

# ELECTORAL CORRUPTION AND GLOBAL IMAGE: AN ASSESSMENT OF NIGERIA'S 2023 GENERAL ELECTION

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## Abstract

Nigeria, a nation that has sought to solidify its strategic interests as a regional power in Africa and globally since gaining independence, has been severely disrupted and weakened by a series of image crises. Factors such as ineffective leadership, rampant political corruption, and flawed electoral processes have instigated these crises, negatively impacting Nigeria's international standing. The paper focused on analysing Nigeria's 2023 general election, specifically examining electoral corruption and its impact on Nigeria's global image. The paper employs the linkage theory, which asserts that Nigeria's efforts to establish a favourable image will fail as long as electoral fraud persists in its domestic sphere. The work analyses secondary data obtained from various sources, such as journals, magazines, newspapers, among others. The analyses conducted were qualitative in nature. The paper revealed that Nigeria's substantial electoral corruption poses a hugely deceptive sense of security, and global investors may want to transfer their assets to more tranquil nations in order to safeguard their interests. Thus, if Nigeria continues to face electoral disorder, as evidenced by the egregious fraud in the 2023 general election, it will find itself in a disadvantageous position within the evolving global and continental order as a state actor in the international system. The paper suggests that in order to uphold the democratic system, elections must consistently adhere to the principles of freedom and fairness. A nation's democratic system may face challenges if not properly managed, leading other nations to doubt its capacity to actively participate in the global distribution of labour.

**Keywords:** Election, Democracy, Electoral corruption, Global Image, International community, Foreign Investors.

## Introduction

The majority of nations, both advanced and emerging, aspire to establish democratic systems of governance. Hence, contemporary society's recognition of individuals' involvement in deciding the governing body for collective welfare serves as the foundation for the global commemoration of democracy. In other words, the global celebration of democracy is based on the contemporary recognition of the importance of citizens' participation in selecting their leaders for the betterment of the overall populace. Citizens' involvement in the process of selecting leaders through elections is vital for all democratic systems. All democratic systems use elections as a means to transfer power, as democracy prioritises the welfare of the common people. Democratic elections are contests between political parties or individuals vying for public office within a framework of set regulations. These guidelines regulate multiple facets of election legislation. Election serves as a prominent mechanism for selecting political leaders in democratic nations, facilitating citizen participation, and establishing consent for governance. Additionally, elections serve to validate administrations. It demonstrates the social agreement between the representative and the represented. During any election, the electorate has the ability to cast their vote in favour of or in opposition to a

government. Crucially, elections and the electoral process provide a means for a country to portray its international reputation in a positive or negative light through many processes, especially the electoral process (David, Manu & Musa 2014; Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede, Nkomah & Kinge 2016).

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has consistently pursued its political and economic influence in order to strengthen its strategic interests within Africa and on a global scale. The nation's image crisis, stemming from ineffective governance and pervasive political and electoral malfeasance, has significantly undermined its global standing and eroded its regional influence in Africa over a prolonged period of time. Under the leadership of Obasanjo, Buhari, and currently Tinubu, Nigeria has witnessed electoral corruption, including in other past administrations. Consequently, Nigeria's global reputation has suffered significantly, particularly in the aftermath of the botched 2023 general election. It should be noted that the International Community dispatched election observers due to Nigeria's despotic leadership.

The general election for the positions of President, Vice President, House of Representatives, and Senate was conducted in Nigeria on February 25, 2023. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidate of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), became victorious in the presidential election. Bola Ahmed Tinubu is a significant political figure in the South West region. Atiku Abubakar, the main rival from the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Peter Obi, a lesser-known contender from the Labour Party, were defeated. The Labour Party, under Peter Obi's leadership, joined the Nigerian democratic system in the current year, which previously operated as a two-party system (Adeoye, 2023). Obi possessed a commendable level of integrity and approachability, which, coupled with his anti-corruption and self-reliance credo, sparked a following known as the "Obi-dients." The crowd size and enthusiasm at his rallies were exceptional. He aimed to eradicate the bipartisan system that had persisted since the end of the military dictatorship. Despite fervent support, particularly from Nigerian youth, he was unsuccessful. The electoral process was exasperating for numerous Nigerians and various political factions, with the most egregious problem being the persistent technical glitches that marred the initial presidential election cycle (Akinterinwa, 2023).

