

ELECTORAL MISCONDUCT AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: FROM VOTE BUYING TO TECHNOLOGICAL MANIPULATIONS

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KEY WORDS

Elections, misconduct, malpractices, technology and democracy.

ABSTRACT

A credible election is a legitimate process that enhances the confidence of both the voters and the candidates as well as rekindles the prospect of consolidating democratic processes and institutions. In Nigeria, the electoral processes and the conduct of elections since the return of democracy in 1999 have been fraught with spiraling misconduct and malpractices in their electioneering procedures and processes. They have further been worsened with each round of elections not better than the previous. This paper examined the patterns and dynamics of electoral misconduct and their implications on the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. It utilizes the secondary sources of data and employed the liberal democratic theory to posit the thrust of its idea. It's of the finding that the upsurge of electoral misconducts and malpractices are the result with the introduction of technology into its electoral processes. It never the less concluded that for an election to be free, fair and credible, citizens must have the right and the opportunity to either elect or choose their leaders within the political atmosphere of freedom in all aspect of human endeavors without intimidation. It is of the recommendation that the government as well as the stakeholders and the civil society organizations should not just observe elections but also get actively involved in monitoring elections, to ensure that electoral rules are adhered to and respected. Critical steps must be taken by the government to combat the danger of Cynicism.

INTRODUCTION

The rationality behind democratic consolidation in any democratic system both in the developed and developing countries depends largely on the conduct of free and fair elections. They have become tools for transition to democratically elected government. But the credibility of the electoral processes has equally become the instrument for determining the integrity and the legitimacy of a good and democratic government. Therefore a credible election is the general acceptance of its conduct as free, fair by the electorates and the international observers (Ogbeide, 2010).

Nigeria elections have become scenario of electoral manipulations and the electoral processes fraught with electoral misconduct (Ojo, 2008). The outcomes of elections in the country have scarcely reflected the will of the voters owing to the challenges of electoral misconducts which have practically characterized previous electoral processes. Since the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria has held seven general elections, apart from sundry re-run elections with one worse election proceeding the other elections (2003 was worse than 1999; and 2007 was worse than 2003;) Iremeka, (2023).

The 2003 election was more openly rigged and flawed than the preceding election held in 1999 which was far bloodier (Onebamhoi, 2011). According to Onebamhoi (2011), the worst election in the history of Nigeria and perhaps in the Africa continent, was the general elections conducted in 2007. The election was full of many irregularities such as late arrival of voting materials in various polling units, insufficient polling materials, issues with ballot papers and voting, snatching and destruction of ballot boxes, there were no voting exercises in some polling units, intimidation of voters by security agencies and political thugs, proliferation of vote buying, perpetration of electoral fraud by government officials and disenfranchising opponent's supporters by omitting candidate names on ballot paper (Kia, 2013).

On the other hand, the 2011 general elections have been said to be the most relatively successful in the political history of Nigeria. However, reports also revealed that there was buying and selling of votes, falsification of electoral results and under age voting in some states of the country (Yusuf and Zaheruddin, 2015). Observers stated that the 2015 general election was marred by malpractices, despite being largely peaceful; thereby saw the said electoral process although to be less than standard but better than the previous elections held in the country since independence. The 2019 election

was also reported to be impaired by multiple voting, selling and buying of votes, result manipulation and intimidation by security agencies (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015 and 2019). Apart from the 2011 and 2015 polls, the credibility and acceptability of the elections waned further with each subsequent election. The inference from the conduct and outcome of these elections is that Nigeria is yet to demonstrate the attributes of a growing democracy Yagboyaju, (2011).

However, the 2015 election witnessed the introduction of technology into the electoral processes such as the Smart Card Reader etc. Agbu (2016), posited that the circumstances warranted the use of the smart card reader, the polemics surrounding its use, its performance during the 2015 presidential elections, as well as its potential for future elections depends not only on the workability of such devices but essentially on the manipulations and the intents of the manipulators. Never the less, the successful deployment of the Smart Card Reader during this election could be seen as the precursor to making the voting process of future elections completely transparent and credible (Ihaza, 2023).

