

Electoral Malpractice and Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria: A Study of Muhammadu Buhari's Administration, 2015-2023

¹Ikedi Odinaka AMAECHINA, ²Jude Chukwuemeka OKAFOR, ³Onyebuchi Johnpaul NDUBA, ⁴Emmanuel Okwuchukwu EZEAMU & ⁵Ogonna Ebenezer CHUKWUMA
Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State-Nigeria
io.amaechina@unizik.edu.ng, ud.okafor@unizik.edu.ng, jo.nduba@unizik.edu.ng,
eo.ezeamu@unizik.edu.ng, oe.chukwuma@unizik.edu.ng

DOI: [10.56201/jpslr.v10.no2.2024.pg50.74](https://doi.org/10.56201/jpslr.v10.no2.2024.pg50.74)

Abstract

Consequent upon the myriad of irregularities that characterise elections in Nigeria which ushers in government at various levels that is not the will of the people, this study interrogated how electoral malpractice affects democratic consolidation in Nigeria using the administration of President Buhari from 2015 to 2023 as a case study. Specifically, the study sought to: identify the indicators of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian electoral system; determine the effect of electoral malpractices on consolidation of democracy in Nigeria; and ascertain the ways by which the incidences of electoral malpractices in Nigeria can be prevented. Adopting the Marxian Political Economy theory, the study employed thematic analysis in analyzing data sourced from the secondary sources of data generation. The study showed that intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes, inconclusive elections, underage voting and vote buying are some of the indicators of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian electoral system. Furthermore, the study revealed that electoral malpractices have had a significant adverse effect on consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Finally, it was also revealed that electoral malpractices can be curtailed by effective execution or enforcement of the laid down rules on electoral malpractices. In line with the findings of the study the study recommends inter-alia that there is need for inter-agency coordination of different security outfit in and around voting arena in order to forestall or prevent some of the noted indicators of electoral malpractices as well as urgent need to put in place mechanisms that promote prompt and effective implementation of laws and policies targeted at electoral fraud or malpractices.

Keywords: Elections, Electoral malpractice, Democratic consolidation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, it is argued that democracy is the best system of government as it gives the people the chance to actively participate in the decision making process of the government. One of the key foundation stones of democracy is periodic fair and credible elections which gives the citizens the chance to regulate the activities of government vis-à-vis supporting a particular government or to change it (Itodo, 2022). Therefore, election gives the people the opportunity to hold government accountable as well as facilitate the expression of public opinion.

However, elections in the country right from independence has witnessed one form of malpractice cum fraud or another. From the early 1960s, when most African countries got political independence, violence during the period of elections has been a reoccurring decimal of national and global concern because of its negative impact on the society. Indeed in many African countries, crisis during elections pre-date the era of political independence. In the words of Hoeffler (2004), election related frauds in Africa has become a burning issue that has occupied academic discourse as well as media circles. Election has been defined as the manner of choice agreed upon by people out of many to occupy one or a number of positions of authority (Nnoli, 2003). Elections have always been the legitimate way of transferring power from one regime to another through ballot box. Through election, popular conduct and participation in public affairs is created in the society, Ugoh (2004).

However, Ake (2000) cited by Omotola (2008) noted that violence during the period of elections in Africa cannot be fully understood without a recourse to the effect of colonialism. The colonial African States offer a useful point of entry. Ake (2000), argued that violence during the period of elections has a strong linkage with colonial rule in Africa. In his words, the introduction of the elective principle in the 1922 constitutional review provided grounds for power tussle that in many instances led to violence in Nigeria. Although the level of violence was very minimal as a result of the fact that democratic substance was limited to individuals and certain levels of income and residential qualifications. The limitation imposed by the income and residential qualifications provided limited opportunities for mass participation, this however created tension within the polity and by extension creating avenue for violence. The implication of the pre-independent political process was that it narrows political participation and as such made democratic process in this period essentially an elite-driven process, while the majority of the citizens were relegated to the back water of political irrelevance (Ake, 2000).

The events of the early years of Nigeria political independence ably captured how primordial sentiments became dominant features of the political process in the country. Beginning from 1964–65 general elections, rigging became a dominant characteristics of the electoral process in Nigeria. The 1964 elections were largely seen as power tussle between the Southern region dominated by National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Northern region dominated by Northern People's Congress (NPC).

As should be noted, NPC had dominated politics at the federal level since independence in 1960 and saw the 1964 election as another chance to consolidate its position. The NPC and NCNC were in coalition that ruled the country from 1960 – 1966. However, by 1964, the NPC further

sought to spread her influence to the south, particularly the Western region, when it became apparent that Chief S.L. Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) which hitherto was part of the Action Group (AG) have broken away and was thus willing to form an alliance with the NPC. However, the 1965 election was an opportunity to prove that it was still very much on the ground in the region by regaining its lost paradise (Omotola, 2008). The attendant frauds, including rigging, looting, and the total collapse of public order especially in the Western region, led in many ways to the death of the First Republic (Osaghae 1998; Akinwumi 2004).

The Second Republic was not in any way different from that of the First Republic. Omotola (2008) stated that electoral process during the Second Republic in Nigeria (1979–1983) was also highly laced with rigging, especially during the second election of 1983. Between February 14, and 28, 2007, the number of incidence of electoral frauds increased to 114 incidents of which there were cases of intra-party clashes, 20 cases of assaults, intimidation and threats to life and physical attacks on competing prospective candidates by opponents' groups (Amnesty International index: AFR 44/004/2007). From all indications, it appeared that Nigeria have acquired an unenviable position, where violence during the period of elections has become a means for attaining political power.

Since the return to civil rule on 29 May 1999, Nigeria has held six general elections, apart from sundry re-run elections and local government polls. Out of the six general elections conducted, only the 2011 and 2015 general election met both the local and international standard. But the disturbing trend is that each general election was worse than the preceding one (2003 was worse than 1999; and 2007 was worse than 2003; 2019 was worse than 2015 as 2023 was worse than 2019). This trend shows that the country is faring very badly at each passing election as nobody can talk of consolidating democracy in such an environment. This is because the leaders seem to have forgotten that conducting a free and fair election is vital to the growth and development of any democratic process. Also, an average Nigerian voter is interested in immediate pecuniary or material rewards, and will easily trade off his votes when appropriately induced. This can be explained by the crippling poverty facing the people in the absence of government's provision of the basic amenities required for decent living, as well as their justified distrust of the political leaders (Ebegbulem, 2011).

Indeed, one major element of electoral process is that election must be conducted in a free and fair atmosphere, while electoral results must reflect the wishes of the people. Nigeria's experience in this regard had since independence been contrary to this expectation. This is because previous and present electoral bodies had conducted elections in a way that favoured the ruling political parties through poor planning, the device of excluding electorates from voting in places considered to be the strongholds of opposition, inadequate supply of voting materials, and late arrival of electoral officers to polling stations. Example of such was the recent conduct of the November 16, 2013 governorship election in Anambra State, Nigeria. In addition, there have been cases in which candidates that won electoral primaries were replaced by candidates that either never contested or were defeated during the exercise. A case in point was that of Rotimi Amaechi that was substituted to Celestine Omehiua for the 2007 gubernatorial election in Rivers State by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Moreover, the scenario in which flag bearers of

political parties either in the Presidential or Gubernatorial election were disqualified from contesting elections few days to the conduct of elections for no genuine reason by the electoral body as observed in the 2007 general elections was an indication that the electoral body was not truly independent of government as those decisions served the interest of the ruling political party.