A significant concern surrounding the election was the widely accepted credibility of President Muhammadu Buhari's assertions regarding a free, fair, and credible election. Consequently, they exhibited a high level of tolerance. In addition, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), consistently reassured Nigerians that the INEC was well prepared for the election and would eliminate any irregularities. Evidence of voting irregularities, including instances of crossed-out and rewritten numbers, flooded social media on February 26, 2023. They changed some numbers originally written in black ink to blue and clumsily covered others with Tipp-Ex. It is alleged that the previous INEC chairman manipulated the election in favour of Bola Tinubu. The prevailing emotions

of wrath, hopelessness, and anxiety have not been as palpable for quite some time. The election manipulation and execution were so incompetent that they deeply offended Nigerians' intelligence. The President has always pledged to ensure that Nigerians will have access to impartial and equitable elections in accordance with the revised Electoral Act. The Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) made a commitment to Nigerians and the international community to conduct elections that are both free and fair (Labs, 2023). He consistently reiterated the commission's preparedness to carry out this responsibility. This is apparent, as none of these commitments were fulfilled. The BVAS-anchored fail-safe system failed to fulfill any of its promises. The election that brought in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu was a letdown for the voters. Both domestically and internationally, the election received criticism, with many considering it to be defective, which had a negative impact on its reputation. The central question is: has the international system been the brain of contemporary electoral corruption in Nigeria? To what extent has electoral corruption contributed to Nigeria's international image crisis?

The linkage theory, which draws assumptions from systems analysis, posits that the process or outcome of one negotiation has an impact on or determines another negotiation. It provides a possible explanation for the interaction between negotiation and its surrounding environment. The concept establishes a connection between domestic boundaries and international engagements (Frankel, 1972). Richard Nixon originally formulated the thesis in the 1970s amidst the Cold War, and several scholars, including Rosenau (1969), have modified and extended it. The interconnectedness of international relations reinforces the linkage theory, advocating for a simultaneous analysis of domestic and foreign interactions (Gourevitch, 1978). Domestic factors have an impact on a state's positive global image, and vice versa. Therefore, the interconnection between the nation-state and the international community cannot be underemphasized.

Thus, the linkage theory is crucial to our work as it significantly indicates that, Nigeria's efforts to cultivate a positive image will face obstacles as long as electoral fraud persists within its internal environment. Hence, the policies and acts within the internal environment have an impact on the policies of the external environment. Meanwhile, the paper employed qualitative method and relied on secondary data collection. The article incorporates data from electoral literature, journals, the Internet, newspapers, and other relevant sources.

### **Historical Overview of Elections in Nigeria**

The electoral system plays a crucial role in fostering political development and ensuring the durability of democracy within any nation. Therefore, if we define democracy as a form of government where the people have authority, control, and benefit, then elections appear to be the fundamental pillar of democracy.

Elections are the only way to ensure that the people "vested in and derived from the authority of governance" (Lawal, 1997), granting power and legitimacy to those in government. The election is considered a vital starting point for democracy, as it enables the selection of officials in a democratic manner and holds them accountable to the governed.

Nigeria has conducted elections throughout several historical periods, including the colonial era (1922–1959), the early years of independence (1960–1965), military governance, civilian administrations, and the transition from one civilian government to another (1999–present). The colonial era witnessed a series of elections, including the inaugural legislative council elections in Lagos and Calabar in September 1923, which followed the implementation of the Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution in 1922. The labour movement and urban expansion prompted colonial authorities to yield, leading to the formation of city and legislative council elections. In 1938, the Nigerian Youth Movement, which was against British colonial interests in Lagos and Nigeria, secured victory in three out of four city council seats and all three legislative council seats (Akerele, 2003).

Several elections took place from 1951 until 1959. The Macpherson constitution guided the regional legislative elections in 1951, while the federal constitution governed the elections in 1954. Prior to 1954, all constitutions restricted voting rights to specific demographic groupings. The universal adult suffrage law of 1958 came into force in 1959. Northern Nigerian women could not exercise their voting rights until 1977, when an election order granted them the authority to participate in elections.

Nigeria achieved political autonomy in 1960 following the local council, regional, and federal parliament elections held in December 12, 1959. The crucial aspect of the election was the establishment of a tri-regional party framework, which mirrored the dominant ethnic group in each region: the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in Northern Nigeria, the Action Group (AG) in Western Nigeria, and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons. In Eastern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello (NPC), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC), and Chief Obafemi Awolowo (AG) emerged as the political heads of the three prominent regional and ethnic political parties (Wanonyi, 1997).

