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An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Election

















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An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

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About The Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a multidisciplinary strategic think-tank which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. The Electoral Hub complements the roles and activities of the different institutions, stakeholders and drivers of the electoral process and governance. The Electoral Hub aims to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through research, documentation, electoral education, policy influencing and impact advocacy. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

IRIAD-THE ELECTORAL HUB

…promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents ii
List of Tables vi
List of Figures vi
Acronyms vii
Executive Summary ix

Introduction 1
1.1 Background and Context 1
1.2 Task of the Report 3
1.3 Structure of the Report 3

Election Observation Methodology 4
2.1 Pre-Election Process Observation 4
2.2 Election-Day Process Observations 4
2.3 Post-Election Process Observations 5

Regulatory Frameworks Guiding the 2023 General Election 6
3.1 The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 6
3.2 The Electoral Act 2022 7
3.3 INEC Regulations and Guidelines 8
3.4 Other Related Laws and Policies 9

Electoral Statistics: The 2023 General Elections in Numbers 11
4.1 Electoral Delimitation 11
4.2 Electoral Constituencies and Candidates 12
4.3 Voter Turnout and Party Performance 14

Observations from the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Elections 17
5.1 Late Arrival of Election Materials and Personnel 17
5.2 Good BVAS Performance 18
5.3 Poor Ad-hoc Staff Performance 19
5.4 Election-related Violence Against Women 20
5.5 Electoral Violence 20

5.6 Intimidation/Voter Suppression 25
5.7 Priority Voting 26
5.8 Youth, Women, and PWD Participation 27
5.9 Misinformation/Disinformation/Fake News 28
5.10 Participation of Urban/Middle-Class Citizens 28
5.11 Poor Logistics 29
5.12 Weak Political Party Agents' Management 29
5.13 Poor Management of the IReV Portal 30
5.14 Late/Delayed Results Upload to IReV 32
5.15 Poor Knowledge of Electoral Legal Framework by Stakeholders 33
5.16 Access to Polling Units 33
5.17 Strengths of the Opposition 34
5.18 Poor Voter Turnout 35
5.19 Electoral Malpractice 35
5.20 Lack of Secret Open Ballot/Improper Positioning of Cubicle 37
5.21 Non-compliance to COVID-19 Protocol 38
5.22 Security Presence 40

Observations from the Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections 42

6.1 Opening of Polls 43
6.2 Poor Voter Turnout 43
6.3 Electoral Violence 45
6.4 Vote Trading 47
6.5 Voter Suppression/Intimidation/ Disruption of Polls (Ballot Box Snatching and Destruction of Ballot Papers and Ballots) in Opposition Strongholds and Brutalization 48
6.6 Ethnic Profiling and Baiting (Lagos State) 49
6.7 Lack of Secrecy at the of Ballot Due to Improper Positioning of the Cubicle and Illegal Proxy Voting 51
6.8 Poor Participation in Urban/Middle-Class Areas 51
6.9 Poor Logistics 53
6.10 Maladministration at Polling Units by Ad-Hoc Staff 53
6.11 Internal Sabotage 54

6.12 Misinformation/Disinformation and Fake News 54
6.13 Upload of Results to IReV 55
6.14 Security Presence 55
6.15 Weak Political Party Agents' Management 56
6.16 Good BVAS Performance 57
6.17 IReV Management 58

Strengths of the 2023 General Elections 60
7.1 Consolidation of Electoral Innovations 62
7.2 Progressive Legal Framework: The Electoral Act 2022 63
7.3 Increased Civic Engagement and Mobilisation 70
7.4 Introduction of a Citizens' Polling Unit Result Monitoring Platform: The IReV ... 70

Weaknesses of the 2023 General Elections 72
8.1 Logistical and Operational Issues 72
8.2 Insecurity and Electoral Violence 73
8.3 Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News 73
8.4 Weak Political Party Agents 74
8.5 Limited Understanding of Legal Framework 75
8.6 Challenge with Election Technology 75
8.7 Poor Logistics and Institutional Strategic Communication 76
8.8 Ethnic and Regional Dynamics 76
8.9 Disenfranchisement and Voter Suppression 77
8.10 Issues with Result Collation and Transmission 77
8.11 Lack of Accountability for Electoral Offences 78

Safeguarding the Integrity of 2023 General Election: Electoral Accountability and Responsibility 82
9.1 Independent National Electoral Commission 83
9.2 Political Parties 85
9.3 The Executive Branch 86
9.4 The Legislature 87
9.5 Security Agencies 88
9.6 Civil Society 89

9.7 Media 90
9.8 National Youth Service Corps and Ad-Hoc Staff 91
9.9 Professional Associations 92
9.10 Logistics Institutions/Associations 92
9.11 Educational Institutions 93

Elections as a Collaborative Responsibility: 2023 General Election in Perspective . 96
10.1 Responsible Parties for Observed Problems 96

Conclusion: Lessons Learnt and Recommendations 100
11.1 Lessons Learnt 100
11.2 Recommendations and Advocacy Asks 104
11.2.1 INEC 104
11.2.2 Political Parties/Politicians 105
11.2.3 Security Agents 106
11.2.4 The Executive Branch 106
11.2.5 The National Assembly 107
11.2.6 Electoral Officers and Ad-Hoc Staff 107
11.2.7 CSOs, Media, and National Orientation Agency (NOA) 108
11.2.8 The Electorates 108

List of Tables

Table 1: Nigeria Electoral Delimitation, Voters and Registration 12
Table 2: Parties and Candidates for 2023 General Elections 13
Table 3: Presidential Candidates and their Running Mates 13
Table 4: Some Innovations by INEC from 2011– 2023 62
Table 5: Key Provision in the Electoral Act 2022 64
Table 6: 10th Senate Political Parties 66
Table 7: 10th House of Representatives Political Parties 66
Table 8: 9th Senate Political Parties 67
Table 9: 9th House of Representatives Political Parties 67
Table 10: Composition Table of the 10th Nigerian Senate 67
Table 11: Parties and Number of Seats in the 10th Assembly 68
Table 12: Composition Table of the 9th Nigerian Senate 68
Table 13: Composition Table of the 9th Nigerian House of Representatives 69
Table 14: Composition Table of the 10th Nigerian House of Representatives (HoR) 69
Table 15: Observed Weaknesses and Their Implication for the 2023 General Election ... 79
Table 16: Responsible Parties for Observed Problems in 96
the 2023 General Elections 96

List of Figures

Figure 1: Turnout Trend in Nigerian General Elections (Presidential) from 1999 - 202315
Figure 2: Parties and Percentage of Votes Secured in the 2023 General Elections 16
Figure 3: Election Support Infrastructure, 2023 61
Figure 4: The Electoral Cycle 82
Figure 5: Electoral Accountability Duty-Bearers 95
Figure 6: Stakeholders for Election Security 99

Acronyms

ACE Project	Administrative and Cost of Elections Project
APC	All Progressives Congress
ASUU	Academic Staff Union of Universities
BASED	Basic Security in Electoral Duties
BBC	British Broadcasting Cooperation
BVAS	Bi-Modal Voters Accreditation System
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organization
CVC	Committee of Vice Chancellors
DAI/EU-SDGN	International Development/ European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria
DSS	Development of State Services
EADR	Election Alternative Dispute Resolution
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EMSC	Election Monitoring and Support Centre
EOSC	Electoral Operation Support Centre
EVMAT	Election Violence Mitigation Advocacy Tool
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
ICCC	INEC Citizens Contact Centre
ICCES	Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
INEC SANS	INEC Security Alert and Notification System
IReV	INEC Result Viewing Portal
IRIAD	Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development
IRP	INEC Result Portal
ISR	INEC Situation Room
LCDAS	Local Council Development Areas
LGA	Local Government Area
LP	Labour Party
NARTO	National Association of Road Transport Owners
NCC	National Coalition Centre

NICVEP	National Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Voter Education and Publicity
NNPP	New Nigeria People's Party
NOA	National Orientation Agency
NOA	National Orientation Agency
NURTW	National union of Road Transport Workers
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
OSF	Open Society Foundation
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PU	Polling Unit
RAC	Registration Area Centre
REC	Resident Electoral Commission
RERC	Registration and Election Review Committee
VAPP	Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act

Executive Summary

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria, conducted between February 25th and March 18th, 2023, marked a significant milestone in Nigeria's democratic journey. It was the seventh general election conducted since the country's return to democracy in 1999. The election generated widespread interest among citizens and other electoral duty-bearers in the country. This interest in the election was also fueled by the fact that it initiated a transition of power from the incumbent, who having served two terms was ineligible to contest under the 1999 Constitution (as amended), to another candidate.

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate of the Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development in line with its commitment to promoting electoral knowledge, accountability and integrity closely monitored the 2023 electoral process (pre-election, electoral and post-electoral stages) particularly from the beginning of the continuous voter registration in June 2021 to end of the general election in April 2023 when the supplementary elections were conducted. This totals a period of 20 months, noting major activities and challenges encountered in the process. This analytical report draws extensively from monitoring the pre-electoral stages and the field observations during the electoral period (from electioneering. Election Day processes to the immediate period after Election Day) to show the strengths and weaknesses arising therefrom and their implications for electoral governance and democratic consolidation. Serving a dual purpose, as our post-election report and analytical paper on the election, this report presents process monitoring, field observations, elements of relevant media reports, and lessons that can be harnessed by stakeholders to better understand the 2023 general elections as well as inform programmes, initiatives and innovations for improving the integrity and credibility of future elections in Nigeria. The report further highlights the crucial place of identifying stakeholders of the electoral process responsibilities and accountabilities in strengthening quality and credible elections.

Key Findings

Background

The 2023 General Election in Nigeria took place between February 25 and April 15, with the most critical dates being February 25 and March 18. The elections included the Presidential, Senatorial, House of Representatives, and Governorship and State House of Assembly elections. Notably, this election was unique as it was the first general election conducted after the new Electoral Act of 2022 came into effect, offering an opportunity to test the adequacy of the new provisions and the effectiveness of government agencies responsible for its implementation. Unlike prior elections in Nigeria, the 2023 general

elections gathered widespread interest across the country. Citizens were optimistic that the introduction of technology – the BVAS and IREV – would result in improvements in the process. Promises of INEC not to backtrack on BVAS[1] intersected with expectations that results and accreditation data would be transmitted electronically directly from the PUs[2] to drive public interest in the process.

Electoral duty bearers and stakeholders in the country, including INEC, the country's EMB, were optimistic about the quality and credibility of the elections. Concerns were, however, raised about ten key issues identified as potential threats to the 2023 election. These include insecurity, poor election management, vote trading, inadequate infrastructure, staff incompetence, conflicting court orders, technological challenges, trust deficit in the electoral system, interference with voter rights, and poor management of youth expectations. These concerns generated widespread attention, both locally and internationally, reflecting the high stakes and potential risks associated with the election. To address these issues, The Electoral Hub conducted pre-election advocacy, sensitization, and stakeholder engagement campaigns to mitigate challenges that could disrupt the electoral process. The Electoral Hub also deployed election observers to follow the process across all states of the federation.

Regulatory Framework

The rules and regulations guiding electoral conduct in the country were a major strong point of the 2023 general elections. The 1999 Constitution, being the grundnorm of the land, emphasizes the need for free and fair elections and lays out key provisions for electoral qualifications, dispute resolution, and jurisdiction. Similarly, The Electoral Act 2022 was the primary legal instrument regulating the conduct of the 2023 general elections. This instrument contains provisions regulating virtually all aspects of electoral conduct, including, voter registration, candidate submissions, campaign expenses, and electoral offences.

Other legal instruments that guarded the electoral conduct include the INEC Regulations and Guidelines, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, the Child Rights Act, and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act. Collectively, these legal instruments serve as guardrails for upholding democratic values, and the integrity of the 2023 General Election.

[1] https://www.channelstv.com/2022/10/26/election-results-will-be-electronically-transmitted-in-real-time-inec-assures/

[2] A publication of INEC (https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Electronic_Transmission___Collation_Of_Result-5.pdf) gives an impression that the Commission aimed to do this.

Electoral Statistics

The elections were conducted across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, encompassing a total of 774 local government areas. The presidential polls covered 176,846 polling units, while the governorship elections occurred in 29 states due to upcoming off-cycle elections in the remaining states. The 2023 elections extended to various levels of government and constituencies, with 8,809 Registration Areas and Electoral Wards, 109 Senatorial Districts, 360 Federal Constituencies, and 991 State Constituencies. The total number of registered voters in Nigeria stood at 93,469,008, with a high collection rate of Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) standing at 87,209,007, representing over 93.29% collection rate, the highest recorded in the country's electoral history.

In terms of candidate participation, a total of 15,331 candidates from 18 registered political parties contested in 1,491 electoral constituencies. Major political parties collectively garnered 92% of the votes, with four parties standing out. However, there were 939,278 invalid votes, constituting 3.71% of the total votes cast, and the remaining 14 parties received approximately 4% of the total votes. The voter turnout for the 2023 general election was notably low, with a record low of 29% for the presidential election, the lowest since 1999.

The Presidential and National Assembly Election

The 2023 Nigerian Presidential and National Assembly Election had 18 presidential candidates, fielded by all 18 registered parties at the time of the contest. Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) won with 8,794,726 votes, defeating runner up, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), who had 6,984,520 votes. Notably, more urban and middle-class citizens participated, a change from previous elections in the Federal Capital Territory.

Observations of the contest revealed some issues of concern. Due to poor logistics, many polling units experienced lags in starting due to late arrival of election materials and personnel. While the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) worked well in some places, malfunctions were reported in others. Ad-hoc staff faced challenges due to inadequate training. Violence marred the elections, with attacks on INEC facilities, candidates, and polling units, especially in states like Imo, Kano, Lagos, Edo, and Rivers. Intimidation and voter suppression was pronounced in Lagos. Misinformation spread through social media impacted the election's integrity. Youth, women, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) had varying participation across polling units. Priority voting for disadvantaged groups was uneven. Security agencies need to ensure voter and election official protection.

Also evident was the weak management of political party agents, with some agents displaying unprofessional behaviour. Additionally, poor management of the IReV portal resulted in incomplete uploading of results, leading to delays in the election process. Furthermore, some ad-hoc staff lacked the knowledge to upload results properly. The lack of a clear understanding of the legal framework among key stakeholders and the public also contributed to confusion and disputes. Low voter turnout was also a major concern, with only 27% participation. Factors contributing to this included safety concerns and fake news. Electoral malpractice, such as results mutilation and ballot snatching, was reported in some areas, undermining the integrity of the process.

Observations also revealed that the COVID-19 guidelines were not adhered to during the contest as many polling units were over-crowded and there was no consistency in the implementation of safety measures at polling units. Moreover, inadequate security presence was noted in some polling units.

The Governorship and State House of Assembly Election

The governorship and State House of Assembly elections in Nigeria, initially scheduled for March 11, 2023, were postponed to March 18, 2023,[3] due to issues arising from the aftermath of the presidential election. For reasons earlier stated, the elections only took place in 28 states across the country. The election witnessed some improvements compared to the earlier Presidential and National Assembly elections. Specifically, the timely arrival of electoral officials at polling stations was noted in some areas. The election also witnessed a notable presence of security personnel, including the police and civil defence corps, who intervened to maintain order in several polling units. The BVAS and IReV devices also functioned effectively in the authentication and verification of voters and the upload of results. However, several observations of concern emerged from these elections.

One significant concern was the poor voter turnout, which was even lower than that of the presidential election. This low turnout impacts the representation of the people's will and raises questions about the democratic principle of government by the people. There were reports of violence occurring in almost every state. These incidents ranged from physical altercations to ballot box snatching and even kidnapping of election staff.

Ethnic profiling and baiting were also observed across states of the federation. Vote trading was more pronounced in the state elections, with party agents offering money and food items in exchange for votes. Poor logistics, institutional strategic communication, maladministration by ad-hoc staff at polling units, misinformation, disinformation, and

[3] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/breaking-inec-postpones-governorship-state-assembly-elections-to-march-18/

fake news also marred the electoral process. Additionally, there were instances of internal sabotage by electoral staff. Late or delayed uploading of election results to the IReV portal was a problem, although it showed some improvement compared to the presidential election.

Like the presidential contest, weak management of political party agents was observed in the governorship and state house of assembly contests. This is evidenced in documented instances of unprofessional conduct and vote buying reported in multiple states, reflecting poor oversight of these agents.

Strengths of the 2023 General Election

The election was conducted under the progressive Electoral Act 2022, lauded for its provisions that improve transparency, accountability, and overall electoral integrity. INEC effectively implemented many of the Act's provisions, leading to one of the most competitive elections and the emergence of a diverse national assembly. The contest also essentially saw the crystallization of efforts of INEC towards an improved electoral process over the past 13 years through reforms and innovations.

The 2023 elections also saw increased civic engagement and mobilization, particularly in urban areas. Citizens' active participation, as seen in movements like the 'Obidient Movement,' underscored growing awareness of civic responsibility. Furthermore, the introduction of the IReV portal enhanced transparency by allowing citizens to track PU-level election results in near-real-time. These strengths can be categorized as participation-related and technology-related. They arose from the Electoral Act 2022, which allows for use of more technology and the accompanying public optimism about the benefits to be derived from the deployment of technology.

Weaknesses of the 2023 General Election

The 2023 Nigerian elections, while commendable for advancements in transparency, technology and civic engagement, were plagued by several complex challenges. The Naira Redesign Policy and cashless measures created a cash shortage, hindering many citizens from voting. Logistical issues, driven by Nigeria's vastness, difficult terrain and infrastructure inadequacies, resulted in potential voter disenfranchisement. The election suffered from insecurity and electoral violence due to regional and ethnic tensions, deterring voters and disrupting the process.

Misinformation and disinformation played a substantial role in influencing voter decisions and causing public trust erosion. Weak political party agents further contributed to transparency issues and the potential for fraud. Limited understanding of the legal framework, technology challenges, poor logistics and institutional communication

complicated the electoral process. Ethnic and regional dynamics influenced electoral outcomes and heightened divisions, and voter suppression tactics further disenfranchised citizens. Results collation and transmission problems led to concerns about accuracy, and the lack of accountability for electoral offences perpetuated unethical behaviour and public mistrust. These challenges underscore the need for electoral accountability and responsibility in Nigerian elections.

Electoral Accountability and Responsibility

Our analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Election emphasizes that electoral accountability encompasses responsibility, answerability, and liability[4]. It calls for considering the entire electoral cycle, including pre-election, electioneering, and post-election phases, when assessing electoral quality.

Key stakeholders, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, the executive, the legislature, security agencies, and civil society, play pivotal roles in ensuring credible elections. INEC's functions cover voter registration, logistics, and compliance with electoral laws. However, the success of elections depends on a network of agencies and institutions. Political parties contribute to credible elections by presenting capable candidates and promoting informed voter choices. The executive can influence elections through appointments and removals, while the legislature enacts laws to ensure fair elections. Security agencies maintain a safe environment for voting, and civil society acts as a watchdog to ensure transparency.

Media informs, uncovers election irregularities and empowers voters with candidate information. Ad-hoc staff, often from the NYSC, oversee voting and logistics. Professional associations like ASUU and CVC provide election officers to maintain ethical standards. Logistics institutions, including NNPCL, NURTW and NARTO, ensure timely petroleum products supplies and materials movement and civic education organisations including NGOs and government agencies promote informed citizen participation and critical thinking, instilling democratic values. These stakeholders collectively contribute to electoral quality and credibility.

Collective Responsibility

Our analysis of the 2023 general elections further reveals that the strengths and weaknesses of the process stem from the collective responsibility of all stakeholders. Late arrival of materials and personnel was blamed on INEC, transportation contractors (NURTW,

[4] As conceptualised by Jinadu, L.A and Ibeanu, O (forthcoming). Introduction: Electoral Accountability and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria. In Adele L. Jinadu and Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds). *Electoral Accountability in Nigeria.* The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation.

NNPCL), while voting late into the night was also INEC's responsibility. BVAS performance, delayed results upload, and IReV management were shared by INEC and ad-hoc staff (including NYSC and universities). Weak political party agent management was the fault of political parties and candidates. Stakeholders had limited knowledge of the legal framework, a shortcoming shared by political parties, candidates, civil society, INEC staff, and the electorate. Various responsible parties, including security agencies, political parties, candidates, and citizens share in the responsibility of addressing electoral violence. Addressing intimidation and bullying was the responsibility of security agencies, political parties, candidates, and citizens. Yet, political parties and candidates contributed to voter suppression. Increased urban turnout and participation of the urban/middle class were the electorate's domain and included, civil society, media and social media champions who engaged with them. Poor logistics and institutional strategic communication were attributed to INEC. Misinformation/disinformation was perpetrated by political parties, candidates, media, and the public. Political parties, candidates, media, and citizens were complicit in the spread of fake news.

Conclusion

The analysis informs a conclusion that although the 2023 general elections were characterized by some improvements on previous electoral experiences, there were also some negative issues, emphasising the role and responsibility of different stakeholders of the electoral process towards containing these negative issues. The analysis highlights the importance of collaboration, the need for strengthening political parties, and the importance of adaptability and flexibility in election management and administration. It also shows that technological innovations are important but they must be well-managed, strategic communications, public perception, accountability, leadership all matter. The socio-political context in which elections take place is important, and disruptive policies impact the process adversely. Arising from the observations and conclusions reached, recommendations and advocacy asks were proposed for INEC, political parties and politicians, security agencies, the executive, the National Assembly, electoral officers and ad-hoc staff, civil society organizations, the media and the National Orientation Agency, and the electorates.

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The key thesis of this analysis is that election is a collective enterprise comprising a multiplicity of stakeholders and institutions such as the EMB, political parties, legislature, security agencies, civil society, media, electorate and citizens. All electoral stakeholders including ordinary voting citizens have a role to play in ensuring the credibility, quality and success of elections. As such, beyond the EMB which is generally responsible for planning and overseeing electoral conduct, all other aspects of the electoral process and the responsibility for upholding the value of electoral integrity and credibility fall within the shared responsibility of all stakeholders including the executive, legislature, judiciary, political parties, civil society actors, the media, educational institutions, amongst others. Similarly, as noted in the Report of the Election Reform Committee 2008, "elections do not take place in a political vacuum. On the contrary, the character of the particular state, her specific material and historical circumstances, as well as the nature of politics all affect the conduct of elections"[5]. In other words, the combination of the structural and cultural base on which the country's political economy rested before in the immediate post-independence years, shaped the dynamics and trajectories of competitive electoral politics in the country. Also, the first-past-the-post electoral system encourages a winner-takes-all political culture, which in turn tends to convert politics and electoral competition into a zero-sum game and a theatre of war[6].

The 2023 General Election in Nigeria was held between February 25 and April 15, 2023, with February 25 and March 18, 2023 being the most important dates. The national elections compromising the Presidential, Senatorial and House of Representative elections were conducted on February 25, 2023. Due to the issues arising from the aftermath of the presidential election, the conduct of the governorship election was shifted from March 11 2023 to March 18, 2023[7]. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), this was to allow the Commission ample time to reconfigure the BVAS machines ready for the conduct of the Governorship/State House of Assembly Election.[8] Also, the issue of BVAS information from the Presidential Election was supposed to be evidence for

[5] Report of Election Reform Committee 2008 page 1.
[6] Jinadu, A. (2012). Preface. In: Report of the Registration and Election Review Committee. 2012, https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RERC-REPORT.pdf . Page xiv
[7] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/breaking-inec-postpones-governorship-state-assembly-elections-to-march-18/
[8] Ibid

during election disputes,[9] hence, the delay in reconfiguring them. The Elections held across all 774 local government areas in the 36 states of the federation had four major contestants at the presidential level (along with 14 other candidates) and a long list of governorship candidates from the 18[10] registered political parties in the 36 states of Nigeria.

The Election was unique as it was the first general election to be conducted after the passing into law of the new Electoral Act, 2022. It served as an opportunity for full implementation of the new Electoral Act across in the whole country, a test of the adequacy of provisions of the Act and a test of the effectiveness of governmental agencies responsible for implementing diverse aspects of the act. More so, the 2023 general election was characterized by far-reaching complexity and the intersection of different factors. Like all elections, it involved a multitude of stakeholders and institutions, each performing diverse complex and dovetailing roles. This complexity and intersecting role of stakeholders in the electoral process largely accounts for the complexity of Nigerian elections. The complexity of elections and their conduct in Nigeria is further compounded by the vast geographical size of the country. As Hamman-Obels[11] noted, presidential elections in Nigeria are actually 37 different elections happening at the same time across 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, which are then collated as one. This is because each state is context-specific with its specificities and peculiarities[12].

It is also pertinent to note the federal structure, which divides Nigeria into 36 States plus FCT. For election to the federal legislature each State and the FCT is divided into senatorial and representative constituencies. States are represented by 3 Senators per State, whereas the FCT has one Senator. In addition, States are divided into a total of 360 federal constituencies which elect members into the House of Representatives. FCT has two Representatives, whilst the States may have between 6 to 24. These require another set of elections in each State of the Federation and FCT. However, as is often the case, in the last cycle, the presidential, Senate and House Representative Elections were conducted in parallel.

[9] See, https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Electronic_Transmission___Collation_Of_Result-5.pdf, p. 1, paragraph 2

[10] During the elections, there were 18 registered political parties in the country, but in the aftermath of the elections, a Supreme Court verdict compelled INEC to register Youth Party (YP), one of the hitherto deregistered political parties in the country, increasing the number of political parties in the country from 18 to 19 following the 2023 general elections.

[11]Hamman-Obels, P. (2018) "Governing Elections in Africa: Discourses of Electoral Assessment and Nigeria's 2015 General Elections." Thesis Submitted to University of Oxford, 2018. Page 7

[12] ibid

Each State is administered by an elected Governor, with an executive legislature called the State House of Assembly, which may have between 24 and 40 Seats or elected Members. This totals 991 constituencies where additional elections are held, usually at least two weeks after the federal elections. However, the FCT, Abuja is ruled by an appointed Minister and the Federal House of Assembly serves as its legislature. Abuja Area Councils sit at the local government level, but with Abuja not having a state legislature, such elections are governed by the federal laws such as the Constitution and the relevant Electoral Act.

1.2 Task of the Report

This analytical report serves a dual role as our post-election report and an analytical brief on the 2023 general election in Nigeria. It not only presents our observations of the electoral process nationwide but also highlights the achievements and challenges that have emerged, along with their implications for strengthening democracy. Additionally, we provide insights into matters of electoral responsibility and accountability stemming from this election. To achieve this, we draw upon field observations, relevant media reports, and the lessons learned, aiming to assist stakeholders in gaining a deeper understanding of the 2023 general elections and facilitating improvements in the fairness and trustworthiness of future electoral processes in the country.

1.3 Structure of the Report

In addition to this introductory section, this report is logically structured to provide insight into the electoral observation methodology adopted by The Electoral Hub, the regulatory framework guiding the 2023 general election, observations from the 2023 general election, a disaggregated analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the election, electoral accountability and responsibility, as well as a conclusion consisting of lessons learnt and recommendations. Recommendations were specifically directed at relevant electoral duty-bearers including INEC, political parties and politicians, security agencies, the executive, the National Assembly, electoral officers and ad-hoc staff, civil society organizations, the media and the National Orientation Agency, and the electorates.

Election Observation Methodology

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria marked a critical moment in Nigeria's democratic journey. The election conducted in the aftermath of the passage of the 2022 Electoral Act marks a major step towards improved electoral credibility and integrity in Nigeria. Being the seventh election since the country's return to democracy and an election that would mark a change of leadership of government, the election was of major interest to stakeholders including The Electoral Hub. The Electoral Hub's observation of the 2023 general elections covered the entire electoral cycle, including the pre-election, election-day and post-electoral stages.

2.1 Pre-Election Process Observation

To adequately understand and monitor the process, The Electoral Hub conducted research with the financial support of OSIWA/OSF which mapped 10 key areas of concern ahead of the polls. Issues identified include insecurity, poor management of tight Presidential and Governorship elections, vote trading (buying and selling of votes), poor infrastructure, staff incompetence and sabotage within the EMB, conflicting court orders and controversial judgments, glitches and hitches in electoral technology, trust deficit in the electoral system, interferences with voters' access and voting rights and poor management of youth expectations in the electoral process[13].