Electoral crisis such as rigging creates political instability, retards democratic reforms, growth, the hope of economic progress, and creates human suffering and in some cases may degenerate into civil wars. Elections related frauds have created avenue for groups seeking power to truncate or manipulate what commonly is regarded as a peaceful process of transiting power from one regime to another and groups within the political space. Indeed, Anifowose, (1982), contended that many political elite see violence as a veritable means to remain tenaciously in office. As such, elections time in Nigeria is seen as war, due to the use of undemocratic means by politicians to acquire power at all cost.

Electoral malpractices, it would seem have become a defining characteristics of democratic process and transition from one government to another in Nigeria, such that all elections since political freedom was granted in 1960 till date have virtually become a cesspool of rigging. From available records, more than nine elections have been conducted since 1960. Unfortunately, almost all these elections have been characterized by rigging. Meanwhile, every attempts designed to restructure the state in order to enthrone a more viable and credible elections have also not yielded the desired results. Unfortunately politics have been mostly reduced to a zero-sum process, where might has become right and the will of the people has been reduced to nothing in governance.

Though, rigging during the 2019 election under Buhari watch remained a marked feature of electoral process in Nigeria, there seems to be an upsurge in the incidences of election related frauds, with significant transformation in form, character and dynamics. This has created an inherent dysfunctional nature of electoral process that often manifest in instability, lack of respect for due process and ultimately the prospect of democratic consolidation. As observed, 2019 and 2023 elections in Nigeria have been characterized by frauds. (Dennis, 2023).

However, the 2019 and 2023 electoral process has been criticized for number of reasons ranging from under age voting, campaigning during election, manipulation of results, intimidation and rigging. The 2019 and 2023 presidential election was marred by allegations of vote buying, ballot box stuffing and inflation of results most noticeably in South West and South South Nigeria. This was greeted with widespread protest which later turn to violence in most part of Nigeria (Human Right Watch, 2023). It is to this end that this research work focused attention to election rigging and consolidation of democracy under Buhari administration from 2019 to 2023.

Statement of the Problem

Since Nigeria's attainment of independence in 1960, violence and myriad irregularities have persistently marred the process of electing the country's leaders. Nigeria political landscape has thus been inundated by antidemocratic characteristics defined by fraud, corruption, intimidation,

and violence, as if these are the necessary weapons of political winners. The electorate in many ways has been denied their very basic democratic rights to vote and be voted for. Indeed, the lack of credibility in the electoral process and the resultant violence has increased in recent elections.

The country has continued to witness growing disappointments and apprehension about free and fair elections whose results are generally acceptable to be credible enough (Igbuzor, 2010; Osumah & Aghemelo, 2010, Ekweremadu, 2011). It is a truism that almost all previous electoral process from 1960 till date have generated increasingly bitter controversies and rigging (Gberie, 2011).

Thus, with unprecedented political crisis and uncontrolled violence during Buhari administration from 2019 and 2023 elections, Nigeria is best described as warfare state. Incidences of crisis are further accentuated by flagrant and official rigging of election results. Further violations of established process have invariably transformed election periods in Nigeria as a-matter-of-do-or-die or a-matter-of-life-and-death (Dennis, 2023).

Electoral malpractice poses serious challenge to, and undermines the development of Nigeria. The act is often in the form of multiple registrations of voters, buying and selling of voter's card, bribing of electoral officials, hoarding of registration materials and adoption of other crude and cunning methods of cheating political opponents (Adeola, 2012; Shelly, 2019). Electoral malpractice is a threat to the development of Nigeria in that politicians, electorate, security agents and the electoral body engage in the unscrupulous act. Oshin (2023) notes that the judiciary, that supposed to be the hope of the cheated is at times used by the perpetrators to uphold the atrocities they have committed during elections. As a result of this challenge, to choose leaders at different levels of government in Nigeria through a free, fair and credible election has become a difficult task (Adeola, 2012).

Even when the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria have been perceived to be "somehow" better compared to that of 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections, yet elections and electoral processes in Nigeria cannot be said to be credible as to determine Nigeria's transition of power. Crises from electoral malpractice have culminated in the famous 'operation-wetie' in the western part of Nigeria among the Yorubas in the first republic. According to Ejigbile (2015), scores of innocent Nigerians were killed and a lot of properties destroyed in Kano, Bauchi, Plateau and Kastina States due to allegation of electoral fraud during the result of 2011 general elections. Electoral malpractice has high tendency to orchestrate violence and hooliganism, and on the long run have retrogressive effect on the development of Nigeria.

As noted by Oshin (2013), the proliferation of small arms like hand guns, rifles, grenades, machine guns and other dangerous devices empower the youth to engage in violence, thereby posing security risk to the corporate image of the country. Violence orchestrated by electoral malpractice is inimical to the development, progress, unity and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria, and further drains the purse of the country.

Another dimension to electoral malpractice is the issue of 'inconclusive election'. The new terminology into the country's electoral system dated back to the Osun state gubernatorial rerun,

where about seven polling units were recorded to have witnessed major disruption culminated in cancelation of the votes earlier cast in those polling units. Thus, polling unit where major violence erupts, votes cast in such circumstances would be canceled and a rerun election reordered. When total number of cancelled votes are more than the total number of 'lead votes', such election is inconclusive. It can thus be said that when election is inconclusive as a result of crises arising from malpractice, another one must be held at a later date in the form of 'repeat votes' before a winner can emerge. It thus has cost implication on the part of the country while economic activities in such areas are often hampered. Unfortunately, Nigeria is yet to have elections where those not affected by any rerun will be civil. In fact, most rerun elections with earlier colouration of malpractice are held in apprehension (Shelly, 2019). It is against this backdrop that the study interrogates the place or effect of electoral malpractice on democratic consolidation in Nigeria using the Buhari administration as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study focused on the interrogation of how electoral malpractices affects democratic consolidation in Nigeria using the administration of President Buhari, as a case study. In line with the identified problem of the study, three specific objectives were raised to guide the research. They are to:

1. Identify the indicators of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian electoral system.
2. Determine the effect of electoral malpractices on consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.
3. Ascertain the ways by which the incidences of electoral malpractices in Nigeria can be stymied or prevented.

Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study provides valuable information on the concept of electoral malpractices especially as it affects consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. It will be helpful to students of Political Science, Public Administration as well as other related disciplines. The work will add to the existing body of literature on the phenomenon under study.

Practically, the study provides realistic and useful information for policy makers and all actors in the struggle for real democracy in the country and how best to deal with the hydra headed monster.

