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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is Democracy a National or Global Problem? the Nigerian Election of 2023

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Abstract

Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa is declining on national, regional, and continental levels. This decline is occurring as China's relationship with African nations becomes stronger. Nigeria is poised to become the world's second-largest democracy by 2050, so its 2023 presidential election was of regional and global concern. However, the recent fraudulent presidential elections, despite the use of new electronic monitoring technology, are worrisome and highlight the increasing global threat to democracy. This threat has led to low voter turnout, election fatigue, disillusionment with the democratic process, and democratic backsliding. It's essential to recognize that this threat is not limited to Nigeria; it can potentially affect the entire region and beyond. As a solution, the study emphasizes the need for civil society to intensify civil and political education to protect democracy and reverse the international rise and influence of authoritarian regimes like China.

Keywords

Democracy, Elections, Corruption, Abuse, Backsliding, China, Civil Society, Democratic Activists/Supporters, and Civic Education.

The paper will begin by defining democracy and its relevance as the best form of government. It will shed light on the global decline in democracy, including the threat to democracy due to the increasing Sino-African relationship and democratic decline worldwide, exemplifying the case of the United States. Notably, it will examine how the recent elections in Nigeria, considering the 2020 US election, could threaten regional and global democracy, leading to a further decline in African countries and other parts of the world. As a solution, it will argue that civil society is critical to addressing this problem through civil and political education.

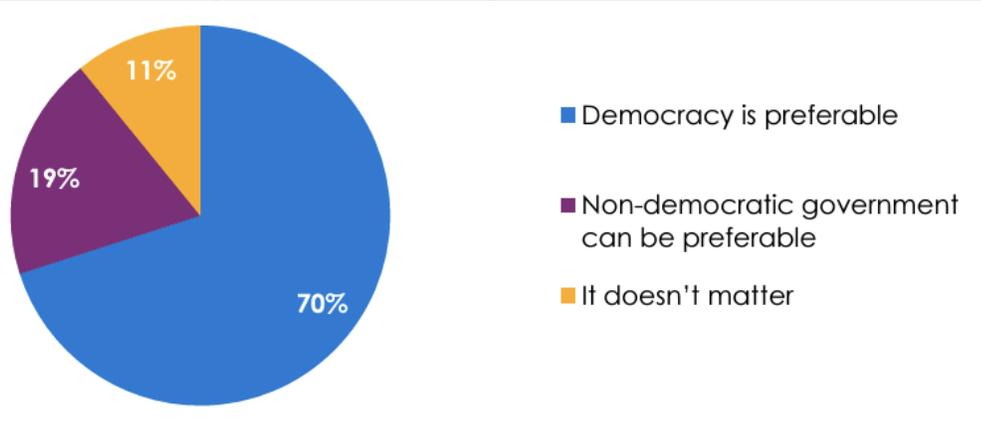
Literature Review

Conceptualizing Democracy as the Best Form of Government and Why Preference for Most Nigerians

Although Athens is widely recognized as the birthplace of Western democracy, the idea of democracy can be traced back to the 5th century BC. Democracy is a complex concept that goes beyond Abraham Lincoln's well-known definition of 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (Hashmi 2017: 331-332; Hashmi 2018: 17-32). Although there are many variations of democracy, the core idea is that democracy promotes a rule by the people, where citizens choose their leaders through free, fair, and competitive elections and have their individual rights protected from the state. Scholars such as Diamond (2015) and Repucci & Slipowitz (2021) have written extensively about the instability, unfairness, stagnation, and incremental decline of democracy. However, a system of multiparty competition is only partially fair and open. Dahl (2003), a political philosopher, established the standard for discussing democratic theory and concepts. Democracy is not a simple system. It is much more than organizing and voting in an election. Democratic states provide citizens with certain freedoms that are crucial to a democratic system, including the ability for political parties to campaign, free and fair elections, transparency, protection of human rights, access to media, campaign finance, independence, peaceful transfer of power, and safeguarding of civil rights. In contrast, citizens living under authoritarian-led

governments do not enjoy the above democratic characteristics experienced by those in democratic nations. However, Hashim (2018) questioned whether the practice of modern democracy is in line with its definition while conceptualizing democracy as the best form of government. Although more countries are shifting towards authoritarianism, democratic nations promote more peaceful conduct, achieve faster rates of development, respect the rule of law, conduct free and fair elections, and are better governed than autocracies. This is in line with Dahl's contention of the democratic process as 'the most reliable means for protecting and advancing the good and interests of all the persons subject to collective decisions' (Dahl 199; Diamond & Leonardo 2004: 20-18; Slater 2023: 95-100). As demonstrated on Figure 1, most Nigerians will agree with Dahl's contention. Despite two decades of democratic challenges, most Nigerians - 70 percent, according to a 2022 Afrobarometer poll prefer democracy (elections) to authoritarianism or other forms of governance (Mbaegbu & Duntoye 2023).

Figure 1.
Support for Democracy in Nigeria (Afrobarometer poll 2022).



Survey Questionnaire Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

Democratic Decline

As noted by Freedom House and others (Gorokhovskaia et al. 2023; Yudhoyono 2010: 5-10; Hyde 2022: 164-166; Chu & Huana 2020: 166-181; Haggard & Kaufman 2021: 27-41), democracy has been on a consecutive year of decline for the last seven years as well as increasing attacks by populist leaders and groups in every region of the world who espouse populism in attempts to address the specific interests of their supporters (Diamond 2016: 151-155). Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian populist prime minister, a member of the European Union, and Europe's closest ally to Russian president Putin, modified his country's constitution upon his victory in 2010, resulting in a backslide in the rule of law (Acosta 2023: 143-149). His actions established an illiberal constitution and illiberal democracy, an attempt at democratic backsliding. He embarked on changes in the constitutional court by reducing judges' office terms and increasing the number of judges, which allowed him to fill the court with judges sympathetic and loyal to Orbán's political party (Acosta 143-149).

The increasing democratic decline and the dramatic rise of populism in Western Europe and the United States can be partly attributable to citizens' disenchantment with democracy's inability or

failure to deliver expectations and erosion of trust in politicians, political parties, congressional and senatorial representatives, and democratic institutions (Diamond 2016: 151-155; Plattner 2017: 6-12). Other reasons could be attributable to the role of Russia, particularly China (authoritarian states), as a powerful force in the global struggle for political and economic power. China's emboldened alliance with developing nations is a testimony to a severe democratic challenge. It is not alarming that democracies have faced challenges throughout historical periods, and according to Larry Diamond, "No system of multiparty competition is perfectly fair and open" (Diamond 2015: 141-146). Furthermore, Diamond pointed out areas of concern; firstly, "there has been a significant and accelerating rate of democratic breakdown. Second, the quality and stability of democracy have been declining in several large and strategically important emerging market countries, which he called 'swing states.' Third, authoritarianism has been deepening, including in big and strategically important countries. And fourth, the established democracies, beginning with the United States, increasingly seem to be performing poorly and lacking the will and self-confidence to promote democracy effectively abroad" (Diamond 2015). As shown in Table 1, in total, there are 24 countries classified as full democracies, 48 as flawed democracies, 36 as hybrid regimes, and 59 as authoritarian. Unfortunately, the number of people living in authoritarian regimes has risen to 35.31%, while the number of people living in full democracies has decreased to 14.4%. However, the number of countries classified as flawed democracies may slightly reduce in 2023.

Table 1.

Democracy Index 2022, by regime type (Economist Intelligence Unit; EIU).