It is important to note that the Nigerian Fourth Republic has seen a significant wave in the increase of the use of technology in various aspects of our electoral systems. While it can be said however, that technological advancement enhances transparency and efficiency, it has also introduced new avenues for potential fraud with the intent to subvert the integrity of an election. Several patterns of electoral technological misconduct can be distinguished;

a. Voter Registration Manipulation: Fraudulent manipulation of voter registration databases to include ineligible voters or exclude eligible ones. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) and Smart Card Readers (SCR) in preparation for the conduct of 2015 elections and the improvement on Nigeria electoral processes. At the registration level, INEC conducted a digital capture of voters, an effort largely seen as an improvement compared to what was on the ground. Still, there were several cases of multiple registrations and multiple voting coupled with the experienced cases of database and website malfunctioning. The card reader, which was also used in 2019, was supposed to prevent multiple voting but this was far from foolproof. The card reader didn't always verify voters who had been registered. This led to the introduction of incident forms, which essentially meant that voters were accredited manually; this opened the door to manipulation (Anichukwueze, 2023).

b. Biometric Identity Manipulation: Tampering with biometric identification systems to allow impersonation and the multiple voting. The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) was introduced as an improvement on the card reader in terms of accrediting voters. The BVAS device would identify a registered voter with either a fingerprint scan or facial recognition before they are allowed to vote. The BVAS were reported to have failed and voters were not accredited and consequently, many were disenfranchised (Anyaogu, 2023 & Amata, 2023).

c. Electronic Result Manipulation: Altering electronic transmission of election results to change the outcome in favor of certain candidates. There are strong indications that the BVAS and the iRev

failed the required stress tests. In many cases the iREV could not be assessed by both the electorates and election officials (Iremeka, 2023).

d. Hacking Voting Machines: Manipulating electronic voting machines to change or discard votes. Voting machines are hacked in some states to disrupt the electoral process, where a preferred candidate is perceived to be losing the elections (Culture Custodian 2023).

e. Fake News and Disinformation: Spreading false information through digital platforms to influence voter behavior. The use of internet and social media to spread fake news about political opponents is a prominent occurrence in Nigeria fourth republic elections. According to Taylor and Eshokeme (2023), misinformation and disinformation are 'plaguing elections' as political actors encourage the spread because they see it as a means to an end of their political aggrandizement. Nigerian politicians secretly paid social media influencers as much as 20 million Nigerian naira (\$43,000) or promised government contracts and political appointments to spread disinformation about opponents, some of these influencers are also being recruited to 'situation rooms' to monitor the spread of the fake news, the report added (Salako,2023).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The importance of the entrenchment of the values and principles of democracy depend largely on the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. The implications of such elections have become an instrument for the entrenchment of democracy and an avenue for the demise of authoritarianism and a transition to democratic elected government. But, the issues of electoral misconducts in our electoral processes have been of significant concern since the inception of democratization in the Fourth Republic. Hence, past elections conducted in the country's Fourth Republic have been fraught with dimensional malpractices, the effects of which have by implication posed a stumbling block to the promotion of democratic principles, especially free, fair, credible and regular election. Various levels of different forms of electoral misconduct spanning from vote buying, vote selling, ballot box snatching, intimidation ranging from destruction of polling units to technological malpractices have undermined the integrity of our electoral processes. It has however offered the electorates with little or no genuine choice of electing candidates of their choice without being intimidated. This trend became evident most recently in the February 2023 general elections. Election practices have degenerated into a situation where results are concocted for areas where no voting actually took place (Iremeka, 2023). Therefore, the following objectives become imperative to this paper.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

To determine the causes of electoral misconduct in Nigeria.

To assess the impact of electoral misconduct on electoral processes.

Ascertain its implications on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Electoral Misconduct

Electoral misconduct refers to the manipulation of the electoral processes often times to the detriment of the opposition party and to the advantage of a particular candidate. Electoral misconduct can be perpetuated at any level of the electoral processes and procedures right from the delimitation of the constituencies all through to the adjudication of election disputes and in the promulgation of electoral laws which could be subjected to political patronage (Kurfi, 2009). Electoral misconduct can be identified and classified into pre-election, election period and post-election period. Pre-election misconduct comprises of misconduct before election which involves vote buying, registration of underage persons, and often times disenfranchisement (Norris, 2012). Election period misconduct are often times committed during election such as ballot box snatching and also the manipulation of technological devices while the post-election misconduct is committed after the elections. In most cases, post-election misconduct often occurs when electoral results and evidences are tampered with during elections tribunal procedures (Iehoucq, 2003). This view of the writer is further accentuated in the illegal efforts at re-shaping of the election results to be far from the reach of justice.