Operationalization of Key Terms

Electoral Malpractice: In this study, electoral malpractice means all mechanisms by which the electoral system is interfered on by human factor resulting in election outcomes not reflecting the will of the people. Simply put, it is those circumstances that mars credible, fair and free elections.

Democratic consolidation: in this research, democratic consolidation is not just democracy that have thrive for over one or two decades or one with some features of democracy, but, one where the will and votes of the people count. This implies that the contestants in election usually accept the outcomes of election as representing the voters' choice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Election Malpractices

Two basic approaches have been designed by scholars seeking to define and categorize practices that undermine electoral process, these are inclusive and restrictive (Vickery and Shein, 2012). They espoused inclusive (fraud, malpractice and manipulation) to be as broad as possible, no matter the imprecision. Some writers in this category situate their definitions normatively, finding that electoral wrongdoing violates domestic norms or internationally accepted standards for free and fair elections. Restrictive approach focus only or mostly on the provisions of the law (i.e. fraud can be identified by whether it violates existing domestic legal provisions). This enables a context-specific approach to combating various kinds of electoral wrongdoing, and it makes obvious sense for the election management body to use a country's domestic laws as benchmarks in its fraud or malpractice control activities.

There are three types of electoral malpractices, pre-election, election period and post-election period (Birch, 2009; Norris, 2012; Olawole et al., 2013; Ugwuja, 2015). The manipulation of rules, the manipulation of voters and the manipulation of voting. By manipulation of rules, electoral laws are distorted so as to favor one party or contestant in an election. For example, when the rules administering candidacy prevent certain political forces from contesting elections, or when large sectors of the adult population are excluded from voting. The manipulation of voters is either to distort voters' preferences or to sway preference expression. The first one involves illicit forms of campaign tactics that are deceptive and that violate campaign finance laws or severe bias in media coverage of the election. The second form consist of alteration of how preferences are expressed at the polling station, through vote-buying or intimidation in the aim of increasing the vote of a specific political force. Voting manipulation consist of electoral maladministration, such as ballot-box stuffing, misreporting, under-provision of voting facilities in opposition strong-holds, lack of transparency in the organization of the election, bias in the way electoral disputes are adjudicated in the courts, and so on (Birch, 2009).

The right to vote is a civic responsibility or public function conferred upon the citizen for reason of social expediency (Olawole et al., 2013). There is strong relationship in Africa's electoral malpractices with the type and forms of historical system practiced by each society, coupled with the class structure, social stratification, aestheticism and religious differences. Thus conclude that until elections become completely competitive and the electorates are free to make a choice between alternatives and that a liberal political system is put in place, there will always be electoral malpractice (Birch, 2009). In Africa, the scenario is a curse to the electorate and a gimmick played by politicians who seek to legitimize the illegitimate practice of coercing citizens into voting for them on the backdrop of rampant electoral rigging (Mapuva, 2013).

Furthermore, electoral malpractices also referred commonly as election rigging or election fraud and crime, election manipulation, voters fraud or vote rigging, involves illegal interference with the process of election either by increasing the vote share of a favored candidate, depressing the vote share of rival candidates, or both (Akindele, 2002).

Researches on election rigging are scarce and often times focuses broadly with a mixture of political and electoral frauds. Most of the works reviewed includes articles, commentaries, reports and interviews from newspapers and magazines on the 2011 presidential post-election violence. Some scholars have made attempt to conceptualize electoral violence. Fischer defined electoral frauds as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, manipulation, forced “protection”, blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination (Fischer, 2002).

Election rigging generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assaults, manipulation, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011; Fischer, 2002). This work of Fischer culminated into a comprehensive research by the international foundation for Election Systems (IFES) on electoral violence, which later set the stage for Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) project that has been implemented in countries across continents including Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Guyana, Iraq, East-Timo and Nigeria. The EVER project is currently been implemented in Nigeria and it presents a comprehensive and robust understanding of the context and concept of electoral violence, within the EVER framework therefore, election-related violence refers; any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011).

Nweke (2005) define electoral frauds as any form of disorganizing the electoral process, ranging from the destruction of electoral materials to the intimidating of the electorate to vote against their wish. It includes physical force aimed at influencing electoral officials to work in favour of particular groups or parties or persons as against an established procedure. Also it is a harmful act targeted at causing disharmony during elections. Olagbegi (2004) viewed electoral frauds as a faceted process not open to a singular explanation but, unfortunately tending to reproduce itself in a series of socially disruptive behaviours.

Electoral rigging/fraud can occur in advance of voting if the composition of the electorate is altered. The legality of this type of manipulation varies across jurisdictions. Deliberate manipulation of election outcome is widely considered a violation of the principle of democracy. Vote buying occurs when a political party or candidate seek to buy the vote of a voter in an election.

According to Iiufoye et al (2005), electoral frauds is a limited aspect of election rigging that is associated with the process of elections. They reason that forms of political fraud occur before, during or after elections. According to Jegede (2003), election rigging mostly occurs in the conduct of an electoral contest before, during, and after elections. Most often they are directed at altering, influencing, or changing, by force, the voting pattern or manipulating the electoral results in favour of a particular candidate or particular candidate or political party (Ugoh, 2004). Igwe (2007) provides more insight on the meaning of election fraud. According to him, election

fraud or rigging connotes any forceful act intended to compel a re-direction nor affect the stable course of development of the political system, usually in response to natural or other emergencies, longstanding demands for changes or part of evolutionary alternation of the system. He maintains that election fraud may or may not involve actual bloodshed, what is essential to amount to the condition is the effort to coercively carry out changes or the process of governance by means that are outside the normal, stable routine of the conventional legal machinery of the political society. Eckstion (1999) asserts that election rigging aimed to change political order, its constitution, common authority and of such dimension that its incidence will affect the exercise of authority in the society.

Therefore, election fraud is carried out in the struggled for acquisition of political power, whole in some case; rigging is aimed at modifying the election results of individuals and groups within political system for some desire results. Election rigging on the other hand, is a limited aspect of election fraud or crimes that is associate with the process of elections. This form of election fraud occurs before, during or after elections (Afolabi 2003).

The Nature of Electoral Process in Nigeria

It has become a truism that electoral processes in Nigeria often feature violence, corruption, rigging, ethnic influence, thuggery, kidnappings and all sorts of antisocial behaviours. These features have always replayed themselves right from the first election conducted in the country up to this present Fourth Republic (Obi, 2004:12).

Under the First Republic, election campaigns were visibly characterized by palpable violence, thuggery and different types of physical assaults on political opponents. According to Dudley (1973:25), much of the violence resulted from the intra-party crisis that rocked the Action Group (AG) which was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The AG crisis, initially started as a form of inter-personal conflict between Awolowo and his deputy, Chief S.L Akintola, which eventually snowballed into total breakdown of law and order and a declaration of a state of emergency in the Western region. The violence that was associated with this incident also resulted in a free for all fight between the supporters of Akintola and Awolowo on the floor of the regional house. Dudley (1973:29) further noted that arising from ethnic factors that became prominent in Nigeria politics, party campaigners and candidates were freely molested in areas where their parties were not popular. For example, Action Group candidates were denied electoral registration forms in the North while the Helicopter that brought Awolowo to Sokoto for a campaign rally was refused landing. Similarly, the campaigners of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and electoral officials were physically assaulted and kidnapped in the North and West.

