

Election Management and Success of Election in Nigeria: A Study of INEC in the 2023 General Elections

ZAIYAN Abdulmajid Muhammad

Department of Political Science

Sokoto State University, Sokoto State

abdulmajidzaiyan15@gmail.com

Abstract

The 2023 Nigerian General Election was a globally watched event due to its uniqueness and the country's strategic importance. This research investigates the successes and challenges of the election, aiming to provide a comprehensive analysis for future improvements. The election faced numerous challenges, including economic and security issues, unpredictability, and the emergence of a third force led by disgruntled youth. Using qualitative methods and in-depth interviews, this study examines the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Election Management, applying institutional and contingency theories. The research identifies challenges during the 2023 election, highlights successes, and scrutinizes INEC's performance. Despite criticism from unsuccessful parties, the study concludes that the 2023 election showed overall improvement compared to previous elections. The introduction of technological tools significantly contributed to this success. Recommendations include reviewing the Electoral Act 2022 to introduce additional rules, regulations, and advanced technological tools for future elections. This research provides valuable insights for improving Nigeria's electoral process, ensuring a more credible, efficient, and technologically driven system. By addressing challenges and building on successes, Nigeria can strengthen its democratic institutions and enhance the electoral process.

Keywords: Successes, Challenges, Implication, INEC, 2023 General Election

Introduction

During the preparation for the 2023 general election, in Nigeria there were already causes for concern over whether the vote will be free, fair and peaceful. The language used at political rallies and events by members of all political parties evoked violence and divisions. In the run-up to the election, ethnic and religious chauvinists had reportedly been stoking the fire of violence during electioneering. The southern part of the country insists that power must return to it, as the setting President Muhammadu Buhari, who originated from Nigeria's north west region, sought to maintain his party's hold on power, the All Progressive Congress (APC) was facing significant backlash due to economic hardship, insecurity, and perceived nepotism by that had characterized his administration. Despite his initial popularity, Buhari's approval ratings had

plummeted, and many Nigerians had grown disillusioned with his leadership, viewing him as out of touch with the needs and concern of the general population. As a result, the APC's chances of winning the election were uncertain, and the party's internal divisions and rivalries further threaten its prospects. People's Democratic Party (PDP) also seemed to have suffered setbacks as a result of unprecedented fictionalization and defections, a number of leading opposition parties had capitalized on this.

The independent national electoral commission (INEC) faced a multitude of challenges in the lead-up to and during the conduct of the election, foremost among which was the pervasive issue of insecurity. This was compounded by a range of logistical issues, including the delayed arrival of voting materials at polling units, which disrupted the smooth execution of the electoral process. Furthermore, the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) failed to upload elections results as intended, while INEC also failed to upload some result sheets to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV), a platform designed to facilitate real-time transmission of the election results to the central collation center. These glitches and logistical shortcomings not only hindered the efficiency of the electoral process but also raised serious concerns among Nigerians about the credibility and integrity of the polls, sparking widespread skepticism and mistrust in the electoral process,

Before the election, several issues have dominated the political landscape. The first ethnic politics that has been brought to the fore by contestation around zoning. The second is the insecurity prevailing across all geopolitical zones of Nigeria and the number of non-state armed actors who could disrupt the process. Finally, the capacity of the institution responsible for delivering the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has come under scrutiny. Despite renewed optimism fueled by a more robust legal framework, the 2022 Electoral Act, which aimed to ensure transparent and credible elections, INEC faced numerous challenges that threatened the integrity of the electoral process. The Act's provision for improved voting technology, voter registration, and result transmission were intended to enhance the credibility of the election, but INEC's inability to effectively implement these measures, coupled with logistical issues, technical glitches, and security concerns, raised concerns about the commission's capacity to deliver a free, fair, and credible election, ultimately undermining public trust in the electoral process.