	No. of Countries	% of countries	% of the world's population
Full democracies	24	14.4	8.0
Flawed democracies	48	28.7	37.3
Hybrid regimes	36	21.6	17.9
Authoritarian regimes	59	35.3	36.9

Frontline democracy & the battle for Ukraine - EIU

The Nordic nations continue to boost the highest positive scores in all categories, particularly in the functioning of governments, electoral process, and pluralism. The staunchest democratic countries include Norway, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Ireland, Taiwan, Australia, and Canada. The US, a global democratic model and promoter, is now ranked as a "flawed" democracy and 36 amongst 176 countries by quality of democracy. Neither the United States nor Nigeria (or any African country) constitutes the list of the ten most democratic countries in the world. Surprisingly, the United States was downgraded from "full democracy" to "flawed democracy" in 2017. Nevertheless, the struggle for freedom has been ongoing worldwide for many years, and as of 2023, only 84 out of 195 countries have been classified as free. Despite this, Gorokhovskaia noted that even though authoritarian regimes pose a significant threat, they are not unbeatable. (Gorokhovskaia et al., 2023).

Sino-Africa Relationship: A Threat to Democracy

The global population living and governed by authoritarian governments is accelerating. China's ascendancy as a global power has political and economic implications in the geopolitical struggle for power and influence. In recent years, while relations between the U.S. and Africa have watered down, ties between China and Africa (Forum on China-Africa Co-operation) have been deepening as it continues to make inroads in the continent. China's growing political influence activities and strategic objectives in Africa are disturbing and suspicious to Western democracies. According to the Chinese President Xi Jinping, China and Africa have "forged unbreakable fraternity." Xi described the Sino-African ties as one of "sincere friendship and equality, win-win for mutual benefit and common development, fairness and justice, and progress with the times and openness and inclusiveness" (The Economist 2021). China is not only Africa's largest trading partner, with approximately \$282 billion in 2023 (Nyabiage 2023), far surpassing that between Africa and the U.S. or more than four times the trade between the U.S. and Africa, but also the continent's biggest bilateral and infrastructural creditor. However, Chinese interest in Africa appears to be primarily focused on infrastructure development, manufacturing, and resource extraction; meanwhile, U.S. engagement is primarily in technology trade, services, and promoting aid policies to advance democracy, good governance, and human rights.

Chinese ethnic communities are spreading over many African countries, becoming significant political and business contacts for China as they promote China's political and economic system, policy preferences, and diplomatic style, and as such, their "advice and suggestions to local government and departments can, to a certain extent, influence the behavior and policies of their host countries toward China" (Rolland, 2022). As democracy faced challenges in conjunction with America's dwindling interest in Africa, the China Communist Party (CCP) mobilized vast sums of money to deepen its political influence, thus shaping the future of power (Gu 2009). Undoubtedly, China in 'creating these new structures, Beijing is expanding its global influence, locking in future benefits, and acting to constrain other states' actions and policies ... Thus, China is unsurprising now widely regarded among African states as a model to be emulated not only in economic terms but also in political and diplomatic terms.' (Hodzi 2022: 51-55). This is troubling in the geopolitical struggle between democracy (freedom) and authoritarianism, of which considerable African states seem to favor the latter as democracy continues the path of abuse and backsliding. China focused its neo-colonial attention on responding financially (development capital loans) to Africa's developmental needs and ambitions (Brookes and Shin 2006). Besides, China has security agreements with most African nations while the US has significant military presence in Africa (Eisenman & Shinn: 145 - 146). While the U.S., particularly under the Trump administration, disregarded African interest in pursuing a national and unilateral foreign policy. A costly exercise in the geopolitical and economic struggle for the global promotion of democracy. Such geopolitical struggles may work to China's advantage on matters requiring the support of African nations. Brookes and Shin (2006) noted the concern by some Western countries over China's disproportionate control over African resources, strategic assets, and aid programs, and China's extensive investments in Africa could undermine Western influence in the region, gaining China political power while eroding democracy, human rights, and governance. This is line with the view expressed by Diamond, "No global development of the twenty-first century has been more damaging to the cause of freedom than the emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the world's next superpower, with the world's fastest-growing military, a worldwide propaganda apparatus, and a program of global infrastructure development---" (Diamond 2022: 170-172).

The State of U.S. Democracy: A Model for Nigeria and the World?

Polarization is visible and evidenced by Covid-19 pandemic debates and the 2020 election outcome, perhaps the most significant threat to United States democracy (Robinson 2023). The U.S. democratic decline has been further frustrated by political and cultural politicization, bleeding "cultural wars" between the conservative republican party and the increasingly transforming liberal democratic party on issues ranging from race, same-sex marriage, black lives matter, black history, reparation, religion in public schools, abortion and the 2020 presidential election. The resulting differentiation in public opinion has 'hardened into political sectarianism and almost permanent institutional gridlock.' (EIU, 2023). Like many other countries, Nigeria regards the United States as a global democratic leader and a model. However, the Trump administration's continuous attack on democracy remains a blemish on democracy and a problem for global democratic civilian elections. The assault on the democratic process reached its peak after the Fulton County Courthouse in Georgia indicted former U.S. President Trump and his allies and co-conspirators for their attempts to overturn the 2020 election results. Trump and his co-conspirators faced 13 criminal charges, including solicitation and racketeering (RICO) to commit election fraud. This charge is related to Trump's request to the Georgian Secretary of State, the top election official in the state, on January 2, 2021, to find more votes for him than were cast, allowing him to win the election in a critical battleground state, despite losing to then-Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden. At about the same time, some Georgian Republican officials in Georgia conspired, posing as "fake electors, to falsely tell Congress that Trump won Georgia's electoral college votes" (Shamsian, 2023).

As indicated above, Trump's alleged actions to illegally overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election following his loss at the polls and the assault on the Capitol by a mob allegedly inspired by the former president to violently stop and disrupt congressional certification of the presidential election result, as well as, June 8, 2023, federal criminal charges indictment of former U.S. President Trump by a federal jury presented unprecedented and historical development in U.S. democratic history and a challenge to America's democratic institutions and system like never before (Bowden & Teague 2022; Freedom House 2022). Such alleged actions set a poor historical precedent to Nigeria and other democratic and non-democratic nations. The conservative Republican party has taken actions that undermine the credibility of America's democratic institutions, such as the Justice Department and the FBI. This move appears to be an attempt to please and support former President Trump. Some Republican members of Congress have even called for defunding the FBI and the Department of Justice during the Biden administration.

On Trump's indictment, Freedom House noted the charge was a test and opportunity for U.S. democracy, adding, "Our leaders must rise to meet this challenge with integrity. They should send the message not only to Americans but also to people watching around the world that democracy is the system that is best equipped to deal with these challenges in a fair and just manner and that we can trust democracy to protect individual rights while also holding the powerful to account" (Freedom House 2023). Regardless of what democracy purports, Trump's administration's assault on the elections has made many to question the institution of democracy. The U.S. pattern of democratic abuse and backsliding remains one of regression rather than improvement in recent years. Although America's democratic institutions were battered, they

remained strong and resilient throughout and after the elections. However, such events have forever exposed the United States' democracy's vulnerabilities with tremendous implications for the cause of global freedom and democracy as global democracy rested on the success of American democracy (Fukuyama 2022). The election denial, the fake electors' scheme, the effort to stop the lawful and peaceful transfer of power, and the Capitol Hill mob attack impacted the U.S. international standing, signaling a significant democratic decline in the global challenge of liberal democracy and its influence in global power (Street 2021: 186-211; Martin, Burns & Vigdor 2022). As Fukuyama commented, the January 6 insurrection was a shocking stain on America's democracy and the fact that the Republican Party not only failed to repudiate the coup leaders that organized and participated in the insurrection but sought to normalize relations with the possibility of presidential pardon (Trump). Some congressional Republicans have been accused of intimidating, frustrating, and purging from the party's ranks politicians who speak the truth about the 2020 elections. The case of former United States Representative Elizabeth Cheney is an example of this. In this context, Fukuyama pointed out that "America's credibility in upholding a model of good democratic practice has been shredded. January 6 sealed and deepened the country's divisions, so it will have consequences echoing across the globe in the years to come" (Fukuyama 2022).