The Second Republic, like the first, also witnessed a lot of election violence particularly in Ondo and Oyo States with the former witnessing a lot of criminal arson (Nwabueze, 1984:12). The situation in Ondo was very tense. The 1983 election was particularly rated as one of the worst election ever held in Nigeria because of the violence that accompanied it. There was fear of violence so much that results were announced at night for fear of violent attack (Eleazu 1984:17).

Violence in Nigeria's politics assumed a more disturbing dimension during the present Fourth

Republic. This is because, apart from the usual form of violence that has crept into the body politics, unwarranted and mindless assassinations and killings had gradually and systematically become defining features of Nigeria body politics. Still fresh in our minds are the killings and unfathomed assassinations of Harry Marshal, Bola Ige, Funso Williams and Deji Daramola, the last two, being PDP governorship aspirants in Lagos and Ekiti States respectively (Akpor, 2004).

However, Ayoade (2007) argued that political violence can also be traced to the role of the organs responsible for the regulations of elections in Nigeria. In his words, the inability of the electoral bodies from independence to the present to exert its independence amidst political influence often attract rancor from the aggrieved party and their supporters. The case against the conduct of the 2007 general elections by (INEC) and the consequent nullification of some States elections by tribunals and courts demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the INEC to conduct credible elections.

In all however, it must be added that the growing incidences of election related violence in Nigeria has a strong correlation with the zero sum nature and the uncontrollable desire to capture power by all means by politicians.

Democracy

The concept of democracy is laden with many meanings. In fact, many scholars agree that democracy like every other social science concept is a very loaded concept with the entire essence which cannot be captured by a single school of thought. Zoë Scott and Claire Mcloughlin (2012) observed that democracy is a highly contestable concept, both in terms of its definition and its relationship to development.

Democracy, which derives from the Greek word demos, or people, is defined, basically, as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. In some forms, democracy can be exercised directly by the people; in large societies, it is by the people through their elected representatives. This is perhaps why President Abraham Lincoln aptly described democracy as “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

It is a form of government in which Supreme power is vested in the people collectively and is administered by their or by officers appointed by them. It is a state of society characterized by recognition of equality of rights and privileges for all people; political, social and legal equality. Therefore, a situation whereby election is marred by rigging and corrupt practices does not seem to represent a government of the people. Rather, democracy must be an avenue through which popular participation of the masses is involved in the selection of their representatives (Odeh, 2007).

According to Osaghae (1999) democracy is seen as “pluralism and multipartyism including free and fair competitive politics in which opposition parties have a realistic chance of coming to power, by means of popular participation in the political process including universal suffrage and free choice by the people of those to govern them, provided those elected remain accountable and can be voted out if they no longer enjoy the support of the people and respect for human

rights, equality of access to all citizen and groups to state power and resources and respect for the rules of the game". Hence, democracy is a system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elect. It embodies fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of speech, political participation etc. As such democracy is a political system that operates on the basis of popular elected or appointed representative to run the affairs of the state. Again Obadan (1999) associated democracy with free and fair election, through which the people may hold their representative accountable for their actions or inactions, the rule of law which acts as a protective shield for citizens and guarantees their access to the judiciary, human rights which entails the freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association; separation of powers between the three branches of government namely executive, legislative and judiciary; majority rule which is critical to the long term consolidation of democratic rule and institutionalization of democracy as a sustainable system of governance; and discussion and compromise as a means of conflict resolution (Obadan, 1999).

Alumona (2010) observance that democracy is a process that occurs over a period of time, where the state and the entire populace are the major actors who must show commitment to ensure that sustainable democracy operated well in the entire society. White H (2002) added that democracy is best understood as a complex, long term, dynamic and open ended process. It consist of progress towards a more ruled-based, more consensual and more participation type of politics. In a similar way. These process takes different forms but a typical occurrences starts when the principle officers of government are chosen through competitive election in which the bulk of population participate. It is technique through which popular participation is enjoyed among the civil masses to decide whom their leader is. Hence, democracy provides an avenue through which member of the society possesses the right of choosing the leadership through elections (Odeh, 2007).

Sergent (1975) gave some indicators that give credence to any state's claim of a democracy as thus: citizens' involvement in political decision making; some degree of equality among citizens; some degree of liberty, freedom granted or retained by citizenry; a system of representation; and an electoral system of majority rule. Conversely, democracy entails the existence of equal opportunity for citizens to participate in the processes of decision making and its implementation. Farlie (1977, cited in Onu, 1994) stressed the importance of voting as the most significant and direct way citizens of a country can affect their governance process.

It is important to point out that the idea of democracy simply revolves around how governance is brought to bear on the masses (people), that is, involvement of the people in the running of the affairs of the state. There are common grounds that serve as basic indicators of democracy upon which the concept can be given a meaning. These include set of institutions that enables as many people as possible to freely express their opinion on how they are to be governed and who are to govern them. This entails the existence of political parties and a free and fair periodic election, a mechanism for replacing elected officers found wanton by the electorates as well as the existence of basic freedom and fundamental rights as citizens of the state (Abiola and Olaopa, 2006).

Democracy is built on the equality of citizens; the freedom of these citizens to associate with one

another for the realization of their ideals and the defence and promotion of their interests; and the freedom of these citizens to choose between the different political platforms of various political parties and candidates, and see to the actualization of the platforms they have voted for, if their choices win.

According to Pogosa (2010), democracy is based on the principle that public decision is the business of all citizens equally. This means that all citizens must not just be entitled to but also enabled to participate in public decision making. It goes beyond the holding of election to the realization of democratic principle of governance in practice and to the balance of social forces in the political community. It is what politician do when they are in office that counts. It presuppose individual right to economic decision to own the means of production and participate fully in economic activities. It means the right to have access to food, shelter, education, health cases etc. In essence, it seeks to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of all and sundry. Pogosa (2010) summarize it thus: in its fullest sense democracy is meaningless without economic, political and social right. It means nothing to people who cannot eat properly, have a roof over their heads, find a job, send the children to school, have access to primary health care and obtain justice in the court of law.

Democracy is a system of government that meets three essential Conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders, at least through regular and fair election, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties: Freedom to form and join organisations sufficient to Ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

Democratic Consolidation

The concern of democratic consolidation is about strengthening or otherwise of political institutions such as political parties, legislature and electoral umpires. It deals with governmental administration in relation with accountability, transparency, constitutionalism, rule of law and bureaucracy. It encompasses the understanding of the acceptance and obedience of formal and informal institutions of democracy (Khorram-Manesh, 2013). However, the most reviewed notions regarding democratic consolidation is that when is democracy “consolidated”, when it is likely to endure and expected to “last well into the future” (Schedler, 1997; O’Donnell, 1996; Valenzuela, 1990). The most significant issue associated with democratic consolidation is transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes (O’Donnell, 1996). The main focus is centered on how really democratic the post-transition political institutions are and on their long-term prospects, i.e. whether they are prone to succumb to a new round of authoritarian rule or whether they will prove to be stable or consolidated (Valenzuela, 1990). Therefore the process of achieving democratic consolidation involves scrapping the institutions, procedures, and expectations that are ambiguous with the minimal workings of a democratic regime, so that the new ones that are “created or recreated with the transition to a democratic government to develop

further.”