The politics of ethnicity, religion and regional sentiments were other problems of the 2023 General Elections. Voters voted in most of the Nigerian elections not based on performance but according to candidate that belong to their ethnic, regional and religious sentiment (Adeyemi, 2012). And it was relatively showcased during the just concluded 2023 general election, whereby ethnicity, religion and regional background played a vital role in voting candidates.

During the 2023 general election, INEC introduced the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) for voter accreditation. However, despite this technological advancement, the election results were not transmitted to the viewing portal, leading to accusations against INEC from various parties. This use of technology was insufficient to ensure a transparent and credible election process.

The 2023 General election was the seventh since 1999, when Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed several attempts at democracy interrupted three times: namely: 1966, 1983 witnessed successive military coups while June 12, 1993 election was nullified by the then military regime. The current democracy era is the longest uninterrupted government in the history of the country. Its administration, under President Bola Tinubu, faces scrutiny in terms of fulfilling the most basic democratic requirements of election: competition, participation, and legitimacy, as the country navigates the challenges of consolidating its democratic gains and ensuring the integrity of its electoral process.

The 2015 general of election which led to the triumph of former President Muhammadu Buhari, believed to be the most credible election in Nigeria, since the return to democracy in 1999. The 2019 general election was to some extent credible but with eye opening challenges and issue ranging from faulty electronic voting machines and insecurity. The 2023 general election, as highlighted, brings lessons to be learned and whereas new challenges have emerged.

This research paper investigates the impact of election management on the success of elections in Nigeria, using the 2023 general election as a case study. The study is guided by four research questions: (1) What was the nature of election management in Nigeria during the 2023 general election? (2) What successes were recorded by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during the 2023 general election? (3) What challenges were encountered during the election, and How were those challenges addressed, and what lessons can be learned for future elections?

The objectives of this study are to: (1) examine the nature of election management during the 2023 general election; (2) analyze the factors that contributed to INEC's successes during the election; (3) determine the impact of INEC's innovations, such as the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) and Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), on the success of the election.

By investigating these research questions and objectives, and providing comprehensive findings, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of election management and its impact on the success of elections in Nigeria, with implications for improving future electoral processes.

Methodology

The research adopts qualitative research method in data collection and analysis. Qualitative aspect the instrument of data collection that was adopted was in-depth interview, and the interview was conducted in an unstructured interview way, where the conversation was free flowing without predetermined set of questions. This research work was conducted in a form of a case study type of qualitative data and particularly specific case study because it studied a particular case study of the 2023 General Election.

The research generated data from two major sources; primary and secondary. The primary data is generated or gathered through a personal in-depth interview with selected informants/participants from selected samples that are directly related to the area of research. The study in terms of selecting participants adopted purposive sampling technique because of the uniqueness of topic under study. The study selected four 4 respondents for interview. These include: one from INEC in Sokoto State Zonal office. one academician from the Department of Political Science, Sokoto State University and one each from ruling and major opposition parties in Nigeria. The four selected participant were selected because of their knowledge and expertise on the topic under study. The secondary data involve the use of textbooks, articles in journals and internet sources for literature review and formation of the theoretical framework.

Limitation of the study

The research work is centered on election management and success of election in Nigeria: A Case of INEC in the 2023 general elections. However, there is no research/study that has not suffered from one constraint or the other. This paper is definitely not be an exception through the methods that will be used in obtaining sufficient data. Many limitations were encountered by the study ranging from; Time constraint Timeframe, because the study focus on election within specific timeframe, 2023, thereby neglecting historical and future context. Another factor was the limited access to key informant, documents and data that were restricted also to some extent hinders the study comprehensiveness, and lastly, interviewee biases, interviews conducted with stakeholders and party officials some were subject to biases due to party affiliation and personal interest.

Overcoming the limitations of the study, the study had to adopt multiple data sources. In terms of Timeframe factor, the study had to conduct longitudinal studies to examine trends of Nigeria's elections over time. On the issue of limited available data, the study had to use alternative data source (documents) and lastly, interviewee biases, the had to employ interview protocols to minimize biases and adopt triangulations to cross-validate data.