Informed by the issues above, The Electoral Hub also launched a full-scale pre-election advocacy, sensitisation and stakeholder engagement campaign aimed at forestalling possible challenges that could truncate the electoral process. The organization, in line with its commitment to promoting electoral accountability, knowledge, and integrity and with financial support from the DAI/EU-SDGN launched the Electoral Volunteer Information Centre (EVIC) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Kano and Lagos States to sensitize and provide electoral services to citizens. The services rendered include assistance with PU collection, assistance with checking of PU status, and sensitisation on the BVAS, among others. This campaign further provided The Electoral Hub with information about issues experienced in the pre-election period.

2.2 Election-Day Process Observations

On 25th February and 18th March 2023 when the general elections were conducted nationwide, The Electoral Hub deployed electoral observers across all 36 states of the

[13]See The Electoral Hub social media pages such as https://www.facebook.com/electoralhubng https://twitter.com/electoralhub

federation. The Electoral Hub's Election Observation Mission for the 25th February and March 18th general elections were led by the Director of the organisation, Princess Hamman-Obels. Specific issues covered in the observation include compliance with the legal framework; RAC preparation and set-up; security presence; fuel and currency scarcity impact; youth, women and PWDs' participation; malpractices including vote trading and electoral violence; election-related violence against women; ad-hoc staff performance; collation process management; post-collation electoral environment and the conduct of key stakeholders.

2.3 Post-Election Process Observations

After the elections, The Electoral Hub's observers and core staff continued to track the process, monitor media reports, and closely document dispute resolution efforts. Throughout the electoral process, The Electoral Hub periodically released infographics and public statements to inform citizens and motivate electoral duty bearers to fulfil their roles effectively.

The Electoral Hub evaluates elections by comparing them to the global standards for democratic elections outlined in the host country's international agreements and its national laws. The Hub carries out its election observation missions in alignment with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, emphasising impartiality, non-interference, transparency, independence, inclusivity, professionalism, and respect for national sovereignty as fundamental principles to guide election observation missions.

Regulatory Frameworks Guiding the 2023 General Election

To begin, it is imperative to note that electoral contests are typically conducted under established regulatory frameworks. Elections are not only civic activities but also legal activities, backed by law.[14]As the Administrative and Cost of Elections (ACE) project rightly noted, the "organization and administration of electoral processes are complex, and always involve a substantial mass of detail which are usually specified in written laws and regulations."[15] For the Nigerian state, the 'substantial mass of detail' involved in electoral contests is codified in the country's Constitution (the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria) and The Electoral Act (as amended in 2022). The INEC Regulations and Guidelines (2022) was another crucial regulatory instrument used in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Other relevant legal instruments include the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability Prohibition Act, and the Child Rights Act (2003). These established statutes and rules offer the advantages of clarity, observability, and openness. They are also more amenable to judicial assessment and available for scrutiny by concerned entities such as candidates, voters, and the general public.[16]Subsequent sub-sections provide insight into each of these regulatory frameworks and their relevance to the 2023 general election.

3.1 The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN)

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria serves as the supreme law of the country, establishing the fundamental principles and structure of the nation's governance. It outlines the powers, functions, and responsibilities of various government bodies and defines the rights and duties of Nigerian citizens. In the context of elections, the Constitution provides a foundational framework for the legal treatment of electoral issues. It empowers the National Assembly to enact laws that establish the procedures and penalties for electoral offences, ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and upholding democratic ideals.

The Constitution emphasizes the need for free and fair elections as a cornerstone of democracy. Sections 33 to 43 of the 1999 Constitution specifying the fundamental rights of citizens is a tacit pointer to the rights of citizens to exercise their freedom to partake in leadership decisions without undue influence or coercion (as exemplified by electoral

14 See The Electoral Hub (2022). Political Context Analysis: 2022 Ekiti State Governorship Election. https://electoralhub.iriadng.org/publications
15 https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/emb/default
16 Ibid

offences). More so, Sections 106, 107, 131, and 177 amongst others by laying out conditions for qualification or disqualification for occupancy of executive or legislative positions at the federal and state levels also border directly on electoral issues. Similarly, Section 239 (1) establishes original jurisdiction for the Appeal Court to decide on presidential election disputes, and Section 285 establish the same for election petition tribunals over all other elections in the country. These are direct pointers to the crucial place of the Constitution in regulating electoral conduct.

In addition to the preceding, Section 221 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria holds that no association can canvass for votes for any candidate at an election other than a political party. Section 225(3) further prohibits political parties from owning or receiving funds or assets from outside Nigeria. These show the pivotal place of the Constitution in regulating the electoral process and determining ideal practices in electoral conduct within the country.

3.2 The Electoral Act 2022

In Nigeria, the Electoral Act serves as a crucial legal instrument for regulating virtually all aspects of electoral conduct and ensuring the credibility of the process. It outlines rules and regulations that govern the entire electoral process, from voter registration to results announcement. The Electoral Act 2022 signed into law on 25th February, 2022, repealed the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended). The Act contains provisions for regulating the conduct of Federal, State and Area Council elections in the FCT, [17] approving the use of card readers, and other technological devices in elections and political party primaries, providing a timeline for the submission of a list of candidates, specifying criteria for substitution of candidates, limits on campaign expenses, and addressing the omission of names of candidates or logos of political parties.[18] The Act further lays out an elaborate list of electoral offences, treated largely as criminal offences with appropriate punitive measures.[19]

Specifically, Part VII (Sections 114 – 129) of the Electoral Act 2022 lays down an elaborate list of electoral offences and prescribed punitive measures. These offences encompass a

[17] Area Councils are administrative units in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria and are the same as local government areas. The FCT has six area councils: Abaji, Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali. While State Independent Electoral Commissions are generally responsible for local government elections in the 36 states of Nigeria, Area Council Elections in the FCT are conducted by INEC.
[18] Electoral Act, (2022). Explanatory Memorandum
[19] For more on Criminalization of Electoral Offences, see Okechukwu Ibeanu (2022, April 28) "Prosecuting Electoral Offences as a Mechanism for Electoral Accountability." Keynote Address Presented at the Roundtable on Electoral Offences in Nigeria organized by The Electoral Hub on the 28th April, 2022.
https://electoralhub.iriadng.org/news-and-events/keynotes/
https://electoralhub.iriadng.org/news-and-events/communique/

range of behaviours which include forgery of documents, multiple voting, impersonation, and vote trading. The Act takes a firm stance against such actions to safeguard the integrity of elections and uphold the democratic principles of the nation. Electoral offences outlined in the Act are designed to prevent actions that could jeopardise public will and compromise the credibility of elections in the country. Offences like spreading false information, engaging in violence or intimidation, and tampering with election results are not only discouraged but also incur penalties for those who engage in such. The Act emphasizes the importance of peaceful and transparent elections by deterring individuals from participating in any form of misconduct that could disrupt the electoral process or manipulate its outcomes. By clearly defining these offences and their consequences, the Act attemps to put a check to the pervasive irregularities that have become a characteristic of Nigerian elections, and ensure that elections in Nigeria are conducted fairly and follow democratic values.

The Electoral Act also underscores the significance of accountability and responsibility in the electoral process. It places the responsibility not only on voters and candidates to uphold the law but also on election officials and stakeholders to do the same whilst administering the process with honesty and impartiality. This comprehensive approach ensures that all aspects of the electoral process are scrutinized and regulated, minimizing the potential for malpractice. The Act is an essential instrument in Nigeria's efforts to promote credible elections, preserve the people's right to choose their leaders freely and maintain the trust of citizens in the democratic system.

3.3 INEC Regulations and Guidelines

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) regulations and guidelines are essentially a set of rules, principles, and procedures established by INEC, the Nigerian EMB, to govern various aspects of the electoral process. It is designed to ensure the fairness, transparency, and integrity of the electoral process. The regulation covers a wide range of areas, including voter registration, participation of political parties, campaign finance, election conduct, and results declaration. In recent times, the Commission has, released guidelines for electoral conduct in 2019 and 2022.

For the 2023 general elections, INEC updated the 2019 version of the electoral regulations and guidelines in 2022 and deployed it for use. The document titled Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022 covers matters of elections and arrangements for their conduct, accreditation and voting procedure during elections, collation of results and making of returns, electoral conduct during COVID-19 and other health emergencies, among others. Each of these key areas contains several specific provisions aimed at guiding the diverse aspects of electoral conduct and ensuring the integrity of the process.

3.4 Other Related Laws and Policies

The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act is a crucial piece of legislation in Nigeria aimed at addressing and eradicating various forms of violence against individuals, especially women and vulnerable groups. Enacted in 2015, the VAPP Act provides a comprehensive legal framework to prevent, prohibit and punish all forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. This legislation recognizes the importance of safeguarding the rights and dignity of all persons, regardless of gender, age, or social status. The focus of the Act on violence of all forms places issues of electoral violence directly within its purview.

Importantly, the Act introduces protective measures for victims, such as restraining orders and orders for the payment of compensation, to ensure their safety and well-being. Specific provisions of the Act as contained in Sections 2 – 4 which borders on willful infliction of injury, coercion, and creation of fear of injury respectively, are all relevant provisions for regulating diverse aspects of the electoral process in Nigeria. Similarly, Section 11 specifies punitive measures for the destruction of properties and Section 18 provides against intimidation all find relevance within the context of discourse on electoral offences, electoral violence and voter intimidation.

Lastly, Section 23 is specifically focused on political violence. The section contains provisions against committing or attempting to commit political violence. As well as proscribing against violence, it also ascribes appropriate punishments to the act of aiding and abetting perpetrators of political violence. These provisions, among others, make the VAPP Act a key legislative instrument for regulating electoral offences in Nigeria.

Like the VAPP (2015), the Child Rights Act (CRA) is also a vital legislative instrument with relevance to the conduct of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. It is a legal instrument designed to protect the rights and welfare of children across the country. Enacted in 2003, the Act is a comprehensive framework that outlines the rights and responsibilities of children, parents, guardians, and the government in ensuring the well-being and development of Nigeria's young population. The CRA is a response to international standards (including the United Nations Convention) on the Rights of the Child and seeks to provide a legal foundation for promoting and safeguarding the rights of children in various aspects of their lives.

With a total of 278 sections, the Act serves as an elaborate instrument for the protection of Nigerian children. Section 26 of the Act specifically proscribes the employment, use or involvement of children in activities that constitute an offence. Subsection 2 of this provision further specifies a fourteen-year imprisonment term for violators of the

provision. This provision is particularly relevant to the electoral process, especially concerning underage voting which, as media reports have revealed, is a commonly perpetrated electoral offence in Nigeria. The Act is, therefore, an important legislative instrument in the regulation of electoral matters and conduct in the country.

Another legislative instrument with utilitarian value in Nigerian electoral discourse is the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2019). Commonly referred to as the Disability Act, it serves as an important legal framework in Nigeria aimed at promoting the rights, inclusion, and well-being of people with disabilities (PWDs). It acknowledges the rights of PWDs and seeks to eliminate discrimination and barriers that hinder their full participation in society. The Disability Act aligns with international standards, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and reflects Nigeria's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens.

The Act's provision for PWDs to be considered first in queues as contained in Section 25 and its provision in Section 30 for PWDs to be encouraged to fully participate in politics and political life (by creating an enabling environment for PWDs to engage in public affairs and hold key positions in political parties) are all crucial provisions that lend credence to the relevance of the Act to electoral discourse in Nigeria.

Electoral Statistics: The 2023 General Elections in Numbers

The 2023 General Elections marked a pivotal moment in the political landscape of the nation, with citizens casting their votes to determine the course of governance for the next four years. This chapter provides detailed electoral statistics on the 2023 General Election, giving a detailed analysis of the total number of polling units, voters registered, permanent voters cards collected, presidential candidates, voter turnout, party performance, and demographic trends, amongst others.

4.1 Electoral Delimitation

The 2023 General Election in Nigeria were a significant and comprehensive democratic exercise that spanned the entire country. The elections were conducted across all 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and extended to all 774 local government areas within the country. This wide-reaching electoral process aimed to provide Nigerian citizens with the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights and choose their representatives for executive as well as legislative positions at both federal and state levels.

Specifically, the presidential polls took place across all states of the country, consisting of 176,846 polling units. The governorship elections, however, occurred in a slightly different manner. While the presidential election spanned all 36 states and the FCT, the governorship elections were conducted in only 29 of these states. This variation was due to specific circumstances in certain states like Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Imo, Ekiti, Kogi, Ondo, and Osun. In these states, the election cycles have been modified as a result of mid-tenure changes of leadership, often arising from judicial rulings. Consequently, these states hold their governorship elections as off-cycle events, separate from the broader electoral timeline.

The comprehensive scope of the 2023 elections extended to various levels of government and constituencies. Across Nigeria, a total of 8,809 Registration Areas and Electoral Wards served as focal points for electoral activities. These constituencies played crucial roles in the selection of representatives at both the federal and state levels.

At the federal level, the elections encompassed 109 Senatorial Districts and 360 Federal Constituencies, allowing voters to choose their senators and members of the House of Representatives. Additionally, the 2023 elections covered 991 State Constituencies, facilitating the election of representatives to state legislatures. The table below offers insight into the 2023 electoral delimitation.

Table 1: Nigeria Electoral Delimitation, Voters and Registration

Number of LGAs	774
Number of Registration Area or Wards	8809
Number of Senatorial Districts	109
Number of Federal Constituencies	360
Number of State Constituencies	99320
Total Number of Polling Units	176,846 (176,606)[21]
Total Number of Political Parties Contesting	18
Total Number of Registered Voters	93,469,00822
Total Number of PVC Collected	87,209,00723
Total Number of BVAS for the election	194,46424

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Official records show that the Nigerian state has a total of 93,469,008 registered voters. According to INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, after the successful clean-up of the data harnessed from the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) exercise, the preliminary register of voters in Nigeria stood at 93,522,272. As at the end of the CVR July 31, 2022, an additional 12,298,944 persons completed the registration as new voters. However, following the clean-up, 2,780,765 registrants were found ineligible and were subsequently removed from the record, leaving valid registrations at 9,618,188 in addition to the existing register of 84,004,0848 (as used for the 2019 General Election). Of the total number of registered voters captured, 87.2 million voters had collected their Permanent Voters Card as the country prepared for the election. This is over 93.29% collection rate and the highest collection rate so far recorded in our electoral democracy.

4.2 Electoral Constituencies and Candidates

For the 2023 General Election, there were 1,491 electoral constituencies. This was the number of positions/seats contested by 15, 331 candidates drawn from 18 registered political parties. While it would be too schematic, perhaps even impracticable, to present a comprehensive list of all the contestants in the election, the table below provides a

[20]Although 991 in the Constitution, INEC conducted election for 993 due to court judgments that brought in 2 additional constituencies

[21] For the 2023 General Election only 176,606 PUs were used. There were 240 zero PUs (PUs without registered voters)

[22] INEC (2023). Registered Voters and PVCs Collected for the 2023 General Elections. Accessed from: https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/PVCs-Collected-Registered-Voters.pdf

[23] INEC (2023). Registered Voters and PVCs Collected for the 2023 General Elections. Accessed from: https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/PVCs-Collected-Registered-Voters.pdf

[24] Vanguard News, (2023, January 5). We've set aside 8,809 BVAS as backup – INEC. Accessed from: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/01/weve-set-aside-8809-BVAS-as-backup-inec/

summary of the total number of contestants from the presidential, governorship and legislative positions across the country:

Table 2: Parties and Candidates for 2023 General Elections

S/N	Elective Position	No. of Candidates
1.	Registered Political Parties	18
2.	Presidential	18
3.	Vice Presidential	18
4.	Governorship	837
5.	Deputy Governorship	837
6.	Senate	1,101
7.	House of Representative	3,122
8.	State House of Assembly	10,240
	Total	16,191

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

At the level of the Presidency, all 18 registered political parties fielded candidates. Each candidate had a running mate or a vice presidential candidate. 837 candidates nationwide contested for the governorship positions with their running mates. There were 1,101 senatorial candidates, 3,122 contestants for the 360 seats in the House of Representatives, and 10,240 contestants for House of Assembly seats nationwide. The list of presidential candidates and their running mates are alphabetically arranged by political party in the table below:

Table 3: Presidential Candidates and their Running Mates

S/N	Party Name	Party Acronym	Presidential Candidates	Running Mates
1	Accord	A	Prof Christopher Imumulen	Bello Bala Maru
2	Action Alliance	AA	Al Mustapha Hamza	Johnson E. Chukwuka
3	African Action Congress	AAC	Omoyele Sowore	Magashi Garba
4	Action Peoples Party	APP	Nnadi Charles Osita	Hamisu Isah
5	Action Democratic Party	ADP	Sani Yabagi Yusuf	Udo Okey Okoro
6	African Democratic Congress	ADC	Dumebi Kachikwu	Buhari Mohammed Ahmed
7	All Progressives Congress	APC	Asiwaju Bola Tinubu	Kashim Shettima
8	All Progressives Grand Alliance	APGA	Professor Peter Umeadi	Muhammed Koli
9	Allied Peoples Movement	APM	Ojei Chichi	Ibrahim Muhammed

10	Boot Party	BP	Adenuga Sunday Oluwafemi	Usman Mustapha
11	Labour Party	LP	Mr. Peter Obi	Datti Baba-Ahmed
12	National Rescue Movement	NRM	Osakwe Felix Johnson	Kyabo Yaya Mohammed
13	New Nigeria Peoples Party	NNPP	Mr. Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso	Isaac Idahosa
14	Peoples Democratic Party	PDP	Alhaji Atiku Abubakar	Ifeanyi Okowa
15	Peoples Redemption Party	PRP	Mr. Kola Abiola	Zego Haro Haruna
16	Social Democratic Party	SDP	Prince Adewole Adebayo	Buhari Yusuf
17	Young Progressive Party	YPP	Prince Malik Ado-Ibrahim	Eyinnaya Michael Kasarachi
18	Zenith Labour Party	ZLP	Nwanyanwu Daniel D.	Abubakar Jibrin Ramalan

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

4.3 Voter Turnout and Party Performance

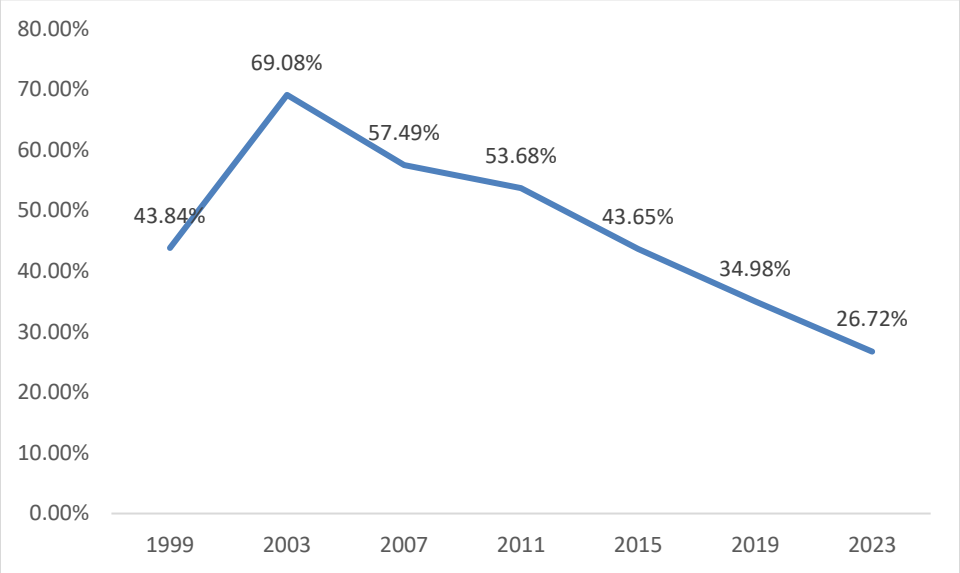
Voters' turnout denotes the ratio of total votes cast to the total number of registered voters. In percentage terms, it refers to the percentage of registered voters that partook in the election. Turnout for the 2023 general election (presidential) was a record low of 29%, the lowest since 1999. In 1999, there were 57,938,945 registered voters, with 25,399,984 votes cast,[25] resulting in a voter turnout of 43.84%.[26] In 2003, the number of registered voters increased to 60,823,022, and 42,018,735 votes were cast,[27] achieving a higher turnout of 69.08%.[28] The trend continued in 2007, with 61,567,036 registered voters,[29] 35,397,515 votes cast,[30] and a turnout of 57.49%.

However, in subsequent elections, the voter turnout percentage decreased: 53.68% in 2011 (73,528,040 registered voters, 39,469,484 votes cast),[31] 43.65% in 2015 (67,422,005 registered voters, 29,432,083 votes cast),[32] and 34.98% in 2019 (82,344,107 registered

[25] INEC (1999). National Report on the National Assembly Elections Held on 20th February, 1999, p. 47
[26] ibid
[27] https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/1894/
[28] INEC (2003). Report on the 2003 General Elections, p. 35
[29] INEC (2007). Official Report on the 2007 General Elections, p. 26; and https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2038/
[30] Ibid
[31] https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/REPORT-ON-THE-2011-GENERAL-ELECTIONS.pdf https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2190/
[32] https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/summary-of-results.pdf https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2541/

voters, 28,614,190 votes cast).[33] The most recent election in 2023 saw 93,469,008 registered voters,[34] but only 25,296,616 votes were cast, resulting in a significantly lower turnout of 26.72%.[35] This was the lowest throughout the over six decades of Nigerian independence.

Figure 1: Turnout Trend in Nigerian General Elections (Presidential) from 1999 - 2023



The graph above depicting the trend of voter turnout in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 shows that, after increasing during the 2003 elections, turnout has decreased in each subsequent election. There are two possible explanations for this. First, citizen disillusionment and waning interest in government and elections may promote a declining trend in turnout. Second, incremental advancements in the election process and checks against manipulation may reduce the chance of voting figures being manipulated. Although the electoral process has steadily improved since INEC's founding in 1999, advances from the 2011 general elections resulted in the introduction of many innovations and mechanisms to prevent irregularities and manipulation of results in favour of candidates. Serial numbering and colour-coding of ballot papers and boxes began around this time, as did the introduction of technological devices such as the Finger Print Reader, Smart Card Reader, Permanent Voter's Cards, and, most recently, BVAS for voter registration and accreditation. With these precautions in place, it becomes more difficult to manipulate the process through multiple registrations, multiple voting, over-voting, multiple voting, voting with fake voter cards,

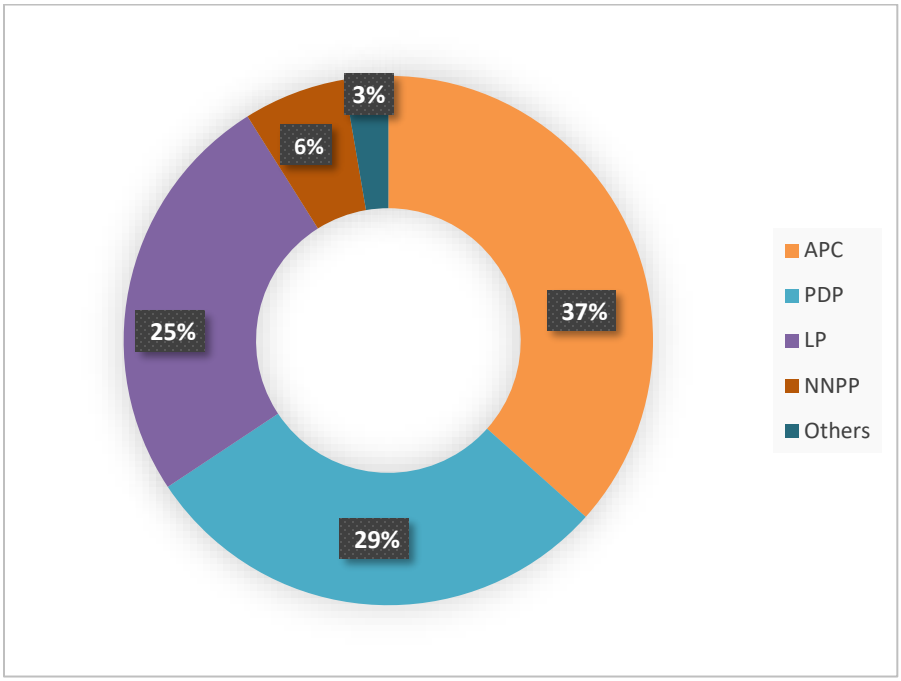
[33] https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3100/
[34] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/586788-nigeriadecides2023-only-27-of-eligible-voters-decide-who-becomes-nigerias-president.html, https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/4018/
[35] European Union Election Observation Mission (2023). Nigeria 2023 Final Report, p. 51

and other methods that might result in an apparent high turnout. This gives a very reasonable explanation for the low turnout during the 2023 presidential election, since the election was preceded by great interest in the process due to anticipated advantages from technology.

For the governorship election held in 28 of the country's 36 states with a voting strength of 71.5 million, only 22.3 million votes were reported to have been cast. With a 31% turnout, this was a marginal improvement on the turnout during the 2023 presidential polls. Taken together with the percentage from the presidential polls, it is deducible that turnout for the 2023 general elections was generally low.

In terms of political party performance during the 2023 election, there was a notable improvement compared to previous elections. While the election featured candidates from 18 political parties, four major parties stood out, collectively garnering 23,377,466 votes, which accounted for 92% of the total votes cast in the election. However, there were 939,278 invalid votes, representing 3.71% of the total votes cast, leaving approximately 4% of the total votes to be distributed among the remaining 14 parties. Although the election was dominated by these four major parties, this outcome marked an improvement in competitiveness of political parties compared to past elections in the country. The chart below provides a visual representation of the total number of votes obtained by each of the four major parties and the remaining political parties.

Figure 2: Parties and Percentage of Votes Secured in the 2023 General Elections



Source: INEC

Observations from the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Elections

As noted in the introductory section, the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was held on the 25th of February 2023. It was the seventh presidential contest since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999, the start of Nigeria's fourth republic. The election had 18 contestants, one from each of the 18 registered political parties in the country. Against the customary backdrop of dominance by two candidates, the election resulted in the victory of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the presidential candidate of the All-Progressive Congress (APC). who pulled a total of 8,794,726 votes[36] to defeat his closest counterpart, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who pulled a total of 6,984,520 votes[37]. Other popular candidates during the election were Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) who scored 6, 101, 533 votes[38] and Rabiu Kwankwaso of the New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) who scored 1, 496, 687 votes[39]. Various stakeholders including the Independent National Electoral Commission and its ad-hoc staff, political parties, and security agencies, amongst others, oversaw diverse aspects of the contest.

Our observations of the conduct of the elections covered the entire electoral process, including pre-election, election-day and the immediate post-election periods. It revealed the following issues:

5.1 Late Arrival of Election Materials and Personnel

The INEC electoral guideline specifies that voting should commence at 8:30 a.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. Live reports from our field observers across the country showed that these guidelines were not adhered to in many places. In many parts of the country, electoral personnel alongside electoral materials arrived late and this led to the polls opening late. The Electoral Hub observers in Kano State reported that as of 12:30 p.m., voting was yet to commence in, Murtala Ward, Nasarawa LGA, of the state. Similarly, an observer from Nasarawa state reported that election personnel arrived at PU 056, Ado by Capital Gate , Karu Ward, Nasarawa State, at 9:22 a.m. while voting commenced at about 10:30 a.m. In the FCT, The Electoral Hub observers reported that, in Capville School, Dawaki Ward, PU 074, electoral personnel arrived at about noon, while in Big Cele Dawaki, PU 76, FCT, the electoral personnel arrived past 10 am. Also, in PU 097, Close to Abuja Model City Gate,

[36] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/585443-breaking-inec-declares-apcs-bola-tinubu-winner-of-nigerias-presidential-election.html
[37] Ibid
[38] Ibid
[39] Ibid

Galadimawa, FCT, electoral officials arrived at 12:15 p.m. Also, in Aleyita Primary School Kabusa Ward, FCT, PU 012 voting commenced at 1:26 p.m. Similarly, in Aleyita Primary Health Care, Kabusa, PU 107 voting commenced at 2:27 p.m. Observers deployed to Benue State reported that in PU 033, Fiidi Ward, Makurdi, voting commenced at 10:42 a.m. Same pattern was observed in Rivers State where feedback from observers deployed by The Electoral Hub revealed that in PU 007, Port-Harcourt, Phalga LGA, as of 10:34 a.m., electoral officials were yet to arrive. From Plateau State, it was reported that voting materials did not arrive in PU 015, Gyel B ward, till past 2 p.m. when persons not commissioned by the EMB volunteered to go and bring both electoral officials and materials to the polling unit.