Similarly to the events in the U.S. and democratic decline, Varshney (2022) discussed how India, the world's largest democracy, has undergone severe democratic challenges in recent times. Carothers and Press (2022) point attention to three explanations as to what is driving democratic backsliding in the US and beyond:

Grievance-fueled illiberalism
Opportunistic authoritarianism, and
Entrenched interest groups revanchism.

Along the same line, Carothers pointed out the 'motivation' and 'methods' driving democratic backsliding, noting the relentless pursuit to undermine democratic institutions that hold them accountable. For instance, despite being a democratic country, the United States 2020 presidential election was marred by undemocratic processes, fraud, and alleged corruption, as the suspected racketeering indictment case of Trump and 18 others in Georgia exemplified. In this instance, Jenna Ellis (Trump's former lawyer and co-defendant) tearfully pleaded guilty, stating, 'If I knew then what I know now, I would have declined to represent Donald Trump in these post-election challenges' (Gardner A. 2023; Botvinik-Nezer et al. 2023: 1106-1110; Fahey 2023: 267-274). Nevertheless, despite democratic challenges, U.S. democratic institutions continue to demonstrate the resilience of America's democratic institutions. The U.S. Congress debate on America's debt ceiling limit signified significant partisan politicization. Still, in the last minutes, avoiding a catastrophic default, the White House and the Republican-dominated Congress arrived at a consensus, marking the resilience of America's democracy and good news for the U.S. economy and its democratic institutions. Even though the U.S. in 2017 was demoted from its long-standing status as a 'full democracy' to a 'flawed' democracy, the U.S. remains the highest rated in political participation and impressively largely scores high in electoral process and pluralism. As stated by Currinder, "Governing in the United States Requires Compromise: Flashy partisan feuds have not eliminated the U.S. political system's need or capacity for productive collaboration in the public interest" (Currinder, 2023). Overall, the democratic backsliding in consolidated economically well-off democracies is mind-boggling, as the cases of India, Poland, Hungary, and

the United States signified. However, depending on the winner of the 2024 U.S. elections, it is not sure if the U.S., once a standing bearer of democracy for the global community, will remain a 'flawed democracy' as recent political events in the U.S. signified democratic decline, rendering its institutions shaken and challenged. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the 2020 US election, which involved fraudulent activities (election interference) by former President Trump and his alleged co-conspirators, did not set an excellent example for Nigeria and other democracies around the world. In the case of the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections, citizens were concerned with issues of fraud and corruption perpetrated by its electoral commission. Such problems involving fraud and corruptive practices challenge global democracy and contribute to the escalation of undemocratic election practices with national, regional, and international consequences.

Nigerian Election History - A Look Back

At independence, Nigeria shed the shackles of colonialism. It became independent as a constitutional monarchy (parliamentary system) with the Queen of England as the head of state, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as prime minister, and Nnamdi Azikiwe as the governor-general. The country transitioned into a federal republic where Azikiwe became Nigeria's first president, and Balewa remained prime minister and head of state. The regime of the first democratic government under Azikiwe and Balewa was labeled the First Republic. Democracy experienced a severe challenge due to the resentment of the domination of northern politicians in the central government, culminating in widespread ethnic violence with a military coup ending civilian rule. Following the ethnic massacre of Ibos in Northern Nigeria, the East attempted secession under the umbrella of Biafra, leading to a bloody civil war with a million dead (Tarantola 2018: 317-318. Forsyth 2007; Omaka 2018). The breakaway state of Biafra ended its secession in 1970. The series of military coups continued, culminating in 33 years of authoritarian rule apart from a brief interval following the election of Shehu Shagari from 1979 to 1983 (Sule & Sabo 2014: 1 -346; Obi 2011: 366-387).

The Second Republic was created democratically but was shortly ended by a military coup. However, in 1999, the era of autocratic governments came to an end when former military general Obasanjo won the presidential election. He served two consecutive four-year terms as a civilian. Thus, the country underwent a successful transition in 1999. Therefore, the country's 1999 transition to civilian rule was monumental in Nigeria's political history, signaling the end of military coup-led autocratic governments to the longest uninterrupted democratic governments since independence in 1960. Umaru Yar'Adua was sworn in following his triumph in the 2007 presidential elections but died less than three years as Nigeria's president. His vice president, Goodluck Jonathan, finished Yar'Adua's term and won a new presidential term in 2011 as the president. Jonathan campaigned for a second presidential term but lost to former military general (now civilian) Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, thus marking the first instance of a win from an opposition-led party in the country. Buhari won a second term, leading the February 2023 presidential election, to which INEC pronounced Bola Tinubu the winner, which is the subject of this study (Obi 2011: 366-387; Nkwachukwu 2015: 75-76; Sule & Sabo 2014: 1 -346). The democratic corruption and abuses in the United States and Nigerian elections led many to question whether these undemocratic practices are a national or global problem?

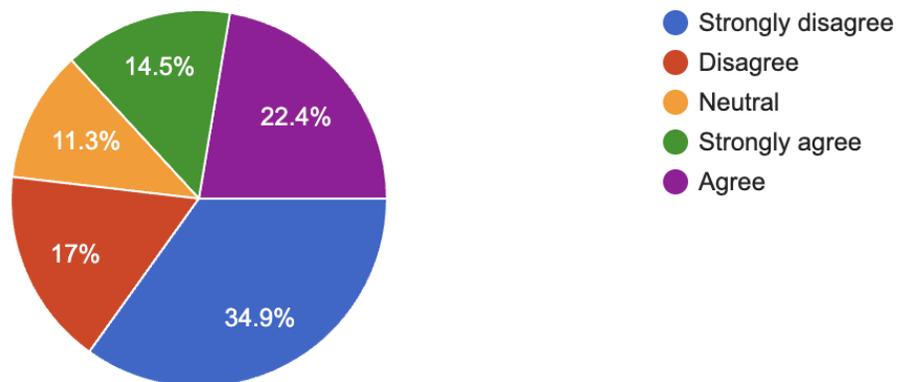
2023 Nigerian Election

The Nigerian Presidential election held in February 2023 was of immense national and international significance. However, the process and outcome were heavily tainted by widespread voting irregularities and rigging, making it the least fair in the country's history of decades of unfair elections. This sentiment was expressed in the responses (Figure 2), indicating that over 56 percent of registered voters disagreed that the election was free and fair.

Figure 2.

Was the election free and fair?

407 responses



Survey Questionnaire Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

The ruling party candidate, Bola Tinubu, was declared the winner of the contested presidential election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). To win the presidential election, each party candidate must gain a 'plurality of votes and secure 25 percent of the vote in at least two-thirds of Nigeria's 36 states.' Eighteen presidential candidates were approved for electoral competition by INEC. Out of these 18 candidates, three major political parties emerged as the front runners in the presidential race and competed fiercely for the presidency.

While Bola Tinubu's All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), heads of the two traditional Nigerian parties, retained some significant support, Peter Obi's Labour Party (LP) was popular among the country's youth population as well as urban and rural voters. However, Tinubu, the declared winner, fell short of ensuring 50% of the votes, becoming the first Nigerian incumbent president to be voted in with less than half of the total vote. Tinubu won 37% of the vote, while Atiku Abubakar, the opposition leader, secured 29%, and the opposition Labour Party came in third place with 25%. A fourth candidate who competed in the presidential election was Rabiu Kwankwaso of the New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP). His 6.40 percent win of the total vote was insignificant compared to the three major political party candidates.