Literature review and Theoretical Framework

There are basically two major sources of laws for the conduct of the election in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic; the 1999 Constitution and the 2010

Electoral Act. The 1999 Nigeria constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act 2022 are the key laws that governed the 2023 General election. These laws have specific provisions that regulate:

- Electoral conduct
- Electronic transmission of results
- Electoral offenses
- Political party activities
- Party financing

These provisions can be found in:

- Section 227 and its sub-section of the Nigeria constitution
- Section 82-90 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended in 2022)

These aforementioned laws provided the legal framework for the conduct of 2023 General Election.

No election in the world is without its own defects. United States of America, as the world most celebrated democratic country, was faced with election interference from another country during its 2020 Presidential election. Therefore, Third World nations are not expected to be perfect towards conducting their election.

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria marked a significant departure from the country's previous electoral experiences since gaining independence in 1960. Unlike the twelve preceding general elections, including two in the First Republic, two in the Second Republic, one in the aborted Third Republic, and five in the current Fourth Republic, the 2023 elections were distinctive due to a combination of unprecedented factors. These factors included:

- i. The emergence of a robust opposition political party, a phenomenon not seen before in Nigeria's history
- ii. The rise of a third force, led by former Anambra governor Peter Obi, which introduced a new dynamic to the electoral landscape.
- iii. The significant impact of social media, driven by the youth, which transformed the election's narrative and engagement.

These converging factors made the 2023 General Elections a unique and historic event in Nigeria's electoral history.

The Challenges of Election in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

One of the major issues of election conduct in Nigeria is the transition process itself which is faltering and faulty from the inception of the Fourth Republic. The transition is perceived by many as pseudo transition organized, supervised and ushered in by military in militaristic style. Candidates were imposed, and election results were predetermined in which electoral process was violated and governance was not in accordance with democratic principles (Yagboyaju, 2011). The electoral body is another major challenge of the election in the Fourth Republic. The independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was designed to be neutral and independent in its structure and function, but it has

been compromised on many occasions by politicians to manipulate the result (Yagboyaju, 2011).

The politics of ethnicity, religion and regional sentiments are other problems of election conduct in Fourth Republic. Voters voted in most of the elections not based on performance but according to candidate that belong to their ethnic, regional and religious sentiment (Adeyemi, 2012). Violence characterized elections in the Fourth Republic where politician established ethnic militias to intimidate and harass opposition to win at all cost (Abdullahi, 2015). The nature of political parties also constitutes a problem in the conduct of the election in the Fourth Republic with the parties devoid of ideology or any democratic principles except capturing of power for personal gain at all cost. (Auwal, 2015).

Another major challenges of election conduct in Nigeria in the present democratic dispensation is the influence of money politics and excessive spending which discredit the electoral process and led to corrupt practices in the procedure because politicians engaged in bribing of electoral officials, security agents and vote buying, as well as the money bag godfathers who sponsored their godsons that are not competent and this, led to the emergence of unqualified and poor leadership as well as misgovernance (Adetula, 2008).

Electoral Management

During the 2015 General Election, the electoral body INEC was applauded by both the ruling party and opposition parties, observers, analysis and the international community for the first credible handling and management of the election successfully which averted the country of a political disaster should it failed to succeed. In this regard, all the categories of the informant from both APC and PDP, observers and stakeholders agreed that in their responses that the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) did a credible job of handling the 2015 General Election.

Unlike the 2015 and 2019 General election which were regarded as somewhat the most credible election in Nigeria's fourth republic, The 2023 General was confronted with many challenges and was widely debunked and deemed fraudulent by the major rival parties involved in the election, some domestic and international observers also made comment regarding the conduct of the election, African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM), highlighted that, the election were generally peaceful but faced challenges such as logistical issues, late voting materials delivery, and isolated incidents of violence. The Commonwealth Observers Group also highlighted, the 2023 general elections have demonstrated the resilience of Nigeria's democracy, but also the election was marred by violence, voter suppression, and irregularities, - Website:<https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-observer-group-nigeria-2023>

The introduction of BVAS, (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System), and the INEC Result Voting Viewing, IREV, portal was regarded as a turning point that would help reduce drastically all forms of electoral malpractices during the elections. The two major opposition parties cited the failure of BVAS, refusal of INEC to broadcast live result directly from the polling station and also the failure of IREV portal as method used by the ruling party and the electoral body to manipulate the outcome of the election, although domestic and international observers believes that the election was peaceful and success and improvements were recorded with few oversight challenges and irregularities.