Electoral officials arriving 9:16 am, Barde Kurduma 2 Ward, Guzape District, Abuja[40]



10:20 am electoral officials yet to arrive U 057, Pyakasa, Kasari ECWA Church, Abuja[41]

5.2 Good BVAS Performance

The Electoral Hub observers documented the BVAS's effective performance in numerous polling units across the country. For example, in places like Karu Ward, particularly at PU: Ado Primary School in Maichibi, Dagbadna, Nasarawa State, and PU: Ado by Capital Gate in Karu Ward, Nasarawa State, the BVAS efficiently accredited voters within a mere 1 to 2 minutes, encountering no significant issues. Moreover, the BVAS exhibited a robust performance in other polling units, including PU 001 in Kubwa Ward, Bwari Local Government Area, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), PU 026 in Gandun Albasa Ward, Kano State, FHA in Lugbe Hausa Market Polling Unit in the FCT, PU 007 in PHALGA, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, PU 015 in Gyel B Ward, Jos South LGA, Plateau State, and PU 007 in Aje Bakwap, Zankan Ward, Kaura Local Government Area, Kaduna State. According to

[40] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Guzape, FCT
[41] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Pyakasa, FCT

a Guardian Report,[42] in PU 009, Ward 2, Abogunde/Sagba, in Ede North Local Government Area of Osun State, the BVAS was lauded for working well.

Nevertheless, there were reports of BVAS malfunctions in PU 005, Area B Opposite Health Centre, Nyanya, Abuja. Similarly, in PU 026, Alimosho Local Government Area, Lagos State it was reported that voting was delayed until 1.30 pm due to BVAS failing to function.[43] In general, The Electoral Hub observers noted good BVAS performance in voter authentication across all PUs, but there were challenges with upload of results at PUs as well as difficulties in the upload of presidential election results to the IReV portal.[44]

5.3 Poor Ad-hoc Staff Performance

Electoral Hub observations revealed critical shortcomings in the performance of ad-hoc staff during the electoral process. One prominent issue was the evident lack of adequate knowledge and training among these staff members. To illustrate, a specific instance in the AMAC Local Government Area, Abuja highlighted the under-preparedness of Presiding Officers, who struggled to carry out their duties effectively. Similarly, in Karu Ward, Abuja electoral officials failed to engage with the voters adequately, necessitating the electorate themselves to step in and provide guidance on the proper voting procedures. Another striking example from Ozubulu in Anambra State demonstrated the extent of the problem, as some voters volunteered to replace absent INEC ad-hoc officials to ensure that voting could proceed in a few polling units. [45] Regrettably, these volunteers lacked the necessary training and familiarity with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and standard electoral procedures, which further complicated the voting process. Such situations were not isolated incidents but were also observed in other polling units, such as Polling Units 018 and 019 in Ward 004 of Ozubulu, Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Anambra State. Inadequate training and a lack of willingness among some staff to learn and execute their responsibilities diligently account for this underperformance.

[42] https://guardian.ng/news/governor-adeleke-votes-commends-inec-on-bvas/
[43] https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2023/02/25/alimosho-polling-unit-026-electorate-disenfranchised-as-bvas-fails/
[44] https://punchng.com/nigeriaelection2023-irev-portal-experiencing-challenges-says-inec/
[45] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/584256-nigeriadecides2023-volunteers-replace-absent-inec-adhoc-staff-in-anambra.html



Voters without the queuing system Ansarudeen Primary School, Fagge LGA, Kano[46]

5.4 Election-related Violence Against Women

The 2023 presidential election was also found to be marked by election-related violence against women. The Gender and Election Watch Room observed that some women were intimidated by the sight of armed police officers[47]. Similarly, news reports revealed that a female voter, Jennifer Seifegha, was severely physically injured during an attack by thugs at Nuru/Oniwo Ward, Polling Units 065, Surulere, Lagos State[48]. They failed to stop her from voting though.Our field observation supported these facts as incidences of violence in several locations were found to have impeded the effective participation of women. For instance, in Garki Primary School, in Abuja, PU 005, the presence of armed police officers intimidated the women[49]. Similarly, the presence of thugs who had forcefully snatched ballot boxes and papers in Surulere 081, 082, and 083 polling units in Lagos had left the women agitated. The Gender and Election Room also reported how the absence of security agents affected the participation of women in Gabasawa, in Kano, 018 Polling Unit, and Urum, Anambra, PU 001 where the women fled as violence erupted amongst voters[50].

5.5 Electoral Violence

The 2023 general election was a closely contested one characterized by ethnic tensions and a perennial threat of violence from the pre-election period, through the electioneering period and even on to the post-election era. This was the case across diverse states in the country. Specifically, the pre-election period in Imo state was marred by widespread

[46] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Fagge, Kano State
[47] https://punchng.com/sight-of-armed-men-scared-female-voters-group/
[48] https://dailypost.ng/2023/02/25/nigeria-elections-lagos-woman-votes-after-thugs-attack-at-surulere-unit/, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/584760-nigeriadecides2023-jandor-visits-woman-injured-during-election.html
[49] Ibid
[50] https://dailypost.ng/2023/02/25/nigeria-elections-lagos-woman-votes-after-thugs-attack-at-surulere-unit/

violence. On the one hand, there was secessionist violence which affected preparations for the election, and on the other, there were incidences of violence that were directed at the electoral process itself. This was most palpable in attacks on INEC facilities within the state. These attacks were such that, in April 2022, INEC was forced to suspend voter registration in three local government areas – Njaba, Orsu and Ihitte Uboma – in a bid to avoid exposure of staff and registrants to violence.

In addition to attacks on election infrastructure and personnel, there were attacks on political party candidates. Specifically, a Labour Party candidate for Imo State House of Assembly, Christopher Eleghu, was shot on 16 December 2022 by assailants who reportedly set his house and vehicles ablaze.[51] Also, on 2 January 2023, gunmen ambushed the convoy of a former Imo state governor, Ikedi Ohakim, and killed four police officers guarding him at Oriagu town in Ehime Mbano local government area.[52] Further to this, a local government administrator of Ideato North local government area of Imo state, Christopher Ohizu, was reportedly beheaded roughly a month before the date of the governorship elections.[53]

The lead-up to the elections in Kano and Lagos States was marked by a high level of tension, and it was evident that the threat of violence loomed large. On November 23, 2022, the state chairman of the APC made a statement suggesting that the party was determined to secure victory in Kano "by any means necessary." While the other two major parties did not express their intentions as explicitly, they also conveyed a strong determination to succeed at all costs. This tension-laden political atmosphere raised concerns that all three parties might resort to inciting violence as a strategy to suppress voter turnout not only for their primary opponents but also for smaller alternative parties. Unfortunately, instances of violence did occur, often stemming from clashes between supporters of the APC, NNPP and the ADP.[54]

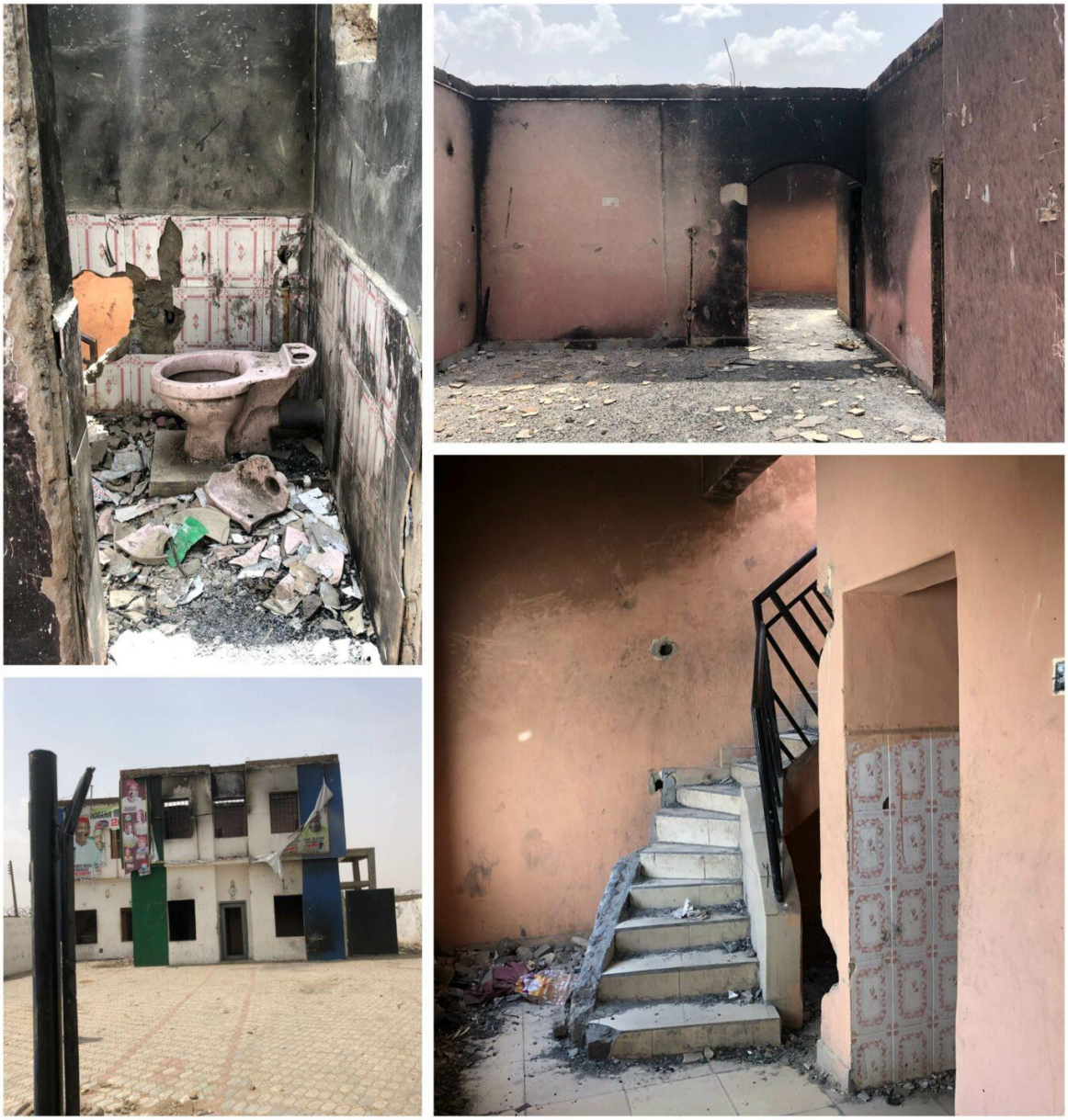
The situation during the election campaign and the immediate aftermath was marked by a significant escalation in chaos and violence. For instance, on Sunday, February 26, while the process of collating election results was taking place in Tudun Wada Local Government Area of Kano State, a group of thugs launched a violent attack and set fire to the office of the NNPP located in the Sabon Gari Ward. It was reported that while the collation of results was ongoing at Tudun Wada LGA INEC Office, a large group of thugs mobilized and attacked the Campaign Office of the NNPP House of Representatives Candidate and set

[51] https://www.channelstv.com/2022/12/16/obi-condemns-targeted-killing-of-imo-labour-party-candidate-eleghu/
[52] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/01/03/four-policemen-killed-as-gunmen-attack-ohakims-convoy
[53] https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/articles/c51l3l8drv2o
[54] https://dailytrust.com/police-residents-worry-over-political-violence-in-kano/

the building ablaze with two unknown persons in a stationary Motor Vehicle inside the building burnt to death as a result of the inferno.[55] This brutal attack resulted in multiple fatalities and left many individuals with severe injuries. Additionally, there were reports of thugs launching an attack on the INEC collation centre in Takai Local Government Area of Kano State following the election that occurred on February 25. These incidents underscored the heightened levels of disorder and violence before, during and after the elections.[56]

In Lagos, a voter, Mrs Jennifer Efedi was reportedly stabbed by thugs who disrupted the voting process.[57] The thugs reportedly snatched ballot boxes, attacked voters and prevented suspected opponents from voting. Although Jennifer's case was reported across media channels in the country, evidence suggests that this was not an isolated case. There was widespread violence across various parts of Lagos State that created palpable fear in voters and electoral staff, and ultimately dissuaded many from partaking in the process.

[55] https://nigeriacrime.com/two-campaign-offices-set-ablaze-in-kano/
[56] https://nigeriacrime.com/two-campaign-offices-set-ablaze-in-kano/
[57] https://businessday.ng/news/article/resilient-lady-votes-after-suffering-election-violence/



Burnt NNPP Office in Tudun Wada LGA, Kano State
Source: International Centre for Investigative Reporting[58]

Arise TV also reports that violence was experienced across diverse areas of Lagos including Mafoluku, Amuwo Odofin, Oshodi, Surulere, Ijaiye, Ijaniki, LASU Iba, Iyana Shashi, Ikorodu, Fadeyi, Ojota, Ogombo, Badagry, Sangotedo, and Lekki.[59] According to their account of violence in the 2023 Presidential Elections, four polling units were affected

[58] https://www.icirnigeria.org/bloodshed-and-death-inside-story-of-kanos-tudun-wada-electoral-violence-in-doguwas-constituency/
[59] https://www.arise.tv/nigeria-decides-pockets-of-violence-rock-lagos-bayelsa-edo-kogi-other-states/

at Ajaiye (Branco (two), Agboola (one), and Obisanya (one)) in Lagos State.[60] Polling units identified to have been affected by violence in Surulere include Adedeji, Owoseni, Dipo Olubi, Itire, and Aguda. In Ikate, it was reported that thugs disrupted the voting process, scattered ballot boxes and dumped them in a gutter. At Ogombo Primary School in the Lekki area of Lagos State, thugs chased away voters and locked the gates, thereby cutting off access to the polling unit.

The Presidential and National Assembly elections were also characterized by the outbreak of violence in Edo and Rivers States. In Edo, it was reported that the election claimed the lives of Festus Idahosa, 33 years old, and late Mrs. Elizabeth Owie, a 43-year-old mother of three. They were reportedly killed by political thugs who invaded their poling unit on election day. In Rivers State, sporadic shootings and vandalization of properties and vehicles were reported to have occurred along the busy Igwuruta-Elele- Airport Road at the Igwuruta axis of the Ikwerre Local Government Area. This reportedly occurred concurrently with protests against alleged manipulation of the Presidential election results. As Vanguard reported, aggrieved youths who were shooting sporadically alleged that a prominent politician in Ikwerre Local Government Area carted away ballot boxes at the collation centre to further frustrate declaration of results. Three youths suspected to be political thugs were reportedly killed during a clash at Ogbakiri Community in the Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers state.

Channels TV reports that thugs disrupted the voting process in Elegushi, Ikate area of Lekki, and other parts of Lagos[61]. A staff member of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was killed by security personnel who reportedly shot into a vehicle that was conveying some workers of the Commission after electoral duties in Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State[62].

In Ebelebiri Community in the Sagbama Local Government Area of the state, some accredited journalists covering the elections in Bayelsa State were chased out, assaulted and their devices destroyed, while in Kuje Area Council, angry thugs disrupted electoral activities at the Kayarda Polling Centre. The thugs destroyed sensitive materials in polling units, 026, 003, and 004[63]. Also, it was reported that two people, including a pregnant woman, were killed in Emohua LGA, Rivers State[64]. In a separate incident, an electoral

[60] Ibid
[61] https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/25/2023-elections-lagos-violence-several-arrests-have-been-made-say-police/
[62] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/02/28/inec-worker-shot-dead-several-others-injured-in-delta/
[63] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/02/2023-election-3-die-in-rivers-kogi-as-thugs-snatch-ballot-boxes-in-lagos/
[64] PIND, Niger-Delta Weekly Update- February 26- March 04, 2023. (2023). https://pindfoundation.org/niger-delta-weekly-update-february-26-march-04-2023/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=niger-delta-weekly-update-february-26-march-04-2023

official was reportedly shot dead in Ukwuani LGA, Delta State. Moreover, two voters were reportedly attacked and wounded by machete-wielding thugs in Onna LGA, Akwa Ibom State before their assailants made away with the BVAS machines.[65] Similarly, in Kogi State, the Eastern senatorial districts of Anyigba, Dekina, and Abocho all experienced election disruption. Moreover, polling units in Ekinrin Adde and Egbeda Egga local government areas as well as several in the Okekoko Ward and Kabba Bunu Post Office unit were also affected[66].

Violent incidents, as highlighted above, signal a pressing need for security agencies to intensify efforts toward ensuring that electoral violence is obliterated from the electoral process. This is the only way to ensure participation by the electorates without fear of danger to life. The INEC chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu reported that thugs stormed polling units in the states of Niger, Delta, and Katsina and stole eight of the BVAS machines; he revealed that three of these machines were later found.[67]

5.6 Intimidation/Voter Suppression

Manifestations of voter intimidation and voter suppression have been a recurrent feature of all elections conducted in Nigeria since 1999. The 2023 presidential election, marked by heightened ethnic and sectional sensitivity, was found to have been widely characterised by this vice. The heightened ethnic and sectional profiling and hate speech that characterized the 2023 general elections contributed significantly to violent incidents of voter intimidation and voter suppression experienced during the elections. Intimidation/Voter Suppression was observed in Anambra state where party agents were standing close to the voting cubicle, directing voters on how to cast their ballot in the presence of INEC ad-hoc staff[68].

Similarly, gunmen broke into a voting centre in Ikate, Lagos, destroyed the voting materials, and scared away the voters until soldiers in the vicinity came to the rescue[69]. In another attempt at suppressing votes, in Shitta, Surulere, Lagos, it was observed that thugs threatened anyone who did not vote for the ruling party[70]. In Ogun State, gunmen interrupted voting in Obafemi-Owode LGA centres at around 7:00 p.m., threatening non-supporters of the ruling party. This anomaly was facilitated by the late arrival of the INEC

[65] Ibid
[66] Sun, 1 Killed in Kogi as Thugs Destroy INEC Materials. (2023). https://sunnewsonline.com/1killed-in-kogi-as-thugs-destroy-inec-materials/
[67]Punch, Nigeria Elections 2023: Killings, BVAS, Ballot Box Snatching Mar Polls, (2023) https://punchng.com/nigeriaelections2023-killings-BVAS-ballot-box-snatching-mar-polls/
[68] https://www.thecable.ng/cdd-how-intimidation-suppressed-voting-in-lagos-anambra
[69] Punch (2023), Elections- Again Buhari, INEC, Police Disappoint Nigerians, https://punchng.com/elections-again-buhari-inec-police-disappoint-nigerians/
[70] Ibid

officials and operational issues with the BVAS machines. The voting process was immediately halted by gunfire from these thugs. Voter intimidation undermines the very idea of participation which underpins electoral contests in democracies.

5.7 Priority Voting

Priority voting is a fundamental concept that emphasizes the need to provide individuals and groups facing disadvantages, such as the elderly, pregnant women, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), with expedited access to polling units during elections. During the 2023 presidential polls in Nigeria, the adherence to provisions for priority voting varied, resulting in a mixture of reactions and practices. In some units, priority voting was adhered to whereas, for others, it was not.

The Electoral Hub's observations revealed that in some Polling Units, including Capville School in Dawaki Ward, PU 074, FCT, and Big Cele Dawaki, Ward PU 76, FCT, priority voting was indeed implemented. Here, special attention was given to the elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and PWDs, ensuring their swift and convenient participation in the electoral process. Reports from other sources also indicate that priority voting was observed in many polling units across the country. The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) reported that from their observation of four focal states – Borno, Plateau, Kaduna and Kwara, priority voting was observed in 85.9% of polling units.[71] Similarly, media platforms, *Infoexpert24* and *Newsone* reported that priority voting was observed in PU 008, Ward 07, Ondo North Senatorial District, Akoko South-West LGA, Ondo State.[72] These are notable instances of inclusiveness for youth, women, and PWDs in the elections.

However, in places like Karu Ward, PU: Ado Pry. School, Maichibi, Dagbadna (025) in Nasarawa State, there were protests against priority voting, with some voters insisting that traditional queues should be utilized instead. Also, at PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056) in Karu Ward, Nasarawa State, an accredited observer from FIDA noted the marginalization of vulnerable groups and the absence of priority voting in polling units. The same report captured a similar incident in Polling Unit 001, Magajin Gari, Jema'a" LGA, Kaduna State, where priority voting was not observed, and elderly women were not given precedence to cast their votes.[73] Practices like this could serve as potent deterrent for participation by marginalized groups.

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[71] https://fida.org.ng/2023/02/fida-nigeria-preliminary-statement-on-the-presidential-national-assembly-elections-as-it-relates-to-women-participation/

[72] https://infoexpert24.com/2023/02/25/nigeriadecides-live-updates-results-and-situation-reports-of-the-2023-presidential-election/ and https://newsoneng.com/nigeria-2023-presidential-election-live-updates-results-and-situation-reports/

[73] https://fida.org.ng/2023/02/fida-nigeria-preliminary-statement-on-the-presidential-national-assembly-elections-as-it-relates-to-women-participation/

The uneven implementation of priority voting during the 2023 presidential polls signals the presence of gaps in adherence to electoral guidelines and the need to ensure that vulnerable segments of the population can exercise their voting rights with ease and dignity



A pregnant woman waiting to cast her vote PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056), Karu Ward



Elderly women and pregnant women given voting PU: 025, Ado Primary School[74]



Elderly and pregnant women allowed to vote first
PU 015, Kurudu 2, FCT[75]

5.8 Youth, Women, and PWD Participation

The Electoral Hub observed massive participation of youths and women across several wards. For example, in PU: 056, Ado by Capital Gate, Karu Ward, FCT, Karu Ward, PU:

[74] ibid
[75] Picture captured by The Electoral Hub Observers during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Ado Primary School, Maichibi, Dagbadna (025), Pyakasa Primary School PU 007, Pyakasa Police Station, Mibasia PU 059, PU Longvel, RCM Primary School, PU 104/ LEA Primary Sch. Chika, FCT, PU 007, Pyakasa Primary School, FCT, PU 007, PHALGA LGA, Port Harcourt, PU 033, Fiidi Council ward, Benue State, PU 026, Gandun Albasa Ward, Kano State, there was massive participation by the youths and women in the voting process. We also observed significant turnout, particularly of women and youth in Longvel and RCM Primary School, in Shendam LGA, Plateau State. The participation of PWDs was, however, observed to be low across PUs in Nasarawa state, including PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056), Karu Ward, Karu Ward, PU: Ado Primary School, Maichibi, Dagbadna (025).

5.9 Misinformation/Disinformation/Fake News

Misinformation/Disinformation/Fake News is one of the means through which the integrity of an election is compromised. On Election Day, fake news was rife across social media platforms. For instance, the BBC disinformation team reports that a widely-shared video clip purporting to show ballot-stuffing on Election Day was fake as the video was discovered by the BBC - using reverse-image search tools - to be of people thumb-printing ballots during the 2019 and 2021 elections.[76] Misinformation, disinformation and fake news were so pervasive that of 16 claims checked by the Nigerian Fact-checkers' Coalition's Election Situation Room[77] on election day, only one was found to be correct. Others were found to be either completely incorrect or at most, misleading. Claims that INEC erased election results from the IReV portal, presidential election results for Ekiti were uploaded before the election, on February 20th, that Prof. Pat Utomi of the LP was held hostage, elections had been extended in 16 states by the Commission, amongst others, were all found to be misleading.[78]

5.10 Participation of Urban/Middle-Class Citizens

The Electoral Hub also observed wider participation of urban/middle-class citizens in the elections. In previous elections, particularly in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), it is a common occurrence that citizens in the urban areas do not come out to vote as the polling units in those areas are usually empty and the ad-hoc staff are left with little or nothing to do. The 2023 general election saw a change in the narrative as citizens in the urban areas also came out to cast their votes. For instance, in Model City Gate 2 Ward, Galadima, PU 096, 221 out of 597 registered voters were accredited and voted. Participation of urban/middle-class citizens was also reported by The Electoral Hub observers in various

[76] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-64797274
[77] https://factcheckhub.com/live-check-results-from-nigerias-2023-presidential-national-assembly-elections-trickle-in/
[78] ibid

parts of the FCT. For example, in PU 043 Citec, Mbora Estate, FCT, PU 064, Nurse Estate, FCT, PU 118, Suncity Estate, FCT, PU 056, Aco Estate, FCT. In PU 089, Trademore Estate, FCT as of 7:45 pm, voters were still waiting to cast their votes.

5.11 Poor Logistics

The Electoral Hub observed poor logistics during during the conduct of the election as it led to delays in the distribution of materials as well as the arrival of electoral officials, and ultimately the late commencement of polls. For instance, in PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056), Karu Ward, the cubicle was missing and a table was used instead. In Model City Gate 2 Ward, Galadima, PU 096, there was a shortage of ink. Also, in PU 012, Aleyita Primary School, Kabusa ward, voting did not commence until 1:26 pm as the stamp pad for stamping ballot papers had no ink in them. Similarly, in PU 107, Aleyita Primary Health Care, voting commenced by 2:27 p.m. due to the late arrival of stamps. To prevent future occurrences, there should be adequate preparation by electoral officials and the Commission to ensure that the process goes smoothly.



PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056), Karu Ward
Voters casting their vote on the table[79]

5.12 Weak Political Party Agents' Management

From observation, it was apparent that political parties exhibited inadequate management of the agents they had been deployed to oversee during the electoral process. This inadequacy was manifest in the unprofessional behaviour displayed by some of these

[79] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Ado, Nasarawa State

agents at various polling units. A telling example of this issue occurred at PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056) in Karu Ward, FCT, where agents declared that voting would cease at 6:00 p.m., disregarding the presence of voters who were still waiting in line to cast their ballots.[80] This indicates a lack of clear knowledge of their jurisdiction, as well as electoral guidelines amongst agents of political parties.

Also, party agents were reported to have induced voters with water, soft drinks, biscuits and food at units 021 and 022 of the Presidential Villa.[81] Similarly, in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, delayed dispatch of electoral materials was reported to have resulted from the delayed arrival of party agents at the INEC office.[82] Another notable pointer to weak political party agent management during the February 25th presidential election was the reported disruption of voting due to an altercation among party agents in Unit 1 ward 10, Ikot Ebom Primary School, Itu LGA, Akwa Ibom.[83] These examples raise concerns about the management of agents by political parties.

5.13 Poor Management of the IReV Portal

In preparation for the 2023 general elections, following provisions in Sections 52 and 65 of the Electoral Act 2022 which empowered INEC to deploy technology for elections, the EMB introduced the IReV portal, alongside the Voter Enrollment Device (IVED) and Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). The IReV portal is an online platform aimed at improving election transparency by allowing for direct upload of election results from the PU by electoral staff, and providing voters with real-time access to polling unit results prior to formal INEC announcements. The resolve to use IReV for the 2023 general elections is encapsulated in Section 38 of the INEC Regulations and Guidelines (2022) which states that:

> 38. On completion of all the Polling Unit voting and results procedures, the Presiding Officer shall:
>
> (i) Electronically transmit or transfer the result of the Polling Unit, direct to the collation system as prescribed by the Commission.
>
> (ii) Use the BVAS to upload a scanned copy of the EC8A to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), as prescribed by the Commission.

[80] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Ado, Nasarawa State

[81] See Anthony Ailemen. Vote Buying: Party agents induce voters with soft drinks, water, biscuits, at Presidential Villa. (February 25 2023). https://businessday.ng/nigeriadecidesliveupdates/article/vote-buying-party-agents-induce-voters-with-soft-drinks-water-biscuits-at-presidential-villa/

[82] https://tribuneonlineng.com/why-theres-delay-in-dispatching-voting-materials-inec/

[83] https://guardian.ng/news/voting-stops-abruptly-in-akwa-ibom-polling-unit-as-party-agents-clash/

(iii) Take the BVAS and the original copy of each of the forms in tamper evident envelope to the Registration Area/Ward Collation Officer, in the company of Security Agents. The Polling Agents.[84]

As Nigeria prepared for the election, the Commission was reported to have reiterated that there would be no going back on BVAS and IReV.[85] This bolstered public trust in the process and generated widespread interest amongst citizens. As a consequence, many partook actively in the electoral process. However, challenges emerged when electoral staff experienced difficulties in upload of results at the conclusion of polls from the Polling Unit. High hopes that accompanied the declared resolve to use technology – the BVAS and IREV portals – were soon replaced with pervasive disillusionment, indignation, and erosion of public confidence in INEC.