While the political parties were approved the right to run for election, the Nigerian citizens were denied the freedom and right to choose their president. Elections in Nigeria are, for decades, a

foregone conclusion. Despite the excitement, hope, and energy, the February 2023 election was no exception. The AP political party (a well-manipulated patronage machine) perfected a system to allow their party to fraudulently win enough votes, proving to the outside world that democracy is indeed working and thus legitimizing the party's corrupt dominance of political power. Tinube was instrumental in bringing Buhari to power and, hence, a payback. With the APC in power, a well-coordinated patronage machine and a corrupt electoral commission, was in place. That corrupt body is none but the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Tinubu was declared winner of the 2023 presidential election amidst allegations of rigging, fraud, corruption, and collusion with the electoral commission INEC. Many, including opposition parties, called for the election to be canceled (annulled) due to alleged breaches of the Electoral Act. Tinubu's APC and INEC refuted the allegations. The newly introduced electronic voting system, the Biomodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), was designed to make the polls more transparent and prevent the manipulation of results. However, the widespread failure of electoral staff to upload results from polling units to INEC's server fueled suspicions of a conspiracy. This dispute remains at the center of the controversy surrounding the election, as many question its legitimacy (Nwonwu 2023).

BVAS's credibility inspired millions, including political activists and young voters, to register to vote. However, their hopes were shattered due to the technology's failure to prevent vote rigging and manipulation of the election results. The technology was designed to monitor and make it difficult for INEC to manipulate the collated election results, ensuring the transparency of the polls. Unfortunately, the technology failed to transmit results from polling stations on time, putting the authenticity and credibility of the election outcome at risk. Obi's Labour Party rejected the presidential results, declaring them unacceptable. Senator Datti Baba-Ahmed, Labour's vice-presidential candidate, described the incumbent Tinubu's government as illegal and unconstitutional. Senator Datti said, "The purported results did not meet the minimum criteria of a transparent, free, and fair election." Further, they accused the government of "attacks, violence, voter intimidation and suppression" (Mohamed, 2023).

Opposition party contenders Obi and Atiku rejected the election results, citing issues with the BVAS electronic voting system. The opposition Labour Party accused INEC of failure to abide by the provisions governing Nigeria's election law. According to the federal government's election monitoring body, regulations, and guidelines, INEC's responsibility was scanning and uploading the election results promptly to the server from over 175,000 polling stations following ratification by election officials and agents representing the presidential contesting candidates' parties. So, what went wrong? INEC's failure to promptly upload the election results from polling units raised concerns and suspicions. As Nigeria's Information Minister, Lai Mohammed (2023) stated, that the electoral commission, INEC, 'deliberately withheld the real-time upload of presidential election results from polling units.' Similarly, Ifeanyi Okowa (BBC 2023), the PDP vice-presidential candidate, alleged that INEC either "connived [with the ruling party] or their system was down.

Furthermore, he elaborated: "If the system was down and they knew it, then they ought to have postponed the election. If the system was not down, and they didn't allow the upload of the results, [it] means that they have connived and are no longer neutral and impartial." (BBC News, 2023). The presidential election results in Nigeria were equally questioned by former President Olusegun

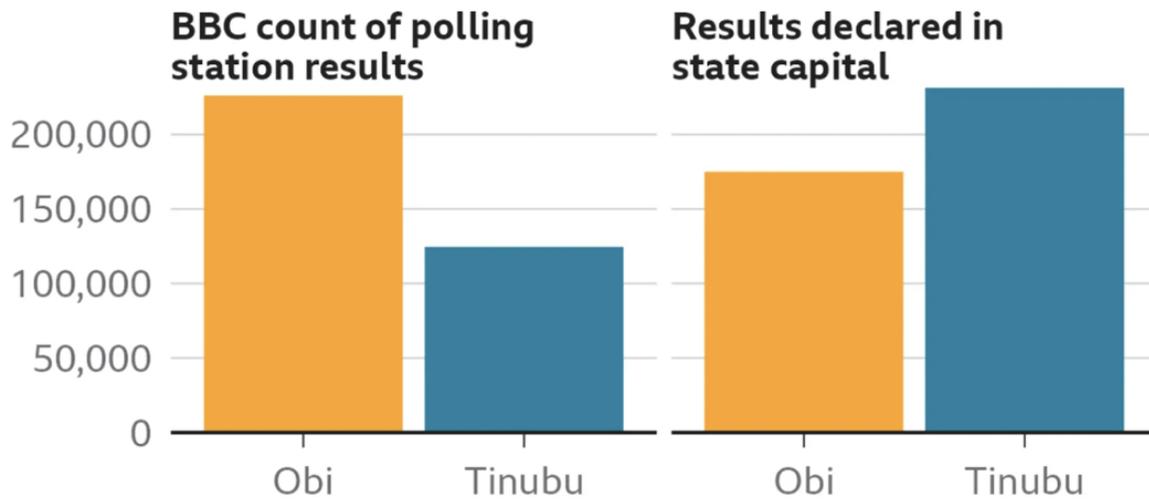
Obasanjo, who requested an annulment. He alleged that INEC officials were bribed and, as such, compromised the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to manipulate the results. Obasanjo expressed his disappointment, stating that a significant amount of money was spent introducing BVAS and a server to immediately transmit results from polling units. However, INEC officials were allegedly compromised to manipulate the manual transmission of results, which could be doctored and manipulated. He criticized the politicians, bureaucrats, and business entities responsible for bribing INEC officials with 'bloody money' for their greedy, irresponsible, and unpatriotic acts. Equally Obasanjo questioned the general voting public, "Why should you as a Nigerian vote for somebody that the character, the reputation, the life of which you do not want your own children to be? It is either you are wicked, you are unpatriotic, or you are really, really a bad citizen of this country" (All.Africa.com 2023). He urged the INEC chairman, Mahmud, to nullify the election result. Any results manipulated or rendered inactive, such as those outside BVAS and the server, should be declared void and inadmissible for election declaration. Obasanjo also urged the INEC chairman to take this opportunity to mend his reputation and character for posterity. The Nigerian people deserve fair and transparent elections, and the INEC chairman is responsible for ensuring this happens. The future of Nigeria depends on it. (Sowole, 2024).

Allegations of rigging and collusion between the APC winning party and INEC officials were not firmly rejected or denied. Ali Mohammed Ali, an APC party member attempting to refute some of the accusations about votes not being transmitted electronically as planned, stated, "We certainly understand some of these concerns. We also wished the election results were transmitted in real-time, but that doesn't invalidate the results because, as the electoral body explained, every polling unit's result would be computed. Then an agent would certify this is an authentic result, and pictures would be taken" (Mohamed 2023). Although he inferred that such was the case, that was not.

Many voters do not buy INEC's defense, which blamed the delays in uploading poll results to the IREV portal on technical glitches and lack of internet access at some polling locations. However, INEC still needs to justify why its agency was able to uphold the results of the National Assembly election much faster and more swiftly than the outcome of the presidential election. In this regard, the European Union's (EU) Chief Election Observer, Barry Andrews, expressed crucial shortcomings in the electoral process concerning the delays in uploading the election results, noting the "clear anomaly between the fact that votes for the presidential election were not uploaded whereas votes for the legislative elections were uploaded." (BBC News, 2023).