The contentious census figures released in March 1961 presented challenges in multiple Nigerian elections following the country's independence from 1960 to 1965. The 1964 general elections were characterised by widespread boycotts in the Eastern, Midwestern, Lagos, and certain parts of the Western regions. Political violence, physical intimidation of opposition politicians and their supporters, procedural violations, inconsistencies among major political parties and certain minority parties, and persistent tensions within the Western region's government marred the elections. The Akinntola government blatantly interfered in

the election results, marring the October 1965 elections for the Western regional government, even though the people clearly rejected the government and overwhelmingly voted for the AG opposition party.

The Middle Belt, political deadlocks at the center, and a broad rebellion in the West by those who felt deceived during the elections set the scene for the initial military revolution on January 15, 1966. These incidents, along with others, set the scene for the initial military coup on January 15, 1966, resulting in the deaths of numerous prominent leaders from the First Republic.

During the period of misrule, military authorities conducted three elections. These encompass the 1979 Obasanjo election, the 1992–93 Babangida election, and the 1999 Abdusalami Abubakar election (Ademoyea, 1981; Joseph, 1987). Civilian regimes have conducted three elections since 1983. Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led the 1983 general election, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo led the 2003 and 2007 general election, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan led the 2011 general election, and Muhammadu Buhari led the 2015 and 2019 general elections, then Bola Tinubu led the 2023 general election.

### **Electoral Process and Voting**

In a democratic system, the electoral procedure encompasses all efforts to select political leaders. It is important to keep in mind that elections are a means of selecting political leaders through voting, and only eligible state residents participate in the voting process. Elections are fundamental to democratic governance, as the government derives its power from the consent of the people. Hence, democratic elections are the primary source of authority. While all contemporary democracies hold elections, not all of these countries can be considered truly democratic.

The qualities of democratic elections include competitiveness, periodicity, inclusivity, definitiveness, and being free and fair. Thus, in order to maintain this, it is crucial to have an impartial electoral process and the individuals responsible for organising and overseeing it must be free from any influence by those involved in the system (Nwabueze, 1993; International Idea, 2000). An independent body or commission that refuses to succumb to the arbitrary desires of those in power, even if it means disadvantaging their adversaries and the general public, is essential to guaranteeing electoral integrity at any expense.

Nwabueze (1993) provides a concise definition of the electoral process, encompassing all the institutional procedures, institutions, and actions associated with elections. He provided a comprehensive explanation of the various components encompassed within the term "electoral process." These components include suffrage, voter registration, constituency delimitation, the right to participate in elections as a candidate, competition between political parties, the entity responsible for organising and overseeing elections,

candidate selection within political parties, nomination procedures, voting methods, the execution of elections, the determination of results, and the resolution of election-related disputes. It is worth noting that local and international observers and verifiers also participate in the electoral process. Additionally, it creates institutions and frameworks to engage the public in the election process and provides guidelines and protocols. Hence, the electoral process consists of both non-constitutional and constitutional elements. The constitution delineates the composition of the electoral body and safeguards its autonomy. This includes non-constitutional matters such as voter registration, election procedures, and electoral crimes, among others (Nwabueze, 1993; Iyayi, 2004).

Over the last twenty years, multiparty political systems have replaced authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Africa. The concept of democracy encounters challenges in various African nations, Nigeria being one of them. The Nigerian political leaders' public expressions of anger and the defective political procedures they follow are clearly highlighting the limitations of democracy. Nigeria's stewardship of impartial and equitable elections encounters numerous challenges at different junctures of her democratic governance. Political campaign malpractices and exploitation of the post-political electoral process, such as the manipulation of card readers, remained prominent in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2019, and 2023, just as they were in previous years.

A total of 93.4 million Nigerians were officially enrolled to participate in the voting process at the beginning of 2022, and the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) were duly obtained, over eleven (11) million, in excess of the number from four years ago. On January 11, 2023, INEC announced the removal of 53,264 individuals who lacked voting rights from its registration (Macaulay, 2023). In this vein, the general elections for the positions of President, Vice President, House of Representatives, and Senate were conducted in Nigeria on February 25, 2023. Bola Tinubu, the presidential candidate of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), was victorious in a highly disputed election, earning 36% of the total votes, surpassing his two main rivals. Following a period of nearly four days characterised by disorder, INEC officially declared the final results on 1st March, 2023. Tinubu became victorious with a total of 8.79 million votes, decisively surpassing the main opposition candidate, Atiku Abubakar, who received 6.98 million votes, as well as Peter Obi who garnered 6.1 million votes. None of the previous officers were contenders for the first time, which is another notable achievement. The proportion of female candidates was below 10% (Burke, 2023; Labs, 2023). However, preliminary data indicated that Nigeria experienced its lowest voter participation to date, with only 27% of eligible voters participating. The pre-election insecurity undeniably decreased voter participation, as a total of 134 attacks were recorded against INEC offices/staff (Gavin, 2023).

