

**Electoral Fraud and Crises of Democratic Consolidation in Southwestern Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the challenges of electoral fraud, causes and its impacts in Southwestern Nigeria. It discusses the implications of fraudulent electoral process on electoral governance, public policy, and democratic consolidation. With 29,835,038 population from Lagos, Oyo, and Ondo states, the study purposively used Taro Yamane formula to select 123 respondents (rounded up to the nearest figure). This made 41 respondents for each state with (15) electorates, (10) political party members, (6) media practitioners, (5) public officials and (5) civil society organizations. Secondary data were from academic journals and other publications. Presentation of results were with descriptive methods and Relative Important Index (RII) for testing the hypothesis, with a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher as acceptable. The study adopted content analysis for the secondary data. Findings revealed that electoral fraud was due to corruption, permissive election laws, inadequate enforcement, and poor voter education and cultural beliefs. Electoral fraud erodes the credibility of democracy, creates political instability, and threatens the legitimacy of elected authorities. The study discusses the implications of electoral fraud on security, voter education, implementation of electoral laws, and empowerment of citizens with the right electoral value, modernizing the electoral system, autonomy for the electoral body and effective oversight by the National Assembly. The study concluded that there is need for proactive initiatives that would address loopholes of electoral fraud.*

**Keywords:** Elections, Electoral fraud, Electoral process, Electoral credibility, Democratic consolidation

**Introduction**

Credible elections are veritable instruments for determining the integrity of a democratic regime. With the return to democratic rule about twenty-five years ago in May 29, 1999, Nigerians ought to have put their concerns on how to conduct credible elections devoid of violence behind them. Unfortunately, the conduct of elections in Nigeria are still equivalent with violence or war after long years of continuous civil transition. Regrettably, many Nigerians have chosen to stay away from voting. A number of Nigerians deliberately disenfranchised themselves because they have no confidence in the process, and see the exercise as a waste of time.



There are pre- and post-election frauds that range from multiple and forced registration, vote buying, voter intimidation, ballot box snatching and stuffing to false declaration of winners<sup>1</sup>. To use the words of Yusuf & Zaheruddin<sup>2</sup>, elections with integrity are instruments for empowering women, fighting corruption, delivering services to the poor, improving governance, and ending civil wars. If a country conduct election with integrity, they resolve conflict amicably<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, and sadly, electoral fraud weakens the authority of democratic institutions and undermines public confidence<sup>4</sup>. Even though it is not possible to have elections that are completely free and fair, yet people should have confidence in the process of all elections.

In Nigeria, the conduct of elections has been a serious challenge and has negatively affected the country's democratic journey. Elections in Nigeria are associated with fears, insecurity of lives and property<sup>5</sup>. Since 1999 and 2023, the conduct of Nigerian elections has fallen below expectation. Several irregularities threaten the conduct of elections in Nigeria in a manner that democratic stability is becoming uncertain<sup>6,7</sup>. Electoral fraud has been a major obstacle to the consolidation of democracy and the magnitude of electoral fraud has risen because political elite exploits the gullibility of poverty-stricken Nigerians<sup>8</sup>. The legislature, executive, political parties, and candidates do not keep to rules set for the conduct of the elections<sup>9</sup>.

Electoral fraud refers to dishonest and illegal activities that subvert the electoral process and influence its outcomes. The 2015 general election was one of the most heavily monetized elections with the two leading candidates trying to outspend each other. There was open vote buying brazenly carried out during the 2015 and 2019 elections and in some cases with electoral officials and security agents<sup>10</sup>. Although, the Independent National Electoral Commission has made several reforms including the Justice Uwais Commission of 2007/2008, the 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2022 Electoral Acts to improve the electoral process. However, the reforms have not satisfactorily addressed

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<sup>1</sup> Adesote, A. S. and Abimbola, J. O. Electoral violence and survival of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A historical perspective. *Canadian Social Science*, 10(3), 140-148, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Yussuf, M. and Zaheruddin, T. Money, politics and electoral violence in Nigeria. Abuja: Garkida Press, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Preye, Z. O. and Abeki, O. Rethinking Democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Democracy*, 8 (4), 132-147, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Okechukwu, D. Why electoral malpractices generate pressures for electoral reform: An agenda-setting model, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Tsuwa, J., Agaigbe, F. and Shaibume, B. Election fraud and political stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Abubakar, S. (2022). Electoral corruption. Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (IDCR) Briefing Paper, 2022

<sup>7</sup> Ejikeme, L. W. and Lawal, B. T. Mechanisms and Implications of Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 4(1), 14–23, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Ugwuala, A. Z. Electoral reforms and democratic stability in Nigeria. *International Journal of Democratic and Development Studies*, 2(2), 23-30, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Abubakar, S. Electoral corruption. Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (IDCR) Briefing Paper, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Adigun, T. Y. Challenges of Manual Inputs of Elections in Southwestern Nigeria, *Lana Interdisciplinary Journal*, 2019

electoral fraud, especially ballot snatching, over-voting, multiple registration/voting, and lack of confidence in the election management body, which have become a serial menace to Nigeria's electoral process.<sup>1112</sup>. Sadly, some politicians that are able to raise large sums of money often buy votes and manipulate the electoral process. Although, no politician is entirely free from the use of monetary and material inducement during elections, the trajectories of electoral fraud are more associated with the use of incumbent power and position to intimidate voters, buy electoral officials, influence security agents, and divert electoral materials. Democratic consolidation is a way of reducing democratic uncertainty by normalizing behavior and institutions. Normalization involves broadening the range of opportunities for citizens, advancing democratic citizenship and civic life, expanding leadership development and education, and other functions of civil society. It deals with governmental administration about accountability, transparency, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and bureaucracy.