Electoral ballot box stealing, this involves where individual or group of individuals forcefully snatch ballot boxes with the overt intention to manipulate the election atmosphere in favour of their preferred candidates. This particularly precludes the electorates their fundamental human right to vote as well as undermines the credibility of electoral processes and procedures.

Technological fraud as a concomitant of electoral misconduct involves altering and tampering with the software and hardware of the voting machine with the intention to alter vote results or figures, this includes manipulation of Smart Card Readers, Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) porters in favour of a preferred candidate. From the above assertions derived from different scholars, it is overtly clear that electoral misconduct remains a bane in the consolidation of democracy and a clog in the democratic processes and procedures in the Nigeria electoral practices. The credibility of the electoral process has become the instrument for determining the integrity and legitimacy of a democratic regime. The challenges of electoral misconducts which have manifested since 1999 till date has made the democratic experience of Nigeria's Fourth Republic a source of concern to this paper.

Democratic Consolidation

According to (Manesh, 2013), it is concerned with the strengthening of political institutions such as political parties, the legislature and the electoral umpires. Oftentimes it is concerned with governmental administration relative to accountability, transparency, constitutionalism, rule of law and bureaucracy as well as, the understanding of the acceptance and obedience of formal and informal institutions of democracy. Consolidation of democracy consist the narrowing of democratic uncertainties through

normalization of behavioral and institutional changes (Okoye, et al, 2012) the normalization requires the expansion of citizen's access, broadening of leadership, development of democratic citizenship and culture of political socialization and participation, political institutionalization and other functions that civil society performs. The significance of democratic consolidation in Nigeria like in other new democracies depends largely on the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Such elections have become an instrument of political recruitment, for transition into and promotion of democracy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The essentialities for the use of the liberal democratic theory are to be able to bridge the gap between electoral misconduct and democratic consolidation and also to direct the focus of this study within the ambits of the formulated objectives. This is evidently posited according to the liberal writer such as John Locke, J.J Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and Montesquieu whose theories are based upon individual liberty, natural rights, social justice and the rule of the majority as well as private property especially at a time when capitalism became the predominant mode of production in Europe and North America (Oddih, 2007). This theory however, utilizes some basic assumptions such as;

- a. The capital mode of production
- b. The existence of a Free, fair and periodic elections based on universal franchise,
- c. The importance of recognizing the civil liberties or individual rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, press and religion etc.
- d. The existence of multi-party system as oppose to one party system,
- e. The presence of Pressure groups or civil societies,
- f. Adherence to the Rule of law,
- g. Separation of powers and checks and balances in all branches of government,
- h. Abhorrence to revolutionary approach to change the government or the system (Abimbola & Adesote, 2012).

The main idea behind the liberal theory of democracy is to create for a political structure that will promote civic virtue and individual engagement. Abimbola & Adesote (2012) assert that in a liberal democracy, the electoral process always allows for the formation of organizations that are commonly known as political parties. These organizations are anticipated to have a number of fundamental qualities, including political ideology, sincere political manifestoes, party discipline and robust internal democracy, among others. Thus, rivalry between different political parties is viewed as an essential component of democracy since it improves the caliber and extent of their service to the public. Electoral researchers like Agbaje (2006) and Omotola (2007) in Adesote and Abimbola (2014), also are of the claim that free, fair and credible elections must include the absence of all forms of electoral misconducts if democratic consolidation is to be achieved. This study is however of the view that the different patterns and the dynamics of our electoral history

have been dominated with various forms of electoral misconduct ranging from vote selling and buying to technological malpractices.