Following the conduct of the election investigation, "The BBC found evidence suggesting some results from Nigeria's presidential election may have been manipulated." (Nwonwu, 2023). Equally, the BBC also observed evidence of vote buying. Still, it could not account for the essence of such corruptive practice and spoke of evidence of ballot tampering tracing its origin to uploads on INEC's server. It equally noted significant alterations on some uploaded results but needed to be clarified about the reasons behind such developments. The 2023 presidential election was not free and fair by all standards. As significantly indicated by the BBC, (as shown in Figure 3 below), Peter Obi, the Labour presidential candidate, secured and received more votes in the River State of Nigeria; however, Bola Tinube was declared the winner.

Figure 3.



Note: Only top two candidates shown

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (Inec)



Many internal and external election observers requested INEC to nullify the corrupted election result. However, contrary to the call for presidential election nullification, attorney Yemi Candide contended that "if non-compliance does not affect the result, it will not nullify [the result]. If certain results in certain areas are non-compliant, a rerun is possible only if it will be material." (Orjinmo, 2023). However, the material substantial evidence theory may not hold. Because what is significant is that non-compliance may have a more significant impact than it appears. The more than a week it took INEC to publish the result (almost a week after the first ballot was cast, 12% of the results have still not been published) may have been the opportunistic period to manipulate, alter, and fix the election results. Such an assumption is not contrary to the election monitoring agency's ongoing influence and corruptive practices (Orjinmo, 2023). According to Leena Hoffmann, "the technology failed to transmit results from the polling units, which was "a critical part of preventing the manipulation of the results and credibility of the outcome," as INEC's credibility 'hangs in the balance.' (Rajvanshi 2023).

Even though attorney Candide Johnson claimed that INEC's guidelines are not law to the extent that the citizens believed and trusted that INEC would stand and carry out its proclamation, making it binding, public trust was eroded. Claiming that INEC's guidelines were not law fails to support the ACT signed in 2022 guiding the conduct of the 2023 elections that "voting and transmission of results shall be by the procedure determined by the [Independent National Electoral Commission]" (Orjinmo 2023).

Atiku Abubakar's People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Peter Obi's Labour Party (LP) took their case to court. They objected to the results of the February 25 presidential elections because INEC failed to follow laws governing the country's elections. However, judging from lessons of historical precedence from similar previous election cases, and as expected Obi and Atiku's court election challenge were doomed and dismissed.

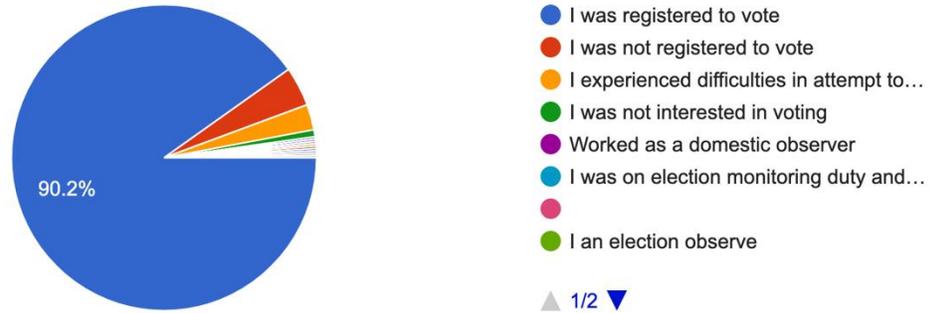
Both opposition leaders, Atiku and Obi, would have to do the impossible, which is to present to the Supreme Court evidence, such as original copies of INEC's result sheets and the BVARs system used for the accreditation of votes from the Southern states, contending that such action was purposeful or deliberate and affected the results of the election. Based on previous election cases, it appears to be challenging to prove any allegations of fraud, as earlier instances of election fraud demonstrate. According to the Electoral Act, the petitioner must provide evidence to the court that any violation of the law has altered the election's outcome. Considering the lessons of history, it is unlikely to achieve this. Nigeria's 2023 presidential election were plagued by allegations of corruption, manipulation, and fraudulent activities. These claims have led to a widespread loss of faith in the democratic process. Despite these issues, the highest court in the land has consistently failed to rule in favor of petitioners, rendering the entire system ineffective. Proving the illegitimacy of election conduct is a daunting task, as demonstrated by Atiku's failed challenge of Buhari's 2019 victory (Okakwu 2019). The Supreme Court required the PDP to provide a staggering 250,000 eyewitnesses to support their claims. This impossible requirement ensures that the opposition party is almost never able to prove their case, leaving them with no recourse for justice. With a fair and transparent electoral process, the people of Nigeria can trust their government to represent their interests. It is time for the courts to take a stand and ensure that these allegations of corruption and fraud are thoroughly investigated and resolved. The future of Nigeria's democracy depends on it. As I write, the Supreme Court dismissed the two opposition court cases. This highlights the significant challenge in proving the illegitimacy of election conduct in Nigeria.

Despite the implementation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the results viewing portals, which encouraged millions of voters to register and participate in the 2023 elections, voter turnout could have been higher. In fact, with just a 27% turnout, the 2023 election recorded the lowest voter turnout in the country's history (Chart 5). This contrasts the fact that the current population is more than three times larger than it was 40 years ago when voter turnout was last this low. However, 2023 changed how the INEC conducts the country's elections. Many will say thanks to BVAS. The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and results viewing portals (voter transparency) encouraged, giving millions of voters hope and confidence that the electoral commission cannot fraudulently manipulate the election results. As shown in Figure 4, unlike previous years, the reliance on this new technology and its transparency in the election process encouraged millions (90.02 percent) to register to vote in the 2023 presidential election.

Figure 4.

Were you registered to vote in the 2023 general elections held on 25 February 2023?

408 responses



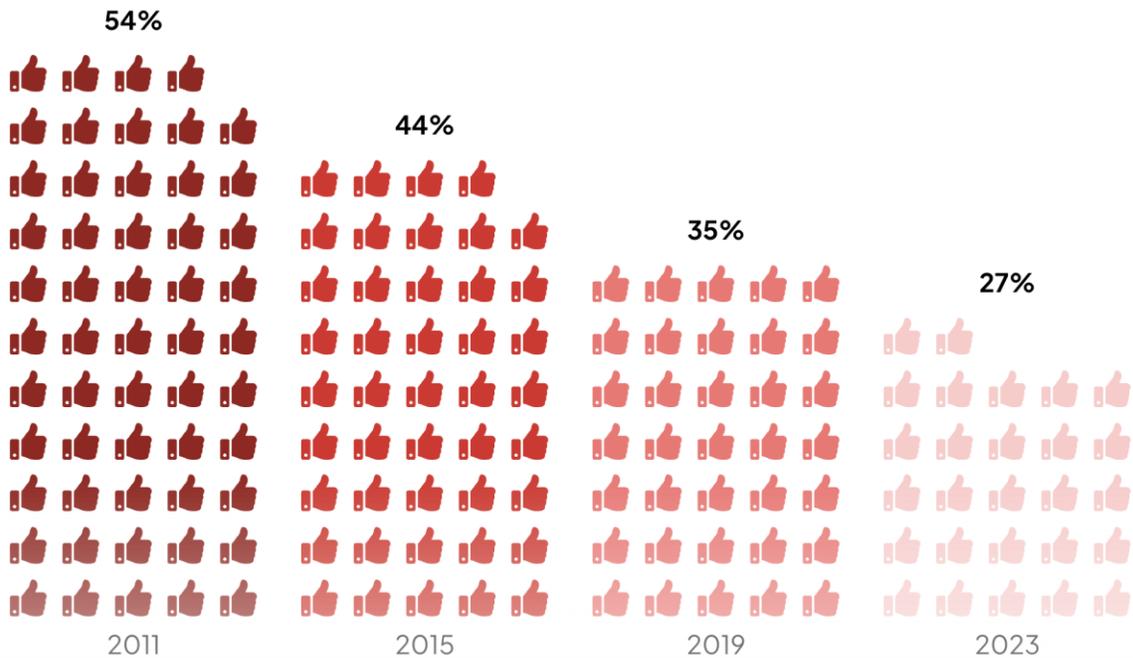
Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

However, out % of the 87 million eligible voters, just 27% voted. Compared to previous election years, many wondered about the reasons for the declining voter turnout, as illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5.