Democratic consolidation ought to constitute a tangible hallmark to acquaint the masses with the required political norms<sup>13</sup>. Achieving a consolidated democracy requires good governance, democratic values of popular participation, rule of law, free and fair elections, and the independence of the judiciary<sup>14</sup>. This study investigates the challenges of consolidation of democracy in Nigerian via electoral fraud. Given the level of fraud in Nigeria's electoral process and its dangers on democratic consolidation, this study interrogates its implications for electoral governance, public policy and democratic consolidation.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Examine the factors that account for electoral fraud in Southwestern Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the socio-political, economic, and institutional factors contributing to electoral fraud in the study area.
- iii. Discuss the impact of electoral fraud on democratic consolidation in the study area.

### Research Questions

The following questions serve as guide to this study:

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<sup>11</sup> Abubakar, S. Electoral corruption. Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (IDCR) Briefing Paper, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ovwasa, O. L. and Abdullahi, M. Democratic transition in Nigeria; Trends and prospects since 1999. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 8, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> . David, K. The Menace of Elections in Selected West African Countries, United Nations Elections Reports, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Oni, E. O. The challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, 1999-2007. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 5(5), 1-29, 2014

- i. What are the factors that contribute to electoral fraud in Southwestern Nigeria?
- ii. What are the impacts of electoral fraud on democratic consolidation in the study area?
- iii. What are the impacts of electoral fraud on the legitimacy of elected officials and democratic institutions in Southwestern Nigeria?

### Hypotheses of the Study

Electoral fraud is responsible for the crisis of democratic consolidation in Southwestern Nigeria

### Methodology

This research is a descriptive design. It employed quantitative data with the use of questionnaire. The research purposively focused on Southwestern Nigeria, which consists of six states to allow for a robust and deep probe into electoral fraud. The study purposively selected three of the six states because of their geographical heterogeneity, which were Lagos, Oyo, and Ondo states. The population of the study were stakeholders in electoral processes in Southwestern Nigeria, including political party members, electoral commission officers, electorates, public officials, media, civil society organizations, and others. This study employed simple random sampling on individuals from southwest states Nigeria, who have been involved in elections in Nigeria. The questionnaire was in sections and addressed factors contributing to electoral fraud, impacts on democratic consolidation, and effects on the legitimacy of elected officials and democratic institutions. The first section of the questionnaire covered demographic characteristics of respondents such as sex, age, and other relevant details. The other three sections covered the objectives of the study. Responses across the last three sections were in five-point Likert scale: "Strongly agree (5)," "Agree (4)," "Undecided (3)," "Disagree (2)," and "Strongly disagree (1)." The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane formula. We derived the sample size with a 9% margin of error and a confidence level of 91%. The formula is  $n = \frac{1}{1 + N(e^2)}$  N

Where:

n= Sampling size

N= Population size

e= Margin of error (expressed as decimal)

Given:

N= Lagos' population - 16,536,018

Oyo's population - 7,976,100

Ondo's population - 5,322,920

29,835,038 (population size)

e= 9%

First, we need to convert the margin of error from a percentage to a decimal:

$e = \frac{9}{100} = 0.09$

Now, we can plug the values into the formula:

$n = \frac{29,835,038}{1 + 29,835,038 \times (0.09^2)}$

$$n = 29,835,038 / 1 + 29,835,038 \times 0.0081$$

$$n = 29,835,038 / 1 + 241,663.807$$

$$n = 29,835,038 / 241,664.807$$

$$n = 123.456$$

The sample size (rounded up to the nearest whole number) with the population of 29,835,038 from Lagos, Oyo, and Ondo states was approximately 123. This made 41 respondents for each state and included (15) electorates, (10) political party members, (6) media practitioners, (5) public officials and (5) civil society organizations. Additionally, we sourced secondary data from academic journals and other relevant publications. We used descriptive methods such as frequency distribution and percentages for presentation of results and Relative Important Index (RII) for testing the only hypothesis. We considered a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher as acceptable. The study adopted thematic content analysis for the secondary data in line with its objectives.

### Literature Review

Nigeria's desires to consolidate its democracy since 29 May 1999 appears difficult due to challenge of electoral fraud. The electoral process that should consolidate democracy has a mockery of itself. Elections are a crucial component of democracy that should facilitate the transfer of power from one government to another. Elections mean the methods and procedures by which the voting population determines which individuals and political groups will govern the nation<sup>15</sup>. Elections occupy a significant position in conflict-ridden, autocratic, and democratic nations because they serve as mechanisms for transiting from the harsh realities of war to a condition of civility. Elections also offer people the freedom and opportunity to establish legitimacy for government<sup>16</sup>.

In stable democracies, election helps to reinforce established system<sup>17</sup>. The political and democratic institutions in Nigeria are fragile and suffer from a lack of democratic culture among its citizens<sup>18</sup>. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) convers the conduct elections on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The governing political party's excessive behaviour in influencing the election process results in several crises<sup>19</sup>. The experiences preceding and following the 2011 elections indicated that Nigeria's democracy has advanced significantly. The electoral umpire, led

<sup>15</sup> Aniekwe, T. O. and Kushie, M. K. Freeing African States from Electoral Manipulation: Issues, Challenges and Ways Out. *Journal of Political Science and Good Governance*, 9 (3), 14-22, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Sisk, A. Fundamentals of electoral process. In *Conduct of elections across the globe*. Lagos: Adflux Press, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Majekodunmi, R., and Adejuwon, K. D. Electoral administration and the consolidation of democracy: An overview of the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences*, 2(5), 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Ojukwu, C., and Oni, E. Ethnicity and political transition programmes in Nigeria, 1960-1999. *Journal of African Elections*, 15(2), 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Ayoade, J. Godfather politics in Nigeria. In *money politics and corruption in Nigeria*. Abuja: IFES Nigeria Election Support Programme, 2018.

by Professor Attahiru Jega, accomplished a groundbreaking success in restructuring and entirely redesigning Nigeria's electoral system.