1. Causes of electoral misconduct in Nigeria:

- a. Weak Institutional Framework: The lack of legal and regulatory frameworks as well as weak enforcement mechanisms can create an environment conducive for fraud. In Nigeria, there are no specific legislations against certain electoral offences, only for associated acts like arson, assault and murder. The laws for example, have no provision for the snatching of electoral boxes from pooling booths (a common crime during elections). Moreover, the penalties for acts associated with electoral violence like assault and arson are generally weak; a few years imprisonment at most (Okwong, 2012). This has contributed to the culture of impunity and underscores the need to review the extant laws.
- b. Lack of Transparency and Civic Education: Insufficient transparency in the use of technology for elections can create opportunities for manipulation. Lack of awareness among voters about the proper use of technology and the risks of fraud can make them susceptible to manipulation (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006).
- c. Socioeconomic Factors: High levels of poverty and illiteracy can make voters more vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation. This assertion aptly captures the present situation in Nigeria where inflation and unemployment rate is constantly on the increase, and where an 'army of unemployed youth' has become a tool for electoral fraud (Iremeka, 2023).
- d. Inadequate Training: Insufficient training of election officials and other stakeholders in the use of technology can lead to errors and vulnerabilities. There are not enough qualified and trained professional technologists capable of handling sophisticated electoral technology in the electoral umpire team. The dismal state of requisite ICT facilities, logistics and expertise is a major driver of electoral fraud in Nigeria's fourth republic (Ahmad, et al 2015).
- e. The weakness of INEC as an institution: Lack of INEC's independence and financial autonomy, inadequate technical and logistic preparation, lack of appropriate organizational and managerial capacities to handle the elections is great driver of electoral fraud in the fourth Republic. Furthermore, limited technical competency and corrupt tendencies manifest among various calibers of its staff. Sheer lack of 'capabilities' of the INEC predisposes elections to numerous rigging techniques and consequent loss of confidence and integrity in the eyes of the electorates. It is evident that viable, independent and effective EMB as well as honest electoral officials responsible for enhancing public confidence in the electoral process is lacking in Nigeria (Omodia & Nwankwo, 2020).
- f. Corruption as one of the major obstacles to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the exploitation of public position, resources and power for selfish gain, this leads to poverty. Similarly, Obayelu (2007) views corruption as an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense or a misuse of public power for private benefits. There is political

corruption, which, Gyeke (1997) defines as the 'illegal, unethical and unauthorized exploitation of one's political or official position for personal gain or advantage'. From the above discussion it will be appropriate to state that political corruption includes electoral fraud like ballot box snatching and manipulation of technological devices, favoritism, nepotism and even illegal seizure of political power. Consequently, consolidating democracy remains grossly unstable due to the rampant political corruption in the country. An average Nigerian associates' corruption to democracy in the name of 'sharing of national cake' (Ugwuala, et al 2020).

g. Poverty, which is a function of inadequate socioeconomic development, is also an impediment to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This is because the high rate of corruption in the country has put a good number of the citizens in an abject poverty and this has also increased the rate of electoral fraud during the conduct of elections. An individual deprived of the basic where withal cannot participate effectively in a democratic system. Poverty has been adjudged to be the major cause of youths being used as thugs by politicians to snatch ballot boxes during elections in the fourth Republic. (Ighorojeh & Adeyeye, 2016).

h. The lack of adequate legal and regulatory frameworks as well as weak enforcement mechanisms is a major impediment to consolidating democracy. In Nigeria there is no specific legislation against certain electoral offences. The penalties for acts associated with electoral fraud are generally weak, and thus encouraging the culture of impunity and underscores the need to review the extant laws (Okwong, 2012). A consolidated democracy needs a strong legal and regulatory framework and enforcement mechanism to tackle electoral fraud offenders.

The absence of free and fair election is also one of the major challenges to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The incidences of snatching ballot boxes and manipulating technological devices during elections have discouraged a large number of qualified citizens in participating in many elections. This is because participation is meaningless when their votes are subverted for the interest of the few (Ugwuala, et al 2020). In a society where candidates are imposed against the will and choice of the people through electoral frauds like ballot box snatching and technological devices manipulations, democracy can hardly be consolidated.