In the presidential election, the two major opposition parties' presidential candidates, Atiku Abubakar of Peoples Democratic Party and Peter Obi of Labour Party all challenged the outcome and emergence of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the winner of the 2023 presidential elections. For some time now, INEC has made efforts to establish and maintain close working relationship with other Election Management Bodies especially in Africa. The aim is to identify area of common interest, encourage collaboration and exchange to enhance the work of the various (EMBs).

Theoretical Framework

The research adopted both Institutional and Contingency theory. Institutional theory will provide the foundation for understanding the role of institutions, while Contingency theory highlighted the importance of adaptability and context-specific strategies. Institutional theory is a social science framework that explains how institutions shape individuals and organizational behavior, and how these institutions evolve over time. Institutional theory in the context of Election Management which refers to the study of how formal and informal institutions shape the conduct of Election. Institution includes, laws and regulations, Electoral Commissions and agencies, Political parties, and Civil society.

The theory posits that effective Election Management depends on a strong, independent electoral institution, Clear laws and regulations, and Professional and impartial electoral administration.

Assumption of Institutional Theory

- Institution matters: Rules, norms, and organization shape behavior and outcomes.
- Institutions are durable: They persist over time, influencing long-time patterns.
- Institution are interconnected: Formal and informal institutions interact and influence each other.
- Institutions can be changed: Through intentional design or evolutionary processes.

Key Concept in institutional theory:

- Institutional design: Crafting electoral institutions to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability.

- Institutional strength: Building robust and resilient electoral institutions.
- Institutional legitimacy: Ensuring public trust and confidence in electoral process.
- Path dependence: How historical and existing institutions influence current and the future electoral arrangements.

Criticism of institutional theory

- Overemphasis on stability: Institutional theory is criticized for focusing too much on stability and persistence, neglecting dynamics of change and innovation.
- Institutional theory focuses on structural factors, neglecting the role of individuals' actors in shaping institution.
- Too deterministic: Institutional theory implies that institutions predetermine outcomes, neglecting the potential for human agency and creativity.

Contingency theory

Contingency theory is a management approach that suggests there is no one-size-fits-all solution to organizational problems. Instead, the optimal course of action depends on the specific circumstances (contingencies) of the situation. The theory was developed by Joan Woodward (1916-1971): A British sociologist who developed the contingency approach to organizational theory.

Assumption of Contingency theory

The theory has the following assumptions:

- i. No universal solutions: What works in one situation may not work in another
- ii. Contextual dependence: Organizational effectiveness depends on the fit between the organization and its environment.
- iii. Situational uniqueness: Each situation is unique, with its own set of circumstances.
- iv. Flexibility and adaptability: Organizations must be able to adapt to changing circumstances.
- v. Multiple paths to success: Different approaches can lead to success in different contexts.
- vi. No one-size-fits-all: What works for one organization may not work for another.

In the context of election management, contingency theory assumes that:

- i. Election environments vary: Different elections have unique contexts, challenges, and opportunities.
- ii. Adaptation is essential: Election managers must adapt strategies to respond to changing circumstances.
- iii. No single best practice: What works in one election may not work in another.
- iv. Contextual understanding is crucial: Understanding the specific election context is vital for success.

Criticism of Contingency Theory

- Lack of clear guidelines: Contingency theory doesn't provide specific guideline on what to do in different situations.
- The theory is too adaptable, making it difficult to test or falsify
- Lack of predictive power: the theory doesn't predict outcomes or provide clear recommendations.
- Neglects institutional context: contingency theory overlooks the impact of institutional factors, such as laws, regulations and social norms.