The purpose of the initiative was to eliminate corruption in the electoral process and reinforce the role of a competent and impartial umpire in the management of election.

### **Conceptualizing electoral fraud**

Electoral fraud is an illicit intervention in the electoral process. Fraudulent activities entail manipulating vote counts in order to achieve a certain election result. This could be by boosting the vote percentage of the preferred candidate, decreasing the vote share of the opposing candidate, or both. Electoral fraud encompasses many illicit activities such as manipulation, violence, abduction, murder, counterfeiting of electoral documents and outcomes, among other tactics. Nevertheless, this practice occurs in almost all democratic societies, although the degree to which it is effectively regulated directly impacts the political and economic progress of the populace. In Nigeria, the prevalence of election fraud is no doubt extensive. Election fraud occurs when one political party or candidate manipulates the electoral process for his own benefit<sup>20</sup>.

Even the promulgation of electoral laws, can be used by a partisan administration. The primary goal of election fraud is to thwart democratic hopes and dreams of those who have cast ballots. There are several forms of election fraud in Nigeria. In the view of Ibrahim<sup>21</sup>, the followings are forms of electoral fraud:

Fictitious names on voter's register, abusing voter registration, printing fake voter register, stealing ballot boxes and stuffing them with fake ballots, falsification of results, illegal thumb-printing, underage voting, printing fake forms for collation and declaration of results, not intentionally providing election materials to certain areas, announcing results in places where elections did not hold, un-authorized announcement of results, harassment of candidates, agents, and voters, changing the list of electoral officials, and ballot box-switching.

The term "election rigging" in the Nigerian context describes the practice of manipulating the results of an election in order to seize control of the government.

Two frameworks, which are inclusive and restrictive, distinguish behaviours that damage the democratic process. In spite of the lack of uniformity, they advocated for an encompassing definition that included fraud, misconduct, and

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<sup>20</sup> Kurfi, J. Nigerian general elections 1951-2003: My roles and reminiscences. Abuja: Spectrum Books, 2018

<sup>21</sup> Ibrahim, J. Ethno-religious mobilisation and sapping of democracy in Nigeria. In J. Hyslop (Ed.), African democracy in the age of globalisation. Witwater-Rand University Press, 2007.

manipulation. To identify fraud, one might look at whether it breaches current domestic legal rules; this is an example of a restrictive approach. There are three distinct waves of electoral fraud malpractices<sup>22</sup>. Those that occur before, during, and after the election. Changing the rules, influencing voters and changing the results of elections. Electoral umpire can manipulate electoral laws in favour of a particular party or candidate. The second kind involves changing voters' choices at the polls by using intimidation or vote buying to boost the turnout of a certain political party. Vote stuffing, inaccurate reporting, inadequate voting facilities in opposition strongholds, biased court adjudication, and other forms of electoral maladministration constitute voting manipulation<sup>23</sup>. Voting is a citizen rights that every person should participate in for the benefit of society. In Nigeria, politicians use the situation as a ploy to justify the immoral practice of forcing civilians to vote for them amidst widespread election fraud<sup>24</sup>. This is a curse for the voter.

### Phases of electoral fraud

There are three phases of electoral fraud. They are before, during and after the elections. For instance, electoral fraud that occur before the election takes place include:

selecting loyal electoral officials to the current governing authority; fabricating registration papers and voter cards; exaggerating the number of registered voters in a particular location that is one's strongholds, deliberately reducing the number of registered voters in the seats of opponents; registration of several entities or individuals, invalidation of opposition candidate; restricting opponents from expressing their sentiments, threats to their lives during registration<sup>25</sup> & <sup>26</sup>.

During elections, there is often collaboration between politicians and officials of the Electoral Commission, including presiding officers, supervisory presiding officers, ward returning officers, and polling clerks. Politicians at times buy the ad-hoc staff of electoral body with material incentives such as money, food, drinks, and promises of government appointments. They fraudulently fill ballot boxes with ineligible voters by marking the names of voters and using agents to provide thumbprints. Voting materials are sometimes taking to a private household, where individuals would securely mark their vote papers with their

<sup>22</sup> Ugwuala, A. Z. Electoral reforms and democratic stability in Nigeria. *International Journal of Democratic and Development Studies*, 2(2), 23-30, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Olawole, O., Adewunmi, E. F., & Oluwole, E. Electoral malpractices and problems in Africa: A critical analysis. *Journal of Research and Development*, 1(6), 11-24, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Mapuva, J. (2016). Elections and electoral processes in Africa: A gimmick or a curse? *African Journal of History and Culture*, 5(5), 87-9, 2016

<sup>25</sup> Nnaa, B. G. The election and incidence of rigging. Undergraduate Seminar, University of Port Harcourt, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Okolie, A. M. The state, electoral fraud and the illusion of participatory democracy in Africa: Lessons from the 2007 general elections in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*. Lagos: NIIA Publication, 2018.

thumbprints. The police engage in fraudulent activities during elections by providing cover for some candidates over their opponents. Touts engaged to harass and intimidate voters in the opponent's territories. After the elections, there is manipulation of election results from several polling stations or false declaration of election results by electoral officials. Politicians collude with some judges to subvert objections that are unfavourable to them.