The Electoral Hub observed that the IReV portal was poorly managed as the presidential results were not uploaded to the portal from most of the polling units due to technical issues. As of 1:46 p.m. on February 26, only 37,577 Polling Units (PUs) results out of 176,846 had been uploaded to the IReV portal. The IReV portal was reported to have been relatively slow and unsteady. The portal was inactive for hours as the commission reported technical hitches arising from scaling up the IReV portal from a platform for managing off-season or state-level elections to one for managing nationwide general elections.[86]

As a result of the challenges with the IReV portal, political parties, including the PDP and LP, as well as their stakeholders expressed concerns about the integrity of the process and independence of the electoral management body.[87] Also, ad-hoc staff did not properly upload results in many polling units. Observations revealed that results for several polling units were either blurry or upside down. This is evident in the pictures below:

[84] Section 38, INEC Regulations and Guidelines (2022). https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/REGULATIONS-AND-GUIDELINES-FOR-THE-CONDUCT-OF-ELECTIONS-2022_updtd.pdf
[85] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/565777-2023-no-going-back-on-bvas-irev-inec.html?tztc=1
[86] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/02/irev-challenges-results-from-pus-safe-inec/
[87] https://leadership.ng/inec-uploads-jigawa-results-on-irev-portal-as-imo-results-pdp/ or https://www.tekedia.com/labour-party-slams-inec-for-conducting-sham-election-vows-to-challenge-results/



Result not properly uploaded
PU 008, Degema LGA, Rivers State[88]



Result not properly uploaded
PU 002, Abia North, Abia State[89]

5.14 Late/Delayed Results Upload to IReV

The Electoral Hub observed that results were not uploaded to the IReV portal in some polling units. For instance, in Model City Gate Ward, Galadima, PU 096, FCT, the result was not uploaded to IReV as the electoral officials claimed that they did not have access to the application that uploaded the results. Similarly, in Usuma Ward, PW Primary School II, PU 024, results were not uploaded to the IReV due to technical issues encountered; results were not also uploaded to the IReV in Usuma Ward, Angelwings Comprehensive College, Maroko, PU 033. However, in Big Cele Dawaki, Ward PU 76, FCT results were uploaded to the IReV due to pressure from voters who volunteered to put on their Wi-Fi hotspots to ensure the upload. While at Capville School, Dawaki Ward, PU 074, FCT, not all the results could be uploaded on the IReV due to technical issues. In Ijesha Collation Centre, there were complaints about the inability to upload results due to congested network. We also received reports that the lack of adequate knowledge on how to upload the results by the ad-hoc staff also led to delays in uploading relevant data. Also, in PU 064, Nurse Estate, FCT, the electoral officials had revealed that only one of them knew how to upload results to the IReV. In PU 091, Trademore Estate, Lugbe, FCT, as of 01:29 a.m., results were yet to be uploaded to the IReV. In PU 024, Byazhin Ward, FCT, the results were not uploaded but were sent offline due to the poor network hindering the upload. In PU 001, Yaba Town/Primary School I, FCT, results were not uploaded as the electoral officials revealed that the GSM Telecom Operator, 9Mobile, used to them had no service in Abaji.

[88] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Degema, Rivers State
[89] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Abia North, Abia State

This challenge was not peculiar to the FCT. Our post-election process observation revealed that several results across the country had not been uploaded to the IReV portal 28 hours after the contest. More so, media reports showed that only 30% of results were available on the IReV portal as of 4 p.m. on Sunday.[90]

5.15 Poor Knowledge of Electoral Legal Framework by Stakeholders

The Electoral Hub's observations revealed that some of the key stakeholders involved in the electoral process lacked sufficient understanding of the legal framework that governs elections in Nigeria. This deficiency in knowledge became evident in the behaviour of party agents, particularly in their attempts to question the authenticity of election results presented at the national collation centre. It is important to note that there are established procedures for verifying and confirming election results at this level.

One of the concerns highlighted by the Electoral Forum about the 2023 general election was the management of public expectations regarding the election outcome. This concern stemmed from the general public's limited knowledge of the specific procedures involved in declaring a president. As a consequence, various interpretations of section 134 (2) of the 1999 Constitution emerged, leading to disputes and disagreements among political parties.

The lack of a clear and shared understanding of the legal and procedural aspects of the declaration of presidential election results contributed to confusion and conflicts among different parties and stakeholders. This underscores the importance of enhancing public education and ensuring that all electoral participants are well-informed about the established legal framework to promote transparency and consensus in future elections.

5.16 Access to Polling Units

Strenuous efforts were made by INEC to educate the public on the change of polling units. These efforts included: SMS texts with details of a new polling unit sent to voters and a link for locating polling units – https://cvr.inecnigeria.org/vvs. Voters were also asked to send the 9-digit code on their PVCs to '8014'). Despite these measures, voters were seen moving from one place to another on election day, due to a lack of prior knowledge of their polling unit. Some voters made complaints of visiting up to four different polling units before locating their polling unit. As Premium Times reported, A voter in PU 053, Aso Primary School, Aso, Mararaba, Karu LGA reportedly experienced difficulties in accessing their polling units.[91] Our observers in the field provided services by helping voters locate their polling units, using the INEC portal. The lack of adequate knowledge of the change

[90] https://www.thecable.ng/less-than-30-of-presidential-results-available-as-inec-begins-upload-on-portal
[91] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/584281-nigeriadecides2023-voters-express-difficulty-in-accessing-polling-units-blames-inec.html#tbl-em-lnw0s464ekghkbydhp

of polling unit could be a result of the nonchalant attitude of voters toward information on PU location and inadequate dissemination of the information by the Commission, particularly in rural areas. Another issue was the poor accessibility of polling units as observed in PU: 032 Channel 8, Kukwaba, FCT (see the photo below).



A gutter leading to the voting point
PU:032, Channel 8 Kukwaba[92], Kubwa

5.17 Strengths of the Opposition

The outcome of the election showed that the opposition party had a good outing in the election. The pre-election period saw the emergence of a third force which was able to pool a large number of supporters, majorly the youth. These supporters birthed what became known as the '*Obidient Movement*.' The presidential election eventually became a four-legged race with the emergence of Rabiu Kwankwaso, the flag bearer of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP). For the first time since the transition to democratic rule in 1999, the presidential race became a four-legged race as against the two-legged race it usually was and for this reason, the election attracted attention both domestically and internationally. The major opposition PDP polled a total of 6,984,520 votes, while the Labour Party garnered 6,101,533 votes and NNPP got a total of 1,496,687 votes. Labour

[92] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Kukwaba-Kubwa, FCT

Party also had a good outing in the Senatorial and House of Representative elections, as it won 14 Senatorial and 12 House of Representatives seats.[93]

5.18 Poor Voter Turnout

Although there appeared to be a fair level of voter turnout in urban areas, the final results of the election showed that there was low voter turnout. The 2023 general elections recorded only 27% voter turnout, the lowest since 1999. For example, PU 146, Abacha Barracks, FCT, had 831 registered voters but only 171 voters were accredited to cast their vote. Similarly, in PU 015, Kpaduma Guzape District, FCT, out of 2,338 registered voters, only 691 voters voted. In PU 147, beside UBA ATM, Mogadishu Barracks, FCT, only 207 voters were accredited out of 705 registered voters. Also, in PU 001, Yaba Town/Primary School I, FCT, 226 voters were accredited out of 750 that were registered to vote. In PU 012, Kabusa Ward with 1,543 registered voters, only 456 voters were accredited to cast their votes. In PU 007, Aje Bakwap, Zankan Ward, Kaura LGA, Kaduna State, 200 out of 615 registered voters were accredited to vote. In Lagos East, reports showed that only 104,405 votes were cast in Lagos East Senatorial District (Epe, Ibeju Lekki, Ikorodu, Kosefe, Somolu LGAs) of a total of 1,168,790 registered voters.[94] Fake news and the security issues in the country, as safety concerns might have caused many to stay at home.

Worth noting is that poor turnout in Nigeria as evident in the low number of votes cast in relation to the number of registered voters also indicates a possibility that many who register as voters may not necessarily do so with the intent of voting but as a means of getting free identity cards which may be required for access to government services.

5.19 Electoral Malpractice

There were recorded cases of electoral malpractice in the 2023 presidential elections, such as results mutilation, BVAS and ballot box snatching, vote trading, vandalism, and killings amongst others.[95] Several examples allude to the pervasiveness of electoral malpractices during the 2023 presidential elections. For instance, the REC, Mallam Attahiru Madami had said that the report of ballot box snatching in PU 010, Tsaragi Ward in the Edu LGA of Kwara State would lead to cancellation of the presidential and national assembly elections.[96]

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[93] https://fij.ng/article/table-number-of-national-assembly-seats-won-by-parties/
[94] https://www.theafricareport.com/53370/nigeria-low-turnout-in-lagos-election-shows-endsars-impact/?gclid=CjwKCAjwp8OpBhAFEiwAG7NaEiFiR1gjeln-ovU0tRHAJ9m_7wFdkE9wxniNU5uBr5g0Ao22KuehpxoCaCcQAvD_BwE
[95] https://punchng.com/nigeriaelections2023-killings-bvas-ballot-box-snatching-mar-polls/
[96] Punch (2023), Ballot Snatching: Gombe Youth Leader Shot, Kwara PU Results Cancelled, https://punchng.com/ballot-snatching-gombe-youth-leader-shot-kwara-pu-results-cancelled/

In Ikate, Eti-Osa, Lekki, Lagos state, Oba Elegushi was reported by *Vanguard News* to have decried the prevalence of electoral fraud in the PU outside his palace. [97] Channels TV reported the occurrence of election-related intimidation, harassment, and violence included Akwa Ibom, Enugu, Gombe, Lagos, Edo, Ogun, Osun, Rivers, and Taraba states, and the FCT.[98] Also, in Polling Unit 003, Dagiri community, Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja, the International Centre for Investigative Reporting noted that ballot boxes were snatched.[99] In Benue State, a Council Chairman was reportedly arrested alongside suspected thugs for allegedly snatching ballot boxes and burning electoral materials.[100] In Polling Unit 17, Ogbakiri Ward, Emohua LGA, at around 10:00 a.m., thugs reportedly snatched ballot boxes and voting materials.[101] A similar incident was reported at Oredo Ward 4, Unit 42 on Butcher Street, Edo State.[102]

In addition to the above, the *Daily Post* reported that ICPC arrested 9 persons for vote buying in Osun, Ondo, Borno, Akwa Ibom and Sokoto States.[103] Punch, reported that EFCC arrested 19 in Kano, Benue and other states across the country.[104] Also, Channels reported the arrest of two persons in Zamfara for vote buying.[105] Another manifestation of electoral malpractice was the alteration of election results as was evident in photographs of results uploaded to the portal as shown below:





[97] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/02/2023-elections-oba-elegushi-cries-foul-over-alleged-electoral-fraud-in-ikate/
[98] https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/26/2023-polls-serap-seeks-us-visa-ban-against-perpetrators-of-electoral-violence/
[99] https://www.icirnigeria.org/armed-thugs-snatch-ballot-boxes-in-abuja/
[100] https://saharareporters.com/2023/02/26/nigerian-military-arrests-benue-council-chairman-oche-suspected-thugs-allegedly
[101] https://www.icirnigeria.org/thugs-snatch-ballot-boxes-bvas-machines-in-rivers-edo/
[102] ibid
[103] https://dailypost.ng/2023/02/25/breaking-2023-election-icpc-arrests-9-persons-for-vote-buying-in-osun-ondo-borno-akwa-ibom-sokoto/
[104] https://punchng.com/nigeriaelections2023-vote-buying-efcc-arrests-19-in-kano-benue-others/
[105] https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/26/efcc-arrests-two-in-zamfara-for-vote-buying/

Mutilated Result
Secondary Sch. Hall, Iwo-Polo New Site[106]



Mutilated Result
PU 012, Degema, Rivers State[107]



Mutilated Result
PU 037, Abua-Odua, Rivers State[108]

Mutilated Result
PU 015, Degema LGA, Rivers State[109]

5.20 Lack of Secret Open Ballot/Improper Positioning of Cubicle

The secrecy of the ballot is a fundamental condition that helps determine the integrity of an election. Regrettably, this essential requirement was found to be lacking in numerous polling units across the country due to the improper placement of the cubicle serving as a polling booth. For instance, in PU 037, Old Ona's Palace, Abaji South-East Ward, and PU 015, Kurudu 2, Guzape District in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the cubicles were not appropriately positioned, resulting in voters in the queuebeing close to the cubicle. This unfortunate circumstance undermined the essential element of ballot secrecy. In another case, at PU 052, Fiidi Ward, Akpehe Waomayo Primary School, Benue State, our observers noted that the voting cubicle was positioned at an elevated spot, creating difficulties for elderly individuals and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in accessing it. This is a potential deterrent to the participation of PWDs and the elderly.

[106] INEC portal
[107] Ibid
[108] Ibid
[109] Ibid

To address this, there is a need for concerted efforts toward introducing measures to guarantee proper cubicle placement and ensure that the voting process at polling units adheres to the principles of secrecy and confidentiality, necessary for ensuring electoral integrity.



Cubicle not properly placed, PU 037, Old Ona's Palace Abaji South-East Ward[110]



Cubicle not properly placed, PU 015, Kurudu 2, Guzape District, FCT[111]

5.21 Non-compliance to COVID-19 Protocol

Despite the perception that the COVID-19 pandemic has largely subsided and people have returned to their regular routines, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) continues to uphold the policies that were put in place to guide electoral conduct during the pandemic. According to this policy, all voters are required to wear face masks on Election Day to minimize the risk of transmission. Additionally, a two-tiered queue system is supposed to be implemented at polling units to ensure a controlled flow of voters into the voting area, and people should be brought in intermittently to prevent overcrowding. Twine is also recommended to demarcate areas, thereby helping to manage crowds, maintain social distancing and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

However, it is worth noting that in practice, these policies were not consistently adhered to during the 2023 elections. Overcrowding was observed at certain polling units, such as PU 014 in Kurduma I, Guzape District, FCT. Furthermore, in other polling units like Ansarudeen Primary School, Fagge LGA, and Tudun Murtala Ward in Nasarawa LGA, Kano State, the two-tiered queue system was not effectively implemented, leading to challenges in crowd management and social distancing. An obvious implication of this non-compliance with the COVID-19 protocol was the risk of a renewed pandemic

[110] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Abaji, FCT
[111] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Guzape, FCT

outbreak.[112] It is trite to note that although the pandemic is no longer a global health emergency, [113] it was considered a global health emergency during the elections.



Overcrowding
PU 014, Kurduma I, Guzape District



Overcrowding
PU 014, Kurduma I, Guzape District



No Queues
Ansarudeen Primary School, Fagge LGA
Kano state



No queues
Tudun Murtala Ward, Nasarawa LGA

[112] Binte Aamir, Faiqa, Syeda Maria Ahmad Zaidi, Saadia Abbas, Syed Roohan Aamir, Syed Nauman Ahmad Zaidi, Karishma Kanhya Lal, and Syeda Sadia Fatima. "Non-compliance to social distancing during COVID-19 pandemic: A comparative cross-sectional study between the developed and developing countries." *Journal of Public Health Research* 11, no. 1 (2022): jphr-2021.

[113] https://www.who.int/news-room/speeches/item/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing---5-may-2023



Overcrowding
PU 015, Kpaduma, Guzape District[114]

5.22 Security Presence

Electoral guidelines in Nigeria specifies a requirement of a minimum of three policemen in every PU. Applying this as criteria to determine the level of security presence, our field observers reported that there was low-security presence in some Polling Units. For instance, in Nasarawa State, Karu Ward, PU: Ado Primary School, Maichibi, Dagbadna (025) with 652 registered voters, only one police officer was present. Similarly, in Aso/Kodape Ward, PU: Ado Pavunya (036), Nasarawa State, PU 033, Fiidi Ward, Benue State, only one security agent was present. However, in polling units like PU 071, JSS FHA Lugbe; PU 060, Pyakasa Bikwa Angwan Tivi Kapwa, FCT; PU 063, Pyakasa, Angwan Basa, New Layout, FCT; PU 153, Durumi, FCT; PU 007 Aje Bakwap, Zankan Ward, Kaura LGA, Kaduna State; PU 026, Gandun Albasa Ward, Kano State at least two (2) security agents were present. The presence of security agents during elections grants assurance of safety to both the voters and electoral officials. However, it is important that the presence of security agents does not scare away voters and as such there should be a balance between securing voters, electoral officials/materials and scaring away voters.

[114] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Kpaduma, FCT



Security agents monitoring the process PU 071, JSS FHA Lugbe, Abuja[115]



Security agents monitoring the process PU 072, Hausa Market Behind Green Park Pharmacy, Lugbe[116]

Other issues include:

- Malfunctioning of BVAS in Some Locations: For instance, it was reported that the BVAS in PU 001, Bwari I, LGA, FCT had could not upload results at PUs at the end of the election.[117].

- There were reports that Kwara Central Senatorial Collation Centre refused admission to one observer Due to his observer badge only reading "field" and not "Collation Centre". Similarly, at Sokoto South Senatorial District Collation Centre, a Department of State Services (DSS) official ordered the observer out of the collation centre despite confirming his identity as a media observer[118].

- In Polling Units like PU 037, Kurudu, Bwari Area Council, FCT observers were not allowed to take photographs of the result sheets. [119]

- With the late-night voting and counting, it was observed that provisions were not made for lighting in Polling Units like; PU 033, Makurdi LGA, Benue State, and PU: Ado by Capital Gate (056), Karu Ward, Nasarawa State where voters eventually provided light via their telephone torches and flashlights.[120]

[115] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Lugbe, FCT
[116] ibid
[117] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Bwari I, FCT
[118] https://thecjid.org/media-observers-barred-from-collation-centres/
[119] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Kurudu, FCT
[120] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Karu, Nasarawa State

Observations from the Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections

The governorship election was conducted across 28 states of the federation. Due to the issues arising from the aftermath of the presidential election, the governorship election which was originally slated for March 11, 2023, was shifted to March 18, 2023[121]. According to the Commission, this was to allow the Commission ample time to reconfigure the BVAS, a prerequisite for the conduct of the Governorship/State House of Assembly Election.[122] INEC was prevented from doing so earlier, due to the relief granted to presidential election petitioners by the appellate Court.[123].

The Governorship/State Assembly election (state elections) were characterised by poor voter turnout in many states, electoral violence, intimidation and brutalisation of voters, voter suppression, disruption of polls (ballot box snatching and destruction of ballot papers and ballots) in opposition strongholds, vote trading, ethnic profiling, and baiting (Lagos State), poor participation in the urban/middle class areas, poor logistics and institutional strategic communication, maladministration at polling units by ad-hoc staff, misinformation/disinformation and fake news were also very prevalent.

It is crucial to consider how these relate to the socio-political environment in which Nigerians were living at the time. There were issues like the scarcity of gasoline and unavailability of cash, due to the cashless policy and currency exchange, low disposable income, poor quality and infrequent power supply, uncertainty due to the contested presidential election result, etc. The election results at the state levels also supported the adage that politics is local and is thus impacted by the unique characteristics of local socioeconomic and political environments. Despite these drawbacks, the election also revealed some positive traits, such as avid engagement of citizens who were fiercely committed to defending their votes and mandates (e.g., in Kano, Abia, Plateau, parts of Lagos States), strong BVAS performance, and women mobilising around the female governorship contestant in Adamawa State. This section provides broad explanations of the observations during the governorship elections.

[121] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/breaking-inec-postpones-governorship-state-assembly-elections-to-march-18/
[122] Ibid
[123] Ibid

6.1 Opening of Polls

Compared to the Presidential and National Assembly elections, the State elections witnessed improvement in the timely opening of polls. According to INEC, voting should commence at 8:30 a.m. and climax at 2:30 p.m. From the live report received, in PU 007 Toungo 2 LGA, Adamawa State, electoral officials arrived at 8:00 a.m[124]. Similarly, electoral officials arrived at 7:43 a.m. in PU 004 Toungo 1 Ward, Adamawa state, and began setting up for the election. The same was the case in PU 010 Toungo 1 Ward, Adamawa state. There were still recorded cases of late opening of polls in PU 007, PHALGA Ward, Port Harcourt, Rivers State where INEC officials arrived at 8:27 a.m. Similarly, in PU 052, Primary School Ward, Makurdi LGA, Benue State, electoral officials arrived at 9:30 a.m. Early opening of polls is relevant in the conduct of elections as it builds public confidence in the process, while late opening of polls discourages voters can lead to the disenfranchisement of voters.



PU 007 Toungo 2 LGA, Adamawa State



PU 004 Toungo 1 Ward, Adamawa state[125]

6.2 Poor Voter Turnout

The Governorship election witnessed even poorer voter turnout than the Presidential election. For instance, in PU 024, Alkaleri LGA, Bauchi State, there was low turnout as at the time the report was filed[126]. Similarly, as of 10:00 a.m., there weren't many voters in Ward 14 of the Onitsha North Local Government Area of Anambra State[127]. Also in PU 092, Amasator Ward 3, Abia State, electoral officials arrived as early as 8am, but could not commence the process as voters were not present[128]. Our field observers observed poor

[124] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Tounga, Adamawa State
[125] Captured by Observers from The Electoral Hub during the 2023 Governorship Election in Nigeria
[126] https://punchng.com/low-turnout-as-inec-officials-wait-for-bauchi-voters/
[127] https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/low-voter-turnout-dots-governorship-elections-across-states/
[128] https://gazettengr.com/polls-low-voter-turnout-in-abia/

voter turnout in PU 020, Dutse LGA, and PU 019, Dutse LGA, Jigawa State. This pattern in voter turnout was also observed by other observers across the country.

Media reports also indicated that there was poor voter turnout across the country during the governorship contest. By 10 a.m. on election day, it was reported that there was no voter in the queue and only six voters were reported to have cast their votes at Kofar Maigari Usman 024 polling units, Bauchi state.[129] Reports also showed that, in some parts of Lagos state, particularly FESTAC, no voter was seen at some polling units as of 8.40 a.m.[130] In PU 085, Ward 3, Ikeja, Lagos, only 50 voters out of 324 registered voters turned out for the election.[131] Meanwhile, polls opened at 8:30 a.m. In Obio-Akpor LGA, Rivers State, yet, it was reported that there was low turnout. Similarly, at Ward 14, Onitsha North Local Government Area, Anambra State, it was reported that there were few voters at 10 a.m. and many stayed away due to loss of confidence in INEC.[132] In PU: Zanna Ibrahim Gujuba 001, Borno State, which had a total of 689 registered voters, only 57 voters had been accredited at about 12:22 p.m. The polling unit had a total of 689 registered voters.[133]

Poor voter turnout in elections also leads to poor representation of the will of the people. When turnout is poor, as was the case in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the outcome will be underrepresentation. Leadership that emerges from such processes may not enjoy popular support. This makes the idea of democracy as a form of 'government by the people' a mere cliché with no real meaning for the majority of people who did not participate in choosing representatives that emerged from the electoral process.

[129] https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/low-voter-turnout-dots-governorship-elections-across-states/
[130] https://guardian.ng/news/low-voter-turnout-heralds-governorship-election-in-festac-town-lagos/
[131] https://punchng.com/obi-obaseki-soludo-saraki-lament-low-voter-turnout/
[132] https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/low-voter-turnout-dots-governorship-elections-across-states/
[133] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/588589-nigeriadecides2023-low-voter-turnout-mars-governorship-assembly-polls-in-borno.html



PU 024, Kofar Maigari Usman, Alkaheri LGA, Bauchi State[134]

6.3 Electoral Violence

Compared to the experience during the presidential election, the country had a seemingly worse experience during the March 18th governorship contests. *Vanguard* reported that violence took place in virtually every state of the federation.[135] In Cross River State, an ad-hoc staff, Miss Glory Effiom Essien was hit by a stray bullet while on a Boat to Bakassi for election duty.[136] On March 19, Ogoja Constituency INEC collation centre was reportedly invaded by over 50 political thugs who injured many and carted away election materials.[137] During the governorship elections in Kogi State, 101 election staff were reportedly kidnapped on their way to the collation centre in the aftermath of the governorship election. The victims were reportedly commuting from Kupa North and South Wards to the Constituency Collation Centre in Lokoja. In Nasarawa, protests over alleged rigging of the governorship election in the state reportedly turned violent, resulted in several injuries and claimed a life. In Kano, the house of a chieftain of the APC, Dauda Rarara, was reportedly set ablaze by thugs following the announcement of the governorship election results.

In Delta State, three persons were reportedly shot dead, and a building was set ablaze in Mosogar, Ethiope West Local Government Area of the state. Two men were also reportedly shot dead by military personnel as they attempted to flee a polling unit with snatched ballot

[134] https://punchng.com/low-turnout-as-inec-officials-wait-for-bauchi-voters/
[135] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/violence-that-marred-2023-elections/
[136] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/rec-laments-as-inec-ad-hoc-staff-shot-in-criver/
[137] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/violence-that-marred-2023-elections/

boxes. It was also reported that at Amukpe, Sapele, one of the youths lost his hand during a clash in one of the polling units in the area. Also, in Utagaba-Uno in Ndokwa West Local Government Area of the state, a thug was reportedly killed. Election materials were also reportedly snatched in Tuomo area in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State. Reports also revealed that there was massive violence in Evwerni community in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of the state where purveyors of electoral violence disrupted the voting process and made away with BVAS machines.[138] It was reported that journalists were prevented from entering the community and ad-hoc staff and other electoral officials were reportedly attacked, with some sustaining varying degrees of injuries.

The situation in Lagos state was particularly tense during the Governorship elections as the state was rife with ethnically charged rhetoric before, during and after the elections. [139] Armed individuals reportedly disrupted the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections at polling unit 003 in Bestford/Ganiyu Yusuff Street, Oke-Afa, Ejigbo, Lagos State.[140] They attempted to steal election materials and ballot boxes and damaged thumb-printed papers in the process. The image below showing a voter assaulted during the governorship elections in Lagos State gives credence to the disturbing magnitude of violence experienced.

[138] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/20-killed-as-violence-apathy-glitches-mar-guber-assembly-polls/
[139] https://www.channelstv.com/2023/03/21/our-observers-witnessed-violence-in-lagos-elsewhere-us-mission-restates-visa-restriction-plans/
[140] https://www.channelstv.com/2023/03/21/our-observers-witnessed-violence-in-lagos-elsewhere-us-mission-restates-visa-restriction-plans/



Source: Channels TV[141]

In addition to the preceding, our field observer noted the outbreak of violence in PU 011, Hanafari Ward Collation Centre, Bauchi State but security reinforcements were deployed to douse the tension. Similarly, in PU 013, Sabon Layi, Shendam LGA, Plateau State, it was recorded that a *Lexus Jeep* showed up with youths presumed to be agents and lured the ad-hoc staff to enter the vehicle in a bid to snatch the election results. An attempt to stop these youths resulted in serious injuries to a voter who was struck hard by the vehicle. Violence was also recorded in Jama'are C Ward Collation Centre; security on the ground made use of tear gas to disperse people in the area.

6.4 Vote Trading

According to the report by CDD, the governorship and state house of assembly elections witnessed a higher level of vote trading than was witnessed in the presidential election. Votes were primarily purchased from voters by party agents using money and food items from voters[142]. Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room observed vote-buying in polling unit

[141] https://www.channelstv.com/2023/03/21/our-observers-witnessed-violence-in-lagos-elsewhere-us-mission-restates-visa-restriction-plans/
[142]https://punchng.com/gov-election-2023-cdd-reports-massive-vote-buying-thuggery-across-states/

008, Ward 5, Onitsha North LGA of Anambra State where party agents were observed gathering voters' bank account details. Additionally, it was observed that party agents distributed cloths and wrapped packages to voters in Polling Unit 002, Bakin Kasuwa, Utai Ward in Wudil LGA of Kano State. This occurrence was also seen in Yobe State's Polling Unit 022 in Nguru Ward and Nguru LGA[143]. Our observers deployed observed vote trading in PU 006, Ward 03, Bauchi State, PU 008, Ward 03, Ondo State, and PU 003, Jigawar Tsada Ward, Jigawa State.