An often ignored crucial problem is the widespread trust among most Nigerians in President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) to carry out an election that is both impartial and trustworthy. Consequently, they exhibit a high level of tolerance. Moreover, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), consistently reassured Nigerians that the INEC was well prepared for the poll, effectively eliminating any irregularities. There was a lack of evidence indicating a deliberate effort to pursue elections that were free, fair, and just. This somewhat elucidates the reason for multiple opposition parties contesting the election outcomes in a legal setting. Meanwhile, the Labour Party alleges that President Muhammadu Buhari and Yakubu did not conduct elections that were both free and fair. The opposition is unwilling to acknowledge it, and the two candidates who are closest in the race have submitted a court petition. They allege electoral fraud. Furthermore, they express their dissatisfaction with the fact that INEC has not posted screenshots of polling station results to IReV, an internet platform specifically designed for the election. Despite their paradoxical nature, the favourable outcomes of successive national legislative elections for these parties have been enthusiastically embraced and commemorated. Hence, Nigerians held the belief that INEC's failure to upload the results as pledged undermined the election's credibility. Subsequent to the election, the electoral commission clarified that technological difficulties hindered their ability to upload the results to the INEC Result Viewing Portal. The majority of the outcomes have been uploaded and disseminated by the agency.

Opposition leaders have also raised concerns about INEC's understanding of the legal requirements for achieving nationwide victory. According to the Constitution, presidents are required to obtain a minimum of 25% of the vote in two-thirds of the states and the Federal Capital Territory. Mr. Tinubu achieved this milestone in 29 out of 36 states, however, his adversaries contend that he was required to do it in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as well. The dissatisfied political parties, namely the PDP and LP, have demanded that INEC cease the announcement of election results and adhere to the protocols for ensuring national harmony and cohesion. The President has always pledged to ensure that Nigerians are granted free and equitable elections in accordance with the newly implemented Electoral Act. In the meantime, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) pledged to both Nigerians and the international community to conduct the 2023 elections impartially and without any form of manipulation. This commitment was consistently reiterated, demonstrating the commission's preparedness to carry out its duties. This is apparent, as none of these commitments were fulfilled. The BVAS-anchored fail-safe system failed to deliver on its promises (Iniobong, 2022; Editorial, 2023; Adebisi, 2023).

The initial manifestation of election manipulations, known as wuruwuru in Yoruba, stems from constitutional irregularities that have cast suspicion on whether the INEC has deliberately disregarded the election Act. The primary concern revolves around the credibility and acceptability of the election. Some

argue that the collation process violated Section 64(4) of the Electoral Act, which stipulates that a Returning officer can only collate and announce the election result after verifying and confirming that the accreditation number and votes on the collated result are accurate and match the votes or results recorded and transmitted from the polling units. The 1999 Constitution, taking into account any modifications made, Section 134 outlines the requirements for exactly two presidential candidates (see Section 134 (1)(a)(b)) and for more than two candidates (refer to Section 134 (2)(a)(b)). Section 134(2) is applicable due to the presence of more than two candidates in the 2023 presidential election. In order for a candidate to be regarded as lawfully elected as president, they must have the highest number of votes among all candidates, if there are more than two candidates. Additionally, they must have at least one-quarter of the votes cast in at least two-thirds of all the States in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (Abdu, 2002).

The primary concern revolves around the question of whether the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) should be regarded as a distinct Nigerian state and be subjected to the same electoral regulations as other states. According to the Nigeria Constitution, candidates are required to obtain a majority of at least two-thirds of all the states in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The clause carries the same meaning, whether interpreted in a conjunctive or disjunctive manner. In 37 territories or states, a presidential candidate is required to secure a two-thirds majority of the vote. Due to the inclusion of the FCT in the law, there are a total of 36 States in addition to the FCT. The law seeks to guarantee that a presidential candidate secures a majority of two-thirds of the votes in each constituent state, including the FCT, which is not considered a state. Therefore, if a candidate fails to secure a two-thirds majority of the FCT votes, they are ineligible to run for president, regardless of the State votes. Regardless of the interpretations of scholars, it is important to note that the FCT is classified as a territory rather than a state. However, it is subject to the regulatory electoral law, which mandates that every presidential contender must obtain a minimum of 25% of the accredited votes. The candidate of the APC party, who has been officially recognised as the President-elect, did not obtain a sufficient number of votes from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to fulfill the constitutional criteria (Burke, 2023; Onyeiwu, 2023).