### **The concept of democratic consolidation**

Democratic consolidation refers to a distinct stage in the shift from authoritarian governance to civil governance. Generally, it is the process of deepening democratic institutions with a view to having a stable, institutional, and long-lasting democracy.

To achieve democratic consolidation, it is necessary to establish democracy as the fundamental system. To do this involves creating the necessary institutions, culture, support system, and collective determination. In addition, it is necessary to cultivate democratic ideals, principles, and institutions that avoid a return to authoritarian rule. A robust and vibrant civil society that bears the duty of monitoring and preventing abuse of power, oppression and exploitation is vital. This entails holding public officials responsible for their acts and inactions in the administration of public resources.

Democratic consolidation is on the enhancement of political institutions. This pertains to the management of government affairs concerning the principles of responsibility, openness, adherence to the constitution, legal governance, and administrative structure. It involves comprehending the willingness and adherence to both official and informal democratic institutions<sup>27</sup>. The quest for democratic consolidation requires that a democracy sustains and persists "well into the future"<sup>28</sup>. The primary emphasis is on the level of democracy within the post-transition political institutions and long-term stability. Specifically, the question is whether these institutions are susceptible to a resurgence of authoritarian control or whether they will demonstrate resilience and consolidation<sup>29</sup>. The process of consolidating democracy requires that citizen have access to, and cultivate a civic culture, leadership recruitment and training, and other roles that civil society fulfils.

### **Electoral fraud and democratic consolidation: any link?**

Given the plethora of explanation from the foregoing, it is evident that democratic consolidation should be rooted in adherence to democratic institutions. As a result, the principles of fairness, freedom, and credibility must prevail in all elections and at all times. In Nigeria, the fourth republic experiment is notable for being the first time a civilian administration has

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<sup>27</sup> Khorram-Manesh, N. Democratic consolidation in Sub-Saharan Africa. QOG Working Paper, January 1, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Valenzuela, B. T. Nigeria and democratic elections. JGGSDA, 2(3), 53-64, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Okoye, F. The prosecution of electoral offenders in Nigeria: Challenges and possibilities. Scholarly project. available from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10405.pdf>, 2017.



lasted for 25yrs years without military intervention, which is a noteworthy achievement. However, there are significant deficiencies in the implementation of democratic principles especially as regards the electoral process. The consequences of these manifests in lack of respect for electoral laws. These crises have led to electoral violence, ethnic and religious politics, widespread corruption and mismanagement, poverty, and a lack of internal democracy. These issues are apparent among incumbent political actors who use excessive money during elections<sup>30</sup>.

The electoral crises that have arisen because of the challenges above are due to technical and logistical difficulties<sup>31</sup>. However, for most politicians, the priority lies in winning the election rather than the harm that may result from electoral fraud. Nigerian politicians seek to either acquire an unjust edge over their opponents. They deliberately disrupt the process when they are not on the winning side. This hinders the development and solidification of Nigeria's democracy. The issues posed by corruption during elections are evident in the manipulation of electoral processes to secure political positions through illicit means. Corruption plays a significant role in these manipulations. Public officials often ignore accountability, transparency, and service delivery in their involvement in electoral matters, and sometimes with no aftermath sanction. Nigeria's inclusion in Transparency International's rankings consistently appear as highly corrupt nations.

It is accurate to say that corruption in our democratic system has been widespread, and blatant, and without shame. The consequences of such an action are evident in the deterioration of infrastructure and the enduring existence of extreme poverty among the Nigerian population. The poor electricity sector severely influenced the economy, and attributed to the misallocation and theft of government funds.

Manifestations of challenges that impede the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria are political and electoral violence. Political violence hinders fair competition, weakens political engagement and foster mediocrity. In addition, it generates dissatisfaction, animosity, and bitterness. This is one of the reasons while democratic principles are in danger in the hands of potentially powerful elites<sup>32</sup>. Electoral violence poses significant risks to the stability of democracy and undermines its consolidation. Democracy and peace are mutually reinforcing, with elections acting as the link between them. Elections serve the purpose of participation, legitimacy; peaceful transfer of power, and establishment of responsible government<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Ebegbulem, J. C. Credible elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: The moral imperatives. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 2(4), 246-250, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Osabiya, B. J. (2014). Nigeria and democratic elections. *JGGSDA*, 2(3), 53-64.

<sup>32</sup> Oni, E. O. (2014). The challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, 1999-2007. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 5(5), 1-29.

<sup>33</sup> Omotola, J. S. Explaining electoral violence in Africa's 'new' democracies. Revised version of a paper presented at the 27th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), Electoral Reform, Political Succession and Democratisation in Africa, held at Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, 2018.

### Gaps in the Literature

Investigation of electoral fraud and situating its impact on the crisis of democratic consolidation in Nigeria is needful to advance the country's democratization. Existing literature have not sufficiently probed into this discourse but provided a broad overview and limited analyses that did not consider the unique political, cultural, and historical contexts of the Southwestern Nigeria.