6.5 Voter Suppression/Intimidation/ Disruption of Polls (Ballot Box Snatching and Destruction of Ballot Papers and Ballots) in Opposition Strongholds and Brutalization

The state election experienced instances of both online and offline voter suppression and intimidation, as well as incidents of physical violence by political supporters across virtually all states of the federation. Political supporters across the country were at loggerheads, exchanging verbal and even physical assaults. For example, in Ejigbo, the electoral process saw voter suppression tactics as political thugs took control of the situation, resorting to random gunfire and forcibly seizing ballot boxes.[144] Similarly, in the Abaranje neighbourhood's Ola Farm in Ikotun, Lagos, a resident exercising his democratic right to vote was subjected to a violent attack.[145]

Moreover, in Ogombo Primary School located in Ajah, Lagos State, voters who dared to cast their ballots against the ruling party faced aggression from thugs. Voting against the ruling party resulted in physical attacks on these individuals. During supplementary elections held in various states, there were reports of voter intimidation and efforts to suppress voter turnout. Notably, in Uzebu Ward, Oredo LGA, Edo State, local thugs took control of Uzebu 1, creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. At the Owegie Primary School 1 polling unit, a few voters who had cast their votes were coerced into revealing their ballot papers after voting had taken place.

These incidents highlighted instances of voter intimidation and attempts to manipulate the electoral process.[146] Similarly, in Anambra State, political thugs targeted Atani 1 Ward in Ogbaru LGA, attempting to steal ballot boxes. However, the Nigerian Army swiftly intervened, contained the situation and arrested the perpetrators.[147] Furthermore, fights

[143] https://situationroomng.org/interim-statement-on-the-commencement-of-governorship-state-houses-of-assembly-election/
[144] https://businessday.ng/news/article/low-turnout-intimidation-of-voters-mar-election-in-lagos/
[145] https://www.icirnigeria.org/electoral-violence-in-lagos-tales-of-agony-pain-ring-loud/
[146] https://situationroomng.org/situation-rooms-statement-on-the-2023-supplementary-elections/
[147] Ibid

erupted between agents of different parties and voters in Takakume Ward, Goronyo LGA, and Badon Uku Uku Ward, Wamakko LGA, Sokoto State, indicating the tense and confrontational atmosphere that marred the electoral process.[148] It is trite to note that incidences of confrontation and voter intimidation like the ones discussed here erode the fairness of the contest and threaten the integrity of the entire electoral process.



An Assaulted Voter[149]

6.6 Ethnic Profiling and Baiting (Lagos State)

Following the conduct of the Presidential Election and preparation for the state elections, there was the emergence of ethnic profiling and baiting which caused unrest in Lagos State before, during and even after the governorship elections[150]. The ethnic profiling, which also assumed the form of ethnic hate speech, was directed at the Igbo, whose population in Lagos has swelled and grown exponentially over several years of in-country migration to Lagos the commercial and industrial heartthrob of Nigeria, from their natal homelands in the Southeast of the country. The migration made them a powerful political and economic group. But this development from time to time creates an uneasy ethnic tension and sometimes conflict between them and their host Yoruba community in Lagos, as when the Lagos State Government attempted to "deport" some Igbo-speaking residents of Lagos to their homelands in the South east.[151]

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[148] Ibid

[149] https://www.icirnigeria.org/electoral-violence-in-lagos-tales-of-agony-pain-ring-loud/

[150] https://dailypost.ng/2023/03/22/yoruba-vs-igbo-lagos-archbishop-condemns-ethnic-profiling-calls-for-peace-tolerance/

[151] Privileged Interview

There have been other cases of violent ethnic conflict erupting between Igbos and Yorubas during federal and state elections in Lagos, since 1999, particularly in constituencies where the heavy population of Igbos, poses a serious threat to the candidates of the ruling party in the state.[152] It is against this background that the rise of the Obidient Movement in Lagos and the emergence of Peter Obi as the presidential candidate of the Labour Party further fueled the historic conflict between the Yoruba and Igbo strands of electoral politics in Lagos on the eve of the presidential elections in February 2023. The fact that Peter Obi won the presidential election in Lagos State, defeating Bola Tinubu, presidential candidate of the APC, which was the ruling party in Lagos reignited the political tension between the Igbos and Yorubas in Lagos State, in the run-up to the governorship elections in Lagos State. The leadership of the APC in Lagos State, faced with the prospects of losing the governorship of the state, which they had won handily since 1999, mobilized Yoruba voters, pointing to the prospects of an Igbo-dominated government if the Labour Party repeated its victory in the presidential elections in Lagos State.[153] To underscore this point, the APC's campaign for the governorship elections emphasized that the mother and the wife of the Labour Party's governorship candidate were of the Igbo ethnic attraction, despite the fact that his father comes from a well-established upper middle-class Yoruba family in Lagos.[154]

A result of the tense ethnic situation, thus created ahead of the Lagos governorship elections in Lagos State was that constituencies in the following conurbations of Lagos metropolis, with a heavy population of Igbos witnessed pre-election, election day and post-election violence in the weeks leading to and after the elections: Surulere, Apapa, Amuwo-Odofin, Festac Town/Lagos International Trade Fair Complex and its environs, Ikorodu, Lekki, Ajah, Epe Shomolu, Ojo, Mushin, and Ikeja. In almost all of the local government areas and LCDAs of Lagos State, there was violence, harassment, and intimidation[155]. A few days before the election, the popular Ladipo Spare Parts Market, a major industrial trading hub populated mostly by merchants of Igbo extraction, in Lagos, was burnt down. On Election Day, voters were macheted, and beaten up; while in some cases the mandate of the people was stolen at gunpoint[156]. These actions are believed to have been a result of the utterances of members of the ruling party stating that "Igbo people must be taught to never again interfere in Lagos politics"[157].

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[152] Privileged Interview
[153] Privileged Interview
[154] Privileged Interview
[155] https://www.icirnigeria.org/electoral-violence-in-lagos-tales-of-agony-pain-ring-loud/
[156] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/04/attacks-on-the-igbo-in-lagos/
[157] Ibid

6.7 Lack of Secrecy at the of Ballot Due to Improper Positioning of the Cubicle and Illegal Proxy Voting

According to a report from our field observers, a clear lack of secret ballots was observed. For instance, in PU 088, Fiidi Ward, Makurdi LGA, Benue State, the polling units were located under a mango tree, and as such the cubicle was placed in a position whereby every other person could see the candidate/party a voter was voting for. Similarly, in PU 002 and PU 003, Nadadaruwa Abdulkadir Primary School, Bauchi State, it was observed that party agents were collecting ballot papers for old people and casting their votes for them. Also in PU 031, Tudun Wada Kabong, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, our observers reported that the voting points and cubicles were positioned on an elevated veranda which made access difficult for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Also, in PU 003, Gidan Bunu Ward of Zuru LGA, Kebbi State, party agents were reported by *ThisDay* to have spied on voting cubicles while voting was ongoing. [158] Cubicles were also not in secret in PUs 004 and 010, Toungo Ward 01, and PUs 007 and 013, Toungo Ward 2, Adamawa State.[159]

6.8 Poor Participation in Urban/Middle-Class Areas

In contrast to the Presidential Elections, the State Elections experienced notably lower participation, especially in urban and middle-class areas. This decline in voter turnout was evident in numerous polling units. For example, our observers reported that in the Igbogbo-Baiyeku Local Council Development Area of Ikorodu, Lagos State, electoral officials were still waiting for voters at polling unit 023, Ward C2, Agunfoye, even as late as 11:48 a.m[160]. This trend may have indicated a reduced level of engagement in the electoral process in this Local Council Development Area. However, a party agent wishing to remain anonymous, put it down to relocation of voters due to demolition of their residences by the State Government in these specific regions.[161]In PU 007, Ward 9, Rumuepirikom, Obio-Akpor, Rivers State, a similar trend was observed as the former governor of Rivers State was reported to have stated that people got discouraged after February 25th Presidential election.[162] The same pattern was reported in polling units 49, 51, and 54 (Rumuobiakani Town Hall) and units 14, 15, 16 and 17 (Woji Ward 6) of the same state.[163] *The Guardian*[164]

[158] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/20/yiaga-africa-guber-and-state-assembly-elections-marred-by-voter-suppression-electoral-violence-others/
[159] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Toungo, Adamawa State
[160] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Agunfoye, Igbogbo-Baiyeku, Lagos State
[161]https://punchng.com/gov-election-2023-low-voter-turnout-mars-voting-in-ikorodu-lagos/
[162] https://www.thecable.ng/voter-apathy-people-got-discouraged-after-their-candidates-lost-on-feb-25-says-wike
[163] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/588392-nigeriadecides2023-low-turnout-of-voters-in-port-harcourt-obio-akpor.html
[164] https://guardian.ng/news/low-turnout-vote-buying-mar-election-in-cross-river/

reported that in PUs 001 - 005, Akim Town, Calabar Municipal, there was a near-absence of voters despite the presence of electoral staff.

The poor participation witnessed in the governorship and House of Assembly contests is a major source of concern for the quality, credibility and integrity of elections in Nigeria. This is because poor participation in elections can result in reduced representation, potentially leading to elected officials not fully reflecting the diverse concerns and preferences of the population.[165] More so, the relatively low interest in local-level participation amongst citizens as manifested in the low level of participation observed creates a risk of allowing the ascendance of politicians with limited local-level of acceptance to national-level leadership positions.



Polling units with low voters' turnout[166]

[165] Ibeogu, A.S and Nwusulor. J.C. (2020) "Electoral violence, political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: 2019 general election in Ebonyi state in focus." *South East Journal of Political Science* 6, no. 1.
[166] https://punchng.com/gov-election-2023-low-voter-turnout-mars-voting-in-ikorodu-lagos/

6.9 Poor Logistics

Although there was an improvement in the arrival times of electoral officials and materials, there were still instances of late arrival of electoral officials and materials that led to the late opening of polls. For instance, it was reported that at some polling units in Odualabe, Arepo, Command, Ajasa Town Hall, White House, and Yetkem, Lagos State as of 8:50 am, electoral officials were yet to arrive[167]; elections were to commence at 8:30 am. Similarly, in PU 059, Ijesha, Ijeshatedo LGA, Lagos State, our observers noted that electoral officials arrived at 9:11 a.m., without tables, chairs, and canopies to conduct the election. This can be linked and attributed to poor logistics.



PU 059, Ijesha, Lagos State, Officials arrived without Tables and Chairs[168]

6.10 Maladministration at Polling Units by Ad-Hoc Staff

Observations from the election revealed that the polling units were not properly administered by electoral ad-hoc staff in several locations across the country. According to reports from the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, the compilation of results was problematic at several polling places across the nation and carried out in contravention of

[167] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/late-arrival-of-inec-officials-materials/

[168] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Ijesha, Lagos State. Picture captured by Observers during the 2023 Lagos State Governorship Election in Nigeria

the election procedures.[169] In polling unit 002, Ward 2 of the Esit Eket local government in Akwa Ibom State, CJID observer reported that INEC officials were working with the party agent to promote vote buying[170]. Similarly, in PU 041 Open Space by Magistrate Court, Ganaja Village, Ajaokuta LGA of Kogi State Situation Room observers also noted that temporary voter's cards were used for accreditation in violation of the law[171]. Also, observations by *Daily Trust*[172] during the election showed that 92 polling units across the country were set up in a way that allowed party agents to see how voters marked their ballot papers. This creates an enabling environment for vote trading and other vices that erode the integrity of elections to thrive.

6.11 Internal Sabotage

Internal Sabotage was identified as one of the anticipated risks to the 2023 General Election[173]. The state elections witnessed deliberate efforts by internal staff to sabotage the process. For instance, in the supplementary governorship election in the Adamawa election, it was reported that the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) had suspended the collation process and gone ahead to declare a fake result[174]. Just as there are external efforts to sabotage the electoral process, there are also internal efforts. The electoral process is crucial for the development of a country, therefore, people employed by the Commission must be people of integrity. Without integrity among electoral officials, all efforts towards credible electoral conduct would only yield marginal results.

6.12 Misinformation/Disinformation and Fake News

The State Elections also witnessed misinformation/disinformation and fake news that affected the elections negatively. The spreading of fake news led to violence in some places, particularly in Lagos State. According to reports by *Dubawa*, there were seven text claims, 23 video claims, and 14 image claims which were proven to be false in the governorship and State House of Assembly elections[175].

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[169] https://situationroomng.org/second-interim-statement-on-the-governorship-state-houses-of-assembly-election-held-on-saturday-18th-march-2023/

[170] https://thecjid.org/observers-suppression-harassment-characterize-march-18-nigeria-gubernatorial-election-cjid-election-analysis-centre/

[171] https://situationroomng.org/second-interim-statement-on-the-governorship-state-houses-of-assembly-election-held-on-saturday-18th-march-2023/

[172] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/20/yiaga-africa-guber-and-state-assembly-elections-marred-by-voter-suppression-electoral-violence-others/

[173] See The Electoral Hub Policy Dialogue Report on Citizens Right and Impact of Insecurity in the 2023 General Election (2023) with support from the Open Society Foundation, Africa

[174] https://punchng.com/adamawa-drama-as-rec-usurps-returning-officer-declares-binani-gov-election-winner/

[175] https://dubawa.org/dubawa-nfc-report-shows-prevalence-of-misinformation-disinformation-during-nigeria-2023-elections/

A few days before the State Elections there was news that the INEC in Lagos had removed all ad-hoc staff of South Eastern and South-South extraction from sensitive duties for the conduct of the governorship election[176]. Despite the electoral commission's efforts to refute these claims, the spread of false information in Lagos State heightened ethnic tensions and hostilities. This was a clear pointer to the harmful consequences of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news in the electoral process. It showed the potential role of misinformation and disinformation in escalating political tensions, contributing to incidents of electoral violence, and deterring eligible voters from partaking in the electoral process.

6.13 Upload of Results to IReV

Compared to the experience during the presidential election, governorship elections conducted on 18th March 2023 witnessed improvements in the upload of results to the IReV portal. As *Punch*[177] reported, as of 9.00 p.m. on election day, results had been uploaded in the 28 States where state elections were conducted. Despite this improvement, there were some cases of difficulty in upload of the governorship results. For example, our observers in PU 010, Toungo 1 Ward, Adamawa State reported that electoral officials stated that they could not upload the result sheet as they were not given the password for immediate transmission.

6.14 Security Presence

According to a report from our field observers, there was security presence in many of the Polling Units. For instance, at PU 005 and 006, Unguwar Ganeri, Kyawawa Primary School, Jama'are C Ward, Bauchi State, security agents were on the ground. Arising from this presence, there were numerous instances of intervention of security personnel to check electoral offences and maintain decorum during the process. Similarly, violence was also recorded in Jama'are C Ward Collation Centre, but security on the ground was able to contain the situation by using tear gas to disperse people in the area after which the collation process continued. Incidences like this were observed throughout the country. It was reported that security personnel foiled an attack on electoral staff in Kogi state and rescued 96 abducted electoral staff.[178] Also, *Channels TV* reported the presence of security persons in Benin City, Oredo LGA, Ward 4, Edo State, as well as the arrest of a lawmaker and 160 others for ballot box snatching and other similar offences in Kano state.[179] Related proof

[176] https://dailypost.ng/2023/03/16/guber-poll-inec-clears-air-on-removing-igbo-south-south-from-election-duties/
[177] https://punchng.com/gov-election-2023-inec-uploads-results-to-IReV-portal/, https://punchng.com/inec-uploads-66634-results-to-IReV-portal/
[178] https://www.channelstv.com/election/live-updates-voters-return-to-the-polls-to-elect-governors-state-assembly-members/
[179] ibid

of the presence of security during the governorship election was reported by *ThisDay Live* which reported the arrest of 26 and over 100 electoral offenders in Benue and Enugu States respectively.[180]

It is trite to note, however, that while numerous pieces of evidence point to security presence during the elections, there were also a few areas where poor security presence was observed to be a challenge. Specifically, *Sun News*[181] reported that there was no security presence in several parts of Zamfara State. Although a specific number of polling unit was not specified, a bulk of the observations during the election, however, support a position that there was security presence in many polling units across the country.

6.15 Weak Political Party Agents' Management

From observation, it was evident that political parties poorly managed the agents they deployed. This was seen in the unprofessional conduct of some agents at polling units. For example, our observers[182] in PU 006, Unguwar Azizi, Abdulkadir Ahmed Primary School, Jama'are Bauchi State said that party agents took some women voters' ballot papers and insisted on voting for them. Similarly, in PU 003, Nadadaruwa Abdulkadir Primary School, Bauchi State, it was observed that some party agents collected ballot papers belonging to women and elderly persons and cast their votes for them. This conduct runs contrary to ideal participatory practices under democratic and electoral conduct. Our observers also reported that in PU 015, Tudun Wada, Dutse LGA, Jigawa State, there were issues emanating from party agents, indicating a challenge with political party agents' management.

Beyond the example from Bauchi State above, media reports indicated the presence of unprofessional conduct of party agents in Benue, Delta and Kano.[183] They also reported that in 92 polling units across the country, party agents monitored the votes of the electorates. In Abia State, Obingwa LGA party agents were reported to have asked observers and agents of other parties to exit the collation centre.[184] Also, the media reported that agents compelled the presiding officer to alter figures on Form EC 8A.[185] The same report noted that in PU 005 of Falagai ward in Bunkure LGA, Kano state, the party agents

[180] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/21/live-updates-governorship-assembly-elections-2023
[181] See https://sunnewsonline.com/there-is-zero-police-presence-in-most-of-the-polling-units-in-zamfara-pdp-alleges/ or
[182] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Jama'are, Bauchi State
[183] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/20/yiaga-africa-guber-and-state-assembly-elections-marred-by-voter-suppression-electoral-violence-others/
[184] ibid
[185] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/20/yiaga-africa-guber-and-state-assembly-elections-marred-by-voter-suppression-electoral-violence-others/

present took advantage of the fact that security agents were not at the polling unit to disrupt the process.[186] In Anambra State, agents were reported to have canvassed for votes with POS Machines during the election.[187] In Bauchi, Adamawa State, party agents were reported to have offered money to induce voters.[188]

In Ogun state, reports by The Cable, Channels TV and Sahara Reporters indicated that NDLEA arrested four party agents in Ibara Axis of Ogun state for possession of over 100 cards intended for vote buying. [189] In the same state, party agents reportedly distributed monies to voters in Ikenne Town Hall Polling Unit in Ward 2 in Ogun East LGA.[190] In polling unit 003, Gidan Bunu Ward of Zuru LGA in Kebbi APC agents were seen openly giving wrappers (yards of printed cloth) to women, rice and fertilizer to men (15 persons/bag), and the party agents were also seen spying on voting cubicles while voting was ongoing.[191] Also in the polling unit under tree (021), Gidan Alhazai ward, Wudil LGA in Kano, APC agents were seen distributing wrappers to voters. These are unruly and undemocratic behaviours of party agents reflecting poor knowledge about elections, a party agent's roles and expectations. This largely stems from poor party agent management

6.16 Good BVAS Performance

The Electoral Hub's observations revealed that the BVAS effectively performed its crucial functions in most polling units across the nation, ensuring voter verification and authentication through fingerprints or facial recognition during the voting process. The BVAS replaced the Smart Card Readers which were only equipped to verify the PVCs and thumbprints of voters.[192] Additionally, during the governorship contest, the BVAS functioned smoothly for voters' accreditation and upload of election results. The Electoral Hub's observers noted its successful operation in various polling units. Specifically, in PU 006, Unguwar Azizi, Abdulkadir Ahmed Primary School, Bauchi State, PU 007, Jama'are A, Bauchi State, and PU 009, Jama'are A, Bauchi State, where it efficiently accredited

[186] ibid
[187] https://businessday.ng/news/article/party-agents-canvass-votes-in-anambra-with-bank-transfer-pos-machines-as-apathy-mars-assembly-poll/
[188] https://saharareporters.com/2023/03/18/nigeriadecides-ndlea-intercepts-four-party-agents-hundreds-credit-cards-buy-votes-ogun
[189] See https://www.thecable.ng/ndlea-arrests-party-agents-with-credit-cards-in-ogun, https://www.channelstv.com/2023/03/18/vote-buying-party-agents-with-hundreds-of-credit-cards-intercepted-in-ogun/ and https://saharareporters.com/2023/03/18/nigeriadecides-ndlea-intercepts-four-party-agents-hundreds-credit-cards-buy-votes-ogun
[190] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/20/yiaga-africa-guber-and-state-assembly-elections-marred-by-voter-suppression-electoral-violence-others/
[191] ibid
[192] https://www.channelstv.com/2021/11/16/bvas-is-a-vaccine-that-deals-with-election-rigging-manipulation-iginni/

voters within 1 to 2 minutes without encountering significant issues[193]. The Electoral Hub's field observers also reported that in PUs 010 and 004, Toungo Ward 01, and PUs 007 and 013, Toungo Ward 2, Adamawa State, the devices worked well.

While the general trend was that the BVAS functioned well, our observers also showed that there were a few incidences. For example, In PU 10, Toungo Ward 1, two incidences of the BVAS failing to recognize both faces and finger prints were observed.[194] More so, Action Aid was reported to have lauded the BVAS for performing seamlessly in 80% of polling units they observed.[195] This further alludes to the good performance of the BVAS, with few incidences of poor performance.

6.17 IReV Management

One issue observed was that some of the ad-hoc staff did not have adequate knowledge of how to properly upload results on the IReV. Our observers noted several cases of upload of blurred results as well as upload of results up-side-down. These issues, though few, were observed in results uploaded from several polling units across the country. Among the Polling units where blurry results were uploaded are: PU 015, Oleh II, Isoko Sough LGA, Delta State, PU 013, Isoko South LGA, Delta State, PU 04, Ward 1, Akoko East LGA, Ondo State, Umuosueke Polling Unit, Ward 1, Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State, amongst others. Similarly, in PU 22, Ward 10, Ibadan North LGA, Oyo State, PU 008, Tsonga 111, Ward 10, Edu LGA, Kwara State, amongst others had results uploaded were upside-down. This precludes specific challenges with presidential result uploads.



Result uploaded upside-down



Blurred result sheet[196]

[193] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Jama'are, Bauchi State
[194] The Electoral Hub Observers Report – Toungo, Adamawa State
[195] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/588670-governorship-elections-actionaid-lauds-inecs-performance.html
[196] INEC IReV



Blurred result sheet uploaded Upside down[197]



Blurred result sheet

[197] INEC IReV

Strengths of the 2023 General Elections

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marked by various issues that underscored both the progress made and the challenges that still lie ahead. Monitoring of the 2023 electoral process/cycle as well as observations in the preceding section on the presidential and governorship elections have been disaggregated here and framed as strengths and weaknesses to aid better understanding and engender progressive thinking toward improved electoral quality and integrity.

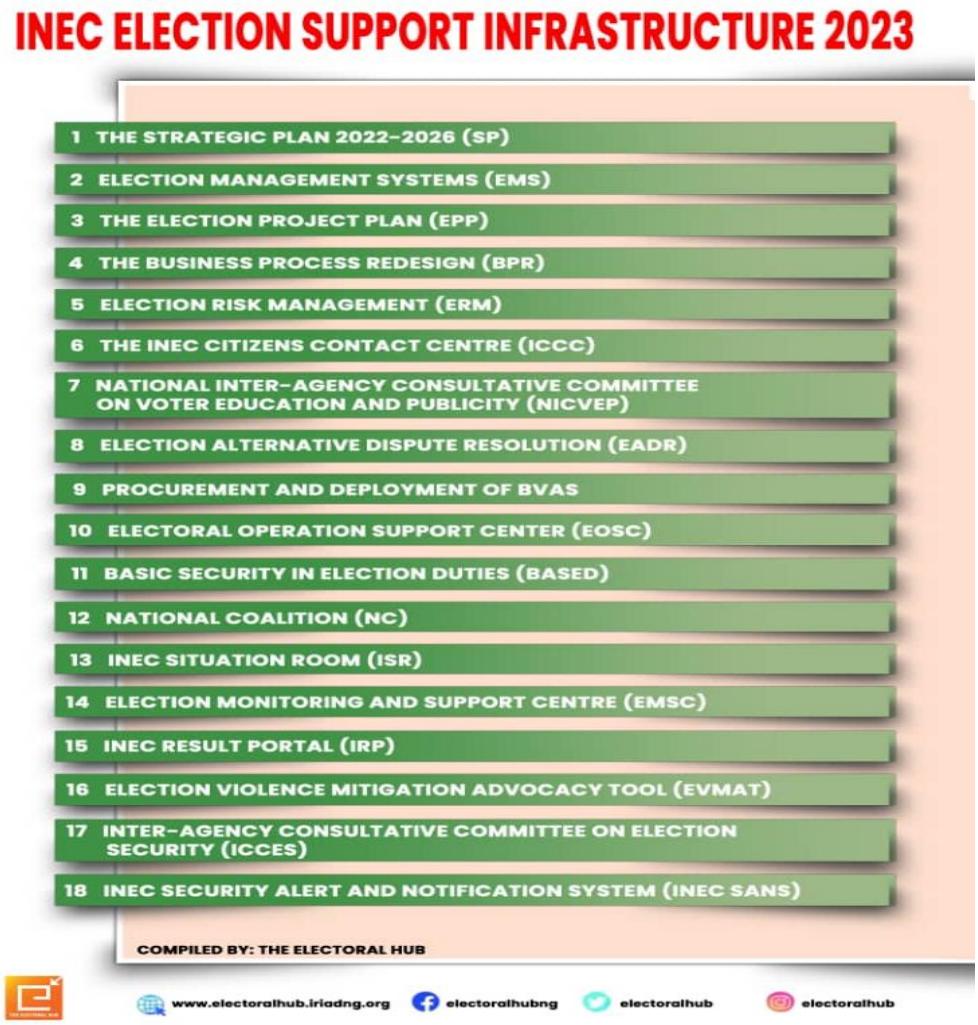
The Independent National Electoral Commission has over time, especially in the past three electoral cycles (13 years), navigated towards the continuous improvement of the Nigerian electoral process via the adoption and use of innovative measures and tools for election management. Beginning from the Jega Commission (2010 – 2015) to the present Yakubu Commission (2015 – till date), incremental efforts have been exerted in successive election cycles to improve the process.

Recommendations from the post-2011 Registration and Election Review Committee (RERC)[198] formed the backbone of the reform process in INEC, rolled out by the Jega Commission and were continued by the Yakubu Commission. The recommendations from the RERC contributed significantly to the wholesome reforms of INEC in the last 12 years. These reforms have paved way for various critical innovations in election management.

These innovations include the components of the INEC Election Support Infrastructure such as The Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026), Election Monitoring System, Election Project Plan, Business Process Design, Election Risk Management, The INEC Citizens Contact Centre (ICCC), National Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Voter Education and Publicity (NICVEP), Election Alternative Dispute Resolution (EADR), Procurement and Deployment Of BVAS, Electoral Operation Support Centre (EOSC), Basic Security in Election Duties (BASED), National Coalition (NC), INEC Situation Room (ISR), Election Monitoring and Support Centre (EMSC), INEC Result Portal (IRP), Election Violence Mitigation Advocacy Tool (EVMAT), Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), and INEC Security Alert and Notification System (INEC SANS). These have, over the years, served as instruments for ensuring quality electoral conduct across the country. For clarity, the image below lays out some of these innovations.

[198] The RERC comprised of seven members and chaired by Professor Adele L. Jinadu. Recommendations included: the development of strategic and operational plans for elections and INEC, Constitutional and Electoral Act amendment, early release of notice of election, monitoring of political parties, number of political parties/deregistration of parties.

Figure 3: Election Support Infrastructure, 2023



Source: The Electoral Hub[199]

In the context of the 2023 general election, two significant advancements received praise for their potential to improve the overall quality of the electoral process: the implementation of the Biometric Voter Authentication System (BVAS) and the introduction of the Independent Result Viewing (IReV) Portal. Notable accomplishments associated with the 2023 general election encompassed its conduct under a progressive legal framework, notably the Electoral Act of 2022. Moreover, the election witnessed the consolidation of various innovative practices, an uptick in civic engagement and mobilization, and the nationwide introduction of an election monitoring mechanism. These achievements will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections of this report.