Again, it was generally accepted that once party representatives and electoral authorities have verified the results, INEC mandates that polling stations scan and upload them to the server. The INEC Chairman expressed remorse for the "technical malfunctions" that hindered his compliance with this guidance. This is a prime illustration of magouille. Is it possible for any apology to eliminate electoral injustice? Does it address the issue of viewing technical malfunctions as a deliberate scheme to manipulate the poll in favour of the APC presidential candidate? During a joint press conference held by the PDP and LP, PDP Vice-Presidential candidate Ifeanyi Okowa and Labour Party candidate Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed asserted that



the Biomodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) was either malfunctioning or that the INEC had conspired with the APC to manipulate the election (Onyeiwu, 2023).

Governor Okowa suggested that if the system was not functioning and the authorities were aware of this fact, they should have rescheduled the poll. If the system had not experienced an outage and if they had not enabled BVAS results uploads, it can be inferred that they engaged in deceitful behaviour and didn't display objectivity and impartiality. Thus, additional concerns encompass illicit financial transactions, manipulation of voters through financial incentives, corruption and collusion, theft of BVAS machines, deliberate destruction of ballot papers, falsification of election results, participation of underage voters, negligence by electoral officers and party agents, misuse of voter's cards, and submission of outdated electoral documents. A noteworthy perspective is that the court system can be consistently manipulated to intentionally prolong cases, allowing unlawfully elected individuals to complete their terms before facing accusations. The election process and the judicial system's integrity and credibility are in jeopardy.

### **Electoral Violence and Vote buying in Nigeria**

Since independence, violence has been a prevalent feature in the majority of Nigerian general elections. Many Nigerian have lost their lives due to election violence. For instance, approximately 200 individuals, primarily in the Southwest, lost their lives in the riots that occurred following the election in 1964–1965. The 1983 election resulted in significant post-election violence, leading to the loss of life and extensive property damage. The 1993 election, widely regarded as the most democratic presidential election in U.S. history and devoid of significant acts of violence, had a turbulent past (Adebajo, 2022).

The Nigerian election has transformed into a volatile battleground and a stage for armed conflict, aligning with former President Obasanjo's depiction of a high-stakes and uncompromising event. Politicians and their adherents have transformed elections into a conflict-ridden battleground, causing contestants and even their followers to question their survival until the end of the election, in which they have played significant roles. Political candidates pursue power without consideration for the potential casualties. Acts of violence, including bloodshed, arson, killings, and physical harm inflicted upon opponents by hired hooligans, supporters, or security agencies loyal to specific candidates, have consistently tainted electoral competitions in Nigeria throughout history, from the "Wild Wild West" era of 1964 to the "land and moon slide" of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the Second Republic, as well as the activities of the Peoples Democratic Party and All Progressive Party in the Fourth Republic (Adeagbo & Omodunbi, 2019; Amanawa, 2022).

Also, in Nigeria's political process, candidates employ financial resources or monetary influence to manipulate support, rather than convincing voters through persuasion but rather by using exchanged funds. Vote-buying is a straightforward economic transaction in which candidates engage in a purchasing process while residents or electorates participate in a selling process, drawing an analogy to the exchange of goods such as apples, shoes, and TVs. Some perceive voting-purchasing as an auction-like process, where voters exchange their ballots for money from the bidder offering the highest amount. Political parties and candidates engage in the practice of purchasing votes by providing tangible benefits. The practice of using money to influence politics and purchase votes significantly increased during the elections of 1999, which marked the beginning of a new government, as well as the elections of 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023, which facilitated the transfer between civilian administrations (Danjibo & Oladeji, 2007; Ovwasa, 2013). Corruption in politics undermines the fundamental tenets of democracy. The practice of bribing voters in order to fund legitimate campaign expenses is considered electoral malpractice. This unethical behaviour distorts the genuine preferences of voters, including their party affiliation, when money is not a factor (Davies, 2006; Sule & Tal, 2018).

Individuals have been consistently instructed to be cautious of politicians who engage in vote-buying, as those who employ "corrupt" methods to secure votes are likely to administer a "corrupt" government. Selecting elected officials who have invested significant funds to secure their position is likely to scrutinise their own commercial and financial concerns, as well as those of their corporate backers, mentors, and financial supporters, often known as 'political godfathers' in Nigeria. This calculation reduces open interest, undermining the responsibilities of elected authorities towards the people. The combination of monetary policy and vote-buying increases the susceptibility of the election winner to debasement, particularly if they have a transparent office and accessible resources (Beetseh & Akpod, 2015; Bratton, 2008).