Some research studies acknowledged the role of international actors and foreign governments in influencing Nigerian elections<sup>34</sup>. Others provided general causes of electoral fraud<sup>35</sup> and<sup>36</sup> while<sup>37</sup> investigated technological advancements and its effectiveness in conducting elections in Nigeria. These studies employed qualitative research methods to sample the opinions of voters, local communities and critical stakeholders in understanding the roles of different actors in sabotaging technological innovation in the management of elections<sup>38</sup> and <sup>39</sup>. Other works used mixed methods to investigate perspectives and experiences of grassroots communities in relation to electoral fraud. However, research that delves into regional specific in the occurrence and nature of electoral fraud with a quantitative data would provide a more robust understanding of the crisis. Addressing these literature gaps is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of electoral fraud and the crisis of democratic consolidation in Nigeria in order to provide a more specific view of the challenges and implications for electoral governance in Nigeria.

### Data Presentation

This segment provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of data. The data analysis employed various statistical methods, including frequency distribution, simple percentages, and the Relative Importance Index (RII).

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<sup>34</sup> Hyde, S. D. The observer effect in international politics: Evidence from a natural experiment. *World Politics*, 63(4), 644–677, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Okoye, F. The prosecution of electoral offenders in Nigeria: Challenges and possibilities. Scholarly project. Available from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10405.pdf>, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> . Ebegbulem, J. C. Credible elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: The moral imperatives. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 2(4), 246-250, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Ekanem, O. The dialectics of underdevelopment and instability in Africa. *Calabar Journal of Politics and Administration*, 1(2), 52-66, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> . Diamond, L. Rethinking civil society: Towards democratic consolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 8, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Bratton, M., & Kimenyi, M. S. Voting in Kenya: Putting ethnicity in perspective. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2(2), 272-289, 2018.

**Table 1:** Demographic distribution of respondents

| Items              |                         | Percent age (%) |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Gender             | Male                    | 42.3            |
|                    | Female                  | 57.7            |
| Age                | 18-24 years             | 56.1            |
|                    | 25-34 years             | 25.2            |
|                    | 35-44 years             | 4.1             |
|                    | 45-54 years             | 11.4            |
|                    | 55-64 years             | 1.6             |
|                    | 65 years and above      | 1.6             |
| Occupation         | Student                 | 63.4            |
|                    | Employed                | 22              |
|                    | Self-employed           | 12.2            |
|                    | Retired                 | 1.6             |
|                    | Unemployed              | 0.8             |
| Educational Level  | Primary Education       | 0               |
|                    | Secondary Education     | 7.3             |
|                    | Tertiary Education      | 78.9            |
|                    | Post-graduate Education | 13.8            |
| State of Residence | Lagos State             | 33.3            |
|                    | Oyo State               | 33.3            |
|                    | Ondo State              | 33.3            |

Field Work, 2024

Table 1 above illustrates the demographic distribution of the respondents and presented in percentages. Among the respondents, 42.3% are male, and 57.7% are female. As regards their ages, 56.1% fall within the 18-24 age group, 25.2% are aged 25-34, 4.1% are 35-44 years old, 11.4% are 45-54 years old, and both the 55-64 years and 65 years and above categories have 1.6% each. About occupation, 63.4% of respondents are students, 22% have gainful jobs, 12.2% are self-employed, 1.6% are retired, and 0.8% are unemployed. Regarding educational level, 0% have just primary education, 7.3% have a secondary education, 78.9% have a tertiary education, and 13.8% have a post-graduate education. Concerning the state of residence, respondents are from three states, with 33.3% residing in Lagos State, 33.3% in Oyo State, and 33.3% in Ondo State.

**Table 2:** Factors responsible for electoral fraud in Southwestern Nigeria

| S/N | Statements  | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Undecided (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1   | Political parties and candidates often use their influence to manipulate election results.      | 52                 | 42.3      | 1.6           | 3.3          | 0.8                   |
| 2   | High levels of corruption among election officials contribute significantly to electoral fraud. | 51.2               | 44.7      | 3.3           | 0.8          | 0                     |
| 3   | Inadequate security during elections facilitates electoral fraud.                               | 35.8               | 52        | 6.5           | 5.7          | 0                     |
| 4   | Intimidation and violence against voters are major factors in electoral fraud.                  | 40.7               | 46.3      | 8.1           | 4.9          | 0                     |
| 5   | Flaw in the electoral system and processes are responsible for electoral fraud.                 | 35                 | 43.9      | 15.4          | 4.9          | 0.8                   |
| 6   | Lack of voter education and awareness contributes to the prevalence of electoral fraud.         | 33.3               | 51.2      | 6.5           | 6.5          | 2.4                   |

|   |  |      |      |     |     |     |
|---|--|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 7 | Offering of financial incentives or bribes to voters is a common cause of electoral fraud.   | 48   | 42.3 | 4.9 | 4.1 | 0.8 |
| 8 | Ineffective enforcement of electoral laws and regulations allows electoral fraud to persist. | 37.4 | 50.4 | 8.1 | 3.3 | 0.8 |