2. The impact of electoral misconduct on electoral processes.

According to International IDEA (2006), the important institutional factors that are major impediment to the electoral process in Nigeria include the limited autonomy of various electoral bodies (particularly their lack of financial empowerment) and their weak human resource base. Unreliable voters register combined with serious logistic and communication problems are characteristics of the flawed electoral process. Psycho cultural factor primarily derived from the history of today's immense political corruption, factors that have undermined the social and economic basis for the emergence and sustenance of democratic political culture in Nigeria.

These political factors are set against the background of a major structural factor institutionalized.

Among the most serious and blatant causes of electoral fraud are;

- i. Rigging, overstuffed of ballot boxes, over bloating ballot register, special treatment of voters and election officials, disappearance or destruction of ballot box etc.
- ii. Distortion or doctoring of results.
- iii. Annulment and falsification of election result.

Despite the serious nature of the above irregularities in the electoral process, the April 2003, “election forgery” and the 2007 “falsification of election results” as well as 2011 “electoral flaws” in the Presidential, Gubernatorial and the Assemblies elections have seriously undermined the country’s democratization processes and corporate existence. Other factors that are consistently cited as undermining competitive electoral politics in Nigeria include;

1. Lack of discipline in the forms, spirit and implementation of the election process.
2. Excessive monetization of politics in general.
3. A “winner takes all” philosophy pervasive among the political elites;
4. The general level of poverty and illiteracy.
5. The absence of clear ideological underpinning of the parties.
6. Religious bigotry and to a limited extent ethnic chauvinism.

3. Implication for democratic consolidation.

In Nigeria, politicians are generally believed to be involved with all sorts of electoral malpractices such as rigging of elections and the intimidation of voters in order to subvert the electoral process. There is a widespread belief, backed by intimidating evidences that the quality of Nigerian elections nose-dives with successive elections since 1999 till date. Over the years, Nigerian elections have offered the electorate little or no genuine choice but electoral misconduct (Tsuwa, et al 2017). This trend as evident in the February 2023 general elections has degenerated into a situation where results are concocted for areas where no voting actually took place.

The 1999 elections did not engender much violence chiefly because the Nigerian public was tired of military dictatorship and thus was desperate to see a form of democratic transition materialize. In the 1999 general elections, there were cases of ballot box snatching and manipulation of election results to favor particular parties and individuals (Nwokeke & Jayum, 2011). The lackadaisical attitude shown towards the election by Nigerians gave the military Junta the free hand to manipulate the election and handed power to the person the hierarchy wanted (Tsuwa, et al 2017).

(Tsuwa et al, 2017) observed that during the 2003 elections, several of the parties pursued practices which could be said to help undermine the chances of peaceful well-run elections. To checkmate the fallouts of the previous elections, INEC introduced the first electronic voters’ registration in Nigeria for the conduct of 2011 elections. The conduct of the 2011 elections was not without some challenges before, during and after the election (Tsuwa, et al 2017).

Concerned about the massive electoral fraud witnessed in the past general elections in Nigeria, INEC introduced Permanent Voters’ Card (PVC) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) in the 2015 general elections to ensure for a transparent, free and fair elections in order to consolidate the unfledged democratic electoral processes. However, the use of the electronic device in the 2015 general elections generated mixed views of Nigerians on the credibility of the election. Some states nevertheless recorded significant cases of electoral misconduct notably in the underage pattern of voting in the Northern part (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015). Ndjuhe, & Kumolu (2015) confirmed that, allegation of wide range of electoral malpractices continued to trail in the outcome of 2015 elections in the country.

The 2019 general elections was sixth election since the inception of the fourth republic, there were reports of ballot box snatching. Votes buying and other irregularities, including multiple voting, result manipulation, disenfranchising of voters due to failure of card readers to recognize their PVCs and intimidation by security agencies during and after the elections have characterized the election process (Agbajileke, 2019; Utebor, et al 2019; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015 and 2019; Amata, 2023 and Ebiri, et al 2019).

To curb the incidences of electoral malpractices during the 2023 elections, two complementary innovations were deployed: the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and the Result Viewing Portal (iREV). BVAS became the only means of voter’s accreditation approved by the newly signed Electoral Act (2022) have not shown the capacity to curb or reduce election malpractices to the barest minimum.