Not surprising, every logical Nigerian should be weary of election by now. The Nigerian elections have become hazardous due to widespread fraud, political intimidation, among others. The integrity of elections has consistently been compromised, with the only uncertainty being the extent of the manipulation (Ekwowusi, 2023; Adebisi, 2023). Meanwhile, the 2023 Nigeria general election witnessed numerous instances of violence, fraud, deliberate property destruction, and homicides, such as shooting incident at a polling unit and the theft or destruction of ballot boxes by political operatives. In Lagos, a police officer observed an APC leader issuing threats to an ethnic community that he believed would support the opposing political party (Hassan, 2023).

## **Response From the International Monitor Groups**

Instances of election-related violence in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, have led to the implementation of international and regional election observation programmes. These initiatives aim to mitigate violence and promote the establishment of democratic principles. International and regional election observer missions have attended nearly all African, including Nigerian elections, as stated by Hyde and Marinov (2014). The increasing involvement of international election monitoring organisations in Nigeria's elections is directly linked to the prevalence of electoral malpractice and violence. Scholars contend that international election aid or observation can guarantee the integrity of elections, the enforcement of legal principles, and a political environment devoid of violence, resulting in its extensive adoption (Onwu-Diwe & Berwind, 2010; Jenkins, 2021).

Meanwhile, the international election observers for the 2023 Presidential election displayed hypocrisy. Opinions on the election(s) varied, with some denouncing them as fraudulent, irregular, and falling short of international norms, while others commended the procedure and extended congratulations to the victorious Presidential candidate, describing it as a free, fair, and peaceful election. However, an international alliance of election observers has said that INEC demonstrated a lack of transparency during the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections in Nigeria, citing specific instances. The coalition stated that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) further contributed to confusion and diminished voters' trust in the process due to insufficient communication and a lack of openness regarding the cause and scope of the issue (Nwezeh, Akinwale & Gabriel, 2023). The confluence of these circumstances resulted in the disenfranchisement of Nigerian voters in numerous regions, although the extent remains uncertain. The lack of prompt electronic transmission and upload of election results to a public portal at the end of the voting period eroded citizen trust. The coalition's official statement emphasized that logistical challenges and political violence marred the electoral process, leading to the disenfranchisement of numerous voters. In addition, international observers observed that delayed opening of voting locations and logistical challenges resulted in overcrowding, which created tensions and compromised the confidentiality of ballots in many polling units (Hoffman, 2023; Adeyemi, 2023).

The Joint Election Observation Mission (JEOM), headed by former Malawian President Joyce Banda and comprising the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), issued an official proclamation on February 28, 2023 (Erameh, Oni & Ijakorotu, 2023).

Ms. Banda praised Nigerians for their perseverance and eagerness participate. Notwithstanding the lengthy queues and large gatherings at certain polling

stations, Nigerian voters demonstrated their dedication to the electoral process and a resolute yearning to have their voices heard.

Furthermore, it is evident that the election monitors from ECOWAS and the AU had a clear understanding that Nigeria's 2023 general elections would lack fairness, justice, and peace. This is why they earnestly implored all Nigerians to refrain from treating the polls as a matter of utmost importance or a matter of life or death. As said by ex-Sierra Leonean President Ernest Koroma and ex-Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta (Onyeiwu, 2023)

We implore Nigerians to remain composed, heed official sources for results, and disregard social media. Disinformation can lead to complications. As the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), we have transitioned from a passive role of observing to actively engaging in preventive diplomacy. We shall persist in involving stakeholders, INEC, and political parties until the process is finalised and a tranquil transfer of leadership takes place

The chairman of the AU observation team expressed support for President Koroma's request for INEC to acknowledge the prevailing sentiment and expedite the process of ensuring accountability and credibility.

Meanwhile, General Embalo, Chairman of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State, sent sincere congratulations to His Excellency Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu on his successful election as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He further implored the individuals involved to actively advocate for peace and employ constitutional procedures to resolve any conflicts they may encounter. The message is commendable, but it overlooks the influence of environmental factors. The British disregarded societal norms in their felicitations to the president-elect. The British Prime Minister expressed his anticipation of collaborating to improve security and trade relations, create opportunities for businesses, and foster prosperity in both nations. The US Department of State made a press statement on March 1, 2023, in which they offered congratulations to the President-elect and advised the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance their efforts in the areas requiring the greatest focus prior to the gubernatorial elections on March 11. Significantly, the United States commended civic society and the media for enhancing election regulations and fostering political dialogue on matters concerning citizens. Election monitors from many countries reported that the election proceeded without any significant issues or disruptions. Worrisome is the fact the Nigeria's 2023 general election, namely the presidential election wasn't fair, just, peaceful, and credible based on the electoral manipulations and assessments of election monitors. Surprising, why without waiting for the court's verdict, do world leaders promptly extend their congratulations to the president-elect if they deem the elections lacking in credibility.