**Field Work, 2024**

Table 2 reveals the factors responsible for electoral fraud in Southwestern Nigeria. On whether political parties and candidates often use their influence to manipulate election results, 52% of respondents strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, 1.6% were undecided, 3.3% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed. Regarding the statement that high levels of corruption among election officials contribute significantly to electoral fraud, 51.2% strongly agreed, 44.7% agreed, 3.3% were undecided, 0.8% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. This implies that undue influence by political parties and corruption among election officials are major contributors to electoral fraud. As shown in Table 2, 35.8% of respondents strongly agreed, 52% agreed, 6.5% were undecided, 5.7% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed that inadequate security during elections facilitates electoral fraud. On the statement that intimidation and violence against voters are major factors in electoral fraud, 40.7% strongly agreed, 46.3% agreed, 8.1% were undecided, 4.9% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. This suggests that inadequate security and voter intimidation are important factors that facilitate electoral fraud. Furthermore, 35% of respondents strongly agreed, 43.9% agreed, 15.4% were undecided, 4.9% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed that flaw in the electoral system and processes are responsible for electoral fraud. Regarding the statement that lack of voter education and awareness contributes to the prevalence of electoral fraud, 33.3% strongly agreed, 51.2% agreed, 6.5% were undecided, 6.5% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disagreed. This indicates a belief that flaws in the electoral system and lack of voter education contribute to electoral fraud. On the perception that offering financial incentives or bribes to voters is a common cause of electoral fraud, 48% strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, 4.9% were undecided, 4.1% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed. Finally, 37.4% of respondents strongly agreed, 50.4% agreed, 8.1% were undecided, 3.3% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed that ineffective enforcement of electoral laws and regulations allows electoral fraud to persist. This implies that financial incentives and ineffective enforcement of laws are major contributors to electoral fraud. The analysis in Table 2 shows that various factors such as undue influence by political parties, corruption among election officials, inadequate security, and voter intimidation, flaw in the electoral system, lack of voter education, financial incentives, and ineffective enforcement of electoral laws significantly contribute to electoral fraud in Nigeria.

**Table 3: Socio-political, economic, and institutional factors contributing to electoral fraud**

| S/N | Statement   | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Undecided (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1   | Political parties and candidates have undue influence over electoral processes, contributing to electoral fraud.    | 33.3               | 50.4      | 8.1           | 6.5          | 1.6                   |
| 2   | Inadequate and poorly enforced electoral laws contribute to the prevalence of electoral fraud.                      | 37.4               | 55.3      | 4.9           | 2.4          | 0                     |
| 3   | Insufficient voter education and awareness programs contribute to the manipulation and fraud in elections.          | 31.7               | 54.5      | 9.8           | 4.1          | 0                     |
| 4   | High levels of corruption among election officials and politicians are significant contributors to electoral fraud. | 45.5               | 44.7      | 7.3           | 2.4          | 0                     |
| 5   | Inadequate security during elections facilitates electoral fraud and voter intimidation.                            | 30.9               | 56.9      | 6.5           | 4.9          | 0.8                   |
| 6   | Weaknesses in electoral institutions, such as lack of independence and resources, contribute to electoral fraud.    | 36.6               | 50.4      | 6.5           | 4.9          | 1.6                   |
| 7   | Cultural and social norms that tolerate or even encourage fraudulent practices contribute to electoral fraud.       | 32.5               | 52.8      | 10.6          | 3.3          | 0.8                   |

|   |   |      |      |     |     |   |
|---|---|------|------|-----|-----|---|
| 8 | Offering financial incentives or bribes to voters is a common practice that leads to electoral fraud. | 43.9 | 42.3 | 9.8 | 4.1 | 0 |
|---|---|------|------|-----|-----|---|

**Field Work, 2024**

Table 3 examines the socio-political, economic, and institutional factors contributing to electoral fraud. On whether political parties and candidates have undue influence over electoral processes, leading to electoral fraud, 33.3% of respondents strongly agreed, 50.4% agreed, 8.1% were undecided, 6.5% disagreed, and 1.6% strongly disagreed.

Regarding the statement that inadequate and poorly enforced electoral laws contribute to the prevalence of electoral fraud, 37.4% strongly agreed, 55.3% agreed, 4.9% were undecided, 2.4% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. This implies that factors such as undue influence by political parties and inadequate electoral laws contribute heavily to electoral fraud. As shown in Table 3, 31.7% of respondents strongly agreed, 54.5% agreed, 9.8% were undecided, 4.1% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed that insufficient voter education and awareness programs contribute to manipulation and fraud in elections. On the statement that high levels of corruption among election officials and politicians are significant contributors to electoral fraud, 45.5% strongly agreed, 44.7% agreed, 7.3% were undecided, 2.4% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. This suggests that corruption and lack of voter education are contributors to electoral fraud. Furthermore, 30.9% of respondents strongly agreed, 56.9% agreed, 6.5% were undecided, 4.9% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed that inadequate security during elections facilitates electoral fraud and voter intimidation. Regarding the statement that weaknesses in electoral institutions, such as lack of independence and resources, contribute to electoral fraud, 36.6% strongly agreed, 50.4% agreed, 6.5% were undecided, 4.9% disagreed, and 1.6% strongly disagreed. This indicates that inadequate security and weaknesses of electoral institutions are facilitate electoral fraud. On the perception that cultural and social norms that tolerate or encourage fraudulent practices contribute to electoral fraud, 32.5% strongly agreed, 52.8% agreed, 10.6% were undecided, 3.3% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed.

Finally, 43.9% of respondents strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, 9.8% were undecided, 4.1% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed that offering financial incentives or bribes to voters is a common practice leading to electoral fraud. This implies that cultural norms and financial incentives are also major contributors to electoral fraud. The analysis in Table 4.3 shows that various factors such as undue influence by political parties, inadequate electoral laws, insufficient voter education, and corruption among officials, inadequate security, and weaknesses in electoral institutions, cultural norms, and financial incentives significantly contribute to electoral fraud.