However, on February 25 presidential election of 2023, this same BVAS technology, which INEC claimed had been tested in 105 communities used in two sub-national elections in 2022 and which on that same day transmitted successfully the national assembly elections results, completely failed to transmit the presidential election results (Anyaogu, 2023). Analysts have wondered at the spectacular failure of the BVAS machines and reached the conclusion that the purported technical glitches were only cover to allow compromised officials of the electoral body to bypass the transparency limitations placed by its own technology to arrive at pre-determined results. Actual implementation on election day was grossly ineffective and served to undermine the credibility of the electoral process and its outcome. The BVAS and the IREV were applied in such a manner that they failed to eliminate or even significantly limit human interference in the electoral process. A number of BVAS devices were recorded as having broken down or outright malfunctioned across the country. There are lingering concerns that many of these incidences were either deliberate sabotage or at least provided the opportunity for electoral manipulation (Acheampong, 2023).

Since the advent of the forth republic, Nigeria has been unable to conduct a free, fair and credible election, largely because there are no consequences for the bad behavior of electoral officers and corrupt politicians. Often, the electoral umpire is beholden to the party in power whose continued existence is dependent on ignoring INEC’s incompetence (Shaibu, 2023).

Electoral misconduct like buying and selling of voters' cards, wide spread intimidation, ballot box snatching and technological devices manipulations have been one of the major challenges to democratic consolidation in Nigeria; these have grown steadily worse and more daring in the fourth republic. According to (Udo, 2015), elections in Nigeria have been associated with irregularities and violence since the 4th Republic. It has become the menu of manipulation because since 1999, the outcome of elections in the country have scarcely reflected the will of the voters due to the avalanche of electoral malpractices experienced in the process (Suberu, 2007 and Oddih, 2007).

The Corruption Perception Index has worsened since 2016, Nigeria has lost hundreds of billions of dollars from corruption and the likelihood of corruption becoming a massive electoral issue is not far from the truth in the case of the 2023 presidential election were both Abubakar and Tinubu, had recorded cases of longstanding major corrupt allegations, Obi candidacy lightly altered the pattern and the dynamics with corrupt allegations against him were more minor (Wikipedia, 2022). This will in no doubt affected voters' perception as well as increase their financial capacities and capabilities for electoral manipulation if such trend is not curbed. Another reason for the manifestation of corruption was the failure of the Buharis anti-corruption war, the premise of which was central to the 2015 campaign (Obadare.E, 2022).

While more major issues like insecurity and poverty have taken central stage, however, corruption is still a pervasive policy issue. The years ahead of the 2023 election marked by a deteriorating security situation nationwide, vivid among of such were advances in the fight against terrorist in the northeast which had led to thousands of human displacement with many forced to become refugees in their own communities, the situation in the rest of the nation became increasingly dire: In the Northwest was the deadly bandit conflict in addition to terrorist expansion, Niger-delta-pirates and illegal oil bunkering gangs activities was not left out. The southeast-violent separatist movement coupled with the regional crises, and the continued proliferation of kidnapping and mob violence along with the epidemic of security force brutality have affected the entire country, the election itself also was affected, as civil society groups noted the possibility of electoral violence stemming from pre-existing violent groups (Ajanaku,A.2022).

Religious identity, a core aspect for democratization, its principles for religious diversity a key tenant of power sharing where a presidential aspirant chooses its running mate from different religious groups. However, these principles are often changed in the lead-up to elections. The case of them aspirant Tinubu remain an accentuated reality who alleged that there were a few influential Northern Christian politicians who could be his running mate which led to Tinubu Muslim-Muslim tickets to the anger of groups like the Christian Association of Nigeria (Yusuf, K.2022), Anglican, Catholic and other religious bodies. This however, has led to reaction and counter reactions capable of affecting the perceptions and trust of the public as well as diverse implication for electoral behavior necessary for free, fair and credible elections.

Elections are an important aspect of liberal democracy. As stated above, the integrity and credibility of elections are strong measures

of a deepened democracy in a country. In every country where democracy thrives, stringent laws exist to guide the conduct of polls.