The international monitoring bodies' disregard for environmental conditions and failure to identify certain difficulties were both surprising and unanticipated. There were several issues such as the delayed arrival of INEC officials and ballot materials at polling stations, malfunctioning biometric voter accreditation system (BVAS) machines, inadequate or nonexistent transmission of results from polling units to the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal, and insecurity at certain polling units. These issues included physical assaults on voters and officials, intimidation of voters, theft, and vandalism of voting materials. Contrary to the assertions of certain international election observers, the Nigeria 2023 general election was marred by a multitude of problems (Akinterinwa, 2023).

Adichie expresses disapproval of the State Department's commendation of Tinubu and acceptance of the election results. "It is highly unlikely that American intelligence is so incompetent." The process was endangered by intentional manipulation rather than technological problems. Adichie, dissatisfied with the outcome of the Presidential 2023 election, refers to Nigeria's democracy as "hollow democracy." Thus, Adichie sent a letter to Biden congratulating Tinubu, the president-elect, on his victory:

You have emphasised the necessity of establishing a worldwide society dedicated to democracy, as well as promoting justice and adherence to the rule of law. Lack of interest or concern from its most influential member has the potential to undermine a global community based on democratic principles. Why would the United States, a nation that upholds the principles of legal governance, endorse a President who was elected in violation of the law?

Adichie asserts that President Biden's congratulations undermine America's professed commitment to democracy. Thus, the United States should accurately reflect its name.

### **Effect of Fraudulent Election on Nigeria's Global Image**

To establish a favorable international reputation, a country must first cultivate its image domestically and internationally, acknowledging the importance of a positive image for all nations. The global perception of a country is vital to its diplomatic ties; hence, governments are constantly watchful and defensive. Before directly engaging with any government, foreign allies carefully evaluate this matter. Adverse global reputations can result in a dearth of allies. The international recognition of a nation is contingent upon its positive or negative perception. An exemplary image commands admiration, exerts influence, and elevates one's standing, whereas a negative one diminishes the reputation of a nation. A country that has a negative global reputation may experience a deficiency in regard to authority and prestige in the international framework (Egwemi, 2010:131). A favourable international reputation can enhance a country's economic performance.

Nigeria, the largest economy in Africa, engages in regional, continental, and global diplomacy. She played a significant role in the process of decolonization in Africa, advocated for the rights of black people on a global scale, and demonstrated exceptional proficiency in international peacekeeping and peace enforcement, all in order to save her reputation. The nation has also engaged in combating global terrorism, safeguarding the environment, addressing climate change, and promoting democracy. Nevertheless, the extensive electoral corruption has elicited predominantly negative political responses. Incompetence, corruption, favouritism, a lack of leadership, and a weak democratic track record have undermined Nigeria's global reputation (Micheal & Abu Baker, 2018). For 30 years, Nigeria has been plagued by a reputation problem. Issues like corruption, specifically electoral malpractice, as the primary factor negatively impacting Nigeria's reputation, asserting that unless the government implements measures to address this matter, the nation will lose its credibility on the global stage (Akinboye, 2013).

The 2022 Electoral Act, implemented last year, brought about significant changes. The Independent National Electoral Commission legalised the use of electronic voter accreditation and result transmission. The chairman of the commission, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, assured Nigerians that the commission would tally the votes in the presence of voters, document the results on an official record, and upload a photograph of the signed record to a secure server. Yakubu refuted allegations of receiving commissions and dismissed suspicions of breaking words. During a speech at Chatham House in London, a popular meeting place for Nigerian politicians, he stated that the general public would have immediate access to the "polling-unit results" as soon as they were officially concluded on election day. Nigerians expressed their approval. Immediate uploading of results would prevent the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), which has been in power since 2015, from tampering with them. The implementation of technology has the potential to safeguard and enhance the democratic system in Nigeria. The number of votes would no longer be greater than the number of voters. Nigerians will no longer have leaders appointed for them. Elections would ultimately reveal the true disposition of the voters. Confidence and optimism emerged (Obe, 2023).