State of Preparedness of INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) faced many challenges in its preparedness towards the 2023 General Election. Ranging from:

- Delays in voter registration and distribution of permanent voter's cards
- Technical issues with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)
- Insufficient security measures for INEC facilities and personnel
- Concerns about the commission's neutrality and independence

Despite these challenges, INEC made efforts to improve its preparedness, including

- Deploying new technology for voter accreditation and result transmission
- Conducting mock elections and testing electoral systems
- Collaborating with security agencies to enhance security measures

Findings

Issues and Features of 2023 General Elections

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria differs from the previous elections in the history of Nigeria since political independence in 1960. There were twelve General Elections that took place since 1960 with two of them in the First Republic, two in the Second Republic, one in the Aborted Third Republic and five in the current Fourth Republic. What made the 2023 General Election unique are combinations of many factors that were not hitherto obtainable in the previous ones. These factors include; the emergence of strong opposition political party never witnessed in the history of Nigeria, the emergence of a third force championed by former Anambra governor Peter Obi, with the youth making waves through social media totally changed the dynamic of the 2023 General election. The labour party led by Mr Peter Obi made great advances by winning in 11 states and the federal capital territory (FCT), Abuja. And also winning Lagos which is the hometown of the Bola Tinubu, the winner of 2023 presidential election, by totaling 6,101,533 million votes across the country which sent some great shockwaves across Nigeria and signaling the end of the dominance of just two major political parties namely, All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Party positioning is an important feature of the 2023 General Elections. The All Progressives Congress (APC) has ruled for 8 years through President Muhammadu Buhari, from 2015 to 2023. Based on zoning arrangement between the North and the South, it was the turn of the southern part of Nigeria to produce the next president of Nigeria. The zoning arrangement was to some extent upheld by the ruling party (APC), although there were some aggrieved members from the ruling party from northern extraction who fiercely contested for the ticket but in the end, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu emerged victorious and was presented as their flag bearer, whilst (PDP) did not abide by the zoning arrangement which led to fierce contestation in the people's democratic party primary election, with politicians contesting from both northern and southern extraction through which Atiku Abubkar, emerged as the party's flagbearer. His emergence which led to defection of some aggrieved party members and also anti party activities by some selected members.

Before the General Election, there were concerns about safety and security due to attacks on INEC facilities across the country, which threatened Nigeria's democracy, and also raises questions about the electoral body's preparedness for the election (CLEEN Report 2023). The Report also revealed that the survey conducted indicated that the performance of the APC government was poor in key economic sectors such as employment poverty corruption, untold economic hardship experienced by citizens and some areas of development. The Report concludes that the election took place at the most challenging time of insecurity in the history of the country with the banditry insurgency in the northern part of the country and secessionists in southern part of the country.

The lingering North-South dichotomy still exhibited a division during the 2023 Election with the North being the majority Hausa/Fulani dominated. The Southeast and South-south being a Christian dominated and the Southwest being a mixed Muslim/Christian region and the election took place along this pattern in most cases. The General Elections in Nigeria was expected to witness the influence of money, incumbency power and other dominant factors. Parties contested election faced many challenges such as shortage of funds because of the new naira policy designed by President Muhammadu Buhari aimed at toppling and eradicating vote buying in all of its forms. Logistic, delays, low turnouts, and the incidence of violence as well as procedural irregularities in some states.

The 2023 General election was one of the most unpredictable elections in the history of Nigeria, due to the emergence of two well established politicians as the flag bearers of the two major political parties and also the emergence of a third force led by Peter Obi with the support of angry unemployed Nigeria youth yearning for good governance.