Democratic consolidation consists narrowing of democratic uncertainties through normalization of behavioral and institutional changes. The normalization requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, and other functions that civil society performs. But, most of all, and most urgently, it requires political institutionalization (Matlosa, 2008). Thus democracy is consolidated whenever political and economic situations of a particular system of institutions become the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions, when all losers (of political contest) want to try again within the same institution under which they have just lost (O'Donnell, 1996). It is argued that a democracy is consolidated when power is alternated between rival parties, support for system is continued during time of economic hardship, rebels are defeated and punished, the regime remain stable in the face of restructuring of the party system, and there exists no significant anti-system (Okoye et al., 2012).

According to Osuna Chukwu and Jawan (2011), democratic consolidation implies a democracy that can stand the test of time and this can be assumed if these values that makes democracy worthwhile are fully institutionalized. Obi (2014) the concept means an identifies please in the transition from authoritarian rule to civil rule and by extension, democratic systems that are germane and fundamental to the establishment and enthronement of a state, institutional and enduring democracy.

According to Luz and Stepan (1996), it is a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institution, rules and patterned incentives and discentives has become “the only game in town. Hence a democratic regime is regarded as consolidated when no significant factors (national, social, political, economics and institutional) will attempt to achieve its objectives either through the creation of non – democratic regime by a way of succession, or when the overwhelming majority of public opinion is consistently supportive of democratic procedures, process and institution as being the only appropriate method of conducting government and public affairs (Ocha, 2002).

In constitutional terms, a democracy can be said to be consolidated when government and non-government actors become subject to, and habituated to the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the democratic process (Linz & Stepan, 2004). Beetham (1993), gave a more incisive definition by arguing that democratic consolidation is meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies search; of extending their life expectancy beyond the short-terms of making them immune against the treat of authoritarian repression and of building dams against eventual reverse waves. The list of condition for democratic consolidation has also included such divergent items as popular legitimization, the diffusion of democratic values, party building, credible legal system, stabilization of electoral rule and routinization of politics (Schedler, 1998).

Consolidating democracy as described by Thompson (2003, p 239) is “ensuring that the democratic process endures beyond the first multi-party election. This will be assisted by

favourable political culture, a strong civil society and a supportive economy”.

Oshagae (1995) also argues that democratic consolidation does not simply mean the defeat of supposed by undemocratic rules or the putting in place of democratic institution, notably multiparty system and free election. Rather its survival would depend on the consequences for the people; law much it is able to better their natural conditions in terms of literacy, security of life and property and rural development as well as to ensure political stability and thereby save the people from the scourge of war and other violent conflicts.

The establishment of stable and sustainable democracy requires substantial changes in the forms of government, the promotion of an acceptable level of welfare that will allow the majority of people to have confidence in the capacity of democratic institutions to manage economic, social and political conflict and the resolution of the contradictions between authoritarian relations that are dominant in the society (Bangura, 1999). It requires, that habituation to the norms and procedure of democratic conflict regulation be developed. A high degree of institutional routinization is key to such a process. With consolidation, democracy becomes routinized and deeply internalized in social institutional and even psychological life as well as in political calculations for achieving goal. Consolidation depends upon a complexity of factors and task, which elected political leaders must apprehend he tackle. They must build, reform and if necessary, dissolve institutions in order to strengthen democracy. Legitimacy is an essential basic tool for consolidating democracy by political leaders or actors. As a concept, democratic consolidation is essentially about regime maintenance preventive its potential breakdown.

Thus, consolidation is the process soft achieving broad and deep legitimation such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass level believe that the democratic system is better for their, society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. According to Diamond (1987) it involves behavioural and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics and narrows its uncertainties.

Democratic consolidation “implies the internalization of democratic culture and the institutionalization of democratic “best practice” by a pouty that has successfully embarked on a democratic transition” (Asiwaju, 2000).

Gap in Literature.

Undoubtedly, the study has unravel some salient literatures on dominant issues on election malpractices and democracy in Nigeria. However, these literature have concentrated only on causes of rigging that occurred in past elections in Nigeria; neglecting to interrogate the electoral malpractices and democratic consolidation under Buhari administration. This study therefore fills that gap.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this thesis, the Marxian political economy theory, premised on dialectical and historical materialism was adopted. The Marxian political economy theory owes its origin to the

works of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and Lenin. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) are the creators of what they called "scientific socialism". Karl Marx continued to develop his thought in collaboration with German thinker Friedrich Engels and published various works, of which the two most well-known are the 1848 pamphlet; *The Communist Manifesto* and the three-volume *Das Kapital*. Lenin's work called "Leninism" comprises socialist political and economic theories, developed from Marxism, and Lenin's interpretations of Marxist theories, for practical application to the sociopolitical conditions of the Russian Empire of the early 20th century.

Marxist theorists maintain that the state is the product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms (Lenin, 1984). This, according to Jakutowski (1973), implies that „the state that arose from the conflict between classes is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful and economically dominant class that also becomes the politically dominant class and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed.

The major contention of these scholars is that the post-colonial state is a creation of imperialism and as such, has followed a developmental strategy dictated by the interest of imperialism and its local allies rather than that of the majority of the indigenous population. According to Ekekwe (1985), the post-colonial state rests on the foundation of the colonial state whose major pre-occupation was to create conditions under which accumulation of capital by the foreign bourgeoisie in alliance with the ruling elite would take place through the exploitation of local human and other natural resources. Therefore, the post-colonial state that now emerged, though ostensibly independent and sovereign, was no less a creation of imperialism than the colonial state (Ekekwe, 1985).

Marxism is based on a materialist understanding of societal development, taking as its starting point, the necessary economic activities required by human society to provide for their material needs. The form of economic organization, or mode of production, is understood to be the basis from which the majority of other social phenomena including social relations, political and legal systems, morality and ideology arise. These social relations form the superstructure, for which the economic system forms the base. As the forces of production (most notably technology) improve, existing forms of social organization become inefficient and stifle further progress. These inefficiencies manifest themselves as social contradictions in the form of class struggle (Tucker, 1961).

As Hegel (1953) observed; "at a certain stage of the development, of the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, the forms of development of the productive forces turn into their fetters. These inefficiencies manifest themselves as social contradictions in society in the form of class struggle. Under the capitalist mode of production, this struggle materializes between the minority (the bourgeoisie) who own the means of production, and the vast majority of the population (the proletariat) who produce goods and services. Taking the idea that social change occurs because of the struggle between different classes within society who are under contradiction against each other, leads the Marxist

analysis to the conclusion that capitalism exploits and oppresses the proletariats".