**Table 4: Impact of electoral fraud on democratic institutions, governance, and public trust**

| S/<br>N | Statements  | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Undecided (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) |
|---------|---|--------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1       | Electoral fraud leads to poor governance and ineffective policy implementation.         | 51.2               | 39        | 4.9           | 4.1          | 0.8                   |
| 2       | The prevalence of electoral fraud decreases public trust in the electoral process.      | 51.2               | 39.8      | 5.7           | 2.4          | 0.8                   |
| 3       | Electoral fraud contributes to political instability and conflict.                      | 43.9               | 43.1      | 8.9           | 4.1          | 0                     |
| 4       | Electoral fraud undermines legitimacy of democratic institutions                        | 39                 | 42.3      | 12.2          | 4.1          | 2.4                   |
| 5       | Widespread electoral fraud discourages voter participation and engagement.              | 53.7               | 33.3      | 5.7           | 4.9          | 2.4                   |
| 6       | Electoral fraud results in policy decisions that do not reflect the will of the people. | 43.1               | 39.8      | 10.6          | 4.9          | 1.6                   |
| 7       | Electoral fraud damages the overall perception of democracy in the country.             | 48.8               | 40.7      | 7.3           | 2.4          | 0.8                   |
| 8       | Electoral fraud poses legitimacy question on acceptance of elected officials            | 38.2               | 46.3      | 11.4          | 3.3          | 0.8                   |

Field Work, 2024



Table 4 above examines the impact of electoral fraud on democracy and public trust. On whether electoral fraud leads to poor governance and ineffective policy implementation, 51.2% of respondents strongly agreed, 39% agreed, 4.9% were undecided, 4.1% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed. Regarding the statement that the prevalence of electoral fraud decreases public trust in the electoral process, 51.2% strongly agreed, 39.8% agreed, 5.7% were undecided, 2.4% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed. This implies that electoral fraud results in poor governance and a lack of public trust in the electoral process. As shown in Table 4, 43.9% of respondents strongly agreed, 43.1% agreed, 8.9% were undecided, 4.1% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed that electoral fraud contributes to political instability and conflict. On whether electoral fraud undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions, 39% strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, 12.2% were undecided, 4.1% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disagreed. This suggests that electoral fraud contributes to political instability and undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions. In addition, 53.7% of respondents strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed, 5.7% were undecided, 4.9% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disagreed that widespread electoral fraud discourages voter participation and engagement. Regarding the statement that electoral fraud results in policy decisions that do not reflect the will of the people, 43.1% strongly agreed, 39.8% agreed, 10.6% were undecided, 4.9% disagreed, and 1.6% strongly disagreed. This indicates a belief that electoral fraud discourages voter participation and leads to unrepresentative policy decisions.

On the perception that electoral fraud damages the overall perception of democracy in the country, 48.8% strongly agreed, 40.7% agreed, 7.3% were undecided, 2.4% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed. Finally, 38.2% of respondents strongly agreed, 46.3% agreed, 11.4% were undecided, 3.3% disagreed, and 0.8% strongly disagreed that electoral fraud affects the legitimacy and acceptance of elected officials. This implies that electoral fraud damages the overall perception of democracy and affect the legitimacy and acceptance of elected officials. Overall, the analysis in Table 4 shows that electoral fraud has a significant negative impact on democracy and public trust, leading to poor governance, decreased public trust in the electoral process, political instability, and undermined legitimacy of democratic institutions.

**Electoral fraud is responsible for the crisis of democratic consolidation in Southwestern Nigeria**

**Table 5:** Test of Hypothesis

| R     | R Square | Adjusted Square | R | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|----------|-----------------|---|----------------------------|
| .6542 | .428     | .426            |   | 1.14285                    |

- a) Predictors (constant)
- b) Dependent Variable: Crisis of Democratic Consolidation

From the regression analysis result shown in Table 5, it was found that the R-value is 0.6542, R-square is 0.428, adjusted R-square is 0.426, and the standard error of the estimate is 1.14285. The value of R indicates a strong relationship between the observed and predicted values of the variables. In other words, the

R-value suggests that there is a significant relationship between electoral fraud and the crisis of democratic consolidation in Southwestern Nigeria. Thus, this finding supports the assumption that there is a significant relationship between electoral fraud and the crisis of democratic consolidation in Southwestern Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

This study establishes a connection between electoral fraud and the challenges of democratic consolidation in Southwestern Nigeria. Most times, political parties and candidates use electoral fraud to undermine the electoral process. Thus, corruption and manipulation of election process poses a danger to the integrity of elections and a stable democracy.<sup>40</sup>

Inadequate security during elections compromises the process. This is in tandem with the position of Arowolo and Aluko<sup>41</sup> that insecurity is a serious threat to electoral compromise. This is the more reason while<sup>42</sup> argued that polling stations with insufficient security officials could become targets for ballot box snatching, voter intimidation, and other forms of electoral malpractice. Voter intimidation and violence further exacerbate these issues, preventing voters from freely exercising their rights and distorting election outcomes. Such intimidation can range from threats and physical harm to coercion, all of which deter voters from participating in the electoral process. As a result, a safe environment it is imperative to conduct elections in order for voters to participate without fear, threat or molestation.

Cultural and social norms also influence attitudes of the people toward electoral process. Norms that tolerate or condone fraudulent behavior undermine the credibility of elections. To some politicians, electoral fraud is a means to an end, and is justified by the desire to secure political power at all cost. Thus, there is need to address the cultural challenge by promoting a civic culture among the voters. This finding tallies with the position of Diamond<sup>43</sup> that civic education awareness campaigns will promote honesty and accountability in electoral processes and drastically reduce electoral fraud. Financial incentives or bribes in electoral activities further compromise the integrity of elections. Candidates often use financial inducements to buy votes, influence the outcome of elections unfairly. Efforts to combat financial corruption should include stringent regulations, transparency in campaign financing, and enforcement mechanisms<sup>44</sup> and <sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Adesote, A. S., & Abimbola, J. O. Electoral violence and survival of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A historical perspective. *Canadian Social Science*, 10(3), 140-148, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Arowolo, D. E., & Aluko, O. A. Democracy, political participation and good governance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(3), 1-13, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Idike, A. N. Democracy and electoral process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects of e-voting options. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (AJHSS)*, 2(2), 122-149, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Diamond, L. Rethinking civil society: Towards democratic consolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 8, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Norris, P. Why electoral malpractices generate pressures for electoral reform: An agenda-setting model, 2017.