BVAS and IREV

In one of its reforms in the build-up to the 2023 General Election, the electoral body introduced the use of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the result viewing portal (IREV). This has been one of the widely accredited sources that made the 2023 General Election commendable and credible in terms of voters' transparency and curbing of rigging. Informants that were interviewed in all the categories admitted that BVAS was one of the important reforms that were central to the success of the election in 2023. The same views held by many scholars, stakeholders and international observers. The introduction of BVAS and IREV played a paramount towards ensuring the success and credibility of the 2023 general election. Although no innovation or reform come without its own defect. There were some cases of the failure of BVAS in accrediting voters in some area during the election, which result in complain and agitation by the opposition parties and also which gave room for the oppositions parties to labelled the election fraudulent and not free and fair.

Factors Influencing the Elections

Apart from the state of preparedness of the INEC, there are other issues that could influence the electoral process and the outcome of the vote. Among them are about the state of governance in Nigeria. Due to the ruling party's quest to retain power at all costs juxtaposed against the oppositions desire to win the election, also at all costs, the political atmosphere has been unduly heated and tendentious. This is a concerning occurrence as it does in a country characterized by the rapid insecurity, mismanagement of resources, waste and endemic corruption all of which negatively affect the economy. The economy was further weakened by Nigeria boarder closure with its immediate neighbors, the harsh economic policies formulated by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, and also the drastic fall in the price of crude oil internationally. Notwithstanding recent setbacks years of mismanagement during the People's Democratic Party and also that of President Muhammadu Buhari administration meant that the country was ill-prepared to absorb the shock, especially following the neckless depletion of the country's foreign reserves and excess crude account (ECA) which was created to serve as a buffer in times of economic stress.

Defections, political party merger and the formation of a meet opposition party also have important implications for the election. The ruling APC itself was the product of merger of the now defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). The Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) and a breakaway faction of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) led by Rochas Okorocha, the governor of Imo State intended to supplant the PDP.

Ethnicity and Regionalism

Four of the 18 presidential candidates in the election, regarded as the front runners, come from the three dominant ethnic groups in the country: Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.

From the North are Atiku Abubakar, a former Vice-President of the country (1999-2007) and the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP); and Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, a former Governor of Kano State and the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP).

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Yoruba from the south-west, is the presidential candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). Peter Obi, an Igbo from the south-east and former Governor of Anambra State, is the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP).

Since the 1999 General Election, there has been an unwritten convention that presidential power will rotate every eight years between the Northern and Southern parts of the country. That's why many individuals and groups from both the North and the South insist that President Muhammadu Buhari must be succeeded by someone from the South.

Some individuals and groups from the South-east further argued that because the zone has not yet produced a president, it should get its turn in 2023. Some from the North-east, where Atiku comes from, equally argued that it should be their turn since the zone has not produced a national head since Tafawa Balewa, the country's first and only prime minister, in the 1960s. (Jideofor Adibe, 2023).

The 2023 elections in Nigeria highlighted how greatly divided Nigeria is in terms of ethnical and regional sentiments. The Northern part making the case of every Nigeria has the right to contest in any election, while the South western part of the country believed the mantle is now their hands in terms of producing the next president of the country. The South-eastern part of the also made the case for always being isolated and has never produce a president since Nigeria's independence, which was the reason that gave birth to secessionist and the Biafra movement.

Emergence of 'Viable' Third Force Parties

Until 2015, Nigeria's political landscape was dominated by one party – the People's Democratic Party (PDP). It was the only party strong enough to win presidential elections. This changed in 2015 when the All Progressives Congress (APC), a coalition of opposition parties, defeated the sitting president, Goodluck Jonathan. This heralded an era of a two-party dominant state. In 2023, the emergence of the Labour Party (LP) and the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) seems to have changed the electoral dynamics.

Obi framed his campaign on anti-establishment rhetoric and was therefore able to attract a horde of young voters. As the only Christian among the four leading candidates, Obi benefited electorally from Christians opposed to Muslim-Muslim ticket of the ruling APC. At least three opinion polls showed him leading the race, though some have questioned the credibility of those polls.

Kwankwaso, founder of the *Kwankwasiya* movement, is regarded as a grassroots organiser. He is believed to be popular with ordinary people in the North but is thought to lack a strong following in the South. (Jidefor Adibe, 2023).