Turnout in Nigeria's elections have been low and declining

Voter turnout = votes cast/registered voters



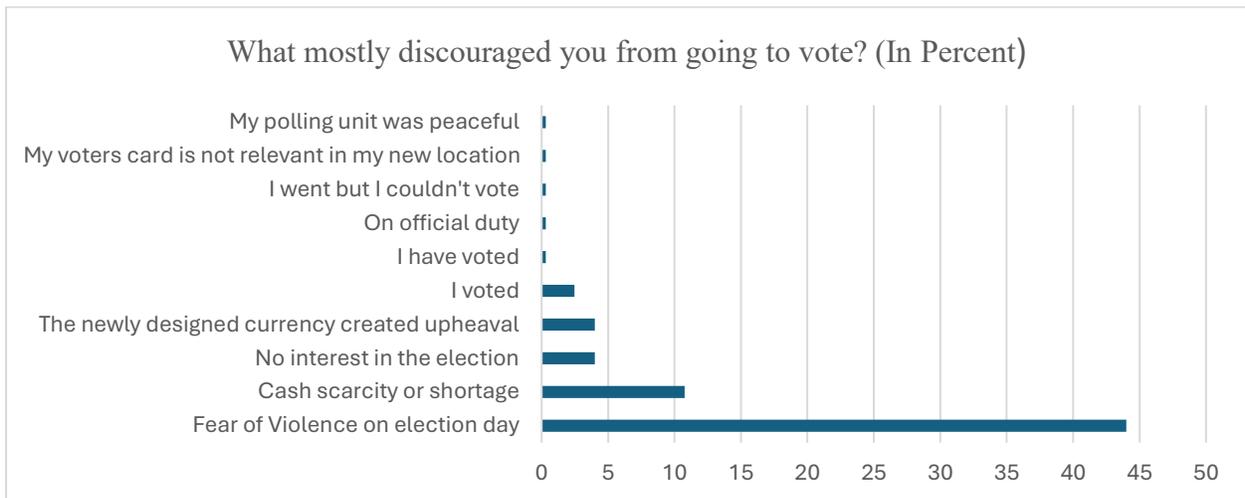
Source: Stears Analytics | stears.co/elections INEC



Below are some of the reasons for the low turnout and declining interest in the democratic process.

1. Harassment and intimidation of voters before the election created fear and discouraged voters from going to the polls. A senior West African analyst, Mucahid Durmaz, explained, "The low participation doesn't necessarily reflect apathy as much as fuel and currency shortages, voter suppression, and violence." " (Mohamed, 2023; Aliyu et al. 2023: 35-41). As shown in Figure 6, about 44 percent of those surveyed did not vote because of fear of violence on election day.

Figure 6.



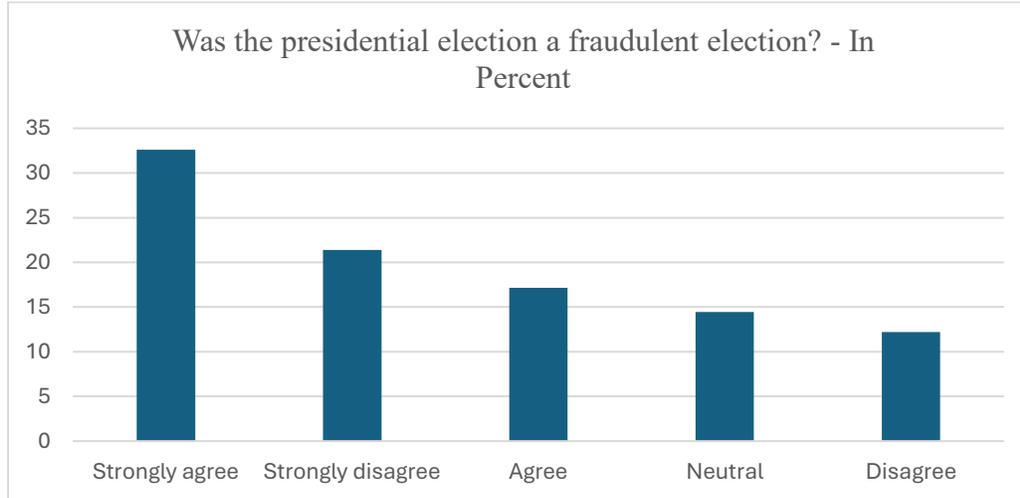
Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

2. The all-day delay in the arrival of voting materials was significant as such logistical issues discouraged many voters who left heading home feeling frustrated and unable to vote as they departed for their homes and never returned, triggering the suppression of voters and their votes.

3. Some first-time voters were disenfranchised, resulting in INEC's official's late arrival (or no-show in some cases), violence, and ballot-box snatching.

4. The fraud, corruption, suspicions, attitudes, and conspiracy surrounding the highly contested presidential election have been depressing to many, particularly Nigerian young voters, and paralyzing along ethnic and religious lines. Of those surveyed, most believed, 32 percent of respondents, as shown in Figure 7, that the presidential election was fraudulent.

Figure 7.



Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

5. Reasons include upheaval created by the newly designed Nigerian currency, cash shortages, scarcity, cash crisis, as many needed help to obtain banknotes or cash for gas or transportation. Many questioned the motives behind Buhari's government currency change a month or two before the election.

6. One possible explanation for the low turn could be cases where INEC failed to report for duty or arrived after polls had closed in Obi's strongholds. Obi was convinced of a planned conspiracy to make it difficult to vote and manipulate and alter the results in his strongholds in the south.

7. Many voters complained about INEC election officials' refusal to upload the results of the votes at the polling station as mandated. Voters presented evidential videos supporting their claims (BBC, 2023).

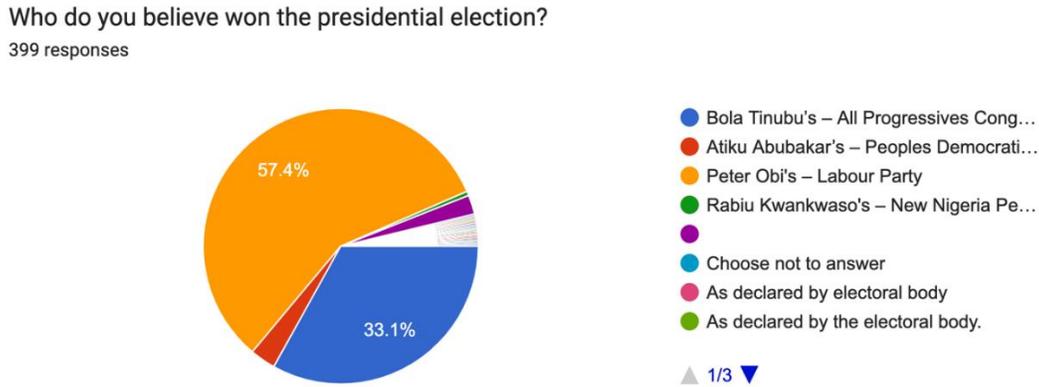
8. Another possibility, as Zuhunan Dapel suggested, was that voters voted. Still, their votes were uncounted, signaling the suppression of votes, and as a "result, we expect to see a decline – equivalent to the total number of suppressed votes – in the total number of votes cast." In other words, "The election was utterly rigged if there was an election." (The Cable, 2023).