According to Iain (1996) the concern of the classical political economists was to identify the social classes which comprise society, define the economic relationships between these classes and discover the laws which regulate these relationship. The structure of society is thereby conceptualized on the basis of an understanding of its economic foundation. As an approach, Ake (2005:1) sees political economy as a method which gives primacy to material condition, particularly economic factors in the explanation of social life.

Marxian method of political economy is dialectical materialism which according to Nikitin (1983) presupposes; "the investigation of the production relations in the process of their emergence and development, the consideration of this process as an objective reality and the revelation of the internal contradictions of development inherent in social production".

For liberal theorists, the market lies at the centre of economic life. Economic progress results from the interaction of diverse individuals pursuing their ends. Scholars use the term political economy to refer to a set of questions generated by the interactions of economics and political activities, questions that are to be explored with whatever theoretical and methodological means that are readily available. According to Sodaro (2007), political economy is the study of how people pursue collective economic goals and deal with conflicts over resources and other economic factors in an authoritative way by means of government.

In other words, political economy is about the relationship between the economy and the state and about the various ways people try to use the State to improve their economic welfare. As a result of the fact that economic transactions and political activity go on all the time, the relationship between politics and economics is frequently interactive. That is economic variables affect political variables which in turn affect economic variables and so on. A central purpose of political economy is to clarify these interacting relationships.

In applying the theory to this study, for one to understand electoral malpractices and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria politics, one has to understand the role the Nigerian state plays in the nation's economy. The Nigerian state plays a dominant role in the national economy in the face of the underdevelopment of private capitalist enterprise. This throws up the State as a primary instrument of accumulation. As a facilitator of the capitalist development process, the Nigerian State is a major owner of the means of production. Buoyed by the expanded oil revenues of the early 1970s, the State effectively dominated all aspects of the national political economy (Jega, 2000:30). This made the State not only the biggest spender of resources but also the largest employer of labour.

As noted by Joseph (1991), the expansion of petroleum production and the resultant increased revenues heightened the centrality of the State as the locus of the struggle for resources for personal advancement and group security. Under this circumstance, access to the state becomes a platform for primitive accumulation. Ake (1996:23) captures the immensity and the ubiquity of state power under this situation when he observes that, the State is everywhere and its power appears boundless. There is hardly any aspect of life in which the State does not exercise power

and control. That makes the capture of state power singularly important.

This character of the Nigerian State encourages clientele politics which, according to Huntington (1997), exists where the State controls opportunities for commerce and a wide range of jobs in the academics, administrative and legal fields. Within this context, politics means more than competition for political power but assumes the character of a desperate struggle for positions in the bureaucracy or for access to those who have influence over government decisions (Leeds, 1981:353). Arising from the profitability of State power for primitive accumulation, the struggle for state power is reduced to warfare by factions of the governing elites. In this struggle, commitment to public service and ethics of governance becomes secondary (Egwu, 2005).

Electoral malpractices in Nigeria under Buhari administration in the context of a struggle to secure or retain political power in democratic political environment, the theory primarily focuses on material or economic aspects of society. In other words, dialectical materialism is premised on the issue of man's inherent motivations of economic pursuits and needs. Thus, man's fierce inclinations and struggles to acquire, control and maintain political power at all cost justify the choice of the theory. Economic issues according to Marx, are the major or primary causes of tension and violence in all societies. Thus, the relations between people in the production processes are symbiotically connected with the nature and direction of the political struggles to capture political power in order to determine economic factors.

Based on this, the fierce struggle to win election and control state apparatuses and invariably exploit the situation for personal economic gains and advantage sparks off the roots of all election rigging in Nigeria. This has implications for the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria's political system. It should be noted however that in the developed World, those who go into politics are the least paid. Their purpose is not to make money or wealth, but in Nigeria and Africa in general, the goal is geared towards primitive accumulation of wealth.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study is qualitative in orientations and adopted Documentary research design. In this regards, various documented evidence; particularly media publications; such as Newspapers were employed. Unlike other research designs such as survey and interview, the documents analyzed in this study were originally cum officially published without the intent of this study thereby added to the validity of the study.

Methods of Data Collection, Presentation and Analysis

The data for the study was collected mainly through the secondary sources of data generation. They include newspaper publications, academic journals, government publications, textbooks, completed research projects, reports and online sources. Data gathered were presented and analyzed thematically in line with the three specific objectives of the study.

INDICATORS OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES IN THE NIGERIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Interrogating cum ascertaining the indicators of electoral malpractice in Nigeria is a worthwhile activity as it will bring to the fore the various ways by which electoral malpractices manifest in the Nigerian electoral system. As have been variously observed by scholars in the preceding chapters, elections in Nigeria since independence and even contemporary in the country's fourth republic is riddled with myriad cases of malpractices. These according to Okon (2022, p. 39) include "illegal printing of voters' cards, illegal possession of ballot boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes, falsification of election results, illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers, infant or underage voting, compilation of fictitious names on voters' lists, illegal compilation of separate voters' lists, illegal printing of forms used for collection and declaration of election results, deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas, announcing results in places where no elections were held, unauthorized announcement of election results, harassment of candidates, agents, and voters, change of list of electoral officials, box-switching and inflation of figures.

The problem, inherent in elections conduct and administration constitutes a central factor in the annals of democratic rule in Nigeria any in many sub-saharan African states (Momoh & Adejumobi, 1998; cited in Akinboye, 2005). Although the integrity of elections is fundamentally germane to the sustenance of a truly representative form of government, election conduct in Nigeria over the years, has been incredible and unsatisfactory as the umpires have consistently performed below expectation. Evidently, successive electoral commissions in the country have been either pro-ruling party or engaged in the manipulation of election results in favour of the highest bidding contestants.

These are quite some indicators of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian electoral system. As our study is delimited to the administration of President Buhari from 2015 to 2023, we have to look at instances of malpractices within the years under review.

Though the 2015 general elections in Nigeria was adjudged to be an improvement on the status quo as many have described it as free, fair and a bit transparent. The success of the 2015 election was attributed to the innovations of the INEC chairman Professor Jega, evidenced in the introduction of the PVC and the card reading machine, aimed at checkmating rigging, impersonation and related electoral malpractices. Despite the general acceptance of the outcome of the election, particularly the presidential election, there are still pockets of dissentments making their round that the elections were flawed. For instance, Hassan Zaggi (2015), in a media article, titled: "Transparent but flawed presidential election" posit that: some of the noticeable faults of the presidential elections, as observed on the day of the election at the polling units monitored, include: late arrival of electoral materials; malfunctioning of Card Readers; insufficient and, in some cases, none availability of electoral materials; overcrowding in polling units, and voting throughout the night which exposed the voters to high risk. Those many faults according to findings, have ended up disenfranchising many voters in many parts of the country. (Citizens' Advocate, April 19, 2015, p.18).