The sudden emergence of Labour party (LP) led by Peter Obi sent a strong shockwave across Nigerian political landscape, that, there is a new force to be reckoned with backed and supported by the angry teeming youth of Nigeria. For the youth, Peter Obi represents hope for a new Nigeria. Although many scholars believe, Peter Obi's strong rise was merely possible because of religious and regional sentiments. Obi's supporters popularly called the 'Obidient' Movement mostly constituted by the youths believe that the Labour Party candidate will bring about great change to the country's political space.

Obi's candidacy has been endorsed by Ohanaeze Ndigbo, and some influential non-Igbo groups and individuals, including former president Olusegun Obasanjo.

Kwankwaso's NNPP played a paramount role during the 2023 general election. The founder of the *Kwankwasiya* movement, who is regarded as a grassroots organizer. The party which was able to clinch victory both in the presidential and gubernatorial elections in Kano State.

Conclusion

The 2023 General Election in Nigeria demonstrated overall improvement and significant success compared to previous elections in the Fourth Republic. This achievement can be attributed to various factors, including both existing and newly introduced reforms. Notably, the Amended 2022 Electoral Act, the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and the Independent Result Viewing Portal (IREV) contributed substantially to the election's success.

However, despite these accomplishments, the research also reveals that the election faced numerous challenges, contradicting the overly optimistic assessments of some scholars, local and international observers, and commentators. These challenges, which hindered the election's smooth operation and total success, were multifaceted, encompassing legal, procedural, and logistical issues.

To ensure the continued improvement of Nigeria's electoral process, it is crucial that these challenges are addressed by all stakeholders involved, including the electoral body, policymakers, civil societies, international supporting agencies, political parties, contestants, electorates, and other relevant actors. By collaboratively working to overcome these obstacles, Nigeria can strive towards conducting more credible, efficient, and successful elections in the future.

Recommendation

- i. Review of the Electoral Act 2010: The Electoral Act 2010 should be reviewed to provide additional rules, particularly an increase in the maximum campaign spending limit. This will provide a flexible legal framework for campaign expenditure, taking into account the reality of Nigerian money politics and the current inflationary trend. The review should aim to strike a balance between allowing candidates to campaign effectively and preventing excessive spending that could compromise the integrity of the election.
- ii. Enhancement of BVAS and IREV: INEC and policymakers should ensure that the usage of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the Independent Result Viewing Portal (IREV) is more adequate and glitch-free. This will provide a secure and transparent platform for voting and result collation, giving room for free and credible elections in the future. Regular maintenance, updates, and testing of these systems should be conducted to prevent technical issues during elections.
- iii. Prosecution of Electoral Offenders: All individuals caught in the act of bribery, corruption, or diverting national resources for illegal campaign spending must be severely punished to deter others from engaging in similar activities in the future. This includes prosecuting those who compromise the electoral process, such as electoral officials, party agents, or contestants. The punishment should be commensurate with the offense, and the prosecution should be conducted in a transparent and timely manner.
- iv. Sanctions for Electoral Regulation Breaches: Laws should be enacted to denote that any party or contestant caught breaking electoral regulations should be banned from participating in politics for a specified period. This includes sanctions for offenses such as vote-buying, electoral violence, or falsification of election results. The ban should be enforced to prevent repeat offenders from undermining the electoral process.
- v. Strengthening of INEC: INEC should be strengthened to ensure its independence, impartiality, and effectiveness in conducting elections. This includes providing adequate funding, training, and resources for electoral officials, as well as ensuring the security and integrity of electoral materials and processes.
- vi. Inter-Agency Collaboration: There should be improved collaboration and coordination among security agencies, INEC, and other stakeholders to ensure the smooth conduct of elections. This includes sharing intelligence, providing security for electoral officials and materials, and responding promptly to electoral violence or malpractices.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can strengthen its electoral process, prevent electoral malpractices, and ensure the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections.

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