Regrettably, the election authority failed to fulfill its commitment to the Nigerian people. There were no immediate updates on the presidential election results. Upon reviewing the tape from the polling location, it became evident that voters harboured suspicions and insisted on prompt disclosure of the results. Several individuals captured photographs of the result sheets using their mobile devices. Interestingly, numerous polling places published election results for the House of Representative and Senate, but not for the Presidential race. One would wonder the reason for the inability to upload presidential results on the same system. Hence voters perceived deception when election personnel at the polling unit claimed their inability to submit results due to a lack of password.

An examination of media coverage on Election Day reveals an increase in instances of ballot box theft and vote purchasing compared to previous elections. Moreover, numerous media personnel were subjected to physical assaults throughout the election. The Incident Centre for Election Atrocities (ICEA) has reported that the 2023 general election resulted in 137 deaths and 57 kidnappings. These atrocities took place across states, which include Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Rivers, Katsina, and FCT, among others. There were also several reports of attacks on election observers, including journalists at polling units, while they attempted to take footage of violent incidents on election day. Journalists were attacked by security personnel and political thugs while carrying out their duties on that day (Eromosele, 2023).

Given the 2023 Nigerian general election, it is critical to acknowledge the substantial presence of electoral corruption, particularly in light of Nigeria's deteriorating global standing. Furthermore, apart from undermining the country, this problem has the potential to adversely affect individuals who have made investments abroad, as well as the nation's diplomatic relationships. As a result, the majority of residents suffer from negative perceptions of their country. The persistence of electoral corruption poses a deceptive threat to security, causing concern among investors. Consequently, international investors may opt to relocate their assets to more peaceful nations in order to safeguard their capital. The United States, United Kingdom, China, France, and Russia have enduring geopolitical interests in Nigeria, which are jeopardised by the Nigerian ruling elite's acceptance of democratic regression, pervasive corruption, and severe human rights abuses (Okojie, 2023; Kohnert, 2023).

One would argue that the tainted 2023 general election not only eroded Nigerians' trust, but also diminished Nigeria's democratic capabilities, leading other global actors to question the effectiveness of Nigeria's democracy. For sure, international actors' uncertainty about Nigeria's democracy has serious consequences for her global image, which also determines her role and activeness in the global community. Electoral corruption in Nigeria is not a contemporary phenomenon, as several electoral frauds have been recorded over time. However, the recently concluded election has demonstrated that, as time goes on, electoral manipulation appears to be on the rise, with the Nigerian state's democratic system failing to urgently address this detrimental electoral malpractice (Ezanya, 2023). The linking theory suggests that Nigeria's image will deteriorate as long as it continues to face the aforementioned problems within its own borders. This is because other nations will not view Nigeria as a credible player in global events.

## **Conclusion**

An investigation has been conducted into Nigeria's international reputation and the issue of corruption in elections. The extent of electoral corruption in Nigeria is substantial, particularly considering the nation's deteriorating reputation. However, it has the potential to adversely affect residents seeking to invest overseas, as well as the nation's diplomatic ties with other countries. Consequently, the majority of residents endure the negative image associated with the country. Given that political corruption provides a deceptive illusion of security, it is likely that international investors will relocate their assets to more tranquil nations in order to protect their investment.

The study revealed a robust correlation between electoral corruption and Nigeria's besmirched global reputation. The nation's domestic turmoil has conveyed an unfavourable message to the global community regarding its fragility and instability, while its abhorrent acts of targeting Nigerian citizens for political gain have tarnished its reputation. Nigeria's inability to be considered a significant player in international affairs can be situated to numerous obstacles which have marred Nigeria's global reputation and hindered its progress. If Nigeria persists in grappling with electoral fraud, it will continue to significantly undermine its standing as a state actor in the international system, jeopardising its position in the evolving global and continental order.

## **Recommendations**

The paper suggests that

1. The INEC Chairman's greater independence is unlikely as long as their appointment remains under the control of the Nigerian President. Thus, the INEC Chairman should be completely independent in order to carry out his duty judiciously.
2. The executive arm of government should grant the judiciary complete autonomy and non-interference so it can interpret laws and correct electoral malpractice when necessary.
3. Free and fair elections are crucial for upholding the democratic system. A nation's democratic system may face challenges, leading other nations to doubt its capacity to actively participate in the global division of labour. Hence, Nigerian authorities must refrain from engaging in electoral corruption in order to uphold a reputable international image.
4. Nigerian leaders should educate the younger generations in preparation for future issues by refraining from engaging in election manipulation. It is also advisable for citizens to abstain from being used as a means of perpetrating election corruption, as politicians frequently exploit young people to cause disturbances at polling stations in order to bolster their preferred candidate or party.



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