However, because it is through elections that people decide who occupies particular elective public offices; politicians and groups sometimes resort to the use of vile unscrupulous methods to win elections. Therefore, it behooves any political entity to put in place rules and regulations that all stakeholders in the electoral process must obey. These regulations also spell out the punishment to be meted out to any ailing individual and group that engages in electoral malpractice. In Nigeria, the legal framework that defines how elections in the country are conducted, what constitutes electoral offences, and how offenders are punished is found in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and the Electoral Act 2010, as amended. The 1999 Constitution deals mainly with the structures necessary for the conduct of elections for the various political offices in Nigeria and the constitution of the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as well as Election Tribunals.

By contrast, the Electoral Act 2010 contains detailed definitions of electoral malpractices and the punishment accrued to them. For example, the 1999 Constitution in sections 76, 77 and 78 provides the modalities for electing members of the National Assembly and the qualifications of Nigerians who can vote during National Assembly elections. Similarly, sections 116, 117 and 118 of the Constitution contain information on how and when elections for State Houses of Assembly are to be conducted. Furthermore, as it affects the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, sections 131, 132, 133 and 134 of the 1999 Constitution specify the qualities of any Nigerian who wishes to contest in a presidential election, and how he or she will emerge as a president-elect in a national poll. Specifications are also stipulated for candidates seeking elections to office as State Governor in sections 177, 178 and 179. In order to resolve disputes arising Scholars such as (Huntington, 1993) and (Philippe et'al 1993) describe democratization as "major global phenomenon during the twentieth century", democratization is thus not a new phenomenon it is a "historical process". Philippe et'al (1993), notes that there are many types of democracy and their diverse practices that produce a similarly varied set of effects. The specific form democracy takes is contingent upon a country's socio-economic conditions as well as its entrenched state structures and policy practices. It is thus interesting, as (Nnoli, 2000) incisively refers to "democratization, as complex social phenomenon which interfaces with various elements of social life, and is suffused.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper examined the various patterns and dynamics of electoral misconducts that have become impediments to Nigeria democratic consolidation. It is also of the opinion that the introduction of technology into our electoral processes no doubted has created for a more advanced electoral misconduct in Nigeria. This is traceable to the adoption of technology in the conduct of elections in the Fourth Republic. Ranging from voter registration manipulation; biometric identity manipulation; election result manipulation; hacking of

voting machines to fake news and disinformation etc. It is important to note however, that the minimal improvements observed in the 2011 and 2015 elections are indications that the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria is possible, especially with regard to INEC as the political umpire as well as the reorientation of our mind-set to enable us combat the danger arising from Cynicism. The study also found expression in the assumption and principles of liberal democratic theory adopted for this study.

This study therefore, recommends the following:

For an election to be free, fair and credible, citizens must have the right and the opportunity to either elect or choose their leaders. Within the political atmosphere of freedom in all aspect of human endeavors for both voters, candidates, party members and the media without intimidation.

To be credible, an election must have honest and clear balloting and counting, administered without fraud, misconduct and manipulations. And there must be prompt and just announcement of results.

Any serious recommendation for curbing misconduct and election malpractices in Nigeria should suggest the need to strengthen political parties, so as to serve as forum of political education in order to regulate the mind-set of political party members as well as voters.

There is also the need to restructure or even overhaul INEC to have representation of credible and respected civil society, human rights based, democracy based or even legal based organizations. Also, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on vigorous education and value- orientation and re-orientation aimed at repositioning democratic institutions.

The civil society organizations should not just observe elections but also get actively involved in monitoring elections, to ensure that electoral rules are respected and adhered to by all the political stakeholders such as representatives of the political parties, candidates, voters as well as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Finally, critical efforts must be made to curb and combat the danger arising from Cynicism. Experiences have shown that election manipulations have rendered the citizenry into cynical reasoning and creating the doubt that there will be no chance for free, fair and credible elections and by extension, for a genuine working and active democracy in Nigeria. Many Nigerians have come to believe the fact that, whether they vote or not, stand for election or not, powerful individuals might have already determined the outcome of the elections. Often times they have lost hopes in election results that could have been subjected to various forms and degree of manipulations; these however do not augur well for smooth democratic consolidation.

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