon in Nigeria's elections."

V-Dem Institute. (2024). *V-Dem Democracy report 2024*. V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg. https://www.v-dem.net

Wattenberg, M. P. (2015). *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952–2014*. Harvard University Press.

Williams, C. (2010). *Integrity and the common good*. Oxford University Press.

Yio, B. W. (2012). "Democracy and Development in Nigeria: A Reflection on the Country's Democratic Experience up to 2011" in National Development Studies, No. 5 Dahl, R. (1998). *On Democracy*. Yale University Press.

Ziblatt, D. (2006). *States and Political Systems in a Comparative Perspective: The Challenge of Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.