[199] https://www.electoralhub.iriad.org/infographics

7.1 Consolidation of Electoral Innovations

Through the years, INEC has adopted innovative measures – technological and non-technological – for the improvement of election quality in Nigeria. Innovations have been made to enhance the quality of political parties, improve public access to polling units, and improvements in election monitoring and support systems, amongst others. The 2023 general elections were marked by the consolidation of these innovations. In addition to the widely acknowledged technology-induced innovations that sought to reduce human interference in the process, the election also witnessed stronger parties arising from innovative reforms by the electoral umpire. The table below, laying out the technological and non-technological innovations by INEC from 2011 clarifies this point.

Table 4: Some Innovations by INEC from 2011– 2023

S/N	Election Cycle	Technological Innovation	Purpose /Function	INEC Chairperson
1	2011	Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM)	- Computer-based biometric voter registration	Prof. Attahiru Jega
2	2015	Advance Finger prints Identification System (AFIS)	- Removal of duplicate registrations from the voter register	Prof. Attahiru Jega
3	2015	Permanent Voters Card (PVC)	- An optimised voters' card containing citizens' demographic and biometric information on a chip	Prof. Attahiru Jega
4	2015	Smart Card Readers (SCRs)	- A portable electronic voting authentication device configured to read only the PVCs issued by INEC. It scans the PVC to determine eligibility to vote.	Prof. Attahiru Jega
5	2020	ZPads	- Deployed technology to support the publishing of election results - ZPad are used at PUs for results upload to the IReV Portal	Prof. Mahmood Yakubu
6	2020	INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal	- technology that enabled the public view Elections	Prof. Mahmood Yakubu

S/N	Election Cycle	Technological Innovation	Purpose /Function	INEC Chairperson
			results of all Polling Units (EC8As) on a Portal	
7	2021	INEC Voter Enrolment Device (IVED)	- Improved android-based voter registration device	Prof. Mahmood Yakubu
8.	2021	Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) Online Platform	- Activation of a dedicated online portal for voter registration.	Prof. Mahmood Yakubu
9	2021[200]	Bi-modal Voter Accreditation system (BVAS)	- Voter's card verification and authentication - Biometric scan – both facial and thumb - PU result upload	Prof. Mahmood Yakubu
10	2023	INEC SANS	- Security Alert and Notification System	Prof. Mahmood Yakubu

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

The integration of the capabilities for card verification, biometric data capture and result upload in the device used for the 2023 general election was a clear consolidation on efforts of the past 13 years by the electoral umpire. This was largely made possible by the provision in the Electoral Act 2022 empowering INEC to deploy technology for elections. Its introduction bolstered public trust while its deployment allowed for a relatively hitch-free voter registration process as well as an effective check against multiple voting.

7.2 Progressive Legal Framework: The Electoral Act 2022

A major strong point in the 2023 general elections was its conduct with the Electoral Act 2022. The Electoral Act 2022 was widely lauded as it contained innovative provisions aimed at improving transparency, accountability, inclusion, and the overall integrity of the electoral process.[201] The table below lays out some of the key provisions contained in the Electoral Act:

[200] BVAS was first deployed in September 2021 in Isoko South Constituency 1 Bye Election into the Delta State House of Assembly, followed by the November 2021 Anambra /governorship Elections where it failed in many PUs, thereby creating doubts about its fitness for purpose in a General Election. Fortunately, it performed creditably well in the Ekiti and Osun off-cycle elections of 2022. This led to its acceptance for the 2023 General Elections.

[201] See The Electoral Hub. (2022). *Merits of the Electoral Bill 2021*. https://electoralhub.iriadng.org/merits-of-the-electoral-bill-2021/

Table 5: Key Provision in the Electoral Act 2022

S/N	Section	Provision
1	Section 3(3)	Release of INEC's funds at least 1 year before an election.
2	Section 8(5)	Political neutrality of INEC Staff by prescribing punitive measures for members of political parties who secures appointment with the commission by not disclosing his membership, affiliation or connection.
3	Section 26	Election officials to swear an oath of loyalty and neutrality
4	Section 28	Notice of election 360days to an election[202]
5	Section 29 (1)	Early conduct of Party Primaries and submission of sponsored candidates' names emerging therefrom, at least 180 days before an election
6	Section 29 (5)	Only aspirants who participated in an election can challenge false information given by Candidates
7	Section 34	Replacement of candidates deceased during the elections
8	Section 37	Contested election of candidate nomination. Where more than one Candidate is validly nominated, a poll must be held.
9	Section 47 (2)	The legalisation of electronic accreditation of voters
10	Section 50	Allowing INEC to determine the mode of results transmission
11	Section 51 (2)	Redefined Over-voting focuses on the number of accredited rather than registered voters
12	Section 54(2)	Inclusion of Persons with Disability
13	Section 64 (9)	Crimininalises false collation and announcement of results by collation or returning officers respectively
14	Section 65	Gives INEC Powers to review results deemed to be declared under duress
15	Section 75(1)	Registration of parties terminates 12 months before the general election[203]
16	Section 81(2)	Notice of merger of parties 9 months before the general election
17	Section 84(12)	Disqualifies political appointees from voting for or being voted as a candidate for in any party primary election
18	Section 94 (1)	Extension of the period of campaigns from starting 150 days to before 24 hours to the election

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[204]

A notable breach of these provisions was the number of serving political appointees who contested for nomination, particularly at the presidential level. However, save for some

[202] Section 28(3) provides for 14days notice of election before the date for bye-election
[203] This is particularly important in addressing the unwieldiness in number of parties on the ballot
[204] The Electoral Hub (2022). Electoral Landscape since the Assent of the Electoral Act 2022. www.electoralhub.iriad.org/publications/

shortcomings in the neutrality of some ad-hoc staff of the commission and gaps in the inclusion of people with disabilities, the conduct of the 2023 general election was characterised by far-reaching adherence to the afore-stated provisions by the electoral commission. This made it relatively better than all previous elections conducted in the Nigerian fourth republic. Being the most competitive thus far,

according to the INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, the elections have produced the most diverse national assembly since Nigerian independence.[205] The INEC Chairman went further to give his definition of diversity. "In some States around the country, different political parties controlled the legislative and executive arms of Government. What is clear from these records also is that the days of single party dominance of our national politics are probably gone. Furthermore, many prominent candidates lost in the constituencies they contested, and political parties lost in some of their presumed strongholds."[206]

Despite Prof. Yakubu's claims about diversity, the Nigerian National Assembly which had hitherto been dominated by two political parties, still is. Furthermore, it now only has 8 parties in total, as opposed to 10 in 2019. Immediately after the 2023 Elections, the Senate had 7 and House of Representatives had 8 parties. On 12th October, 2023 Ifeanyi Ubah, the lone YPP Member in the Senate, defected to APC, leaving 6 Parties[207]. Whereas, the 9th Senate and House of Representatives had 7 and 10 parties respectively. The diversity in party representation may be seen in the increased number of seats gained by the smaller opposition parties as seen in the tables below. However, there is more to diversity than that. Other criteria such as the number females, youths and people with disabilities who were elected, compared to previous National Assemblies, particularly the 9th (2019 – 2023), are also paramount. The tables below give an insight as to how little has been gained or in the case of female representation, how much has been lost. The 9th National Assembly had 8 female Senators and 13 Representatives.[208] There was a downturn in female Senators elected into the 10th National Assembly with only 4 female Senators now that Natasha Akpoti succeeded with her petition.[209] Although the female Representatives increased by 3 to 16.[210]. This is a still down from the 8th National Assembly where there were 7 female Senators and 22 female Representatives[211]. The passing into law in 2018 of the 'Not too

[205] https://inecnews.com/2023-general-election-outcome-fairly-reflects-nigerias-complex-multi-party-democracy-says-yakubu/
[206] ibid
[207] https://www.thecable.ng/just-in-sole-ypp-senator-ifeanyi-ubah-defects-to-apc
[208] https://dailytrust.com/22-years-after-women-still-poorly-represented-in-nigerian-parliament/
[209] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/639464-natasha-sworn-in-as-new-kogi-central-senator.html
[210] https://businessday.ng/politics/article/meet-female-lawmakers-in-nigerias-10th-national-assembly/
[211] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/274577-fact-sheet-women-poorly-represented-in-nigerias-19-years-of-democratic-rule-cdd.html?tztc=1

young to run Bill' has not dramatically increased the number of youths winning seats in the National Assembly. Firstly, the lower age limit to run for President was pegged at 35 and the same as for a Senator. So, no youth can sit in the hallowed senate chamber. The House representatives now has 12 Youths as against 13 in 2019. A drop by 1 seat, though the improvement over the 3 youth held seats in 2015 has been maintained. As for PWDs, they do not seem to be making any inroads with regards to getting elected into the National Assembly. It has already been emphasized that money has played an even greater role in winning Nigerian elections since the advent of technology to check vote rigging[212]. Notwithstanding vote trading,[213] where women are allowed to register for primaries free, money still changes hands to win primary elections to become a candidate, not to talk of run an election campaign.[214] Having less money than over 35-year-old males may well be a common factor between these politically marginalized groups, hindering them from winning elections in larger numbers.[215]

Table 6: 10th Senate Political Parties

S/N	Party	No. of Seats
1	APC	59
2	APGA	1
3	LP	8
4	NNPP	2
5	PDP	36
6	SDP	2
7	YPP	1[216]
	TOTAL	109

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Table 7: 10th House of Representatives Political Parties

S/N	Party	No of Seats
1	ADC	2
2	APC	176
3	APGA	5
4	LP	35

[212] https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/managing-the-influence-of-money-in-nigerian-elections/
[213] Ibid
[214] https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/09/why-women-haven-t-been-successful-in-nigerian-elections-pub-89707
[215] https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Report-on-Inclusivity-in-Nigerias-Elections.pdf
[216] Defected to the APC on October 12th 2023

5	NNPP	19
6	PDP	118
7	SDP	2
8	YPP	1
9	Vacant	2
	TOTAL	**360**

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Table 8: 9th Senate Political Parties

S/N	Party	No. of Seats
1	APC	64
2	PDP	44
3	YPP	1
	TOTAL	109

Source: Compiled by Electoral Hub

Table 9: 9th House of Representatives Political Parties[217]

S/N	Party	No. of Seats
1	AA	2
	ADC	3
2	ADP	1
3	APC	212
4	APGA	10
5	APM	1
6	LP	1
7	NNPP	0
8	PDP	127
9	PRP	2
10	SDP	1
	TOTAL	**360**

Source: Compiled by Electoral Hub

Table 10: Composition Table of the 10th Nigerian Senate

[217] House of Representatives political parties as of February, 23 2023 (These dates are important because of defections within the house which may mean that at prior times, parties may have fewer or more members in the House of Representatives.

S/N	Indices	No.
1	Senate Seats	109
2	Political Parties	7
3	Male Senators	105 (96.3%)
4	Female Senators	4 (3.7%)
5	Youths (25-35)	N/A (age limit is 35+)
6	PWDs	0
7	Oldest Senator	72
8	Youngest Senator	37

Source: The Electoral Hub

Table 11: Parties and Number of Seats in the 10th Assembly

S/N	Party	No. of Seats
1	AA	2
	ADC	3
2	ADP	1
3	APC	212
4	APGA	10
5	APM	1
6	LP	1
7	NNPP	0
8	PDP	127
9	PRP	2
10	SDP	1
	TOTAL	**360**

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Table 12: Composition Table of the 9th Nigerian Senate

S/N	Indices	No.
1	Seats	109
2	Political Parties	8
3	Male Senators	101 (92.7%)
4	Female Senators	8 (7.3%) reduced to 7 after demise of Sen. Rose Oko, back to 8 after bye-election win of Prof. Nora Ladi Dadu'ut
5	Youths (under 25-35)	N/A (age limit is 35+)
6	PWDs	0

7	Oldest Senator	78
8	Youngest Senator	41

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Table 13: Composition Table of the 9th Nigerian House of Representatives

S/N	Indices	No.
1	Seats	360 (2 vacant)[218]
2	Political Parties	11
3	Male Representatives	347 (96%)
4	Female Representatives	13 (4%)
5	Youths (25 - 35)	13
6	PWDs	0
7	Oldest Representative	68
8	Youngest Representative	34

Source: The Electoral Hub

Table 14: Composition Table of the 10th Nigerian House of Representatives (HoR)

S/N	Indices	No.
1	Seats	360 (2 are vacant)[219]
2	Political Parties	8
3	Male Representatives	344 (96%)
4	Female Representatives	16 (4%)
5	Youths (25 - 35)	12
6	PWDs	0
7	Oldest Representative	70
8	Youngest Representative	27

[218] Two seats in the 9th House of Representatives were vacant prior to the general election of February 2023 due to deaths, which occurred on April and July 2022 as follows:

i) Oron/Mbo/Okobo/Udung Uko/Urue Offong/Oruko (Akwa Ibom State): Nse Ekpenyong died on 23 April 2022.

ii) Egor/Ikpoba-Okha (Edo State): Jude Ise-Idehen died on 1 July 2022.

[219] As of June 21, 2023, 2 seats were vacant in the 10th NASS due the death of one member and the demise of another. These were: i) PDP – Jalingo/Yorro/Zing Federal Constituency, Taraba State (Deceased); and ii) APC – Surulere 1 Federal Constituency (Resigned) https://orderpaper.ng/2023/06/21/10th-nass-composition-of-the-nigerian-house-of-representatives-age-gender/

With the Electoral Act 2022 providing a broad foundation, it became easy for the contest to garner an unprecedented level of public interest and consolidate previous electoral innovations.

7.3 Increased Civic Engagement and Mobilisation

The 2023 elections witnessed a notable increase in civic engagement, particularly in urban areas. The active participation of urban and middle-class citizens and the youth indicated a growing awareness of the importance of civic responsibility and democratic engagement. The Obedient Movement and indeed many of the obedient movement supporters and leaders had their roots in the short-lived youth composed and led EndSARS movement and they replicated its successful mobilization strategies. Social media and other online communication, rallies and protests mainly by young people were an integral part of the EndSARS Movement. However, it was supported in many ways including financially and materially with meals, medical support and transport for protesters by older people from all walks of life including veterans of the Nigerian democracy struggle. EndSARS started on Twitter and climaxed with the October 2020 protests mainly in Lagos State, where many were killed and injured at Lekki, Lagos State, which had become ground zero.[220] The rise of the '*Obidient Movement*' and the resultant country-wide rallies organised by citizens and non-partisan groups, which were held even before the commencement of campaigns, was a clear pointer to the surge in civic engagement that characterised the 2023 elections. It signaled a positive shift in the willingness of citizens to engage in the electoral process, thereby strengthening the democratic foundation of the nation.

In addition to the increased participation of citizens and civic groups was the palpable increase in the virility of opposition parties across the country. The emergence of active opposition parties with a wide range of supporters across the country did not only signal a broader civic space but was also indicative of progress towards quality and credible elections and democratic consolidation.

7.4 Introduction of a Citizens' Polling Unit Result Monitoring Platform: The IReV

Efforts were made to enhance electoral transparency through improved data management and dissemination. The use of the INEC Results Viewing (IReV) portal allowed for the prompt and easier viewing of election results. Although there were some challenges related to delayed upload of results, the provision for citizens to track the results in near real-time demonstrated a commitment to transparency and accountability in the electoral process.

[220] https://www.theafricareport.com/222267/nigeria-how-endsars-figures-are-transforming-into-an-obidient-army/

As can be conjectured, the strengths above can be broadly subsumed under two categories: participation-related and technology-related. Technology-related achievements were largely engendered by the implementation of the Electoral Act 2022, which as noted in the introductory section of this analysis, guides electoral conduct in the country. More so, improved citizens' engagement in the electoral process stemmed largely from optimism arising from the Electoral Act 2022 and the resultant adoption of technology for voter authentication. When this optimism waned following difficulties with upload of the presidential election results, voters' engagement and turnout were adversely impacted.

Weaknesses of the 2023 General Elections

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were remarkable for the technology-induced enhancement of transparency and the broader civic engagement and popular optimism that characterised the process, particularly during the presidential polls. The election was however marred by a range of complex challenges that reflected the country's pervasive defective political culture and accountability gaps in its electoral governance institutions, stakeholders and actors. For instance, the Naira Redesign Policy was a significant pre-election issue that affected turnout and other critical aspects of the election. The policy and an attendant cashless policy resulted in an acute shortage of cash which made it difficult for many citizens to travel to their respective places of registration to cast their vote. The problem was further compounded by serious scarcity of fuel which shot up the cost of transportation and further placed limits on the ability of citizens to participate in the process. Although these challenges can be gleaned with examples from the observations under the presidential and governorship elections, they have been extrapolated and broadly discussed here.

8.1 Logistical and Operational Issues

As observations from the 2023 general elections in Nigeria revealed, logistical challenges constituted a major challenge to the effective conduct of the elections. Nigeria's vast size, difficult topography (especially in riverine and mountainous communities), and often inadequate infrastructure can lead to logistical challenges that impact various stages of the electoral cycle, from voter registration to result tabulation. Specifically, election-day logistics challenges as identified in the 2023 general elections generated enormous adverse consequences for the process. One of the primary consequences of logistical bottlenecks is their potential for voter disenfranchisement. Inadequacy or late delivery of election materials, especially to rural areas and difficult terrain, can result in long waiting times for voters who may have already had a long and tortuous journey to vote. This discourages participation, particularly among such marginalised or vulnerable communities. Additionally, insufficient printing and distribution of voter cards or ballots can further restrict access to the electoral process, leading to decreased voter turnout and a skewed representation of the wishes of the electorate.

Also, delays in the transportation of election materials arising from logistics challenges can lead to long queues, disrupted schedules, and an overall sluggish voting process. These delays can not only frustrate voters but also compromise the transparency and accuracy of the election, as rushed procedures might result in errors or irregularities. Furthermore, logistical challenges can induce post-election disputes and controversies. If delays in the

delivery of election materials or tabulation processes occur, political parties and candidates might contest the legitimacy of results, alleging manipulation or bias. Disputes arising from operational delays can lead to legal challenges, protests, and even violence, prolonging the uncertainty surrounding the election outcomes.

8.2 Insecurity and Electoral Violence

Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and regional landscape, coupled with historical tensions, creates an environment prone to violence during electoral periods. These predisposing factors were compounded by the nature of the electoral contest in the 2023 general elections, where the major contestants were from three distinct ethnic groups with a history of mutual suspicion. It was, therefore, unsurprising that the election was marred by electoral violence with far-reaching adverse implications.

One major consequence of insecurity and violence is the disenfranchisement of voters. Fear of violence or intimidation can discourage citizens from going to the polls, particularly in areas with a history of electoral violence. This consequence is much more acute for women as a result of the "fear-victimisation paradox"[221] – the idea that although men are more likely to be victimised during violence, women are more predisposed to be fearful of violence. With electoral violence and insecurity, voter turnout is likely to be adversely affected and electoral outcomes are less likely to be reflective of the will of the majority. Additionally, violence can disrupt the voting process, and affect the timelines of electoral conduct.

Furthermore, electoral violence exacerbates existing societal divisions and ethno-religious tensions. Political competition can escalate into clashes between supporters of different candidates or parties, with violence becoming a tool to intimidate opponents. This can deepen animosities and create long-lasting divisions within communities. Political violence can also spill over into post-election periods, leading to ongoing instability and conflicts that impede national progress.

8.3 Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News

Misinformation refers to the spread of inaccurate or misleading information, often unintentionally, while disinformation involves the deliberate dissemination of false information to deceive and manipulate. As observations presented in the preceding section showed, the 2023 general election witnessed both of these trends. It is worth noting that misinformation, disinformation and fake news have the potential to sway voters' decisions.

[221] Elliott, C. (2022). "Investigating the Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Fear of Crime in an Irish Population." PhD dissertation, Dublin, National College of Ireland.

False narratives about candidates, parties, or policies emanating from misinformation and disinformation can influence public opinions and choices, leading voters to make decisions based on inaccurate premises. This can distort the democratic expression of voters' will, compromising the legitimacy of election outcomes. Also, these phenomena contribute to the erosion of trust in institutions, the media, and the electoral process itself. When citizens are bombarded with conflicting or fabricated information, they may struggle to discern reliable sources of news and information. This erosion of trust can lead to a cynical electorate that questions the credibility of election results, the electoral umpire's voter education campaigns, and the intentions of candidates and parties.

Additionally, misinformation and disinformation can fuel polarisation and societal divisions.[222] False narratives that exploit emotional triggers or deep-seated biases can contribute to deepening the fragmentation of societies like Nigeria that is torn along ethnic lines. This polarisation hinders constructive political dialogue and cooperation, making it difficult to find common ground and address pressing issues. For the Nigerian state, whose populations are already polarised and balkanised along ethnic and geopolitical lines, the spread of false information as was the case during the 2023 general elections further compounded the extant chasm. It also accentuated the trust deficit against electoral governance institutions and the electoral umpire, thereby resulting in heightened cynicism and disillusionment amongst the populace.

8.4 Weak Political Party Agents

Political party agents act as representatives of their respective political parties during the electioneering process. As party representatives, they are responsible for monitoring polling stations, ensuring compliance with election laws, and safeguarding the integrity of the process. However, when party agents lack adequate training, resources, or motivation, their ability to effectively fulfil these roles is compromised. As observations during the 2023 general elections held across the country revealed, agents of many political parties were vulnerable and even collaborated with other 'bigger' parties. This weakness and complicity of political parties, as was experienced in the 2023 general elections wields enormous adverse consequences.

One implication of weak political party agents is reduced oversight and transparency during the voting process. Inadequately trained or disengaged agents may fail to identify irregularities or fraudulent activities, which can undermine the credibility of election outcomes. Additionally, the absence of vigilant agents allows room for malpractices such

[222] Vasist, P. N, Chatterjee, D. and Krishnan, S. (2023). "The Polarizing Impact of Political Disinformation and Hate Speech: A Cross-country Configural Narrative." *Information Systems Frontiers* (2023): 1-26.

as voter intimidation, ballot stuffing, or manipulation of results to go unnoticed, thereby distorting the true representation of the voters' choices. The complicity of party agents has the same impact as it allows for electoral malpractices and other anomalies to thrive unencumbered.

8.5 Limited Understanding of Legal Framework

A major high point of the 2023 general election was that it was held following the passage of the Electoral Act 2022, with its attendant legal provisions for improved electoral credibility. The implication of this, however, was that citizens and stakeholders were required to understand the provisions contained in the electoral instruments regulating the process. Poor understanding of this framework and its provisions hinders the ability of various stakeholders to fully comprehend and adhere to the laws, regulations, and procedures governing the electoral process. It could also lead to confusion, disputes, and even violations that compromise the integrity and fairness of elections.

In addition, a poor understanding of the electoral regulations poses the risk of making election officials and observers struggle to effectively fulfil their roles. This could further erode public trust in the electoral process and lead to post-election tensions. With the 2023 General Elections, the poor understanding of the legal framework resulted in widespread public misinterpretation of the place of technology in the election and there was a far-reaching erosion of public trust in the post-election period.

8.6 Challenge with Election Technology

The introduction of technology with the accompanying reduction of human influence in the electoral process wields massive benefits for electoral conduct. However, technology does not obliterate the issue of trust deficit that has pervaded the country over the years. In fact, technology is readily susceptible to technical failures.[223] The adoption of the BVAS for the 2023 election, therefore, had some benefits for smoothing out the voting process but technical glitches in results upload to the IReV portal threw up massive repercussions in the post-election era. The BVAS technology was adopted by INEC in line with the provisions of the Electoral Act, allowing for the adoption of technology in electoral conduct. The technological device served two major purposes – verification and authentication of voters via PVC and biometric scan, and uploading of PU results to an online result viewing portal (IReV). The device performed optimally in the verification and authentication of voters. Even uploads of Senatorial and House of Representatives results were relatively hitch-free. However, there was a setback in the uploading of the 2023

[223] Dorpenyo, I.K (2019). "Risky election, vulnerable technology: Localizing biometric use in elections for the sake of justice." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2019): 361-375.

Presidential Election result across the country. This technical glitch bred widespread scepticism among voters, candidates, and even international observers, eroding public trust in the accuracy and fairness of the entire electoral system. Although the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, that followed, had a slightly better turnout.

8.7 Poor Logistics and Institutional Strategic Communication

Observations from the field have also revealed a dearth of coordinated communication efforts by electoral management bodies, government institutions, and relevant stakeholders during the electoral process. This accounted in part, for the difficulty experienced by many in locating their PUs, as well as the late arrival of election staff and election materials amongst others at PUs. Other logistical problems could include shortages of staff and or lack of election materials. This deficiency significantly impeded the timely and smooth conduct of elections and had far-reaching consequences on the transparency, credibility, and legitimacy of the democratic process. One of the primary challenges posed by inadequate communication is the potential for misinformation and confusion among voters. With changes in PU delimitation by the election management body before the election via the establishment of new PUs and change of voting points (sub-PUs) to PUs, strategic communication - especially between the electoral umpire and the electorates - became a crucial issue in the election, necessary for avoidance of disenfranchisement and ensuring the credibility of the process. Where there are such communication gaps, as was experienced in the 2023 general elections, the outcome could be disenfranchisement, low voter turnout, public mistrust, or a combination of any of the three.

8.8 Ethnic and Regional Dynamics

Ethnic and regional dynamics play a significant role in shaping the electoral conduct in Nigeria, posing substantial challenges to the country's democratic process. Nigeria is a diverse nation with various ethnic and regional groups, each with distinct interests, historical grievances, and political affiliations. However, these dynamics can sometimes lead to divisiveness, polarisation, and even violence, which can severely hinder the conduct of elections. One major challenge is the manipulation of ethnic and regional sentiments by political actors. This is pervasive in Nigeria as politicking is not ideologically laden and politicians often exploit divisions to secure support from their respective ethnic or regional bases, often at the expense of national unity. This manipulation can lead to a focus on identity politics rather than the actual issues affecting the nation, diverting attention from important policy debates and contributing to a fragmented electorate.

Another challenge is the potential for election-related violence and conflicts along ethnic and regional lines. Competition for political power can intensify existing tensions, leading

to clashes between supporters of different ethnic or regional groups. This violence not only disrupts the electoral process but also threatens the safety and lives of citizens. Moreover, the perception of electoral outcomes favouring one ethnic or regional group over others can result in grievances, protests, and even challenges to the legitimacy of elected officials. This has the potential to destabilise the country's political landscape and undermine the democratic process.

Ethnic and regional dynamics can also affect voter behaviour and electoral outcomes. Some voters may cast their ballots based on ethnic or regional loyalties rather than a candidate's qualifications or policy positions. This can lead to a distortion of representation, as candidates may prioritise catering to specific groups rather than pursuing policies that benefit the entire nation.

8.9 Disenfranchisement and Voter Suppression

As observations in the preceding section show, disenfranchisement of voters via voter suppression was a major issue experienced in the 2023 general elections. These issues particularly impact marginalised groups and vulnerable communities, preventing them from exercising their right to vote and engage in the electoral process. Voter suppression tactics, such as intimidation, violence, and misinformation, are used to disenfranchise eligible voters, particularly in places with heightened ethnic or political tensions. This type of manipulation disproportionately affects specific ethnic or regional groups, further deepening divisions and skewing representation. Instances of violence or the threat of violence can discourage citizens from going to the polls, and disinformation campaigns can confuse voters and undermine their confidence in the integrity of the electoral process as well as the elections as a whole.

Additionally, issues with logistics and infrastructure can contribute to disenfranchisement. Inadequate provision of polling stations, voting materials, and personnel can lead to long wait times and frustration, discouraging citizens from casting their votes. Furthermore, complex voting procedures can lead to confusion and errors, resulting in invalidated ballots and suppressed voter turnout. These challenges perpetuate a cycle of underrepresentation, where women, PWDs and the elderly consistently face barriers to their participation in the electoral process.

8.10 Issues with Result Collation and Transmission

Result collation and transmission refers to the process of gathering and transmitting vote counts from polling stations to central tabulation centres, where the final results are compiled and announced. For the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the collation process was confronted by several challenges. One major challenge was the vulnerability of the

result collation and transmission systems to manipulation by desperate politicians in collusion with complicit electoral officials, particularly ad-hoc staff.

Furthermore, issues with human resources and training can impact result collation. Inadequately trained election officials might make errors in compiling and transmitting results, which can lead to discrepancies between polling station counts and central tallies. This can raise concerns about the accuracy of the results and the overall conduct of the election.