9. Many did not care to vote because voters' lack of confidence in elections' ability to produce influential leaders has significantly impacted their behavior.

10. A significant number of voters lost faith in INEC due to irregularities and alleged collusion with the ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC), led by Tinubu. Consequently, they chose not to use their Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) during the election. As shown in Figure 8, most respondents, 57.4 percent, believed that Obi was the rightful winner of the election, while only 33.1 percent believed that Tinubu won. Additionally, there were some who suspected that INEC was bribed to manipulate the results in favor of Tinubu. As a result, a disappointed voter explained

their decision to boycott the election by saying, "They invalidated their PVCs because they are convinced that Nigeria will never improve, no matter how hard one tries." (Orjinmo, 2023).

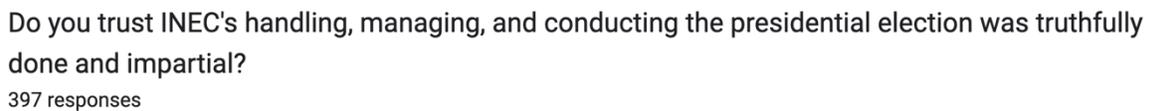
Figure 8.



Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria is responsible for ensuring that elections are conducted fairly and impartially. However, it is disheartening to learn that INEC often determines the outcome of elections before they even take place, leaving the citizens no choice but to witness a mere facade of democracy. This system, which is based on violence and theft, has led to widespread disillusionment among the people. It is not a secret that some INEC staff intentionally undermine the election process for their personal gain, making it difficult for the commission to regain its credibility and transparency. About 41.3 percent (Figure 9), of those surveyed believed INEC mishandled and rigged the election process and result.

Figure 9.



Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

An election monitor and observer named Agwuegbo has referred to INEC as a "rotten pipe" incapable of producing clean water adding that this must change if we are to restore trust in the election process. It is imperative that INEC prioritize fairness and neutrality in electoral administration to ensure that every citizen's voice is heard and counted. We need to create an electoral body that can control corruption and hold politicians accountable (Source: Agwuegbo). Larry Diamond's (Diamond 2015:141-144) insights on the importance of these factors cannot be overstated. He emphasizes that these are essential elements for ensuring democracy's quality and stability (Rajvanshi 2023). Nigeria's election system is deeply entrenched in corruption, serving as a payback patronage system for the wealthy, who sponsor political candidates and expect to be rewarded with power and influence. Unfortunately, this has led to rampant vote buying and intimidation tactics, denying impoverished citizens their right to make free choices. This corrupt practice has compromised the integrity of the election and undermined citizens' confidence in the result. The problem of corruption in Nigeria is pervasive, affecting various aspects of life- from health, education, security, law enforcement to even religious institutions. It's a scourge that no government has been able to tackle effectively due to weak and non-independent systems and institutions that check possible abuses of power. The media is also embroiled in corruption, which has led to journalists and media houses pandering to the highest bidder in their reportage. Despite significant technological advancements utilized for the first time in processing ballots, Nigerian electoral commission officials attempted to manipulate election instruments (BVAR) and results. These actions, coupled with violence and corruption, raise concerns about the sustainability of democratic institutions and practices in Nigeria. The 2020 US presidential elections come to mind as an example of such corruption and abuses of the election process.

Why the Nigerian 2023 Presidential Election Was of National & Global Concern: An Analysis

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was the most consequential election in Africa, generating significant interest worldwide. This election is of national and global concern, as Nigeria is known for being a political heavyweight, a top oil producer, and the largest economy on the African continent. Additionally, Nigeria is currently the most populated country in Africa and is expected to surpass China and India as the world's most populous country by 2050, with an estimated population of 560 million. With its growing population and position as the world's second-largest democracy by 2050, Nigeria is well-positioned to become a global democratic leader, providing momentum for democratic movements. A credible election would position Nigeria as a global democratic leader and bolster Africa's position as a source for democratic momentum. Moreover, the Nigerian election is particularly significant due to the history of military coups in the West African region. This election's outcome may impact the region's ongoing security and political development and potentially discourage further military takeovers. The 2023 Nigerian election was expected to establish the country as a model of democracy in the continent and beyond. With its successful outcome, Nigeria can emerge as a formidable force in the fight against the recent wave of authoritarianism that threatens to engulf the region and the world. Given the recent coups and jihadist insurgency causing instability in the area, the 2023 elections are a defining moment for Nigeria, Africa, and the world. The election promised to transform the nation into a beacon of democracy for the rest of the continent and beyond. Nigeria stands as a beacon of stability in West Africa, and it is expected to lead the way towards a peaceful and prosperous future for the continent. Therefore, the elections would set a direction and path to the survival of democracy in Africa and elsewhere. In the words of Stanley Achonu, 'Nigeria stands to become a beacon for Africa but also stands the risk of bringing darkness to the continent

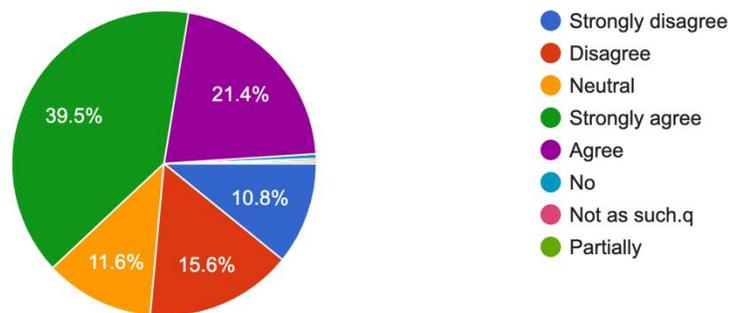
because whatever happens will have great repercussions across the continent and also the impact will be felt around the world.’ The 2023 Nigerian election is an African and global concern and will have immense repercussions, making it a defining moment for Nigeria and the world (Egbejule 2023).

Furthermore, the 2023 elections were significant because Nigeria's electoral commission planned to use an electronic voter accreditation system and results-viewing portal for the first time. This new technology would allow voters to be verified using facial features or fingerprints, and results could be transmitted electronically. The goal was to enhance transparency and accessibility, setting a new standard for voter transparency. Millions of people registered to vote, and polling units increased by almost 50% compared to the previous election in 2019. This groundbreaking election gave hope that Africa's most populous nation is progressing in elections and democracy. However, the recent poll suggests that the election outcome could have been more satisfactory, and many people at home and abroad were disappointed. The findings of the Afrobarometer poll are alarming. Nigerians have lost hope and enthusiasm for the state of democracy in the country and are generally dissatisfied with governance. This is evident from the low voter turnout in Nigeria, the largest democracy in Africa, coupled with a decline in democratic participation, leading to democratic backsliding. Many, about 60 percent, believe that democracy is under threat in Nigeria, as exemplified in Figure 10.

Figure 10.

Do you believe democracy is under threat or danger in Nigeria?