Furthermore, Nwosu (2015) noted that the electoral body was confronted with logistic problems including the late arrival of its officials, inadequacy of both the officials and election materials in some units, lack of proper arrangement for conveying officials and materials to polling stations in view of the restrictions of vehicular movements, and lateness in commencement of elections. Similarly, Obi (2015) reported that some of the deficiencies in INEC Management of the election included: late arrival of election materials, overcrowding, failure of the card reader, result manipulation and voting of under-aged in some units in the Northern part of the country. As noted by Hassan Zaggi, while monitoring the election in some parts of the FCT, and neighbouring towns, it was discovered that electoral materials arrived late at the polling stations. This unavoidably, led to late accreditation of voters and commencement of the voting process itself (Hassan, 2015). In addition, while the Card Readers aided in keeping away fake voters, it however had its faults as in most of the polling units visited, especially in the finger print identification. Incredibly, the Card Reader was also reported to have failed Mr. President himself while standing for accreditation in his polling unit at Bayelsa State.

Also, the issue of overcrowding in some polling units also encumbered the electoral process. For instance, as observed by the Daily Independent, many voting points were located in one major primary school which inevitably caused a measure of overcrowding with the attendant security risk. Evidently, some voters, on sighting the mammoth crowd at the polling centres refused to stand in the place for fear of terrorist attack; thereby leading to many voters not being able to cast their votes at the end of the exercise.

The case of 2019 general election was more so. According to Agu (2019), the 2019 general election witnessed a new method cum lexicon of electoral malpractice in the Nigerian electoral system. That is, 'inconclusive election'. This according to him arises from a situation whereby the gap (in vote count) between the first two contestants is lesser than the total number of votes in areas election was cancelled or did not hold. This became apparent as electoral malpractice as subsequent holding of election in such places were marred by intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes and election outcome been decided by judicial pronouncement cum judgment based on technicalities.

In conclusion therefore, the study has been able to interrogate the indicators of electoral malpractices in Nigeria especially during the 2015 and 2019 general election. Based on the discussion, the study upholds its first research hypothesis, thus we conclude that intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes, inconclusive elections, underage voting and vote buying are some of the indicators of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian electoral system.

ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Following the survey of democratic consolidation in our literature review in Chapter two, it is clear that it is characterized with longevity of a civilian regime as well as recognition and respect of democratic institutions, thus fairness, freest and credible elections must not therefore be an exception to these characteristics. Although there is significant breakthrough regarding the fourth

republic experiment in Nigeria such as being the first time civilian government stayed for long periods without military intervention. Seven general elections have been conducted within the time frame (Nigeria's Fourth republic) as well as alternation of power by incumbent to the opposition in 2015. Yet there is so much to be desired in the conduct of democratic practices of the fourth republic in general and the conduct of the electoral process in particular.

Perhaps, the predicaments of practice of democracy in the fourth republic have threatened its consolidation, hence it is characterized with bane of democratic governance. The implications of these therefore manifest in issues such as disrespect and outright violations of electoral act with impunity due to weak democratic institutions, electoral violence, ethno-religious politics, rampant corruption and mismanagement, poverty and lack of internal democracy which is visible in incumbency factor, godfatherism and excessive monetization in politics (Ebegbulem, 2021).

The moral foundation of the state in its capability to meet its obligation to the citizens, and citizen's ability to obey the laws of the state has been questioned. As instructively observed, these issues which have triggered electoral crises are mostly technical and logistical problems (Osabiya, 2014), however for many politicians, winning election is more important than deaths that occurs due to application of violence as part of their overall campaign strategy. For Nigerian politicians it's either to gain an unfair advantage over their opponents, or to disrupt the process outright when it is clear that they are not of the winning side of the divide. This makes our democracy to remain nascent and unconsolidated thereby leading to minimal benefit emanating from it. It is therefore visible how democracy and not election is the problem in the Nigerian System (Osabiya, 2014).

Electoral malpractices since independence in 1960 has delayed Nigeria's hope for a consolidated democracy. For democracy to be properly consolidated, the government in power must be legitimate. Legitimacy is the belief in the rightness and appropriateness of the ruling regime and the government and their policies by the populace (Dahrendorf, 1996). The ruling government cannot command legitimacy through the use of force; it's the right of the people to grant or withdraw legitimacy from governments (Nwosu, 2016) and this varies from time to time depending on how satisfied citizens enjoy from the government in power (Dare, 1975). In Nigeria, electoral malpractices have failed to produce a government that will be popularly acceptable. This is because some of the leaders that emerged victorious in her elections as we analyzed in this work found themselves in the corridors of power using all forms of manipulations and this restricted the chances of true candidates from winning the election even though they are people's choice. When this unpopular candidate is elected, the people will be reluctant to support his administration as they feel that the government is a stolen mandate. Any government that assumes office against the majority votes lacks the legitimacy of the moral authority that popular mandate enjoys. Democracy cannot be consolidated where a candidate is imposed against the choice of the people and a government instituted without people's acceptance will not succeed.

Therefore, electoral malpractices have instigated for the emergence of bad politicians who want power by hook or crook. It is against this backdrop that the study conclude that electoral

malpractices have had a significant adverse effect on the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

STRATEGIES FOR CURBING ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Owing to the unpleasant nature of electoral malpractices and its concomitant adverse cum negative effect on democratic consolidation in Nigeria and other areas of the society in general, it becomes quite imperative to examine some noted strategies to stymie this ugly trend/situation. It is worthy to note that various scholars, writers, policy analysts and commentators cum speculators have at different times noted that Nigeria has abundance of laws, but practice is problematic. This simply imply that Nigeria has enough laws to tackle much of its challenges but the lack of implementation of the laws is the bane to her development.

In agreement, Nwosu (2022) noted that electoral malpractices such as underage voting, vote buying, violence, corruption, etc. already has laws boldly written in the electoral act as amended and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He went further to maintain that due to corruption and the like, laws meant to forestall such ugly incidences are not implemented, therefore, electoral malpractices persists.

Arguing along Nwosu (2022), Adibe (2021) asserts that lack of political will on the part of the executives and corruption encourages electoral malpractices to thrive. He noted that even when some enablers of these electoral malpractices are tried in line with the extant laws, some executive leaders abuse their power of prerogative of mercy to grant pardon to them. This is likely because they worked for the incumbent rulers.

Against this backdrop, it is safe for the study to assert that incidences of electoral malpractices can be curtailed by effective execution or enforcement of the laid down rules on electoral malpractices as there already exist laws to forestall such ugly incidences. In conclusion, we uphold our third and final hypothesis.

Furthermore, to forestall cases of electoral malpractices, there is urgent need for INEC to plan ahead and get its workings in order by making sure that card readers (BVAS) work, timely delivery of election materials, limiting the use of Adhoc/Temporary staff (as most of them are supplied by politicians who are contesting elections), allow for forensic analysis of ballot papers, non-acceptance of underage persons around voting vicinities, arrest and immediate prosecution of persons involved in vote buying (and making sure that they are exempted from executive pardons), instituting a working and effective e-voting system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contemporarily, it is argued that democracy is the best system of government as it gives the people the chance to actively participate in the decision making process of the government and one of the key foundation stones of democracy is periodic free, fair and credible elections which gives the citizens the chance to regulate the activities of government vis-à-vis supporting a particular government or to change it. Therefore, election gives the people the opportunity to

hold government accountable as well as facilitate the expression of public opinion.