8.11 Lack of Accountability for Electoral Offences

With the competitive nature of elections, especially in Nigeria, it is almost a given that electoral rules and regulations would be flouted. As such, it becomes equally necessary for deterrence mechanisms to be in place to check against electoral offences like vote trading, violence, and voter intimidation, amongst others. Electoral offences were largely perpetrated and perpetuated during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria due to the fact that offenders were not often held accountable in the past. When individuals or entities responsible for electoral offences go unpunished, it creates an environment where unethical and illegal actions can occur with impunity, distorting the fairness and credibility of elections, and undermining the entire democratic and governance process. This not only skews electoral outcomes but also undermines the principle of free-and-fair competition that is essential for a healthy democratic system. Moreover, the lack of accountability contributes to a cycle of mistrust in the electoral process. When citizens witness instances of electoral offences going unpunished, they lose faith in the ability of institutions to ensure fairness and uphold the rule of law. This skepticism can lead to voter apathy, decreased civic participation, and a growing disillusionment with the democratic process.

In addition, the absence of consequences for electoral offences can deter individuals from serving as credible candidates or election officials. Those who are committed to ethical conduct may be reluctant to participate if they perceive that the playing field is not level and that offenders are not held to account. This ultimately limits the pool of individuals willing to engage in the electoral process, which can impact the quality of elections, governance and representation. The table below summarises the observed challenges in the 2023 general elections and their implications:

Table 15: Observed Weaknesses and Their Implication for the 2023 General Election

S/N	Issue	Explanation/Implication
1	Logistical and Operational Issues	Despite efforts to improve logistical arrangements, issues such as late arrival and shortages of election materials and security personnel persisted in some regions. These delays and shortages can lead to frustration among voters, hampering their ability to cast their ballots, and potentially causing mistrust in the overall process. Furthermore, poor logistics affect the smooth conduct of elections and have far-reaching consequences on the transparency, credibility, and legitimacy of the democratic process.
2	Insecurity and Electoral Violence	Election-related violence remained a significant challenge. Instances of intimidation, bullying, and voter suppression were reported. Thus, affecting the ability of citizens to freely exercise their right to vote. Electoral violence against women also underscored broader issues of gender-based discrimination and violence in the political arena.
3	Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News	The spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news continued to be a pervasive challenge during the 2023 elections. False narratives and misleading information distort public perception, sway voter decisions, and contribute to a divisive political climate.
4	Weak Political Party Agents Management	Political parties and candidates' inadequate management of political party agents at polling units including inadequate reverse logistics to facilitate proper retrieval, documentation and storage of signed result sheets remained a concern. Effective party agent management is crucial for maintaining transparency, preventing fraud, and ensuring that the interests of all parties and candidates are properly represented and protected throughout the electoral process.
5	Limited Understanding of Legal Framework	A lack of adequate understanding of the legal and regulatory framework guiding elections was evident

		among various stakeholders. This lack of awareness can lead to disputes, challenges, and post-election conflicts, undermining the integrity of the electoral process and legitimacy of electoral outcomes.
6	Challenges with Electoral Technology	While strides were made in using technology to enhance the electoral process, challenges with technology implementation persisted. These included issues with the performance of the Biometric Voter Authentication Systems (BVAS) and delays in uploading results to the INEC Results Viewing (IReV) platform.
7	Inadequate Institutional Strategic Communication	Effective communication between election authorities, political parties, and the public remained a challenge. E.g., changes in PUs locations and voters' distribution were not effectively communicated. Poor communication can lead to confusion, disenfranchisement, distrust, and misinformation. Thereby negatively impacting the perception and performance of the EMB and the integrity of the electoral process.
8	Ethnic and Regional Tensions	Ethnic and regional tensions continued to influence the electoral landscape in Nigeria. These dynamics can affect voter turnout, candidate support, and even the acceptance of election results in different parts of the country.
9	Disenfranchisement and Voter Suppression	Despite efforts to encourage increased civic participation, instances of voter suppression and disenfranchisement were reported. These impacts the outcomes of the electoral process. These issues also disproportionately affect marginalised and vulnerable populations, thereby reducing the inclusivity of the electoral process.
10	Issues with Results Collation and Transmission	Challenges with the collation and transmission of election results were observed during the 2023 general elections. These issues can erode public trust in the accuracy and fairness of election outcomes.

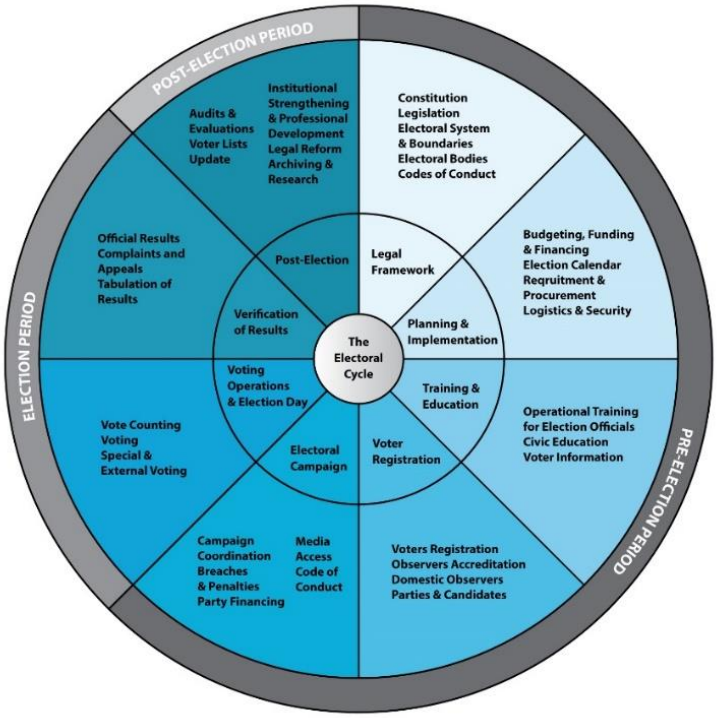
11	Lack of Accountability for Electoral Offences	The lack of swift and decisive accountability for electoral offences, including violence, voter intimidation, and fraud, can perpetuate a culture of impunity and undermine confidence in the electoral process.

The litany of issues contained in the table above, though not exhaustive, are reflective of the complex web of problems that have continued to bedevil the Nigerian electoral process despite efforts at improvement through reforms and improvements in the legal frameworks for conduct of elections. The existence of these challenges and their manifestations during the 2023 general elections are indicative, not only of shortcomings of the electoral umpire – INEC – but also of other governmental and non-governmental agencies and stakeholders involved in the electoral process. This understanding informs the next section's focus on electoral accountability and responsibility in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Safeguarding the Integrity of 2023 General Election: Electoral Accountability and Responsibility

The strengths and weaknesses discussed in the previous section are indicative of the context, complexities, and network of mutually reinforcing factors and forces that characterise, shape and influence the 2023 general election in Nigeria and the country's electoral governance in general. Elections, as rightly noted, are cyclical and intersecting processes and not events.[224] For every election cycle, there is a pre-election, election/electioneering, and post-election period.[225]As such, the post-election period for one election is the pre-election period for the subsequent one. In each of these stages, there are various stakeholders responsible and accountable for the different aspects/activities/stages of the electoral process. Elections should, therefore, be assessed not just based on election-day events but in recognition of the totality of activities in the electoral process as depicted by the electoral cycle pie chart below:

Figure 4: The Electoral Cycle



Source: European Centre for Election Support[226]

[224] Report of Election Reform Committee (ERC) 2008 page 1. (Uwais Panel Report)
[225] European Centre for Electoral Support. (n.d.). Electoral Cycle's Steps Training. https://www.eces.eu/en/electoral-cycles-steps-training
[226] ibid

The conceptualisation of electoral accountability in this paper draws from the position of Jinadu and Ibeanu[227] who contend that accountability requires three related factors – responsibility, answerability and liability. Responsibility as a criterion for accountability implies that public officeholders serve the public for clearly defined purposes. Accountability is the idea that individuals in public office and/or public agencies should, at certain points, be called to answer for their actions, based on existing rules and regulations. Thirdly, accountability also entails that individuals are personally liable for actions they take or fail to take while in office. We apply the idea of accountability, as Jinadu and Ibeanu did, to the supply-side of electoral institutions and conceptualise it as the idea that "individuals, agencies and institutions charged with ensuring and protecting the integrity of elections be held accountable for the quality of elections."[228]

Different stakeholders are responsible for overseeing differing aspects of the electoral process, the functionality of which is crucial for electoral outcomes and credibility. Successes or flaws witnessed in elections are, therefore, not solely a result of the shortcomings of the electoral umpire but due to collective limitations in the functionality of the litany of agencies and institutions playing complementary roles in diverse stages and aspects of the electoral process. Thus, ensuring quality and credible elections is a function of the collective efforts of all electoral stakeholders, each playing crucial roles towards ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and the success of elections. Additionally, as noted in the ERC 2008 and stated in this paper's introduction, the environment (socio-political context) in which elections are conducted also matters and should be taken into consideration in any analysis and assessment of the quality of an election.

Below, we offer a concise insight into the accountability and responsibilities of critical stakeholders of the electoral process such as the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties, the executive, security agencies, legislature, civil society, media, educational institutions, NYSC and Ad-hoc Staff, etc., in ensuring quality and credible electoral processes in Nigeria.

9.1 Independent National Electoral Commission

INEC, the Nigerian EMB, is the central institution responsible for organising and conducting elections in Nigeria. Its role includes voter registration, designing and distributing ballot materials, ensuring a level playing field for all political parties, and overseeing the entire electoral process. INEC's functions include voter registration,

[227] Jinadu, L.A. and Ibeanu, O. (2023). Introduction: Electoral Accountability and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria. In L. Adele Jinadu and Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds). *Electoral Accountability in Nigeria*. The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation.
[228] Ibid, p. 4

overseeing polling logistics and ensuring transparency of the electoral process and ensuring adherence to electoral laws. The electoral management body provides materials to aid voting (voting materials), arranges for the transportation of staff, and materials to polling units to facilitate smooth voting operations. They are also empowered to enforce, to a reasonable degree, electoral laws, regulations, and guidelines that govern the conduct of elections.

Specific responsibilities of INEC as encapsulated in Section 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) are to: organise, undertake and supervise all presidential, governorship and legislative elections in the country; register political parties and monitor their organisation and operation; arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties and publish reports on these for public information; arrange for the registration of voters and maintain and revise the voters' register; monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations to govern the political parties; ensure that all Electoral Commissioners, Electoral and Returning Officers take and subscribe to the oath of office prescribed by law; delegate any of its powers to Resident Electoral Commissioners. The Electoral Acts of 2006, 2010, 2010 as amended and the Electoral Act 2022, further mandate the commission to i) conduct voter and civic education; ii) promote sound knowledge of democratic election processes; and iii) conduct any referendum required to be conducted by law.

More so, Section 71 of the Constitution also empowers INEC to divide each state and the FCT into three senatorial districts for purposes of elections to the Senate and divide the federation into 360 federal constituencies including the FCT for purposes of elections to the House of Representatives. In addition, INEC is responsible for dividing states into between 24 and 40 constituencies for representation at the State Houses of Assembly depending on the population and size. These duties primarily constitute the official role of INEC as the entity responsible for managing elections at the National and State level in Nigeria. As Attahiru Jega[229] correctly pointed out, effectively fulfilling these official duties would undoubtedly improve trustworthiness and increase the responsibility of elected representatives, particularly among the public.

It is trite to note that issues affecting elections in Nigeria are both internal and external to the election management body – INEC. On the one hand, some issues fall under the direct purview of INEC; these are issues on which the commission exercises direct oversight and

[229]Jega, A. (forthcoming) 'Between Independence and Openness: Electoral Accountability and the Independent National Electoral Commission' In Adele L. Jinadu and Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds). '*Electoral Accountability in Nigeria*. Forthcoming publication of The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation.

control. On the other hand, there are external issues which are controlled by external agencies or institutions. This divide inadvertently places limitations on the powers of the Commission while pointing to the role of other electoral duty-bearers.

9.2 Political Parties

Political parties are the vehicles through which candidates seek public office. They contribute to credible elections by selecting/electing and presenting candidates with integrity and capability, engaging in campaigns (which are ideally, but often not, issue-based and informative), deploying polling agents to monitor voting and ballot counting, ensuring transparency and fairness, and encouraging supporters to act in civility and accept electoral outcomes whether it is in their favour or not. Alluding to the crucial role of political parties in ensuring electoral credibility and accountability, Antonia Simbine[230] contended that political parties are significant supply-side entities responsible for strengthening the quality and integrity of elections.

Political parties contribute to the quality of elections by facilitating informed voter choices. Through their policy platforms and ideological orientations, parties offer voters a range of options that reflect diverse political viewpoints.[231] This allows voters to align their preferences with parties that best represent their interests and values. Moreover, parties engage in campaigns that disseminate information about their policy positions, enabling voters to make well-informed decisions. The existence of multiple parties also encourages political discourse and debate, which further educates the electorate and fosters a deeper understanding of the issues at stake.[232] This deliberative process empowers citizens to participate meaningfully in the electoral process, enhancing the overall quality of democratic representation.

Political parties also contribute to the quality of the electoral process by promoting transparency and accountability. As entities responsible for nominating candidates and formulating policy agendas, parties undergo internal processes that require transparency and inclusivity.[233] Intra-party mechanisms, such as primaries or party conventions, allow members to participate in candidate selection, thereby ensuring that party nominees possess the necessary qualifications and relevant competencies. Additionally, parties' adherence to

[230] Simbine, A. (forthcoming) "Despotism Within, Democracy Outside: Political Parties and Electoral Accountability in Nigeria". In Adele L. Jinadu and Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds.) "*Electoral Accountability in Nigeria*". Forthcoming publication of The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation

[231] Tarouco, G. (2016). "The role of political parties in electoral governance: Delegation and the quality of elections in Latin America." *Election Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (2016): 83-95.

[232] ibid

[233] Ewing, K. D. "Transparency, accountability and equality: The political parties, elections and referendums act 2000." *Chapter 6-Transparency, Accountability and Equality: The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (2002): 1000-1050.

democratic norms and internal regulations, coupled with their responsibility to present clear policy proposals to the public, fosters accountability and provides voters with a basis for evaluating candidates' credibility.[234] This heightened transparency and accountability within parties could be extended to the electoral system at large, ultimately fostering greater public trust in the electoral process.

In addition, the legitimacy of democratic outcomes is closely tied to the role of political parties. Through their involvement in electoral activities and their role as intermediaries between citizens and the government, parties contribute to ensuring that election results are widely accepted as legitimate expressions of the public will[235]. When parties adhere to democratic principles and provide credible alternatives, the legitimacy of the electoral process is bolstered, and outcomes are less likely to be contentious. Furthermore, the recognition of parties as legitimate actors within the political landscape facilitates peaceful transitions of power and reinforces the stability of democratic systems.

Overall, political parties wield significant influence in enhancing the quality of electoral processes. Through their role in informing voters, promoting transparency, and ensuring the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, parties contribute to the vitality and strength of democratic systems. By providing avenues for political participation, fostering a well-informed electorate, and upholding democratic norms, parties play a critical role in consolidating the foundations of democratic governance and ensuring the effectiveness and credibility of electoral processes.

9.3 The Executive Branch

The executive branch of government comprises the Presidency, state governors, and other government ministries, departments and agencies. The functionality of these ministries, departments and agencies covers virtually all affairs in the state, giving the executive potential power to shape electoral processes and outcomes if it so chooses. The election management bodies typically rely on various governmental ministries, departments and agencies for their diverse activities. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for the EMBs' budgets. In many cases, EMBs rely on government ministries for transportation and logistics support. Procurements also require approval of import regulatory agencies and relevant executive agencies carry out audit roles over the election management body. This places the electoral umpire and the success of electoral conduct largely at the mercy of the

[234] ibid

[235] Daadaoui, Mohamed. "Rituals of power and political parties in Morocco: Limited elections as positional strategies." *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 2 (2010): 195-219.

various executive bodies and their leadership.[236] However, since many of the 2008 ERC recommendations were included in the 2010 Electoral Act, the Nigerian EMB was put on a first line charge and enjoys financial autonomy. The 2022 Electoral Act went further to ensure that the finance for Elections is made available at least 1 year before. This also translates to some measure of political independence and prevents the EMB from being held to ransom.

While the Nigerian Constitution provides for an independent electoral management body, executive influence can still permeate the electoral process through indirect means. The appointment and removal of key personnel within the electoral management bodies by the executive can create a perception of bias, affecting the credibility and integrity of electoral administration. More so, the concentration of authority within the executive branch can also lead to the consolidation of power, especially when incumbents seek to retain control through electoral victory as required by democracy.[237] In extreme cases, executive influence may lead to electoral malpractices, disenfranchisement, and electoral violence, thereby posing a significant threat to electoral accountability and public trust. Moreover, the nature of the Nigerian political system, with its strong party affiliations and clientelist networks, contributes to the executive's influence over the electoral process.[238] The loyalty of political elites to the ruling party, often driven by patronage and access to resources, can impact electoral outcomes, skewing the representation of the electorate's preferences. This makes it crucial for a part of the burden of accountability for the credibility or its lack thereof, of the electoral process to be placed on the executive.

9.4 The Legislature

The Nigerian legislature, comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives at the federal level, and the State Houses of Assembly at the state level, has a crucial role to play in ensuring quality and credible elections. The Senate and the House of Representatives are collectively referred to as the National Assembly. They are responsible for carrying out various election-related law-making functions at the national level. State Houses of Assembly, on the other hand, play a crucial law-making and audit role in elections

[236] International IDEA (2014). Electoral Management Design. Available at: https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-management-design-2014.pdf

[237] Ojibara, I.I. (2023). "Parties Without Ideology: The Implications for Nigeria's Politics, Policies, and Democracy." *Insights and Explorations in Democracy, Political Unrest, and Propaganda in Elections* (2023): 82-94.

[238] See: De Sousa, R. Real, P., and Cuadrado, J. (2023). "Neopatrimonialism in Africa: A Review of Concepts, Practices and Implications." *Africa Review* 15 (2023):316-337 and Awhefeada, U.V. (2023) "A Review of Constitutional Safeguards for Anti–Corruption in Nigeria." *International Journal of Law and Society* 6(2):130-143

conducted at the local government level of their respective states by the diverse State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) in Nigeria.

The 2023 general elections being a country-wide election conducted by INEC, the onus of election-related law-making and audit fell within the jurisdiction of the National Assembly. The Electoral Act 2022 which regulated the entire electoral process is an outcome of the National Assembly's exercise of its law-making power on elections. By establishing clear legal frameworks, the Assembly can contribute to the prevention of electoral malpractices, thereby ensuring that elections are credible. The enactment of laws that promote free and fair elections, regulate campaign financing, and deter voter intimidation can significantly enhance the integrity of the electoral process.[239]

The National Assembly also holds oversight power over the executive branch, including the electoral management bodies. Through its committees and legislative functions, the Assembly can conduct thorough inquiries and investigations into allegations of electoral misconduct or irregularities. This oversight function helps ensure that responsible parties are held accountable for their actions. By scrutinising the activities of election management bodies and other relevant electoral stakeholders, the National Assembly can provide a checks-and-balances mechanism that bolsters electoral integrity and prevents undue influence on the process. Hamman-Obels and Weldone highlight the crucial place of the legislature in ensuring quality and credible elections in their assertion that, "the legislature can enhance electoral credibility by making rules that guard against irregularities in the electoral process, and by discharging their oversight roles to ensure that elections are properly conducted in conformity with electoral laws and rules."[240] This largely sums up the pivotal role of the legislature in general, and the Nigerian National Assembly, in particular, in ensuring quality and credible elections in Nigeria.

9.5 Security Agencies

Security agencies play a pivotal role in ensuring the safe conduct of elections and guaranteeing the quality and credibility of the process. They typically provide a safe environment for voters to cast their ballots, prevent disruptions and violence, safeguard polling stations and election materials from tampering or intimidation, and work to prevent conflicts that could arise during campaigns or on election day.

[239] See Hamman-Obels, P. and Weldone, D. (forthcoming) "The Legislature and Electoral Accountability, 1999 – 2023." In Adele L. Jinadu and Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds.). *Electoral Accountability in Nigeria.* Forthcoming Publication of The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation

[240] ibid

With specific relevance to the Nigerian context, the Justice Uwais led ERC Report lays out the broad nature of the responsibility of security agencies in elections to include: a) guaranteeing peace and safety throughout the election process, b) restoring peace and safety after disorder that may be engendered by delimitation of constituencies, c) safeguarding the security of personnel, materials and values for voter registration, d) safeguarding the security of life and properties of citizens during voter registration, political campaign and voting, e) ensuring the safety of electoral officers before, during and after elections, f) providing security for politicians during campaigns, g) ensuring and preserving a free, fair and safe atmosphere for election campaigns by all parties and politicians, without discrimination, h) maintaining peaceful conditions, law and order around the polling units and collation, or counting centres, i) ensuring the security of sensitive election materials at voting and collating or counting centres and during transportation. The police have the responsibility of ensuring that election materials are not hijacked, destroyed, or fraudulently altered by any group or person, j) ensuring that politicians do not intimidate, corruptly induce or manipulate the electorate at voter registration and polling centres, and k) maintaining security around the election petition tribunals.[241] Pointing out the pivotal place of security agencies in elections, Oyomola asserted that election security involves ”the deliberate prevention of electoral governance from distortions, violations and manipulations; in such a way that legitimacy of democratic elections and democratic political succession would be guaranteed.”[242] This position is an apt pointer to the crucial role of security agencies in the integrity of electoral duty bearers and other stakeholders.

9.6 Civil Society

Civil society plays a crucial role in safeguarding electoral integrity, ensuring responsibility, and promoting electoral accountability. Civil Society Organisations act as watchdogs, closely monitoring the electoral processes to ensure fairness and transparency.[243] Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), grassroots movements, and citizen-led initiatives often play a pivotal role in observing elections, reporting irregularities, and raising awareness about potential manipulation or fraud. Their presence helps maintain public confidence in the electoral system, as their impartial assessments can expose discrepancies or malpractices that could undermine the integrity of the elections.

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[241]Report of Election Reform Committee 2008 pages 172 - 173

[242] Zabadi, I, and Ayomola, O. (forthcoming) “Exclusionary Politics and State Capture: The Role of Security Agencies in Nigeria Elections.” In Mohammad Kuna and Jibrin Ibrahim (eds.) “*Elections and Democratization in Nigeria*.” Forthcoming Publication of The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation.

[243]Odeh, A.M. (2012) "Civil society and democratic consolidation in Nigeria." *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3, no. 1: 61-67.

Civil society also provides a platform for citizens to voice concerns, ask questions, and demand transparency from those in power. Through advocacy, public awareness campaigns, and mobilisation efforts, civil society groups can pressure electoral bodies to ensure that procedures are followed and that any attempts to influence outcomes are thwarted. As Hamman-Obels and Otive-Igbuzor noted, "through election monitoring and observation, CSOs demand that not elected officials are held accountable but other critical electoral stakeholders such as EMB, NASS, political parties and candidates, media et al."[244] CSOs also carry out voter education functions, which translates to informed choices during elections. By fostering an engaged and informed citizenry, civil society organizations contribute to creating a sense of responsibility among both voters and candidates, promoting a culture of ethical political conduct.[245]

Lastly, civil society enhances accountability by creating channels for citizens to participate beyond just the act of voting. They encourage ongoing civic engagement, which involves citizens in decision-making processes beyond the elections.[246] Through public forums, debates, and discussions, civil society provides spaces for dialogue between citizens and elected officials. This engagement helps ensure that politicians remain responsive to the needs and concerns of the people they represent. Moreover, civil society organisations often advocate for legal reforms that enhance electoral transparency and accountability mechanisms.[247]This is exemplified by the push by non-governmental organisations in Nigeria for the establishment of an Electoral Offences Commission. By pushing for stronger regulations and oversight mechanisms, they help create an environment where electoral malpractice and corruption are deterred and where those who violate the rules can be held accountable. They are, therefore, key stakeholders in ensuring the quality and integrity of the electoral process.

9.7 Media

The media largely serves the purpose of keeping citizens informed about the electoral process. By providing accurate and timely information to the public, the media empowers citizens to make informed choices, ultimately bolstering the legitimacy of the electoral

[244] Hamman-Obels, P. and Otive-Igbuzor, R. (forthcoming) "From Election Observation to Electoral Accountability: The Role of CSOs in Electoral Matters" In Adele L. Jinadu and Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds.). *Electoral Accountability in Nigeria.* Forthcoming Publication of The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation
[245]Odeh, A.M. (2012) "Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria." *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3, no. 1: 61-67.
[246]Foley, M. W., and Edwards, B. (1996) "The paradox of civil society." *J. Democracy* 7: 38.
[247]Bakolias, M. (2000) "Legal and Judicial Development: The Role of Civil Society in the Reform Process." *Fordham International Law Journal* 24 (6): S26-S55

outcomes.[248]The media can also deploy journalism and fact-checking tools to uncover irregularities, misinformation, and potential manipulation. Through rigorous reporting and analysis, the media can also shed light on the conduct of candidates, highlight ethical breaches, policy inconsistencies, and even instances of hate speech or incitement. The media also has a key role to play in encouraging responsible behaviour and discouraging the spread of divisive tactics. Additionally, media outlets can facilitate debates and interviews, allowing candidates to articulate their platforms and engage in substantive discussions, fostering an environment where political discourse is centred on accountability and meaningful dialogue.[249]

Media coverage of campaign finances, candidate backgrounds, and party affiliations provides voters with information about those seeking public office. Investigative reporting can expose corruption, conflicts of interest, or attempts to influence the election through unethical means.[250] This exposure not only encourages candidates to maintain high ethical standards but also enables citizens to make informed judgments about the individuals and parties vying for their votes. Moreover, by serving as a platform for citizen opinions and concerns, the media facilitates a two-way dialogue that holds elected officials accountable for their promises and actions after they assume office. In performing these diverse roles, the Nigerian media plays a major part in elections. As Omotosho[251] noted, by "educating, enlightening and informing" the public on salient election-related state matters, the media qualifies as a critical supply-side institution with a responsibility to ensure quality and credible elections.

9.8 National Youth Service Corps and Ad-Hoc Staff

Due to the large manpower requirement for electoral conduct, the Nigerian election management body – INEC - engages the services of ad-hoc staff for electoral conduct. Ad-hoc staff are temporary workers who are employed on a short-term basis to carry out specific tasks during elections. These staff members are largely drawn from serving members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme to serve as presiding and assistant presiding officers at polling units across the country.

As polling unit officials, serving Corps members on election duty oversee voting activities at the polling unit, count votes, and assist with collation and aggregation of results from

[248]Oboh, G.E. (2016). "Reflecting on the Nigerian Media, Elections, and the African Democracy." *Sage Open* July-September 2016: 1–10
[249] ibid
[250]Coronel, S. (2003) "The Role of the Media in Deepening Democracy." *NGO Media Outreach* 1 (2003): 23.
[251] Omotosho, S.A. (forthcoming). Holding the Nigerian Media Accountable in the Electoral Process. In Okechukwu Ibeanu& L. Adele Jinadu. *Electoral Accountability in Nigeria.* Forthcoming publication of The Electoral Hub with support from the MacArthur Foundation.

various polling units. They also assist with logistics by overseeing the movement of electoral materials to and from their designated polling units. The performance of these functions by ad-hoc staff of the Commission makes them crucial stakeholders in the country's electoral process that should be held responsible for the failings or successes arising from the discharge of their duties. More so, NYSC, the umbrella body from which several ad-hoc staff are recruited also has the responsibility of ensuring the optimal performance of electoral duties.

9.9 Professional Associations

The Nigerian electoral process also involves the participation of serving university academic staff through their various professional bodies in the country. Specifically, the ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities), and the CVC (Committee of Vice-Chancellors) are prominent professional bodies known for their role in the Nigerian electoral process. The electoral commission typically engages the services of serving lecturers (members of ASUU) and Vice Chancellors of universities within the country (members of CVC) as collation and returning officers. The participation of members of these professional associations in the country's electoral process gives them the responsibility to ensure adherence to global best practices and optimal ethical standards for electoral conduct. More so, the professional associations from which electoral staff are recruited have a major role to play in ensuring that members on electoral duty uphold the values of electoral integrity and credibility.