397 responses



Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

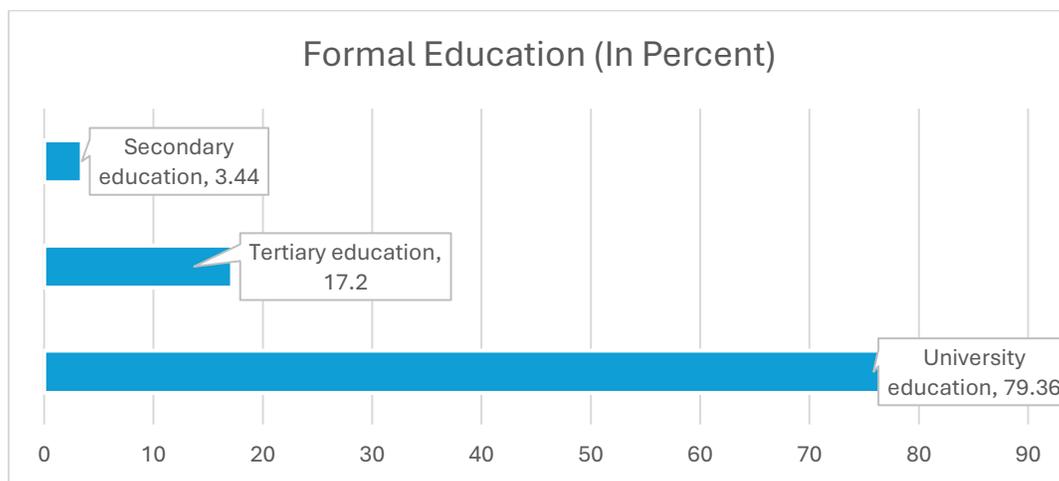
Moreover, the poll revealed that satisfaction with the way democracy is working in Nigeria has hit an all-time low of 21% in the past decade (Hawkins 2023). However, the lack of political and civic education is one of the significant reasons for the low voter turnout in the 2023 presidential election. Many Nigerian citizens, especially those in local towns and communities, lack a proper understanding of democracy, its ideals, values, and principles, and corrupt practices' dangerous and destructive nature. As a result, these citizens often participate in bribery and corruption, casting their vote for a particular candidate who may not be their best choice. This leads to declining democratic values and undermines the public's political decisions. Corruption is rampant in crucial governing institutions, particularly the INEC, and it continues to rise. Therefore, to address this

issue, we must prioritize civic and political education and empower citizens with the knowledge and tools to safeguard their right to vote. By doing so, we can ensure that citizens understand the importance of democracy, its values and principles, and the impact of their choices. This will lead to increased democratic participation, reduced corruption, and ultimately, a better and more prosperous Nigeria.

Solution: Civic Education

Education is the cornerstone of progress, and to achieve sustainable development, it's crucial to focus on civic education. Despite challenges faced by democratic governments worldwide, leaders and activists are striving to improve governance. In Africa, civic education is especially important for young individuals to understand their government's structures, responsibilities, and procedures. Civic education should begin at the grassroots level, teaching citizens about the different branches of government and their policies' impact. Education is crucial in Nigeria, where 31 percent of the population is illiterate. Unfortunately, many of the uneducated only participate in the voting process when bribed, intimidated, assisted, and directed by corrupt politicians and their accomplices. As shown in Figure 11, 79.36 percent of the surveyed population has a university education, 17.2 percent has tertiary education, and only 3.44 percent has a secondary education. Civil society should engage in dialogue with and influence a significant percentage of the illiterate population (some of whom have informal education) about the importance of education, freedom, and human rights.

Figure 11.



Survey Responses – 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

According to those surveyed, 85 percent of survey respondents support educating citizens in African countries on their rights and obligations as democratic citizens. Therefore, aside from the fear of violence, many citizens did not vote because they did not understand the political process or the importance of political participation due to insufficient voter education. Hence, civic education in schools, colleges, and universities as workshops for those with minimum or no formal education becomes paramount. Many were unaware of their rights and obligations as democratic citizens.

Empowering African students through civic education can help them realize that their voices matter in their government's decision-making processes. As Battistoni et al. (2009) highlighted, students connected to civic spaces can develop a deeper understanding of global forces and become better global practitioners. This aligns with Dewey's (1927) vision of educating global citizens and building democratic communities. Likewise, Okechukwu in her 2023 article, emphasized the crucial role of civil society in promoting good governance and democracy in African nations. She highlights the urgent need to sensitize and engage students in democratic governance through education and skill training while offering them the necessary leadership skills and exposure to become effective change agents. By training students to understand the leadership and development gap in declining democracies and failed African states, we can instill in them the values of democracy and civic responsibility necessary for nation-building. To achieve these objectives, civil democratic activists must develop programs for democratic civic education in schools and colleges across African nations, highlighting the dangers of corruption and its limitations on development while teaching the young generation the principles and values of democracy. As Larry Diamond has noted, democracy can provide new forms of interest and solidarity that cut across traditional tribal, linguistic, religious, and other identity ties. Therefore, civil education plays a crucial role in creating a society aware of the electoral process and the rights that come with it, fostering political inclusion and bolstering democracies.

Democracy begins at home and requires continuous monitoring, oversight, and engagement to function effectively. Prioritizing civil education is key to establishing more democratic and effective governance for Nigeria and the region. By increasing awareness and encouraging student participation in democratic governance, we can create a more equitable and just society. Civil society organizers must work together to inspire and develop the next generation of leaders and change agents who will drive progress and create a brighter future for Nigeria and the African region. By emphasizing civic education, we can empower young individuals to become future democratic leaders who will promote sustainable national and global development. Therefore, civil society and democratic supporters should play an essential role in actively participating, promoting, and consolidating a democratic culture in Nigeria and other African nations.

Conclusion.

Elections serve as the cornerstone of any functioning democracy. Sadly, Nigeria's political landscape has been plagued with corruption and policy issues for far too long. The 2023 presidential elections were supposed to set a new standard, but instead, they have caused concern and disappointment on both a national and global scale. Credible allegations of fraudulent practices, bribery, corruption, intimidation, violence, vote-buying, unfairness, and lack of integrity. In addition, the failure of the technology (BVAR) to transmit results promptly from the polling units has compromised the election's credibility and fairness. This critical aspect is necessary to prevent manipulation and ensure a just and transparent electoral outcome. These allegations are not expected of a national, regional, or global democratic leader. As the world's second-largest democracy by 2050, Nigeria must become a credible democratic leader. Nigeria's youth population had high hopes for the election, believing that change was possible and that it would finally come. However, the election results have shattered the hopes of Nigerians at home and abroad, as well as international observers who contend that the election was flawed.

The Nigerian government's continuous disregard for basic democratic principles and human rights since gaining independence is concerning. Without free and fair elections, democracy is meaningless. Prioritizing civic education is the key to unlocking the potential of Nigerian citizens. Civic education should be taught at all levels of education to promote active citizenship and socio-political progress. Civil society must use civic education effectively to confront Nigeria's current political challenges. Despite citizens' disillusionment with democracy, we must remember that democratic think tanks, supporters, and activists, along with civil society and the international community can ensure the survival of democracy. It is imperative to help people understand the importance of democracy and its impact on their lives. It will encourage them to become more engaged in the democratic process, hold their leaders accountable, and promote transparency and fair elections. The recent success in Czechia and Slovenia proves that this approach can work. Nigeria's position as a political powerhouse and its projected position as the world's second-largest democracy by 2050 make the 2023 presidential election a significant event. Democracy is vital to sustainable development, and Nigeria must set an example for the world. Although democracy is declining in Nigeria and the United States due to abuses and corruption, both countries can work together to promote better political and economic sustainable development. By conducting a fair and credible election, Nigeria will set an example for the world and pave the way for a brighter future for its citizens.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Methodology of the Study: Sampling and Survey Implementation

The study's methodology involves quantitative data gathered via a survey conducted in May and June, examining the conduct and outcome of the Nigerian presidential election in 2023. The study analyzed data from a survey questionnaire distributed to a random sample of citizens from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria: North-East, North-West, North-Central, South-East, South-West, and South-South. These geopolitical zones, established in 1993 by the military government of General Sani Abacha formed the basis for the distribution of economic, educational, and political resources among Nigerians. Approximately 600 questionnaires were distributed, with 410 participants responding. The survey instrument utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure respondents' experiences, views, and observations about the 2023 presidential election. The research data analysis utilized a frequency distribution table employing percentages and bar charts created using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

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