This also reinforces the argument of Aderonke<sup>46</sup> that implementation of strict campaign finance laws could reduce the influence of money during elections. As opined by Bratton and Kimenyi<sup>47</sup>, it is not the numbers of good laws made that matter but ability to enforce them. If electoral stakeholders resolve the challenges of insecurity, corruption, voter intimidation and cultural norms, we can enhance the credibility of elections in Nigeria. No doubt, democratic consolidation that would sustain citizens' free participation without undue influence or coercion is possible. An electoral system that is transparent encourages voter participation and trust<sup>48</sup>. This study has also established that electoral fraud leads to poor governance and ineffective policy implementation. Leaders elected through fraudulent means often lack the legitimacy necessary to govern effectively. As revealed by Sulaiman<sup>49</sup>, when elections are rigged, citizen's trust in the political system diminishes and results in apathy<sup>50</sup>.

### Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed insight into the obstacles that Nigeria voting system face. We have highlighted major worries regarding insecurity, use of incumbent power, money as bribes and corruption, voter coercion, inadequate voter awareness, and non-compliance with electoral laws. These problems, either as individual or collectively erode public confidence, results in ineffective governance, lower the morale of voters and subvert democratic consolidation.

### Implications for Electoral Governance, Democracy and Public Policy

This study poses a number of implications for electoral governance, democracy and public policy. It is important for Nigerian leaders to comply with measures in place against electoral corruption. Offering money or bribes to voters must become a criminal act. Nigeria needs to wake up by applying all laws that prohibit vote buying and impose strict punishments for offenders. Promoting openness in campaign funding can also lessen the impact of financial influence in the electoral process. There should be detailed background checks on election officials. Setting up independent groups to oversee the electoral process can also ensure openness and responsibility. Unless the country's

<sup>45</sup> Kurfi, J. Nigerian general elections 1951-2003: My roles and reminiscences. Abuja: Spectrum Books, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Aderonke, M. Democratisation and development in Nigeria: The fourth republic in perspective. *International Journal of Academic Research in Economics and Management*, 1(5), 26-45, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> . Bratton, M., & Kimenyi, M. S. Voting in Kenya: Putting ethnicity in perspective. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2(2), 272-289, 2018

<sup>48</sup> Adebayo, P., & Omotola, S. Public perception of the 2007 Nigeria's general elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 6(2), 201-216. <https://doi.org/10.20940/JAE/2007/v6i2a1>, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Sulaiman, A. O. Electoral reforms and democratic stability in Nigeria: A critical review of the 2022 electoral act, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> United States Institute of Peace. (2021). Côte d'Ivoire's political stalemate: A symptom of Africa's weak electoral institutions. Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB80%20Cote%20%27Ivorie%27s%20Political%20Stalemate.pdf>

electoral process is inbuilt in integrity, Nigeria would continue to be a mockery in her desires to foster democratic norms.

For Nigeria's electoral governance to be meaningful, security during electioneering period is vital to safeguard voters from coercion and violence, and ensuring a level playing field. A thorough revision of voting laws is important to give strict implementation to punishing electoral fraudsters. Insufficient security during elections allows fraud and voter intimidation. Improving security measures is vital to guarantee a fair voting process. There should be robust collaboration among the electoral umpire and security agents. Unbiased security agents at polling booths boost voter's confidence and strengthen democracy. Creating safe voting areas will protect voters from threats and violence, making sure they can vote much more with confidence. Nigeria needs to brace up with its policy of regular security outfits recruitment. Educating voters is crucial to equip them with imbining appropriate values to stand against deceitful electoral tactics. People should be free to express their views on electoral manipulations. Existing laws on electoral financing as beautifully crafted are mere paper works. How would a country put beautiful laws in place and unable to apply them? As good as most electoral laws are, they are disobeyed at wanton. INEC should be politically neutral and apply all extant laws on electoral process. Use of iREV should not be optional. If the laws are fully enforced, the country could avert fraudulent electoral activities.

Electoral finance should be in line with extant electoral laws for Nigeria to have a good standing in its democratic journey. Nigerians need to imbibe a civic culture that canvasses honesty, openness, fair play and transparency. It is important for Nigerian political leaders to embrace these qualities. By strengthening the legal system, Nigeria can build a more solid and transparent voting system. These initiatives should educate voters about their voting rights. Problems within the electoral system itself are a major concern. Regular evaluation of the electoral system is essential. Adopting new technologies, like biometric identification and digital voting, can help lower the risk of fraud. By updating the electoral system, Nigeria can govern its electoral process more with civility. The National Assembly should fulfil its oversight functions in this regard from time to time. The parliament needs to come up with a solid legislation that would grant "real" autonomy to the electoral umpire – INEC. It is important to ensure that INEC is adequately funded, independent, and have the necessary tools to conduct free and fair elections. Strengthening the institution will enhance the integrity of the electoral process and reduce the risk of fraud. INEC should be free from the control of the presidency in Nigeria.

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