9.10 Logistics Institutions/Associations

Logistics institutions and associations play a significant role in Nigerian elections by ensuring the smooth and efficient conduct of various logistical aspects of the electoral process. These organisations are responsible for coordinating the movement of personnel, equipment, materials, and information necessary for electoral conduct in a timely and organised manner. For this reason, the Nigerian EMB engages with various logistics associations including the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) and the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN), amongst others for the movement of electoral personnel and materials (including ballot papers, ballot boxes, result sheets, and other essential supplies) to and from their designated locations.[252] Since transportation requires fuel, INEC made arrangements with NNPCL to ensure adequate and timely supplies for the "100, 000 Vehicles and 4, 000 Boats to be used in reaching the 176, 846 PUs spread across 8,809

[252] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/571543-inec-to-use-100000-vehicles-4200-boats-for-2023-elections-signs-mou-with-transport-unions.html

Registration Areas (or electoral Wards) in 774 Local Government Areas nationwide".[253] In addition, it is usual for INEC to engage the services of the Armed Forces, and in particular the Nigerian Airforce for delivery and protection of election officials and materials in difficult to reach areas[254].

They ensure that these materials are delivered to the right polling stations on time, minimising delays and logistical challenges. The role of logistics institutions and associations in Nigerian elections is critical for maintaining the integrity, transparency, and effectiveness of the electoral process. Their ability to coordinate complex logistical operations ensures that elections are conducted smoothly, in a timely manner and the voice of the electorate is accurately represented in the results. For this reason, these unions, NNPCL and the Armed Forces constitute major parties responsible for ensuring quality and credible elections in the country.

9.11 Educational Institutions

Educational institutions play the role of disseminating knowledge and inculcating values, specifically, democratic values in citizens. They, therefore, contribute towards credible and quality elections by promoting informed citizen participation and preventing electoral manipulation. Educational institutions teach students about the importance of voting, democratic principles, the dangers of electoral malpractice, and responsible citizenship. They are also very instrumental in promoting media literacy as they help individuals critically evaluate political information, reducing susceptibility to misinformation.

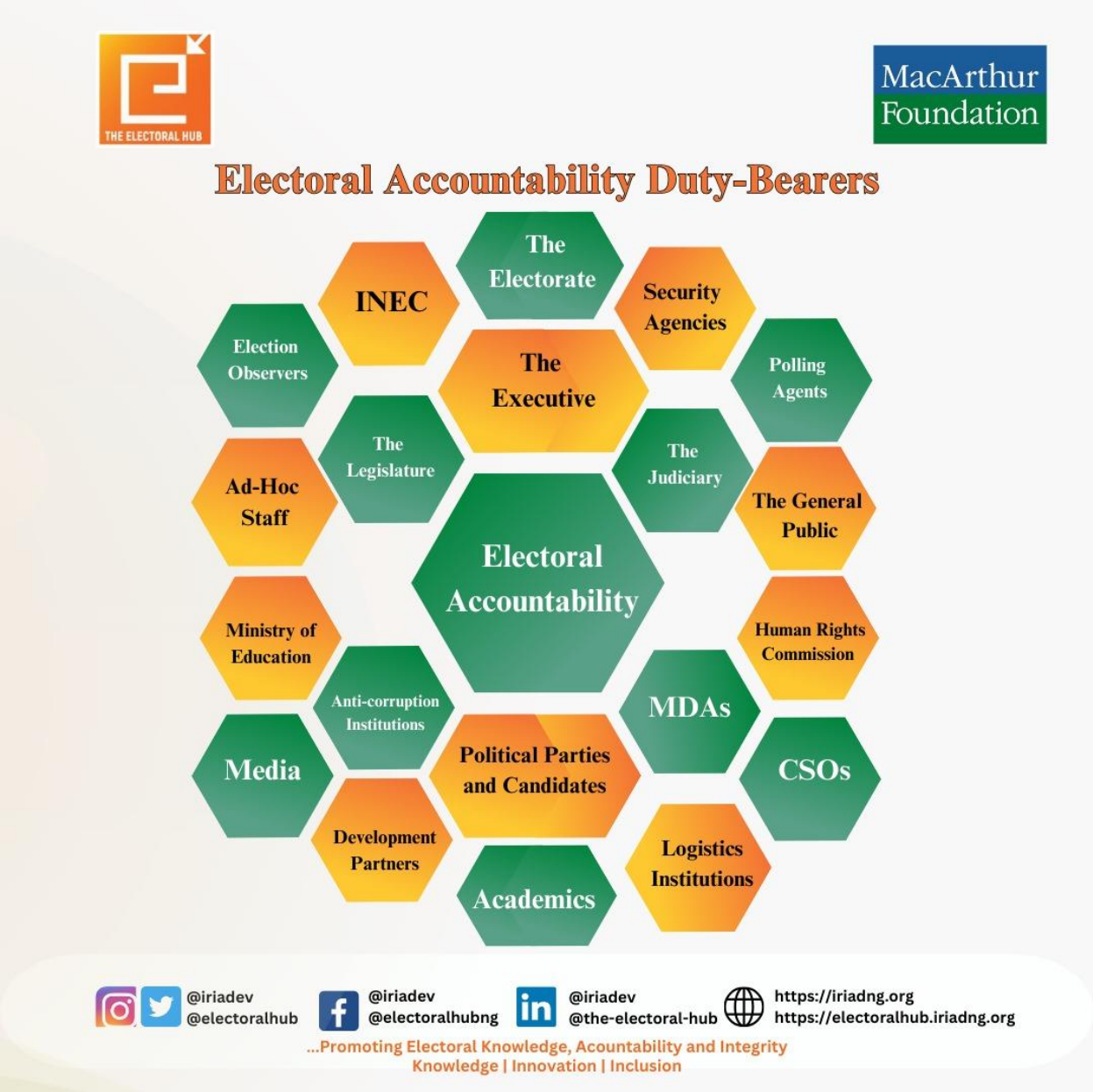
The link between education and electoral quality is multifaceted, as education not only fosters an informed and engaged citizenry but also contributes to the development of critical thinking skills, civic responsibility, and a broader understanding of the democratic process.[255] Through the dissemination of accurate information, the cultivation of active citizenship, and the promotion of ethical behaviour, educational institutions contribute significantly to enhancing the overall quality of elections. Firstly, educational institutions serve as platforms for the dissemination of accurate and unbiased information regarding the electoral process, candidates, and policy issues. A well-informed electorate is fundamental to the functioning of a healthy democracy, as it enables voters to make informed decisions based on an understanding of the issues at stake. Through civic

[253] https://leadership.ng/nnpcl-inec-parley-on-fuel-supply-for-election-material-movement/
[254] https://punchng.com/inec-seeks-air-force-support-on-security-logistics/
[255]Tang, G., and Cheng, E.W. (2021) "Postmaterialism and the Perceived Quality of Elections: a Study of the Moderation Effect of a Critical Event." *Social Indicators Research* 155 (1): 335-354.

education and political science programs, institutions provide students with the tools to critically assess the policies and promises put forth by candidates.

Additionally, the academic environment encourages open dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives, enabling students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the political landscape. Secondly, educational institutions foster active citizenship by instilling a sense of civic responsibility and encouraging participation in the electoral process. By promoting the values of democracy, respect for individual rights, and the importance of collective decision-making, institutions contribute to the cultivation of a politically engaged citizenry. This engagement extends beyond voting to include activities such as volunteering, advocacy, and community involvement. Educational settings provide opportunities for students to engage in mock elections, debates, and discussions about current events, thereby preparing them for their roles as informed participants in the democratic process. More so, ethical behaviour and democratic values are ingrained in students through the guidance of educational institutions. By emphasising the importance of integrity, transparency, and respect for differing opinions, these institutions shape individuals who are more likely to uphold ethical standards in their electoral interactions. Furthermore, the academic environment provides space for critical reflection on historical and contemporary instances of electoral manipulation and voter suppression, encouraging students to become vigilant guardians of the electoral process.

Figure 5: Electoral Accountability Duty-Bearers



Source: The Electoral Hub[256]

[256] https://electoralhub.org/publications/infographics/electoral-accountability-duty-bearers/electoral-accountability-duty-bearers/

Elections as a Collaborative Responsibility: 2023 General Election in Perspective

Preceding discourse points to the pivotal role of other institutions beyond the EMB in ensuring quality and credible elections. The list is, however, not exhaustive as an election involves a broad gamut of activities requiring diverse stakeholders and institutions to play specific and sometimes, overlapping roles.

10.1 Responsible Parties for Observed Problems

Observed experiences from the 2023 general elections including the late arrival of election materials and personnel, voting and counting of results into the night, good BVAS performance, late/delayed results upload to IReV, IReV management and access, maladministration at the PUs/poor ad-hoc staff performance, weak political party agents management, poor knowledge of legal framework by stakeholders, electoral violence, election-related violence against women/violence against women in elections, intimidation/bullying, voter suppression, increased turnout in urban areas, participation of urban/middle-class citizens, poor institutional strategic communication, misinformation/disinformation and the presence of fake news are indicative of shortcomings on the part of diverse responsible stakeholders in the electoral process, as captured in the table below:

Table 16: Responsible Parties for Observed Problems in the 2023 General Elections

NO	ISSUE	RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDER
1	Logistical Problems (Late and Non-Arrival of Election Materials, Personnel and Poor Supply of Petroleum Products)	— INEC — Electoral Ad-hoc Staff — Logistics Institutions (NURTW, Marine Workers, etc.) — NNPCL, etc. — Security Forces
2	Voting and Counting of Results into the Night	— INEC, — Ad-hoc Staff and — Logistics Institutions
3	Electoral technology - BVAS Performance	— INEC — Electoral ICT Suppliers
4	Late/Delayed Results upload to IReV	— INEC — Electoral Adhoc Staff

NO	ISSUE	RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDER
		— Electoral ICT Suppliers
5	IReV Management and Access	— INEC — Electoral ICT Suppliers/Consultant
6	Maladministration at the PUs/ Poor Ad-hoc Staff Performance	— Electoral Adhoc Staff — NYSC — Universities / School System
7	Weak Political Party Agents Management	— Political Parties — Candidates
8	Poor Knowledge of Legal Framework by Stakeholders	— Political Parties — Candidates — Civil Society — INEC Staff — Electorate — Citizens — Media — The Ministry of Information — National Orientation Agency
9	Electoral Violence	— Security Agencies — Political Parties and Candidates — Political Party Supporters — Citizens
10	Election Related-Violence Against Women / Violence Against Women in Election	— Security Agencies — Political Parties and Candidates — Political Party Supporters — Citizens
11	Intimidation/Bullying	— Security Agencies — Political Parties and Candidates — Political Party Supporters — Electorates — Citizens
12	Voter Suppression	— Political Parties — Candidates — Security Agencies

NO	ISSUE	RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDER
13	Voter Turnout	— Political Parties and Candidates — Civil Society — The Media — Ministry of Information — National Orientation Agency — Electorate — INEC
14	Increased Participation of Urban/Middle-Class Citizens	— Political Parties and Candidates — Civil Society — The Media — Ministry of Information — National Orientation Agency — Electorate — INEC
15	Poor Institutional Strategic Communication	— INEC — Security Agencies
16	Misinformation/Disinformation	— Political Parties and Candidates — Media — Citizens/Public
17	Fake News	— Political Parties — Candidates — Media — CSOs — Electorate — Citizens/Public

Source: The Electoral Hub

Issues and challenges arising from the conduct of the 2023 general elections indict every responsible party over the flaws that characterised the process. From state ministries, departments and agencies to non-state institutions and the electorates, virtually everyone is culpable, or at minimum, complicit in the pervasive lacunae that bedevilled the contests at both the presidential/federal executive and governorship/state executive levels. This point is further buttressed by the figures below showing electoral accountability duty-bearers as well as the key stakeholders in electoral security:

Figure 6: Stakeholders for Election Security



Source: The Electoral Hub[257]

This culpability or irresponsibility of critical stakeholders portends severe limitations in the effectiveness of elections as an instrument for ensuring public accountability. More so, it creates a need for a shift from the traditional focus on INEC to a more elaborate concern over the functionality of all electoral stakeholders and their accountability for the performance or non-performance of their electoral responsibilities.

[257] https://electoralhub.iriadng.org/infographics

Conclusion:
Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

The 2023 General Election, though characterised by some improvements on previous electoral experiences in Nigeria, had a number of negative issues. Gains arising from the adoption of technology and increased pre-election civic engagement were counteracted by a long list of challenges including electoral malpractice, voter intimidation, electoral violence, misinformation and disinformation, and logistics issues amongst others. There were also pre-election factors that had an adverse impact on the election. These factors include the appointment of key electoral staff close to the elections, the appointment of partisan persons into the Commission, fuel scarcity, currency scarcity, poor economy, pervasive insecurity, a deeply divided society, growing numbers of IDPs, electoral violence, attacks on candidates, political rivalries, and internal divisions, overt support for candidates by religious leaders, compromised and fractured civil society and the postponement of the Enugu East Senatorial election as a result of the death of a candidate.

While the elections conducted on 25th February and 11th March were both characterised by serious anomalies, the state level elections (Governorship and State Assemblies) were worse as they were adversely impacted by the outcome of the national elections. The post-presidential election period witnessed widespread citizen disillusionment and trust issues arising from challenges with the upload of presidential results to the IReV portal and intensification of efforts by state-level political actors to secure victory at all costs in the governorship and state assemblies' elections. The outcome was a repeat and even intensification of the panoply of challenges that marked the presidential contest.

11.1 Lessons Learnt

Issues observed in the 2023 general elections provide far-reaching lessons to inform the planning and conduct of future elections in Nigeria. These lessons are broadly discussed below:

i. **Collaboration is essential:** The experiences in the 2023 election cycle analysed in this report highlight the need for various stakeholders, including political parties, electoral bodies, and civil society, to work together to ensure a smooth and fair electoral process. The electoral process begins with the pre-election phase involves activities such as legal reforms, research, voter registration, candidates' nomination, voter education and information, civics, election campaigns, and media coverage of the electoral process. The activities at this phase involve different actors and stakeholders. For instance, the EMB takes charge of voter registration. Candidates

are nominated by their respective political parties. Voter education and mobilization falls within the purview of multiple actors including the EMB, political parties, civil society organisations, and even the executive as well as the Ministry of Information and National Orientation Agency. Election campaigns are conducted by political parties, and the media handles media coverage.

During the election phase, major activities include political campaigns, observers' accreditation, deployment of election materials, opening and closing of polls, security conduct, conduct of party agents, and vote counting process. Multiple actors are also involved in this phase. For example, the electoral umpire provides election materials, and logistics agencies and institutions are contracted to transport these materials to and from where they are needed. The effectiveness of logistical arrangements influences the opening and closing of polls, thus making it a collective responsibility of both logistics' agencies and election officials. More so, various security agencies take charge of election security.

In the post-election phase, the election management body manage the results process, conduct electoral audits and evaluation, and where there are disputes with election results, the judiciary, consisting of the election petition tribunals and the relevant appellate courts resolve them and makes verdicts which sometimes, influence the outcome of the process.

ii. **Strengthening political parties is important:** The 2023 general elections underscored the significance of strong and well-organised political parties in presenting clear platforms, fostering healthy competition, and offering voters distinct choices. There were too many incidences of double nomination or candidate substitution from legislative seats to the presidency which heated up the polity and led to litigation. INEC imposed stiffer conditions for registration of Parties and deregistered many for not meeting current criteria. Thus far, the 2023 General Elections, though having only 18 political parties, has been the most competitive since 1999. In comparison to the 2019 Elections which had 73 political parties, besides being more competitive, the 2023 Elections had a much more positive level of citizen engagement. However, there is still need to further strengthen political parties and voters' distinct choices through electoral laws and INEC regulations for political parties.

iii. **Adaptation and flexibility are important**: The experience in 2023 also emphasises the need for bringing adaptability and flexibility in election planning and implementation to the fore. This was particularly highlighted by the adoption of

election technology and the accompanying need for the public to adapt to its use. Similarly, electoral officers are required to show adaptability and flexibility in virtually all aspects of the electoral process, especially when confronted with unanticipated difficulties. Thorough screening and training of prospective ad-hoc staff may would to improvements.

iv. **Technological innovations are important but they must be well-managed:** The use of technology, while beneficial for enhancing efficiency, emphasises the necessity for careful planning and management. This was clear from the 2023 General Election. INEC deployed the BVAS and IReV in the hope of enhancing electoral transparency and promoting public trust in the process. But there was poor management of challenges with upload of presidential election results during the election. This became a key issue in evaluating the election, and a recurring theme in post-election discourses and litigation.

v. **Strategic communications matter:** Effective communication of policies, plans, and positions are crucial for shaping public opinion. Strategic communication ("a method of delivering calculated, purposeful content intentionally. Thus, communicating the best message, through the correct channels, *to the right people, at the right time* and using feedback from this process to stay focused on goals"[258]) is very important tool for managing electoral expectations and addressing both anticipated and unanticipated challenges throughout the electoral cycle. This point became very glaring during the 2023 General Election, the EMB had heightened public expectations, which it did not managed properly and timely, especially following the failure to upload the results of the presidential election onto the IReV portal. Also, difficulties experienced by voters in locating their new polling units and poor understanding of the role of IReV in the election would have been adequately addressed with strategic communication. These issues with strategic communication resulted in public disenchantment and mistrust of in the electoral process and the EMB

vi. **Perception matters:** The 2023 General Elections showed the importance of public perception for successful electoral conduct. Participation and citizens' engagement with the electoral process are largely determined by their perception about the electoral process/EMB, candidates as well as the stakeholders involved. Specifically, the mistrust which characterised citizens' perception of INEC was markedly palpable following the failure of the BVAS to transmit PU presidential

[258] https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/strategic-communications/

election results to the IReV portal. This sadly, overwhelmingly overrides all other positives of the election in a huge percentage of public.

vii. **Accountability matters:** Issues identified in the 2023 general elections and the analyses presented in this report show that accountability is a critical factor necessary for guaranteeing successful elections. The exclusive focus on INEC has blindsided many on the reality of the multiple stakeholders that are required and which should be held accountable for ensuring successful elections. The failure of the IReV portal, security issues, logistic delays, and other issues that characterised the elections are all indicative of the urgent need for the various stakeholders in charge of each of these to be held accountable.

viii. **Leadership matters:** Leadership at various levels plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality and credibility of elections. Leaders influence the process, and the actions of followers are often attuned to the direction provided by leaders. The 2023 General Election provided ample evidence of this. During the pre-election campaigns, statements made by political aspirants exerted tremendous influence on followers. Although elections in Nigeria have almost always been ethnicised, the reported statement by Atiku that Northerners need someone from the North,[259] contributed to fueling the ethnic concerns in an election that was already ethnically charged. Similarly, statements by Tinubu of the APC that if gaining power requires fighting for, "one should grab it, snatch it and run with it",[260] cannot be extricated from the pockets of violence experience during the contest.

More so, the declaration by Peter Obi of the Labour Party of his intent to address his contentions about the Elections via the courts served to calm his supporters and discourage them from taking to the streets in protest.

ix. **The socio-political context in which elections take place is important:** Elections do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they are influenced by the broader socio-cultural and political environment in which they take place. The 2023 General Elections was, therefore, not conducted in isolation from the social, cultural and political context of the Nigerian state and society. Where parochialism, ignorance and poverty persist, as was the case in several locations observed in the 2023 General

[259] https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/15/northerners-dont-need-yoruba-or-igbo-candidates-they-need-me-pdp-candidate-atiku-plays, https://www.channelstv.com/2022/10/16/2023-northerners-need-someone-from-north-not-igbo-or-yoruba-atiku/
[260] https://www.tracknews.ng/politics/snatch-it-and-run-with-it-tinubu-advises-team-members-on-how-to-gain-power-at-any-cost/

Election, it is almost a given that electoral irregularities such as vote trading would be present. More so, the zero-sum nature of Nigerian politics and the pursuit of power for private interests by the political class ensures that electoral irregularities and malpractices are perpetrated despite best efforts at containing them. These all point to the pivotal place of the socio-political context in electoral conduct.

x. **Disruptive policies impact the process adversely:** This analysis of the 2023 general election has also revealed that state policies and programmes impact the electoral process. The specific experience with the Naira Redesign Policy was a major factor that affected diverse aspects of the electoral process, including logistics arrangements, voters' turnout, amongst others.

11.2 Recommendations and Advocacy Asks

Given these challenges and our analysis of the diverse stakeholders responsible for ensuring the credibility, quality and integrity elections, the following recommendations are proposed:

11.2.1 INEC

- INEC should strengthen its strategic communication to ensure good crises management, as well as proactive and effective engagement with the stakeholders and the general public for delivery of successful elections.

- INEC should do more in deepening capacity of permanent and ad-hoc staff to adequately carry out their electoral responsibilities.

- In compliance with Section 2(a) of the Electoral Act 2022, INEC should carry out extensive voter education about Election Day activities. This should include the electorate and citizens' responsibilities to safeguard electoral integrity and compliance with legal provisions such as inclusivity and priority voting.

- INEC should ensure all basic materials required in conducting elections are available for the electoral officials. For example, proper functioning pens or markers used for documenting election results.

- INEC should be more diligent in electoral logistics management to ensure timely electoral conduct. This is a persistent issue, that may not be completely eliminated because of the broader systemic challenges, but there is much room for improvement.

- INEC would do well to adequately inform persons who have been transferred to new PUs, particularly persons in rural areas who may have to travel long distances on foot or at great financial and time costs. This will bolster participation and improve electoral quality and credibility.
- INEC should adequately train ad-hoc staff on the use of technology to be deployed, such as the BVAS machine and effective results upload.
- INEC should make provisions for lighting to ensure the smooth running of the voting process in the event of voting not being concluded before dark.
- INEC should ensure that all staff employed possess adequate capacity to carry out their duties by screening and training them.
- INEC is presently legally responsible for prosecution of electoral offenders; it is clear INEC has its hands full just running the elections. Furthermore, INEC is not equipped for this, therefore as per the recommendations of the Justice Uwais ERC 2008 report, a separate body such as Electoral Offences Tribunal should be set up to handle prosecution of those suspected of electoral offences.

11.2.2 Political Parties/Politicians

- Political parties should discourage the trend of contesting election results in courts where there are no solid grounds for presenting such a claim.
- Opposition parties should campaign and engage the public more effectively, to increase voter choice, scrutiny of government and further strengthen the quality and credibility of the electoral process.
- Political parties should discourage their supporters from inciting violence and conflicts during elections (Section 93(1))
- Political parties and politicians should have adequate knowledge of the legal frameworks guiding electoral processes so as that have a better understanding of the electoral process.
- Political Parties and politicians should be forced to publicise their Manifestos and Presidential and legislature candidates at state and federal level should be forced to give at televised Speeches outlining their policies and ideology. They should also be forced to participate in debates, with no proxies allowed. This gives the electorate

an opportunity to see what candidates are made of and gives rise to more issues-based campaigns.

- Politicians should refrain from using statements that could incite violence as this contravenes Section 91(2) of the Electoral Act and is likely to jeopardize the credibility of the electoral process.
- Political parties/politicians should adhere strictly to the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022, especially those contained in Part V (Sections 75 to 97) which border directly on political parties' conduct.

11.2.3 Security Agents

- Security agents should develop strategies to protect electoral officials/electoral materials as well as voters. This should be done in compliance with Section (104) of the Electoral Act.
- Security agents should do more to ensure that electoral offenders are arrested. There should be specific compliance with the provisions of Section 104(v) of the Electoral Act which empowers security agencies to arrest any person constituting disturbance or preventing the smooth conduct of the polls.
- Institutions responsible for prosecuting electoral offenders should ensure that they are prosecuted. However, the Justice Uwais led ERC 2008 recommended a separate Electoral Offences Commission be set up.
- Security agencies should strategise on how to create a balance between protecting voters, electoral officials/electoral materials and not intimidating the voters.
- ICCES has become an institutional part of the election process. It should be used more effectively to get the security agencies to harness their powers to fulfill their roles properly during election. This includes, ensuring security personnel undergo training on election procedure and offences.

11.2.4 The Executive Branch

- Maintain neutrality in political contests to ensure an even playing field for all parties and candidates as a step towards enhancing the credibility of the electoral process.
- Avoid interference in the operations and activities of INEC and ensure that all appointments to the electoral commission are equitable, transparent and merit-based.

- Relevant ministries, departments and agencies should provide optimal support for the electoral commission and other electoral governance bodies to act against threats to the credibility of the electoral process.
- Relevant governmental ministries, departments and agencies should avoid the initiation and implementation of policies with disruptive capacity during electioneering periods.

11.2.5 The National Assembly

- Both Houses of the National Assembly should pass the Electoral Offices (Establishment) Commission Bill with innovative modification that addresses the issues of cost of governance (so moderate membership of the commission) and powers of attorney general over the commission. The Commission should also be well resourced (technical and financial capacity), as it is a critical step towards containing electoral malpractices and impunity experienced in the 2023 general election.
- There should be a review of extant electoral legislative framework, including constitutional provisions on party and electoral politics, taking into account recommendations of the Uwais Election Review Committee, such as unbundling INEC, to create (a) a political parties registration and regulatory commission, (b) a constituency delimitation commission; and (c) an electoral offenses commission, and for all election adjudication cases over disputed election results to be completed before elected public office holder are sworn in.
- Similarly, the review needs to be robust enough to empower INEC to effectively carry out its responsibilities. E.g., INEC has powers to register and monitor political parties and primary elections, but it cannot regulate parties or candidates effectively. Many issues have to be challenged in court by the party or persons affected such as whether or not a candidate is qualified to stand for election. Despite the fact that after winning the nomination, a candidate's credentials are submitted to INEC.
- The legislative houses should demand and ensure accountability from all relevant electoral governance bodies, including INEC, political parties, and security agencies amongst others as part of its oversight responsibility.

11.2.6 Electoral Officers and Ad-Hoc Staff

– Electoral Officers and Ad-hoc staff should pay attention to learning when undergoing training for the Election Day job to avoid mistakes like improperly

placed cubicles or improperly pasted voter lists. INEC would do well to provide ad-hoc staff with soft and hard copy manuals and checklists for field operations.

- Electoral Officers and Ad-hoc staff should be diligent in carrying out their duties as errors can undermine the integrity and credibility of elections.

11.2.7 CSOs, Media, and National Orientation Agency (NOA)

- CSOs, the media, and the NOA should engage in more effective civic and voter education to raise awareness and public interest in the electoral process.
- The troika should launch an awareness-raising campaign well before Election Day, to ensure citizens do not only come out to vote on Election Day but vote properly thereby minimising cases of invalid votes.
- The troika should also work collaboratively in addressing the menace of hate statements which portends danger to stability and peace.
- CSOs and the media should deepen education and enlightenment about the legal electoral frameworks specially focus on issues of inclusivity such as priority voting etc.
- CSOs, the media, NOA, in collaboration with INEC should ensure that relevant information about the electoral process is effectively disseminated.
- CSOs, the media, and NOA should engage in more effective civic and voter education that is focused on electoral civics, human rights, democratic participation and inclusion.
- CSOs should do more in the area of fact-check information circulating in the public to address issues of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news

11.2.8 The Electorates

The electorate should assume an actively civic engagement with the general democratic institutions and process generally in the country. Doing this requires that citizens should:

- Actively participate in the electoral process by coming out en masse to vote as a matter of human rights as well as key stakeholder with responsibility for successful elections.

- Desist from spreading fake news and misinformation as these have severe adverse implications for the electoral process, its quality and outcomes as well as peace and stability.

- Support the security agencies in mitigating violence and chaos that can disrupt the electoral process.
- Actively seek knowledge of the legal frameworks guiding elections so as to have a better understanding of the electoral process.
- Engage the electoral process so as to have adequate knowledge of the happenings in the electoral process.
- Verify and fact-check every piece of information before sharing to avoid the spread of fake news and misinformation.
- Refrain from any form of ethnic profiling and baiting as this could precipitate disenfranchisement of voters, give unfair advantages to contestants and undermine the credibility of the entire electoral process.

INITIATIVE FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ADVOCACY IN DEVELOPMENT

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THE ELECTORAL HUB

..promoting electoral knowledge, accountability and intergrity.

About The Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub is an affiliate of IRIAD. It is committed to promoting electoral knowledge, integrity, and accountability in Nigeria. Our aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of data, critical and contextualized analysis, and solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. The Electoral Hub is conceptualized to complement the roles and activities of the different institutions, stakeholders, and drivers of the electoral process and governance by providing back-end support services to stakeholders and institutions of the electoral process.

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