It is against this backdrop that notable cases of electoral malpractices that takes power from the people with its concomitant adverse effect is a worrisome phenomenon that must be nipped in the bud. Otherwise, the practice of democracy is at best theoretical and loses the essence of it. The study therefore, concludes that all hands must be on deck to checkmate all manner of electoral malpractices in the country in order to usher in government that truly reflects the opinion and choices of the people.

Sequel to above, the study specifically recommends that, there is need for inter-agency coordination of different security outfit in and around voting arena in order to forestall or prevent some of the noted indicators of electoral malpractices such as intimidation of voters, ballot box snatching, vote buying and underage voting. Furthermore, given the noted adverse effect electoral malpractices have on the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, it becomes quite urgent for all hands to be on deck to stymie this ugly incidences of electoral malpractices. Therefore, urgent practical steps must be taken to re-orient the people on this ugly incidence and the actions to be taken to forestall it. Finally, there is urgent need to put in place mechanisms that promote prompt and effective implementation of laws and policies targeted at electoral fraud or malpractices. Those caught in the act should be severely punished and made to be a scape goat to prevent future occurrence.

REFERENCES

- Adejumobi, S. (2019). The Two Political Parties and Electoral Process in Nigeria, 2015-2019. In the State and Democracy in Africa (G. Nzongola Ntalaja & M. Lee, eds.) Harare: AAPS.
- Adekanye, J.B. (2020). Elections and electoral practices in Nigeria: dynamics and implications. *The Constitution: Journal of Constitutional Development*. Vol.5 No.2.
- Adeosun, A.B. (2014). Democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigerian fourth republic: Issues and challenges. *IOSR-JHSS*, 19(10), 5-10.
- Aliu, M. (2013), Legislative corruption and democratic consolidation in the Nigerian fourth republic. *Journal of Sustainable*, 15(6), 101-112.
- Arolowo, D.E., Aluko, O.A. (2012). Democracy, political participation and good governance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(3), 1-13.
- Ateno, O.P. (2009). An analysis of the strengths and limitation of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*. 13, 13-38.
- Bamisaye, O.A & Awofeso, O. (2011). Democracy and Democratic Practice in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects. Lagos: MacGrace Publishers.
- Birch, S. (2009). Electoral Corruption, Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (IDCR)

Briefing Paper.

- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Ebegbulem, J.C. (2011). Credible elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: The moral imperatives. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 2(4), 246-250.
- Ebirim, S.I. (2013). Assessment of the Performance of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the 2011 Gubernatorial Elections in South Eastern Nigeria". *Global Journal of Political science and Administration: European Centre for Research, Training and Development (ECRTD)*, Luton, UK. Vol. 1, No. 2.
- Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York:Oxford University Press.
- Inokoba, P.K, & Kumokor, I. (2011). Electoral Crises, Governance and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *JSoc Sci*, 27(2), 77-91
- Ismaila, Y., &Othman, Z. (2015). Challenges of electoral process in Nigeria's quest for democratic governance in the fourth republic. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(22), 1-10.
- Ismailaa, Y., &Zaheruddin, O. (2016). Electoral Malpractice and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.
- Kerr, N.N. (2011). Perceptions versus reality: Assessing popular evaluations of election quality in Africa. Afro Barometer, Working Paper No 137.
- Khorram-Manesh, N. (2013). Democratic Consolidation in Sub-Saharan Africa. QoG Working Paper Series January, 1.
- Kwasau, M.A. (2013). The challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *European Scientific Journal Vol. 9. No. 8. ISSN. 1857- 7881*.
- Linz, J.J & Sepan, A. (2016). Towards Consolidated Democracies. *Journal of Democracy*, 7(2),8-17
- Mapuva, J. (2013). Elections and electoral processes in Africa: A gimmick or a curse? *African Journal of History and Culture*, 5(5), 87-95.
- Matlosa, K. (2008). African Charter on Democracy. Assessing the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance: Declaration vs Policy Practice.
- Mbah, P. (2011). Party Defection and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, (19998-2009). *Afro*

Asian Journal of Social Sciences, Vol 2, No 2.3

- Momodu, A.J., Gambo, M.I. (2013). The implications of intra-party conflicts on Nigeria's democratization. *GJHSSPS*, 13(6), 1-13.
- Norris, P. (2012). Why Electoral Malpractices Generate Pressures for Electoral Reform: An Agenda-Setting Model. APSA 2012 Annual Meeting Paper.
- O'Donnell, G. (1996). Illusions about consolidation. *JDNED*, 7(2), 34-51.
- Ojo, E.O. (2009). Guarding the guardians a prognosis of panacea for evolving stable civil-military relations in Nigeria. *Armed Forces and Society*, 35(4), 688-708.
- Okoye, F. (2013). The prosecution of electoral offenders in Nigeria: Challenges and possibilities. Available from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10405.pdf>.
- Okoye, J.C., Egboh, E.A., Chukwuemeka, E.E.O. (2012). Changing perspectives of Nigeriapolitical development: From militarism to incumbency and godfatherism. *Journal of Political Studies*, 19(1).
- Olawole, O., Adewunmi, E.F., Oluwole, E. (2013). Electoral malpractices and problems in Africa: A critical analysis. *Journal of Research and Development*, 1(6), 11-24.
- Omodia, S.M. (2012), Election, governance and the challenge of national integration in the Nigerian fourth republic. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 307-314.
- Omotola, J.S. (2008). Explaining Electoral Violence in Africa's 'New' Democracies, Revised Version of a Paper Presented at the 27th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), Electoral Reform, Political Succession and Democratisation in Africa, held at Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. 16-19.
- Oni, E.O. (2014). The challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, (1999-2007). *International Journal of Politics and Governance*, 5(1), 1-29.
- Osabiya, B.J. (2014). Nigeria and democratic elections. *JGGSDA*, 2(3), 53-64.
- Osinakachukwu, N.P. (2011). The Electoral Process and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol.4.No.2.
- Oyekanmi, B. (2015). INEC Conference 2015 General Elections and the Role of INEC.
- Schedler, A. (1997). Concepts of Democratic Consolidation. Guadalajara: LASA.
- Ugwuja, I.D. (2015). Political crisis and electoral malpractices in a growing Nigeria democracy. *Humanity and Social Sciences Journal*, 10(1), 23-31.

- Valenzuela, J.S. (1990). *Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions*. Vol. 150. London: Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame.
- Vickery, C., Shein, E. (2012). *Assessing Electoral Fraud in New Democracies: Refining the Vocabulary*. IFES White Paper Series, May.
- Yusuf, M. (2015). Party politics, electoral crisis and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 3(1), 19-27.